

COUNCIL

Wednesday, 22nd January, 2025
Time of Commencement: 7.00 pm

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Present: Mayor - Councillor Barry Panter (Chair)

Councillors:	Adcock	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
	Burnett-Faulkner	D Jones	Whieldon
	Crisp	Lewis	Whitmore
	Dymond	Northcott	Wilkes
	Edginton-Plunkett	Parker	G Williams
	Fear	Reece	J Williams
	Gorton	Richards	Wright
	Grocott	Skelding	

Apologies: Councillor(s) Allport, Bettley-Smith, Lawley and Moss

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
	Sam Clark	Service Director - IT & Digital
	Geoff Durham	Civic & Member Support Officer

1. **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

There were no declarations of interest stated.

2. **MINUTES OF A PREVIOUS MEETING**

Resolved: That the minutes of the meeting held on 20 November, 2024 be agreed as a correct record.

3. **MAYOR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS**

The Mayor announced that his Charity Ball will be held on Saturday 29 March at Keele Hall and asked Members for their support.

4. **DEVOLUTION & LOCAL GOVERNMENT REORGANISATION: WHITE PAPER**

Council - 22/01/25

The Leader introduced a report seeking endorsement and support to act to preserve the borough, following release of the English Devolution White Paper on 16 December, 2024.

The paper added forced unitarization to the devolution and stated that councils should be around 500,000 residents strong implying that Stoke City Council could merge with Newcastle and would take away the decision making and delivery of its services.

Devolution had been on the agenda for a while. The previous government was bringing forward devolution deals – bringing more power and money to be spent locally to deliver services. The Staffordshire Leaders Board put in a devolution submission in September when the present government indicated that they wished to have submissions. There had been no mention of forced unitarization but there was mention of elected mayors. Members' attention was drawn to paragraphs 1.4 and 1.5 of the report which set out what had been included in the Staffordshire Leaders Board submission.

The Leader stated that thousands of residents in the borough appreciated its history. There was a proud record of delivery of services here which could suffer under unitarization. This Council needed to stand up for its residents and for the history of the Borough.

The Leader had reached out to Adam Jogee MP for his support in saving the borough and he had mentioned it in Parliament since.

This Council needed to ensure that any changes served the best interests of residents and preserve the unique character, autonomy and history of the borough.

The Government would be setting out the full details by the end of January and were hoping for a submission during March. Newcastle was not in the initial phase, it would be possibly 2027/28 before there was any significant change.

The Mayor referred to an amendment that had been tabled this evening by the Labour Group, however, an adjournment of the meeting was required for officers and the Mayor to review the document before proceeding further.

Meeting adjourned at 7.20pm

Meeting resumed at 7.51pm

The Mayor stated that, following advice from the Monitoring Officer, the amendment was declined due to it being deemed to negate the motion contained within the agenda.

Councillor Parker arrived at 7.55pm

Councillor Sweeney, in seconding the motion stated that he had been looking through various papers and had come across various aspects that reorganisation must achieve, such as enhancing local services and democracy; have the support of local residents and have the agreement of the whole local government sector which he felt would not do so in this case. Councillor Sweeney questioned how cutting councillors would increase democratic accountability. Reorganisation would not drive savings if there were redundancy, consultancy and set-up costs.

Councillor Dave Jones stated that reorganisation was a once in a generation opportunity to reset council services and design better provision for residents. The formation of the new unitary councils came with the proposal of more devolved powers over various services. It would provide an opportunity to have a seat at the table of upper tier services. Councillor Jones felt that reorganisation was needed because residents were being let down by the County Council.

Councillor Whieldon stated that Stoke on Trent City Council had never had a good bank balance and without financial and fiscal security in Newcastle, it would be at a distance as the city would take precedence and Newcastle would be used to prop up Stoke's fiscal failings.

