

COUNCIL

Wednesday, 19th March, 2025
Time of Commencement: 7.00 pm

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Present:

Councillors:	Adcock	Grocott	Skelding
	Allport	Heesom	Stubbs
	Barker MBE	Holland	Sweeney
	Beeston	Fox-Hewitt	J Tagg
	Berrisford	Hutchison	S Tagg (Leader)
	Brown	Johnson	J Waring
	Bryan	S Jones	P Waring
	Casey-Hulme	D Jones	Whieldon
	Crisp	Lawley	Whitmore
	Dymond	Northcott	Wilkes
	Edginton-Plunkett	Parker	G Williams
	Fear	Reece	J Williams
	Gorton	Richards	

Apologies: Councillor(s) Bettley-Smith, Burnett-Faulkner, Lewis and Wright

Officers:	Gordon Mole	Chief Executive
	Simon McEneny	Deputy Chief Executive
	Anthony Harold	Service Director - Legal & Governance / Monitoring Officer
	Sarah Wilkes	Service Director - Finance / S151 Officer
	Geoff Durham	Civic & Member Support Officer
	Sam Clark	Service Director - IT & Digital

1. APPOINTMENT OF CHAIR

Nominations were received for a Chair for the meeting. Councillor Joan Whieldon was appointed.

Councillor Joan Whieldon in the Chair

2. TRIBUTES TO THE MAYOR, COUNCILLOR BARRY PANTER AND FORMER COUNCILLOR CHARLES EDWARD (TED) HOLLAND

A minute's silence was held for the late Mayor, Councillor Barry Panter and former Councillor Charles Edward (Ted) Holland.

The Leader of the Council, Councillor Simon Tagg led tributes to Councillor Panter stating that he had been dedicated to public service throughout his life and loved

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collecting model police cars, books and pencils. He was elected as Councillor in 2016 and had always wanted to become Mayor. Best wishes were sent to his family and friends.

Councillor Dave Jones stated, on behalf of the Labour Group that the news of Councillor Panter's passing had hit everyone hard. He had made public service his life commitment and was a true gentleman. Best wishes were sent to the family.

Members stated that Councillor Panter was a good friend, an all-round nice guy and a true gentleman, well known and well liked who would be hugely missed.

The Chair stated that a letter had been received from Adam Jogee MP which would be passed to the family.

The Leader of the Council, Councillor Simon Tagg led tributes to former Councillor Charles Edward (Ted) Holland stating that he had worked for local government in the Planning Department and had served on Newcastle's Planning Committee. He had also been leader of the Conservative group and a Cabinet member and sent best wishes to his family.

Members sent condolences to his family. He always welcomed new Councillors and was always ready to share his knowledge.

[Watch the tributes here](#)

3. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

The Chair asked the Council's Monitoring Officer for advice on Dispensation for Councillors on agenda item 5.

The Monitoring Officer advised that it had been decided that all Members would be granted a dispensation this evening on the matter of Local Government Reorganisation at item 5 of the agenda. There was therefore no need for any Member to declare an interest in that item.

There were no declarations of interest stated.

4. NEWCASTLE-UNDER-LYME BOROUGH COUNCIL RESPONSE TO LOCAL GOVERNMENT REORGANISATION

The Leader introduced a report, seeking Council's endorsement and support for actions to preserve the Borough following the release of the English Devolution White Paper in December, 2024.

The Leader had written to Jim McMahon OBE MP, Minister of State for Local Government and English Devolution inviting him to visit the borough and setting out concerns with the reorganisation process; a copy of the letter was appended to the report.

The Leader stated that the two tier local government system had worked very well for this Council over the years and could continue to deliver in the future and was therefore the best model going forward.

Referring to the recommendations, the Leader referred to the ‘Strategic Authority’ participation (recommendation C), which supported economic growth and better infrastructure at a strategic level. At a recent Cabinet meeting at Stoke City Council, discussing the possibility of merges with Staffordshire Moorlands and Newcastle, all of the benefits that they discussed were those of a ‘Strategic Authority’.

The Leader stated that there needed to be a Government-funded Borough-wide referendum on any proposals and a full boundary review and that the Government fully fund any reorganisation.

