Stockton-on-Tees
BOROUGH COUNCIL

My Ref: MG/AB/4251
Your Ref:

Dunedin House
Columbia Drive
Stockton on Tees
TS17 6BJ

Tel: 01642 527000
Email: mike.greene@stockton.gov.uk

Date: 14 October 2026

Dear Lord Chancellor

Council Motion – Early Release of Serious Offenders

I have been instructed to write to you on behalf of Stockton Council, in respect of a motion that was approved at the 23 September 2026 meeting of Full Council. The motion relates to the early release of serious offenders and states:

“Council notes that:

From 1 October 2026, the Labour Government’s new sentencing arrangements will allow many eligible offenders serving standard determinate sentences to be released after serving as little as one third of their custodial sentence.

Although some offences are excluded from these arrangements, the fundamental principle remains that offenders could spend substantially less time in prison than victims, their families and the public were led to expect when the sentence was imposed.

His Majesty’s Inspectorate of Probation rated the Northeast Probation Service as “Requires improvement” overall and its public protection work as “Inadequate”. The Stockton and Hartlepool Probation Delivery Unit was rated “Inadequate” for both the assessment and implementation of public protection work.

The inspection found that the Northeast region was already managing 8,616 people in the community, of these 3,058 people released from prison on licence, while implementing several national policies intended to reduce pressure on prison capacity.

Rt Hon Alex Norris MP
Lord Chancellor and Secretary of State for Justice
Ministry of Justice
102 Petty France
London
SW1H 9AJ

Sent by email to: alex.norris.mp@parliament.uk

Council believes that:

The first duty of government is to protect the public.

The exclusions set out on 30 August 2026 for life sentences, extended determinate sentences, rape offences, specified serious child sexual and grooming offences, and offences relating to unlawful killing must be maintained and applied fully in every relevant case. No offender convicted of attempted murder, terrorism, serious violence, child abuse, child sexual exploitation or serious domestic abuse should qualify for earlier release under the Progression Model.

A prison sentence should mean what victims, the public and the courts reasonably understand it to mean. Reducing the time an offender spends in custody after a sentence has been imposed undermines confidence in the criminal justice system.

The capacity pressures within the prison estate must not be addressed by transferring greater risk and responsibility onto communities, police forces, probation services and local authorities.

The findings concerning public protection work in the Northeast demonstrate the serious risks of placing even more offenders under supervision in communities before the probation system is demonstrably able to manage them safely.

The present Government's decision to release many offenders after as little as one third of their custodial sentence is the wrong approach. It prioritises the management of prison capacity over punishment, public protection and the rights of victims.

For victims and their families, seeing an offender released substantially earlier than expected risks creating the unacceptable impression that crime pays. It is an insult to those who have suffered and risks diminishing the seriousness of the crimes committed against them.

"Council condemns the Government's approach and believes that dangerous and serious offenders should remain behind bars, prisons should have the capacity required to accommodate them and sentences imposed by the courts should be properly served.

Council resolves that:

The Chief Executive writes on behalf of Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council to the Prime Minister and the Lord Chancellor:

Expressing this Council's opposition to the release of offenders after serving as little as one third of their custodial sentence

Condemning the use of earlier release as a means of managing pressure on the prison estate.

Seeking a firm assurance that the exclusions set out on 30 August 2026 for life sentences, extended determinate sentences, rape offences, specified serious child sexual and grooming offences, and offences relating to unlawful killing will be maintained and applied fully in every relevant case, while calling for them to be extended to cover any offences involving attempted murder, terrorism, serious violence, child abuse, child sexual exploitation or serious domestic abuse that might otherwise qualify under the Progression Model.

Requesting that no offender assessed as presenting a significant risk to the public is released early solely because of pressure on prison capacity.

Calling upon the Government to provide sufficient prison places so that serious criminals can serve the custodial sentences imposed upon them.

Requesting sufficient resources for the Probation Service, Cleveland Police and other agencies responsible for protecting people across the borough of Stockton-on-Tees.

Asking that victims are informed promptly of any proposed change to an offender's release date and are given a meaningful opportunity to raise concerns about their safety and the conditions attached to the offender's licence."

I am therefore writing to you and the Prime Minister in accordance with the Council motion to seek your support.

Any response that you send to this letter will be shared with all Members of the Council and made available to view with the relevant minutes from the meeting of Council (23 September 2026) on the Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council website.

Thank you in anticipation for your consideration of the above.

Yours sincerely

Mike Greene
Chief Executive