

SPECIAL COUNCIL

Wednesday, 19th November, 2025
Time of Commencement: 7.14 pm

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Present: Mayor - Councillor Robert Bettley-Smith (Chair)

Councillors:	Adcock	Gorton	Stubbs
	Allport	Grocott	Sweeney
	Barker MBE	Heesom	J Tagg
	Beeston	Holland	S Tagg (Leader)
	Brown	Hutchison	Turnock
	Bryan	Johnson	J Waring
	Burnett-Faulkner	D Jones	P Waring
	Casey-Hulme	Northcott	Whieldon
	Crisp	Parker	Whitmore
	Dymond	Reece	G Williams
	Edgington-Plunkett	Richards	J Williams
	Fear	Skelding	Wright

Apologies: Councillor(s) Berrisford, Dean, Fox-Hewitt, S Jones, Lewis and Wilkes

Officers:	Gordon Mole	Chief Executive
	Simon McEneny	Deputy Chief Executive
	Anthony Harold	Service Director - Legal & Governance / Monitoring Officer
	Nesta Barker	Service Director - Regulatory Services
	Georgina Evans-Stadward	Service Director - Strategy, People and Performance
	Geoff Durham	Civic & Member Support Officer
	Craig Turner	Service Director - Finance / S151 Officer

1. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

The Council's Monitoring Officer was called upon to advise Members of declarations of interest in relation to item 5 on the agenda – Local Government Reorganisation.

Referring to the Annual Council meeting in May, whereby a general dispensation had been given to all Members, the Monitoring Officer stated that it was good practice that a dispensation could be given for this matter and therefore Members did not need to declare any interest on item 5.

There were no declarations of interest stated.

2. MINUTES OF A PREVIOUS MEETING

Resolved: That the minutes of the meeting held on 24 September, 2025 be agreed as a correct record.

3. MAYOR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Mayor made three announcements:

Members were thanked for their support throughout the Mayor's 65 mile walk around the Borough. It was expected that over £5000 would be raised for Papyrus.

The Mayor's Civic Carol Service would be held on Saturday 20 December, 2025 at St Margaret's Church, Betley at 5.30pm and a Carols By Candlelight Service – in the presence of the Mayor would be held on Sunday 21 December at St Giles Church Newcastle at 6pm.

There would be several events announced at January Council and Members were asked to note the Mayor's Ball on Saturday 21 March, 2026 at Keele University.

4. LOCAL GOVERNMENT REORGANISATION

The Leader introduced a report seeking endorsement and support of Members for actions to enable the submission of a proposal to the Government setting out a model for the invitation area of Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent.

The Leader believed from the outset that the two tier system of County and Borough worked well. Strong local services were delivered, there was local accountability and financial stability.

Reorganisation was not a priority and pursuing it risked diverting resources from what truly mattered – delivering services to the residents of the Borough and securing real devolution.

The Borough had a proud history, going back over 850 years and in 2023, the passion and pride of its residents and businesses and past and present Members of the Council was evident. The local governance of the Borough should therefore be protected.

The Save our Borough petition now had over 9,300 signatories which was a testament to local feeling. If the Government insisted on enforcing change it must be ensured that the Borough remained strong and independent.

The proposal being put forward was for a unitary authority for the whole of the Borough of Newcastle-under-Lyme, based on its current boundaries as part of a full unitary model for the County of Staffordshire and Stoke on Trent.

This was the preferred model that came from the investigation of options agreed by the Council last March. A unitary Borough Council would meet the Government's local government reorganisation criteria. Newcastle Borough Council was financially strong with balanced budgets, well managed reserves and no long term debt and was therefore ready to take up the challenges of taking on the extra services of a unitary council.

Any merger with Stoke on Trent City Council would harm the residents of Newcastle financially and by hitting service delivery.

There were other proposals – such as Staffordshire County Council's creation of east and west Staffordshire councils but the investigations showed that the key criteria were not met. Members of the County Council had all signed a letter to the Prime Minister asking him to stop local government reorganisation. The Leader asked that Members at Newcastle do the same, as outlined in an email that he had sent to all Members last week.

The Deputy Leader seconded the recommendations stating that he could not understand the point of local government reorganisation. In a recent survey, only 6% thought that it was a good idea. Work to develop the submission brought to committee this evening cost nearly £200,000 – money which could have been better spent on local services. A further £400,000 had been put into this years budget for local government reorganisation.

