

LOCAL GOVERNMENT REORGANISATION CABINET PANEL

Monday, 30th March, 2026
Time of Commencement: 7.00 pm

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Present: Councillor Simon Tagg (Chair)

Councillors: Fear Holland
Fox-Hewitt D Jones

Officers: Geoff Durham Civic & Member Support Officer
Gordon Mole Chief Executive

1. **TO NOTE THAT THE CABINET PANEL WILL BE MADE AVAILABLE TO PUBLIC VIEWING**

This was noted.

2. **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

The Chief Executive advised Members of the special dispensation for Members in respect of Local Government Reorganisation advising them that they were able to participate in the meeting.

There were no other Declarations of Interest from Members.

[Watch the explanation here](#)

3. **TERMS OF REFERENCE**

The Leader introduced a report setting out the proposed Terms of Reference for the Cabinet Panel, including key functions and membership.

The Leader stated that the Terms of Reference would apply to this meeting only as, following the Local Government Elections in May the newly elected membership would review the Terms of Reference.

Councillor Holland stated that the draft Terms of Reference stated that this was a politically balanced, six member panel and suggested that it could be a five member panel split 5:3 between the two main groups.

The Leader stated that, for this meeting this was a correct proportionality. However, after the elections it could be different if there was several groups making up the Council.

Resolved: That the Terms of Reference be agreed.

[Watch the debate here](#)

4. PRESENTATION ON NEWCASTLE-UNDER-LYME'S PROPOSAL FOR FOUR UNITARY COUNCILS

The Chief Executive gave a presentation on the Four Unitary Council options put forward by the Council in November, 2025.

The presentation covered six areas; how the proposal was developed; pre-submission engagement and analysis; fit with Government criteria; financial sustainability; meeting local needs well and challenges and opportunities.

The Council had considered five options including a unitary for Newcastle-under-Lyme; a unitary across Newcastle-under-Lyme and Staffordshire Moorlands; East and West Staffordshire unitary authorities; Newcastle-under-Lyme and Shropshire Unitary and a unitary authority on the existing footprint of Staffordshire County Council.

A range of engagement had been taken out within the time available with an online survey, individual stakeholder interviews and focus groups. There had been strong cross-party support for a Newcastle-under-Lyme unitary authority.

The Council had worked hard to ensure that the submission demonstrated that it fit with the six areas of the Government's Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) criteria.

With regard to financial sustainability, it was felt that the proposal for four smaller and agile unitary authorities brought a blend of local benefits and financial resilience.

The submission had to demonstrate how the proposal would meet local needs well and those included: retaining cultural and historical value proposition across all four unitary authorities; fair, decent and legal; opportunities for shared service delivery; developing a strong Foundation Strategic Authority to Mayoral Strategic Authority; Newcastle specific challenges that needed to be addressed; transition process.

In respect of the challenges and opportunities for Newcastle, those included: size and sustainability; complexity; placemaking and planning; partnerships and stakeholders; economy, innovation and growth; parishes, towns and local democracy; history, heritage and tradition; national level issues and priorities and addressing underlying staffing challenges.

The final slide of the presentation set out ten points that Newcastle asked the Government to consider, before making their decision.

The Leader asked the Chief Executive for an update on the Government's announcement on the priority programme and how it might affect the Council's option that had been put forward.

The Chief Executive stated that one of the key features was the size of new authorities in areas such as Suffolk with the three authorities being around 250,000 population each. Also the Government's option, again in Suffolk to divide across parish lines thus not maintaining boundaries.

Councillor Fox-Hewitt asked if Members would receive a copy of the consultation response and also sought clarification whether the payback over two financial cycles, as mentioned earlier, was over two calendar years and budgets or two Medium Term Financial Strategy.

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In terms of the shared service delivery, what did that mean in practice?

The Chief Executive confirmed that the consultation response would be shared with Members.

One example of shared service delivery was included within the proposal as an existing model was waste. There was the existing Staffordshire Waste Partnership. There were some challenges coming up with new facilities needed across Staffordshire with the intention being for Staffordshire to work as a whole unit. There were particular challenges with children and young people and the number of care homes that Newcastle had in the Borough and a creative solution would be sought.

Councillor Holland thanked the Chief Executive for the presentation and the work that had gone into it, also the Cabinet were thanked for convening this Cabinet Panel. The process would require cross party analysis but felt that one of the problems was, by engaging with it the Council was accepting the Governments terms that reorganisation was a benefit. The Chief Executive was asked, among the Council's asks on the final slide, the Council would like to see devolution accelerated regardless of the progress of LGR. Was there any indication that the Council would receive good answers to those points raised.