Councillor Stubbs stated that modern governance needs may differ from those in the past and historical independence did not provide a practical argument against reorganisation. Reorganisation could streamline services and improve efficiency and bring additional resources and expertise. Councillor Stubbs stated that a more comprehensive analysis of the White Paper should consider both the risks and the opportunities.

Councillor Reece stated that reorganisation had the potential to deal with pressing issues for residents such as adult social care and hospitals. Reorganisation of local authorities across Staffordshire and the creation of larger, more geographically representative unitary councils would allow for the resetting of relationships with care providers, integrated care boards and hospital trusts.

Councillor Paul Waring stated that this Authority had provided a sound financial base and as such benefited from significant assets. Any amalgamation would be detrimental to residents and there was no clear evidence that creating larger bodies led to economies of scale. It had been seen where larger authorities had got into financial difficulty whereas smaller ones had managed to avoid it.

Councillor Adcock stated that it was important to stand up for the Borough of Newcastle-under-Lyme. Cross-council working had many benefits and Newcastle was proud to work with its partners, however, a much larger unitary authority would have much less focus on Newcastle and its villages/rural areas. Newcastle's business would be decided in Stoke by councillors, very few of whom represented the borough.

Councillor Fox-Hewitt stated that councils had a duty to hold power to account and to ensure that changes serve the public good.

Councillor Skelding stated that the White Paper represented the dilution of the borough's heritage and the loss of its individual identity. Local facilities such as the museum would be lost and there would be no control over money coming into the borough for projects.

Councillor Gorton stated that the White Paper adopted a high handed, top down approach. There was very little in the White Paper to justify the combining of county and borough/district councils. Change of some kind may be coming and there were two ways in which the Council could respond; refuse any reform or work with other Staffordshire councils to put together models for a new structure of local government. There were key aspects that needed to be preserved in any new structure such as mayoralty, honorary aldermen and burgesses. Change to the delivery of services in North Staffordshire may allow councils to improve and strengthen key services.

Council - 22/01/25

It was hoped that before a firm decision was reached here at Newcastle, all Members would be able to scrutinise and examine the options for change.

Councillor Heesom stated that this Council was solvent and well run and had demonstrated that it could focus and influence actions and decisions at a local level.

Councillor Lewis stated that highways and transport were letting people down and said that it was time for accountability and a commitment to delivering the basic standards.

Councillor Holland stated that it could be considered more widely whether unitarization was a good thing and what the optimum size for a unitary authority might be. Referring to being made into a larger authority, Councillor Holland stated that the Walleys Quarry Issue, the Local Plan and the Town Deals funding would not have been dealt with as effectively as this Council had done.

Councillor Brown stated that ways of improving and enhancing the services provided by this Council could be looked at. Residents had not been consulted on this yet and therefore it was not known if they would be opposed to any reorganisation. A unitary authority could simplify the way in which a council worked.

Councillor Fear stated that the White Paper was all about centralisation; taking power away from smaller groups to bigger groups and with fewer elected members per head of population. Having been a Councillor at Newcastle for many years, Councillor Fear stated that every power that had been moved upwards, away from the Borough had got worse.

In summing up, the Leader thanked all Members for their views and stated that he would be engaging with this and had been since the announcement in December and had been key members in putting together the bid that went in for devolution in September, which the government did not respond to.

The Leader stated that attacks on the County Council were bad form, especially as their public health function had been heavily involved with the Walleys Quarry issue and continued to be so.

The White Paper had been sprung upon local authorities by the government in December, 2024 after bids for devolution had been requested in September of that year.

It was hoped that this Council could work with the local MP to put forward a case accepting the history of the borough and that local services were best and to point out some of the deficiencies of unitarization. If the government forced this forward this Council would work with its partners to make whatever was imposed happen.