Councillor Dave Jones stated that the Labour group would be supporting the recommendations outlined in the report. Councillor Jones stated that his preferred model since 2018 had been for a Newcastle-under-Lyme unitary authority to allow for more services to be run locally as it was in the best interests of residents. Becoming a unitary authority would break up the control from upper tier services. Councillor Jones agreed with the Leader that this Council was in the best place to step up and run the upper tier services and better decisions could be made locally.

Councillor Holland referred to Appendix C, stating that it was confirmation that the Council's principles were the right ones with 59% of survey respondents backing a unitary authority. Appendix B demonstrated that Newcastle could succeed as a unitary authority. The Borough had been opposing the annexation into Stoke on Trent for 95 years and very little had changed. The arguments of 1930 were the same arguments of today.

Councillor Gorton stated that to date, only five responses had been published which seemed to indicate that there was no consensus and also showed how difficult it was to unpick the present two tier system. Councillor Gorton felt that it would be better for ministers to call a halt to local government reorganisation in Staffordshire and focus on the devolution aspect of last year's White Paper.

It was very clear from respondents to the survey that many questioned the value and benefit arising from a reorganisation.

Councillor Whieldon stated that local government reorganisation was trying to force a mandate with non-comparable regions with no evidence or reasons why and no thought had been given to cultural compatibility. It would cause serious imbalance in the widely different demographic and cultural development.

Councillor Stubbs stated that the proposal put forward sought to safeguard this Council's identity and accountability. It argued for a single unitary authority within Newcastle's current boundaries – a model that reflected the Council's community and history.

Councillor Skelding stated that the reorganisation was a 'hostile takeover bid'. It would strip away Newcastle's heritage and would decimate representation and dilute democracy. There had been no consultation with residents on this.

Councillor Paul Waring stated that the general feeling of residents within his wards was that it would lead to more levels of management and cost. The savings for local government reorganisation in comparison with the cost were minuscule at 0.4%.

Councillor Adcock stated that the reorganisation was a pull towards centralisation with fewer elected representatives per head of population and decisions being taken further away from where people were living.

Councillor Hutchison stated that local government reorganisation would significantly change local services such as waste and recycling and street scene. A Newcastle unitary authority would give a clear picture of who controlled and was responsible for local services.

Councillor Fear stated that this was not devolution – it was the reverse. Instead of passing powers down they were being sucked upwards to a few distant people. Although it was stated that reorganisation would save money, it had since emerged that it had not been costed at all.

In summing up, the Leader thanked everyone for their contributions in agreeing to support the submission on 28 November, 2025 for a Newcastle unitary authority but this Council did not accept that there was a need for change. A two tier system did deliver.

Local government reorganisation could mean the loss of Newcastle's Aldermen and Burgesses.

The Leader stated that the offer was there for a letter to be drafted to the Prime Minister asking for local government reorganisation to be stopped and it could be sent round to all Members for them to add their signature if they wished to do so.

Newcastle's proposal was strong, practical and represented local identity.

A named vote was called for and taken:

ADCOCK	Y	FEAR	Y	RICHARDS	Y
ALLPORT	Y	FOX-HEWITT	Absent	SKELDING	Y
BARKER	Y	GORTON	Y	STUBBS	Y
BEESTON	Y	GROCOTT	Y	SWEENEY	Y
BERRISFORD	Absent	HEESOM	Y	J TAGG	Y
BETTLEY-SMITH	Y	HOLLAND	Y	S TAGG	Y
BROWN	Y	HUTCHISON	Y	A TURNOCK	Y
BRYAN	Abstain	JOHNSON	Y	J WARING	Y
BURNETT-FAULKNER	Y	D JONES	Y	P WARING	Y
CASEY-HULME	Y	S JONES	Absent	WHIELDON	Y
CRISP	Y	LAWLEY	Absent	WHITMORE	Y
DEAN	Absent	LEWIS	Absent	WILKES	Absent
DYMOND	Y	NORTHCOTT	Y	G WILLIAMS	Y

EDGINGTON-PLUNKETT	Y	PARKER	Y	J WILLIAMS	Y
		REECE	Y	WRIGHT	Y

In Favour (Y) – 35

Against (N) - 0

Abstain – 1

Resolved:

- (i) That the work undertaken in the preparation of a final Local Government Reorganisation submission to UK Government from Newcastle-under-Lyme Borough Council be noted; and
- (ii) That the case for a single unitary council for Newcastle-under-Lyme within the current Borough boundaries, be endorsed.