The response of this Council on the forced local government reorganisation was routed in the preservation of the Borough’s independence and maintaining of high standards of local service provision and recognition of residents opinions in choosing its future. The governance model should be in the best interests of Newcastle and the first option would be that of recommendation I – the unitary council for Newcastle but, keeping options open with investigations of other possible models.

Councillor Sweeney in seconding the motion stated that removing a level of democracy would not make the system more democratic nor would it save money, but there would be a detriment for local decision making.

An amendment had been submitted, proposed by Councillor Dave Jones and seconded by Councillor Fox-Hewitt. The amendment solely supported a Unitary Council model for Newcastle-under-Lyme.

Following a debate on the amendment a named vote was taken.

ADCOCK (arrived 8.49pm)	Absent	GORTON	Y	RICHARDS	Y
ALLPORT	Y	GROCOTT	Y	SKELDING	N
BARKER	N	HEESOM	N	STUBBS	Y
BEESTON	N	HOLLAND	N	SWEENEY	N
BERRISFORD	N	HUTCHISON	N	J TAGG	N
BETTLEY-SMITH	Absent	JOHNSON	N	S TAGG	N
BROWN	Y	D JONES	Y	J WARING	N
BRYAN	N	S JONES	N	P WARING	N
BURNETT-FAULKNER	Absent	LAWLEY	Y	WHIELDON	N
CASEY-HULME	Y	LEWIS	Absent	WHITMORE	N
CRISP	N	NORTHCOTT	N	I WILKES	N
DYMOND	Y	PARKER (arrived 7.48pm)	N	G WILLIAMS	Abstain
EDGINGTON-PLUNKETT	Y	REECE	Y	J WILLIAMS	Y
FEAR	N			WRIGHT	Absent

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FOX-HEWITT	Y				
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In Favour (Y) – 14

Against (N) - 22

Abstain – 1

The amendment was not carried, therefore Members debated on the original motion put forward by the Leader of the Council.

Councillor Holland referred to a comment made by the Leader of Staffordshire County Council in a report to their Cabinet which stated that two tier local government worked in Staffordshire and struck the right balance. Councillor Holland agreed, with important regulatory services being delivered by Newcastle and having a much better understanding than they would with a larger authority. He supported a Unitary Authority in Newcastle covering the existing Borough boundaries but stated that the Administration was also right to thoroughly investigate other options.

Councillor Stubbs stated that the English Devolution Policy Paper emphasised the need for a transformational approach to local government aiming to decentralise power, enhance local accountability and drive economic growth. He stated that the report did not fully align with those objectives and outlined the reasons. In addition, the Paper called for a balanced approach in economic development but the report focussed on local identity and historical significance. Finally, the report did not state how communities would be involved in any decision making process.

Councillor Fear stated that he would like to see the two-tier system continue. The Bill from the government was not one of devolution, but one of centralisation. Newcastle would become a permanent minority with a lower level of representation. The proposals put forward this evening were aiming to prevent that from happening as they included possible alternatives to save the Borough from the worst scenario.

Councillor Paul Waring stated that reorganisation was expensive and disruptive and there were no clear benefits in doing it. His concern was that Newcastle would become a 'cash cow' for Stoke City Council who had huge outstanding borrowing and current liabilities.

Councillor Crisp referred to the devolution of power to parish councils stating that there was an ongoing problem with those arrangements nationally, which might be viewed as tax without representation whereby the majority of members were coopted rather than being elected and there were also increases in precepts.

Councillor Dave Jones stated that parish council precepts had risen because they had taken on certain areas of work that were previously done by county and district councils.

In summing up, the Leader referred to page 7, option 9 which talked about various options to be investigated or not taken further. The Government had asked for proposals to be submitted for investigation. He agreed that Newcastle should either stay within a two-tier system or become a unitary borough which, in this Council's submission to Government, would be clearly stated as Newcastle's preferred option.

Resolved: That recommendations A to O, as set out in the agenda report,

be agreed.

[Watch the debate here](#)

5. DISCLOSURE OF EXEMPT INFORMATION

There were no confidential items.

**Councillor Joan Whieldon
Chair**

Meeting concluded at 9.08 pm