A named vote was requested:

ADCOCK	Y	GORTON	N	RICHARDS	N
ALLPORT	ABSENT	GROCOTT	N	SKELDING	Y
BARKER	Y	HEESOM	Y	STUBBS	N
BEESTON	Y	HOLLAND	Y	SWEENEY	Y

BERRISFORD	Y	HUTCHISON	Y	J TAGG	Y
BETTLEY-SMITH	ABSENT	JOHNSON	Y	S TAGG	Y
		D JONES	N	J WARING	Y
BROWN	N	S JONES	ABSENT	P WARING	Y
BRYAN	Y	LAWLEY	ABSENT	WHIELDON	Y
BURNETT-FAULKNER	Y	LEWIS	N	WHITMORE	Y
CRISP	Y	MOSS	ABSENT	WILKES	Y
DYMOND	N	NORTHCOTT	Y	G WILLIAMS	N
EDGINGTON-PLUNKETT	N	PANTER	Y	J WILLIAMS	N
FEAR	Y	PARKER	Y	WRIGHT	N
FOX-HEWITT	N	REECE	N		

In Favour (Y) – 24

Against (N) - 14

Abstain – 0

The motion was carried

- Resolved:**
- (i) That the contents and implications of the English Devolution White Paper be noted.
 - (ii) That Council pledges to stand up for the historic independence of the Borough.
 - (iii) That the petitioning of residents in relation to the preservation of the Borough, be supported.
 - (iv) That Newcastle-under-Lyme’s Members of Parliament be called upon to support the Borough’s preservation, and that they engage with Government Ministers in stating the case for the Borough.
 - (v) That the Leader & Chief Executive write to the Deputy Prime Minister and relevant Ministers stating the Council’s position.
 - (vi) That the Leader be enabled to take forward necessary discussions and actions with Government and others and report these to the next suitable full Council.

[Watch the debate here](#)

5. STATEMENT OF THE LEADER OF THE COUNCIL

Council - 22/01/25

The Leader, Councillor Simon Tagg presented the statement that had been circulated about the activities and decisions made by Cabinet to allow questions and comments.

Questions were raised and responses were provided as follows.

On paragraph 2 – Walleys Quarry Odour Issue

Councillor Adcock referred to the ongoing issues and especially over the last few months, following the issuing of the closure notice. Recently there had been over three thousand complaints in one week. What was now required was for the Secretary of State to fast track the appeal hearing.

Councillor Dave Jones echoed Councillor Adcock's comments. He stated that he had been disappointed with comments made in recent election literature and asked the Leader if he agreed that the comments were factually inaccurate and harmed the long standing agreement that Walleys Quarry remained an issue that united all Members in seeking a resolution.

The Leader stated that during any election, literature was put out by all groups making the case to vote for their candidate, which contained criticisms.

Councillor Whieldon asked what monitoring was taking place regarding the Environment Agency and the closure notice.

The Leader agreed that the issue needed to be resolved and that suffering had been amplified since Christmas. He stated that the Chief Executive sat on a group which sought assurances on the progress of the work to let both council members and the public know what was happening.

Councillor John Williams referred to the travellers whose site adjoined Walleys Quarry and asked if there had been any representations from them.

The Leader agreed that this was a good point and stated that the SCG there was extra concentration and analysis on those residents. It was also reflected with council officers and its partners who monitored the travellers' wellbeing.

On paragraph 3 – Borough Local Plan Submission

Councillor Bryan asked the Portfolio Holder for Strategic Planning if he could outline the next steps now that it had been submitted and how rural areas were protected.

Councillor Crisp asked if the rumours of the government's plans to force through a new local plan were correct and asked the Portfolio Holder for Strategic Planning for an update.

The Portfolio Holder confirmed that the local plan had been submitted before Christmas and thanked the Planning team for their hard work on this. By submitting it, the Council did not have to put in the revised housing target from the new government although the rules had been changed slightly, therefore the submitted local plan did have the old rules. However, there was now a new National Planning Policy Framework and the rules had now been changed in such a way that the housing requirement would increase and if this Council falls short of the new 80% requirement, the local plan procedure would have to be gone through again.