Councillor Sweeney raised a point of personal explanation and informed Members that Councillor Bryan's abstention was due to her holding paid employment with a local authority which may be impacted by the changes.

[Watch the debate here](#)

5. LICENSING ACT POLICY

Councillor Dave Jones left the meeting at 8.11pm

The Deputy Leader of the Council introduced a report seeking the adoption of the draft Statement of Licensing Policy 2025-2030.

There was a requirement for Council's to update their Statement of Licensing Policy every five years. The Policy had been reviewed by the Licensing and Public Protection Committee at its meeting in August where they reviewed the consultation and at a meeting in October, the results of the consultation were reviewed.

Councillor Joan Whieldon, Chair of the Licensing and Public Protection Committee seconded the recommendations stating that the Policy was instrumental to the Council as it set out how the Council dealt with pertinent and complex issues raised when administering this regime and without which, the Council could be open to challenge.

Resolved:

- (i) That the decision made by Licensing & Public Protection Committee on 8th October 2025, be endorsed.
- (ii) That the adoption of the Statement of Licensing Policy 2025-30, be approved.

[Watch the debate here](#)

6. MOTIONS OF MEMBERS

A Motion regarding the first anniversary of the Borough's Civic Pride Campaign was submitted by the Conservative Group, proposed by the Leader - Councillor Simon Tagg and seconded by Councillor Hutchison.

Councillor Tagg introduced the Motion stating that the last twelve months had seen a real effort made for cleaner and safer streets and stronger community engagement right across the Borough. It had been a partnership with residents, residents groups, businesses, voluntary groups, Police, Aspire Housing, Newcastle Business Improvement District and Council staff.

Activities had included litter picks, green space improvements and tree Planting, graffiti removal, support for vulnerable individuals. The Motion acknowledged the successes of the first year of the campaign.

Civic Pride showcased the work that the Council and all of the organisations involved did on a daily basis. It was not just about cleaner neighbourhoods, but also about people, place, purpose and working in partnership together.

In seconding the Motion, Councillor Hutchison stated that the first year of the initiative had been well received by the local community and partner organisations and the commitment looked set to continue.

The initiative began in the Kidsgrove area in January and then in June there was a day of action in Wolstanton and May Bank. October saw a week of action in Newcastle. In total the Civic Pride Events did 22 days of action, covering all areas of the Borough.

The Civic Pride Investment Fund had assisted groups and projects within the Borough to promote the image of Newcastle as a clean, safe and friendly place in which to live, work and visit.

Councillor John Williams, in supporting the Motion stated that he had found that there was a lack of residents involved and asked that they be encouraged to be involved and take more pride in their area.

Councillor Holland stated that, as he was compiling his report for the North Staffordshire Theatre Trust – at item 8 on this agenda, he was reminded of Stoke-on Trent's City of Culture bid and, although unsuccessful it transformed the way in which the City thought about itself. Programmes like Civic Pride could do that.

Councillor Stubbs asked if it was possible for the Council or Portfolio Holder to put out a calendar of events – earlier than the previous one to allow more Councillors and the community groups to attend the events.

Councillor Heesom stated that she had attended several events and that Civic Pride had had a significant effect – especially on community safety and community cohesion. Silverdale had a bike marking event by the police which was really well attended. It was supported that, for next year a programme would be set out much earlier and some events could be advertised on the new screen in the town centre.

There was a Civic Pride Investment Fund that people could apply for with published criteria.

Councillor Fear agreed with all that had been said and stated that it had all worked well but improvements could always be made, such as advertising earlier. This was only the first year and therefore could be built upon.

In summing up, the Leader stated that there was more that could be done for future events including encouraging more community participation through social media or other means. The calendar of events should be made available earlier. The Leader was pleased that issues such as e-scooters and e-bikes and street racers were being dealt with by the police.

A vote was taken and the Motion was carried.

