Y Gwir Anrh./The Rt. Hon. Rhun ap Iorwerth AS/MS
Prif Weinidog Cymru/First Minister of Wales

The Rt Hon Andy Burnham MP
Prime Minister
10 Downing Street

23 November 2026

Annwyl Andy

I write in response to your letter of 20 November, which related to the priorities for further devolution set out in my letter of 1 October.

I was deeply disappointed and surprised by the position set out in your response, which is difficult to reconcile with the commitment to genuine partnership that you and I discussed previously, including in Glasgow. I came away from that discussion encouraged that there was a real willingness to look again at where powers should sit, to challenge established ways of working and to approach these questions in a different way. Your response points in the opposite direction.

It also contrasts concerningly with the wider approach you have set out publicly. You have spoken of fundamentally "rewiring the state", of devolution by default, and committed that "the days of Whitehall fighting the devolution of power into the regions and nations are over, for good." I welcomed that approach because it appeared to signal a substantive change in the relationship between the UK Government and the Devolved Governments, and a willingness to challenge outdated, erroneous assumptions about where power should sit. However, your letter appears largely to rest on the long-established positions of the UK Government departments which currently exercise the relevant responsibilities.

Comments made by the Secretary of State for Wales over the weekend also indicated that Whitehall departments had been consulted on the proposals. Of course, I recognise the need for collective consideration across the UK Government. But there is an important distinction between seeking departmental advice and reaching a final, considered view based on not just UK Government departmental views but the view of Welsh Government and the substantial body of evidence I provided in my letter and the context of the personal discussion we had in Glasgow. If the commitment is genuinely to devolution by default and to rewiring the state, that gives the starting point, not a presumption in favour of retaining existing arrangements.

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Rydym yn croesawu derbyn gohebiaeth yn Gymraeg. Byddwn yn ateb gohebiaeth a dderbynnir yn Gymraeg yn yr iaith honno ac ni fydd gohebu yn Gymraeg yn arwain at oedi.

We welcome receiving correspondence in Welsh. Any correspondence received in Welsh will be answered in Welsh and corresponding in Welsh will not lead to a delay in responding.

We are not seeking the transfer of powers for its own sake. Our proposals are rooted in where responsibility can most effectively be exercised to improve outcomes for people in Wales, strengthen democratic accountability and enable services and policy to work better together. This is based on an overwhelming body of independent evidence on these issues.

The Independent Commission on the Constitutional Future of Wales examined Wales's constitutional arrangements in considerable depth. The Commission on Justice in Wales chaired by Lord Thomas of Cwmgiedd (a former Lord Chief Justice of England and Wales), undertook a comprehensive examination of justice in Wales. More recently, the Preparing for the devolution of policing in Wales report, led by Carl Foulkes (a former Chief Constable of North Wales Police), examined in detail the practical considerations associated with a devolved policing model for Wales.

What is notably absent from your response is substantive engagement with that evidence. If the UK Government has reached different conclusions, I believe it is reasonable to expect those conclusions to have been supported by evidence and to explain in detail why the findings and recommendations of those independent, expert reviews should not be accepted. Restating traditional departmental concerns does not provide an evidence base for maintaining the status quo. I am therefore enclosing copies of those reports and would ask that you consider their findings personally.

There is also an important question of parity within the United Kingdom. A number of responsibilities which remain reserved in Wales are already devolved in Scotland. The need for cross-border cooperation, common frameworks or effective intergovernmental working has not prevented those arrangements from operating elsewhere in the UK.

It is fundamentally incompatible that at the same time as the UK Government is advocating the transfer of significant powers out of Whitehall to regions and local leaders in England, it seems to want to resist the transfer of further responsibilities to Wales, a nation with its own democratically elected legislature and government.

Wales should not be required to meet a different or higher threshold for devolution. If the ambition is genuinely to rewire the state and move power closer to the people affected by the decisions it takes, that principle must apply every bit as strongly to Wales. Were the UK Government to nevertheless believe that powers which can be exercised at a devolved or sub-state level elsewhere in the UK should remain reserved in Wales, there should be a comprehensive and evidence-based explanation for that. This is absent in your letter.

Nor do I accept that further devolution need create barriers between our governments. Where responsibilities interact across borders, the answer should be strong and effective intergovernmental arrangements. The existence of a cross-border dimension is a reason to work together effectively, not in itself a reason for responsibility to remain in Whitehall.

The fact that your response is at odds with the views of many of your party colleagues in Wales is a matter for you to reconcile, however, I feel compelled to note that they include eminent and hugely experienced individuals whom I would argue deserve a fair hearing from you on this matter. I intend to work with them and others to take this issue forward on a cross-party basis.

Given our discussion in Glasgow, your commitment to devolution by default and your wider ambition to rewire the state, I am asking you personally to look again at the evidence and at the conclusions that have been reached. Once you have had the opportunity to consider the enclosed reports, I would welcome an urgent meeting with you to discuss the evidence and agree a substantive way forward.

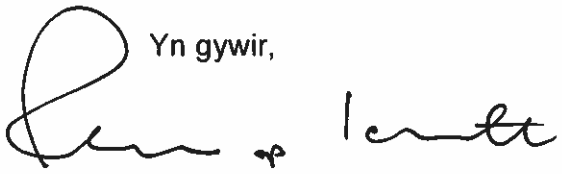
In these discussions, I would also like us to return to those elements of my 1 October letter which were not covered in your response. In particular, I proposed early engagement between our governments on the scope, timing and content of a Wales Bill as a coherent framework for strengthening Wales's devolution settlement. I also identified areas for further discussion, including welfare, broadcasting, port regulation, air passenger duty, and energy regulation and pricing. I would welcome the opportunity to consider these issues with you as part of our wider discussions on the future of Wales's devolution settlement, alongside the specific priorities covered in your letter.

In relation to your commitment given in our meeting to providing greater financial flexibilities for the Welsh Government, I ask that you ensure that the new arrangements are agreed immediately, so that public services, communities and the economy in Wales can benefit sooner from this greater funding flexibility and certainty that is already in place in Scotland. That same sense of urgency also needs to be applied to confirming the tax and benefits treatment of the Cynnal Child Payment pilot. We welcome ongoing discussions on this matter and emphasise that swift decisions are essential for Cynnal to ensure we maximise the benefits to children and families and to meet our shared commitments on child poverty.

I want to work with you to realise your stated ambition to change how power is exercised across the UK for the benefit of people, communities and businesses everywhere. To reiterate for Wales, this is not about seeking powers for their own sake. It is about ensuring that responsibilities sit where they can deliver the best outcomes, with clear democratic accountability for the decisions taken. That requires us to move beyond established departmental positions and demonstrate in practice that decisions about where power should sit will be determined by evidence, outcomes and accountability.

That is the partnership I understood us to be discussing in our previous meetings, and it is the approach I hope we can now take forward. Given the importance of these matters, I would reiterate my request for an urgent meeting so that we can discuss them directly and agree how our governments can make substantive progress.

Yn gywir,



Rhun ap Iorwerth