On paragraph 4 – Draft Revenue and Capital Budget and Strategies 2025/26

Councillor Parker asked the Portfolio Holder for Finance, Town Centres and Growth what the implications were for the Government's cut to the minimum funding guarantee and how this Council would be affected.

The Portfolio Holder stated that grant funding, paid to the Council by Central Government as part of the Local Government Finance Settlement would be cut from £6.123m to £5.852m in 2025/26 – a cut of £271,000.

On paragraph 5 – Car Parking Strategy 2019-29 Update

Councillor Whieldon welcomed the charge of £1 after 1pm that was still running on surface level carparks around the town centre. It was introduced in 2018 to help the footfall in the town centre. The Portfolio Holder for Finance, Town centres and Growth was asked to outline the benefits of this concession and how it was working.

The Portfolio Holder stated that the £1 after 1pm had been very successful and had improved the footfall in the town centre. This Council had never used its car parks as a cash cow

Councillor John Williams asked if parking would still be free for disabled badge holders on the new car park and also, with the car parks being sold off, would there still be the same amount of disabled parking in the town.

The Portfolio Holder confirmed that there would be disabled access onto the new car park but it would not be free as there would be nobody on there to monitor it. However, the surface level car parks around the town centre would remain the same.

On paragraph 6 – Navigation House Refurbishment Contractor Award

Councillor John Williams asked that, after twelve months of this facility being opened, it go back to scrutiny to assess any anti-social behaviour that had taken place outside of the building.

The Portfolio Holder for Community Safety and Wellbeing stated that she had no problems with it going to scrutiny after twelve months. The Council officers and Rough Sleeper Team were liaising closely with residents in the area and the only people using the facility would be those wanting support.

The Leader stated that this Council had always had a proud record in tackling homelessness, with facilities around the town centre and this would be an addition to those, helping people to get off the streets.

On paragraph 7 – Update on Decarbonisation of the Council's Operational Buildings and Fleet

Councillor Northcott congratulated everyone involved in this and particularly the teams who dealt with collections over the recent period of bad weather and the clear instructions put onto the website regarding the collections that had been missed. The Leader asked the Leader and the Portfolio Holder for Sustainable Environment that this excellent service continue in the future.

The Portfolio Holder confirmed that this would be the case and stated that he was very proud of the recycling and waste team.

Councillor Paul Waring asked the Portfolio Holder for Sustainable Environment what the plans of the Council were to replace the trees at Clough Hall Park that were lost during bad weather.

The Portfolio Holder stated that 60 healthy trees had been uprooted, along with over a hundred in the woodland area; all lost trees would be replaced in due course.

Councillor Berrisford asked the Portfolio Holder for sustainable Environment how the 35% reduction in carbon emissions during the past year had been achieved.

The Portfolio Holder stated that carbon emissions had fallen by 68.37% since measurements began fifteen years ago and effort had accelerated over the last 12 months with a switch to bio-degradable and fossil free fuel for its heavy goods vehicles which had cut carbon emissions by the 35% year on year. In addition, solar panels had been installed at four of the Council's office buildings.

On paragraph 8 – Forward Plan

Councillor Whieldon stated that, here at Newcastle there was a perfect template for fiscal responsibility and responsibility to residents.

The Leader agreed with Councillor Whieldon.

Resolved: That the statement of the Leader of the Council be received and noted.

[Watch the debate here](#)

6. REPORTS OF THE CHAIRS OF THE SCRUTINY COMMITTEES

Reports for the Finance, Assets and Performance Scrutiny Committee, the Health Wellbeing and Environment Scrutiny Committee and the Economy and Place Scrutiny Committee were attached to the agenda.

Resolved: That the reports be received.