Referring to the devolution process, the Chief Executive confirmed that it was included within the Council's asks of Government. Work had been carried out prior to the LGR process and the ten Authorities had responded to the Minister stating that they were ready to talk about devolution.

The Leader stated that he had been pleased to sign the letter, along with the other leaders of Staffordshire and Stoke. It took the Council back to pre- November 2024 agreement to put forward a bid for a Strategic Authority. However, the end result of that was likely to be an elected Mayor and the Leader had some concerns about that as they could raise precepts and there would be no caps on those precepts.

Councillor Fear asked the Chief Executive how much, he felt, would have to be expended on the process in the coming months and also, had any thought been given to future proofing for beyond the elections or was it prudent to stay on the current course and if that was the case, what was the bill likely to be at the end of the process.

The Chief Executive stated that officers had sought to prepare for the timelines given by the Government. Regarding risk planning, there could be delays or changes but the Council would adjust if required to do so.

Regarding the resources, across Staffordshire and Stoke there had been a range of assumptions made and the Council was now in the middle of that financial trajectory. The transition costs would be over a ten to fifteen or longer period through the adjustment. The government would provide a sum of money to each new unitary authority.

The Leader pointed out that the Government had stated that any money spent on LGR and the transition must be in a separate reserve, which this Council had already done in February during budget setting. The Government were giving £63m to newly formed authorities under LGR not to authorities such as Newcastle who would be putting work and resources into the transition.

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Councillor Holland stated that the Government's proposals for Norfolk and other areas had been seen and the population size of those authorities were a lot smaller than initially expected. Councillor Holland reflected when all authorities generated proposals the Government was clear on the population size target of 500,000 but it appeared now that the goalposts could move. Councillor Holland asked whether this Council would have done anything differently if it had been known from the outset that the Government may have been amenable to substantially smaller unitary authorities. Also, were there future changes that might be made mid-stride.

The Chief Executive stated that as the LGR process had gone through many iterations there had been a difference in the numbers in areas that had not been fast-tracked – such as Surrey. Regarding whether the guidance had changed, the 500,000 was a target figure that then moved to guidance and a number of authorities were smaller than that as a result.

The Leader, referring to civic functions and Burgesses, the Chief Executive was asked for confirmation that when it had been raised with the Civil Servants they had not had an answer on that point or provided any further information. Also, the issue to do with parish and town councils and local democracy. If Newcastle was to obtain unitary status it would enable the continuation of the civic functions and also the current structure of Government within the Borough. However, if the bid was not successful it would not be too late to start the process of reviewing parishes and creating town councils if necessary to try and save some of the trappings of the Borough.

The Chief Executive stated that the Council had been in contact with the Staffordshire Parish Councils Association who were keen for principal authorities to look at the reviewing and creating Town/Parish Councils as an option. This did fit with Newcastle's option which stated that governance models would be looked at, including the option of parish and town councils.

Regarding the Burgesses, the Council had engaged with Civil Servants who had a civic team who were supporting LGR and questions had been raised up through the MHCLG leads for guidance.

Councillor Jones, referring to concerns about a directly elected mayor having the ability to set precepts without a limit, stated that parish councils had that same function. If a town Council were to be associated with civic functions, the managing of the process could map through onto the precept and passed onto residents.

The Leader stated that this point had been made at the first Full Council meeting where LGR was discussed. However, the Council was not going to miss the opportunity of putting something in place if that was what people requested.

Resolved: That the presentation be received and the comments noted.

[Watch the presentation here](#)

5. INVITATION FOR MEMBERS OF PARLIAMENT TO PRESENT VIEWS ON LGR PROPOSALS FOR STOKE ON TRENT AND STAFFORDSHIRE

The Leader stated that the three local MP's were unable to attend and had sent apologies. Written submissions had been requested, following this Council's Consultation response and one was received, from Adam Jogie MP.

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Documents can be found at item 5 of the agenda.

The Leader thanked Adam Jogee for his submission. In response the Leader felt that the record put forward by this Council and timelines did not support the claims put forward by the MP. In addition it had been suggested that there had been no adequate engagement with the MP or partners although the documents showed otherwise. Also, a meeting had taken place on Teams with the three MP's last autumn.

There had been extensive engagement, regarding LGR, with strategic partners and stakeholders within the Borough and there had been debates at three Full Council meetings.

There had been a claim of political motivation and a non-consistent approach, however, correspondence showed that Newcastle had a reason to consider every option, which was done – with Full Council choosing the Newcastle Unitary option.