[Watch the debate here](#)

7. REPORTS OF THE REPRESENTATIVES ON OUTSIDE BODIES

The Leader introduced a report regarding the bi-annual submission of reports from Members representing the Council on outside bodies in respect of those organisation's activities.

These were the first reports back following the decision to do this which was made at Full Council in April. Reports were attached to the agenda.

In future the reports would be incorporated into the Regulatory and Scrutiny Chairs' reports on the agenda.

Councillor Sweeney seconded the recommendations.

Resolved: That receipt of the bi-annual reports which have been received in relation to the business carried out/matters dealt with by relevant Outside Bodies to full Council as appropriate be noted and accepted.

[Watch the debate here](#)

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

Question from Councillor Nick Crisp to the Portfolio Holder for Community Safety and Wellbeing:

“I’m pleased that Newcastle-under-Lyme Borough Council has been recognised with the Employer Recognition Scheme Bronze Award for its support of Armed Forces veterans. This reflects the council’s commitment to supporting veterans, reservists, service families, and cadet volunteers.

Can the Portfolio Holder confirm whether the Council intends to build on this success by working towards silver and gold level recognition, further strengthening its support for the Armed Forces community in the Borough?”

The Portfolio Holder stated that the bronze award was welcomed. Confirmation was given that the Council did intend to build upon it by applying for silver and gold awards. The Scheme recognised the commitment and support that organisations gave to Armed Forces veterans and personnel through the signing of the Armed

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Forces Covenant and making of pledges which demonstrated the development and implementation of Armed Forces friendly policies and promoting and advocating good practice to other partners and organisations.

The Council was already in a good position to achieve silver standard – having policies in place which, for example acknowledged the housing needs of ex Armed Forces people and was currently looking at human resources policies which would ensure that there was no unfair disadvantage to ex-service personnel through the recruitment and selection processes.

Councillor Crisp did not ask a supplementary question:

Question from Councillor Andrew Parker to the Leader of the Council:

“Following last week’s announcement that Newcastle Town Centre Business Improvement District (BID) has successfully secured its re-ballot, alongside the Town Centre’s outstanding achievements in the Heart of England and National Britain in Bloom awards, Will the Leader join me in congratulating the BID team and council staff on these successes, and outline how the council intends to build on this and work with the BID to further enhance the vitality and attractiveness of our town centre for businesses, residents, and visitors?”

The Leader stated that the success of the BID re-ballot was really welcome, giving it up to 2031 to continue delivering its services and the great work that it did with businesses in the town centre – such as the Christmas lights switch-on which was funded by the BID. They had a Business Plan and Prospectus, setting out their aims and objectives for the next five years, for which they went to businesses and got support in the ballot from voting businesses.

The Council would continue to work in partnership with the BID and other key organisations such as the police, helping to deliver the objectives which married with the Council’s objectives which included a cleaner and safer town centre, vibrant businesses and the regeneration that was currently underway.

Regarding the success in the Britain in Bloom Awards, that was a great achievement for the town centre again. Last year the BID won the regional finals and went through to the nationals where they won a silver award and received a commendation. The Leader thanked all of the Council staff who were involved in that.

The business engagement part of the awards was carried out by the BID, getting businesses involved in dressing their windows and frontages.

Councillor Parker asked a supplementary question:

“The Queen’s Gardens have been a credit again this year. Could the Leader confirm that the Council’s policy of having a sustainable herbaceous perennial planting scheme mixed in with the annual planting in the Queens’ Gardens is to be continued. The Scheme demonstrates that the Council’s environmental

sustainability approach whilst ensuring a striking and interesting garden environment for town centre visitors”

The Leader stated that Queens Gardens had always been the flagship of the town centre. The Council had moved towards more sustainable planting around the sides. The Council still did the proper bedding plants and the changing throughout the year ensuring that the Council still mixed the sustainable planting which would grow and improve year after year whilst still changing the bedding plants in the central parts to keep the variety.

[Watch the debate here](#)

9. RECEIPT OF PETITIONS

No petitions were received.

10. URGENT BUSINESS

There was no urgent business.

11. DISCLOSURE OF EXEMPT INFORMATION

There were no confidential items.

**Mayor - Councillor Robert Bettley-Smith
Chair**

Meeting concluded at 9.02 pm