[Watch the debate here](#)

7. REPORTS OF THE CHAIRS OF THE REGULATORY COMMITTEES

Councillor Paul Northcott advised Council that the Planning Committee had met on 3 December 2024 and there had been five applications for major development and two applications for minor development. There was a report on a non-determination appeal at a site in Loggerheads and an application for a Historic Buildings Grant. Finally there was the regular update report on Boggs Cottages.

The Audit and Standards Committee and the Licensing and Public Protection Committee had not met since the last meeting of Full Council.

Resolved: That the report be received.

[Watch the debate here](#)

8. QUESTIONS TO THE MAYOR, CABINET MEMBERS AND COMMITTEE CHAIRS

Question from Councillor Richard Gorton to the Leader of the Council

“2025 marks eighty years since the end of the Second World War with Victory in Europe (V E Day) on 8th May 1945 and Victory over Japan (V J Day) on 15th August 1945. Will the Leader of the Council confirm how the Borough Council intends to commemorate these important anniversaries?”

The Leader stated that national guidance was still awaited but confirmed that there would be a beacon lighting ceremony in the Queens Gardens and a commemorative Civic church service on the relevant Sunday. Applications would also be taken from residents wishing to close roads for street parties/events.

The Museum would also be doing a series of events, not only looking at the national ramifications of VE Day but also the impact on Newcastle and its residents.

Where the Council had control over war memorials, they would be the central focus of any celebrations going forward and it would be ensured that they were in a good condition.

Question from Councillor Mark Holland to the Leader of the Council

“We have seen an extreme spell of cold weather affecting residents of the Borough since the New Year. Many of our pensioners are still reeling from the governments cut to the Winter Fuel Allowance, some making a decision about whether to eat or heat.

The Council unanimously passed a Motion at its September meeting asking the Leader & Chief Executive to write to Rachel Reeves, Chancellor of the Exchequer, urging a review of the decision to means-test the Winter Fuel Allowance and asking her to ensure that vulnerable pensioners, particularly those who do not claim Pension Credit, were protected from fuel poverty. Secondly, to write to Adam Jogee MP and the other MPs representing the Borough, calling on them to support the campaign to reverse the Government’s decision.

Has the Council received a response from the Chancellor or local MPs?

Mr Jogee told the local newspaper that he would be organising a series of ‘roving surgeries’ across Newcastle to help pensioners claim Pensions Credit to therefore qualify for the Winter Fuel Allowance.

How many ‘roving surgeries’ did Mr Jogee hold before the deadline to apply for Pensions Credit to enable pensioners to receive this year’s Winter Fuel Allowance?”

The Leader referred to the motion, passed by Full Council last September, part of which was to campaign against the cut to the Winter Fuel Allowance. That was done and all community groups had been written to and two sessions were held for pensioners to come in and get advice on applying for Pension Credit.

Letters were sent to the local MP’s and the Chancellor, Rachel Reeves and no responses had been received, however a letter had been received prior to this meeting from MP’s who wanted to arrange a meeting.

Regarding the roving surgeries, the Leader had checked and could only see one event, pre-Christmas which was related to Pension Credit.

Councillor Holland asked a supplementary question:

“It being the case that he did not get a reply from the Chancellor or MP, would the Leader write again and in the course of either corresponding with the MP or, in the suggested meeting would he please ask how many of the surgeries were held and how many people may have been reasonably been expected to be assisted with their application for Pension Credit.

It was understood that since the time that the Government had made that announcement there had been a rise in people applying for Pension Credit but it would not have been 100% of those eligible so it was needed to know what worked.

The Leader confirmed that he would do that and feed back to Members and to Councillor Holland who asked the question.

[Watch the debate here](#)

9. **RECEIPT OF PETITIONS**

No petitions were handed in.

10. **URGENT BUSINESS**

There was no urgent business.

11. **DISCLOSURE OF EXEMPT INFORMATION**

There were no confidential items.

**Mayor - Councillor Barry Panter
Chair**

Meeting concluded at 10.01 pm