



HOUSE OF COMMONS
LONDON SW1A 0AA

The Rt Hon Andy Burnham MP
Prime Minister
10 Downing Street
London
SW1A 2AA

and

The Rt Hon Angela Rayner MP
Secretary of State for Housing,
Communities and Local Government
Ministry of Housing, Communities
and Local Government
Fry Building
2 Marsham Street
London
SW1P 4DF

Sent by email

19 October 2026

The Future of the South Midlands – The Case for a Six-Authority Strategic Authority

On Wednesday 21st October 2026, an important motion is being proposed at an Extraordinary Council meeting of Milton Keynes City Council. In essence the Council will debate support for the principle of a six-unitary South Midlands Strategic Mayoral Authority, comprising Milton Keynes, Bedford, Central Bedfordshire, Luton, North Northamptonshire and West Northamptonshire as Milton Keynes City Council's preferred geography for devolution.

As Conservative Members of Parliament for South Northamptonshire, Daventry, North Bedfordshire and Mid Bedfordshire, we are writing not only in support of this motion but more widely to reaffirm our support for a six-unitary South Midlands Strategic Mayoral Authority.

Whilst opinions on devolution vary, given the direction that this Government is taking, our shared priority is ensuring that any new strategic authority reflects the real economic geography of the South Midlands and provides the strongest possible platform for growth, investment and opportunity for our constituents.

A six-authority South Midlands Strategic Authority would better reflect the longstanding economic, transport and business links that already bind our communities together than the currently proposed Bedfordshire, Luton and Milton Keynes (BLMK) model alone. Rather than creating a structure based primarily on administrative convenience, the Government has an opportunity to establish an authority that is genuinely aligned with the region's economy, labour markets, transport networks and growth ambitions.

The Economic Case

The economic case for a six-authority model is compelling.

The South Midlands is already connected by nationally significant infrastructure, including the M1, A14, A43, A421/A428 corridors, the West Coast Main Line and East West Rail. The six authorities also work together through the South Midlands Business Board and a range of collaborative programmes on skills, employment and business support.

A strategic authority covering the whole South Midlands would build upon these existing partnerships while providing a stronger platform for investment, infrastructure planning, economic development and inward investment.

Each constituent authority contributes unique strengths:

- **Milton Keynes** brings a £16.7 billion economy with major strengths in technology, financial services, logistics and innovation, alongside the Open University.
- **Bedford** is set to benefit from transformational investment from Universal, capable of generating billions of pounds in economic value and supporting thousands of jobs.
- **Central Bedfordshire** contributes world-leading expertise through Cranfield University, aerospace and advanced engineering, while occupying a strategic position linking key economic centres.
- **Luton** provides an international airport, global connectivity and significant strengths in aerospace and advanced manufacturing.
- **North Northamptonshire** offers a strong industrial base spanning manufacturing, logistics and food production.
- **West Northamptonshire** is home to Silverstone and one of the world's leading clusters of advanced engineering, motorsport and high-performance technology.

Together, these six authorities represent more than **80,000 businesses** and contribute over **£50 billion annually** to the UK economy.

Viewed collectively, these complementary strengths create an economic proposition considerably greater than the sum of its parts. A six-authority model would provide the scale, diversity and critical mass necessary to compete effectively for investment and maximise the contribution of the South Midlands to national economic growth.

The Business Case

As you will be well aware, businesses do not operate according to administrative boundaries. They operate according to markets, supply chains, transport connections, skills availability and investment opportunities.

Across the South Midlands, businesses already draw talent, customers and supply chains from all six authority areas. Manufacturers, logistics firms, advanced engineering businesses and

technology companies benefit from the region's integrated transport corridors and complementary economic assets.

A strategic authority covering the whole South Midlands would enable more effective coordination of infrastructure investment, skills provision, business support and growth strategies. It would allow businesses to access opportunities across the region more easily and present a stronger, unified proposition to international investors.

By contrast, a smaller authority risks creating artificial boundaries within an already integrated economy.

Why the South Midlands Model Is Stronger Than BLMK

The Government's Devolution White Paper identifies a population benchmark of 1.5 million for Mayoral Strategic Authorities.

A BLMK authority would fall significantly short of that threshold, with a population of under one million. A South Midlands authority including Northamptonshire would serve approximately 1.7 million people, comfortably exceeding the Government's own benchmark and creating a stronger foundation for long-term strategic governance.

Including Northamptonshire would also ensure that a substantial proportion of the South Midlands economy is not excluded from decisions on transport, skills, economic growth and regional investment.

The economic and transport links are already clear. Northamptonshire's major towns, including Northampton, Kettering, Corby, Wellingborough, Daventry, Brackley and Towcester, are closely connected to Milton Keynes, Bedford and Luton through the strategic road and rail network.

The county is also home to nationally significant businesses and industries, including the Silverstone motorsport cluster, Mercedes-AMG F1, Aston Martin F1, Cosworth, Weetabix, Travis Perkins, Dr. Martens, Church's and Heygates. These assets complement rather than compete with the economic strengths of Bedfordshire, Luton and Milton Keynes.

A strategic authority which excludes Northamptonshire would therefore overlook a major component of the South Midlands economy and forgo opportunities for stronger regional collaboration and growth.

Conclusion

The Government now has an opportunity to establish a strategic authority that genuinely reflects the economic reality of the South Midlands.

A six-authority model would provide greater scale, stronger economic complementarity, broader representation and a more compelling platform for growth than the currently proposed

BLMK arrangement. It would bring together an interconnected region with shared economic interests and a clear ambition to contribute more to the prosperity of the United Kingdom.

We therefore urge the Government to reconsider the current proposals and work towards the creation of a South Midlands Strategic Authority comprising Bedford, Central Bedfordshire, Luton, Milton Keynes, North Northamptonshire and West Northamptonshire.

The decisions taken in the coming months will shape the future of our region for decades. We believe that a six-authority South Midlands model represents the most ambitious, coherent and economically credible option available, and we respectfully ask that it be given full and urgent consideration.

Yours sincerely,

Sarah Bool, Member of Parliament for South Northamptonshire

Stuart Andrew, Member of Parliament for Daventry

Blake Stephenson, Member of Parliament for Mid Bedfordshire

Richard Fuller, Member of Parliament for North Bedfordshire

Copy to: Leaders of Bedford Borough, Central Bedfordshire, Luton, Milton Keynes City, North Northamptonshire and West Northamptonshire Councils