There had been mention of the £200,000 that had been spent on LGR. Although LGR had not been asked for, the Council had had to put forward a proposal that had gained cross-party support.

The LGR process put forward by the Government required all Council's to submit models by November, 2025 and this Council's were prepared with the help of an external consultant and in accordance with the national criteria.

There was public support for the Council's position and in response, the Council had put forward a proposal that would protect the Council and Borough's identity, by creating a unitary authority.

The submission from the MP showed criticism of the current two-tier system, referring to coordination challenges. This Council's performance was strong with high quality cost effective services.

The Government had been actively consulting on the models with the results, as yet, unknown but civil servants had confirmed that local MP's would be a key consultee going forward so the MP needed to talk to the Government to protect Newcastle's identity.

This Council had been transparent with three debates in public, a consultation, talking to partners and key stakeholders in the Borough and reporting back at meetings.

It was felt that the MP's submission misrepresented what position this Council had taken. This Council's priority remained unchanged – to protect the Borough's identity and it was hoped that the MP would support the Council going forward.

Councillor Fox-Hewit raised concerns over the remit of the Panel regarding earlier comments and whether it was appropriate to be discussing costs during the pre-election period.

The Chief Executive responded, as noted in the Terms of Reference document there was pre-election guidance accompanying it which set out what the Council was able to do and must not do. Regarding the question on funding, the sum referred to had been previously published in previous Cabinet reports before the pre-election period.

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Advice had also been sought from the Council's Monitoring Officer that this meeting could go ahead if Members were reminded of the pre-election restrictions.

Councillor Jones disagreed that the current system worked, referring to a personal struggle regarding the education of his son and with adult social care. Councillor Jones asked what the 'what-if' planning scenario would be if this Council ended up with one of the other options and what discussions had taken place.

The Leader stated that it had been discussed at Full Council to ensure that the Council had all of the base levels of Newcastle's position if the unitary authority bid was not successful. The £200,000 consultancy fee was providing those base lines and the full submission that was put in included a number of options – including East and West. The consultants also looked at the North Staffordshire models. The Leader had also had discussions with Staffordshire Moorlands but there had been a lack of engagement from Stoke on Trent City Council.

The Chief Executive stated that there had been a number of meetings across the Staffordshire Chief Executives discussing what needed to be prepared post-July including programme management arrangements and work streams. There was a commitment across all ten authorities that post July the work would be carried out with all available resources to bring in best practice.

The Leader stated that, as he had mentioned at previous meetings, if the Government wished to put forward a proposal that this Council had not put forward, the Council would work to make it a success.

Councillor Holland agreed with Councillor Jones to focus on service delivery as a key element of what was being discussed at this meeting. However, he disagreed that unitarization did not fix things that were broken. Councillor Holland endorsed the Leader's rebuttal of the MP's submission. Referring to page 2 of the MP's letter, Councillor Holland quoted the first paragraph on page 18 of the agenda and other points raised on that page and stated that he was concerned that the stand alone unitary proposal differed from the three unitary proposal only in the fact that the northern Staffordshire area was further sub-divided into two and was worried that, if the MP was prepared to say publicly that Newcastle was inadequate or incompetent, what was he doing to advance this Council's cause behind closed doors.

Councillor Fox-Hewitt asked the Chief Executive what data had been examined and if financial modelling had been looked at in terms of what level of funding would be required to deliver the statutory functions as a unitary authority in Newcastle.

The Chief Executive advised that the appendices to the proposal contained the methodology that the proposal had used which had hypothecated the existing levels of spend and the existing levels of activity across Staffordshire and Stoke on Trent to reach the conclusions. Civil servants had specifically asked that the Fair Funding allocations not be taken into account as part of the modelling as they had not been determined at the point of submission.

Councillor Fear stated that he was disappointed in the timing of the letter – being received this afternoon.

It was unfortunate to use hearsay comments with criticism of council officers and, moreover, the criticisms did not give any positives. Referring to the three-unitary model, Councillor Fear stated that the MP should be asked whether he felt that that should be expanded.

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- Resolved:**
- (i) That the information be received and comments noted
 - (ii) That the submissions and correspondence tabled this evening be added, under item 5 of the agenda.

[Watch the debate here](#)

6. WORK PLAN

Members agreed that a work programme should be produced at a meeting following the Local Government Elections in May, 2026.

7. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

Members agreed that a date for the next meeting should be set following the Local Government elections in May, 2026.

8. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

There was no other business.

**Councillor Simon Tagg
Chair**

Meeting concluded at 8.34 pm