

COUNCIL

Wednesday, 11th February, 2026

Time of Commencement: 7.00 pm

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

Councillors:	Adcock	Gorton	Richards
	Beeston	Grocott	Stubbs
	Berrisford	Heesom	Sweeney
	Brown	Holland	J Tagg
	Bryan	Fox-Hewitt	S Tagg (Leader)
	Burnett-Faulkner	Hutchison	Turnock
	Casey-Hulme	Johnson	J Waring
	Crisp	D Jones	P Waring
	Dean	Lewis	Whieldon
	Dymond	Northcott	Whitmore
	Edgington-Plunkett	Parker	Wilkes
	Fear	Reece	Wright

Apologies: Councillor(s) Allport, Barker MBE, S Jones, Lawley, Skelding, G Williams and J Williams

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

1. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest stated.

2. FORMER COUNCILLOR PETER HAILSTONES

A minute's silence was held for former Councillor, Peter Hailstones who had recently passed away.

The Leader of the Council led the tributes stating that Peter had been a well-known Conservative Councillor between 2000 and 2018 and had served as Consort to the Mayor in 2014-15 when his wife Linda was elected as Mayor. Peter and Linda had won an award for attending the most Conservative conferences in a row.

On behalf of his group, the Leader sent condolences to Linda and her family.

Councillor Dave Jones stated that Peter was a man of few words although, when engaged in conversation was a very generous person. It was a real testament to Peter that he had the fortitude and stamina to win the conference attendance award. On behalf of his group, Councillor Jones sent condolences to the family.

Councillor Fear stated that Peter was a hard worker who cared about his council work and also worked hard to keep the Wye Road Community Centre running for many years. Peter's interest in the community had continued when he had left the Council. Condolences were sent to the family.

[Watch the tributes here](#)

3. MINUTES OF A PREVIOUS MEETING

Resolved: That the minutes of the meeting held on 21st January, 2025 be agreed as a correct record.

4. MAYOR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Mayor made the following announcements:

- the funeral of Peter Hailstones would be held at Bradwell Crematorium on Wednesday 25th February commencing at 12.40pm.
- the Freedom Ceremony for Sir Ian Dudson KCVO CBE, would be held here on Wednesday 11th March at 6.30pm.
- the Mayor had attended the AGM of the Burgesses and Alicia Hand was elected Chairperson of the Burgesses – the first female Chairperson of the Burgesses in Newcastle-under-Lyme.
- nominations for the Borough Heroes awards would close on 15th February if any Members were thinking of making a submission.
- there were two remaining fund-raising events that the Mayor would be holding: firstly, the concert at St Giles at 7pm on Saturday 14 March and secondly, the Mayor's Ball on Saturday 21 March at Keele.
- there would be a final fund-raising event on Saturday 16 May, in Betley Village Hall; details would be posted on the Mayoral Facebook page and circulated to members once they were available.

5. REVENUE AND CAPITAL STRATEGIES 2026/27

The Leader introduced the report and moved the recommendations as set out by Cabinet for the 2026/27 General Fund Revenue Budget and Capital Programme. The Medium-Term Financial Strategy 2026/27 to 2030/31, Capital Strategy for 2026/36, Treasury Management Strategy for 2026/27, Investment Strategy 2026/27 and Commercial Strategy for 2026/27 were also recommended for approval.

The Leader stated that there would again be a below inflation Council Tax increase of 1.99%. The Efficiency Board had ensured that the budget gap of £1.599m had been filled. Appendix 4 of the report detailed saving measures, including good housekeeping, efficiencies and no reduction to front line services.

The public consultation had shown that town centre regeneration, street cleaning, refuse collection and recycling, parks and open spaces keeping Council Tax low. The Leader said that the budget reflected those priorities.

Car park charges on surface level car parks would be frozen as would sports fees for outside sports including tennis, bowling, football and rugby for the year ahead. Support would be added for Newcastle's bid to become a town of culture, from the Civic Growth Fund.

Councillor Sweeney seconded the recommendations and stated that the budget had been scrutinised at the previous two meetings of the Finance, Assets and Performance Scrutiny Committee. Councillor Sweeney thanked the Finance Team for the work that had gone into it.

It was forecast that the Council would achieve a balanced outturn for 2025/26.

The Civic Growth Fund would provide £250,000 investment into the Council's Corporate Priorities. £125,000 would be used within place development on initiatives and boosting footfall in the town centre. Environmental sustainability within the Borough would be boosted by £75,000 and £50,000 would continue to be allocated to the digital programme.

Councillor Stubbs said that he had several serious concerns including: a lack of responsiveness to scrutiny; continued reliance on optimistic assumptions; a growing exposure to borrowing and capital programme risk; the fact that the Civic Growth Fund had had little scrutiny; and that the public consultation had attracted 25 responses.

Councillor Parker arrived at 7.34pm.

Councillor Whieldon stated that, despite difficult circumstances, the Council had managed to keep the Council Tax low and protect services. Very few people realised how much the Council had done under the current administration.

Councillor Lewis asked what modelling had been carried out to test whether higher charges would reduce usage and how it would be tracked.

Councillor Paul Waring thanked officers for producing the budget which had been subject to a high level of scrutiny and for which sensible suggestions seemed to have been taken into consideration.

Councillor Reece asked what assurances could be provided regarding deliverability and timeline certainty for the major redevelopment taking place in the town centre, as well as what were the financial implications if capital receipts were lower or later than projected.

Councillor Fear said that this administration had kept its promise in respect of keeping Council Tax increases below inflation. £800,000 had been wasted on the Local Government Reorganisation – which could have been used for the wellbeing of residents. No employees at the Council had lost their jobs as a result of due economy.

Councillor Dave Jones asked for a point of personal explanation regarding Councillor Fear's mention of 'due economy'. Councillor Fear explained that it meant responsible behaviour when managing money.

Councillor Brown referred to the consultation 25 responses which felt like a significant drop from the 82 that had been received in 2025 and asked what assessment had been made in terms of the consultation's representativeness as well as what steps would be taken to improve public engagement before taking decisions that affected the taxpayer.

Councillor Hutchison stated that he was pleased that the budget had been shaped by resident feedback from the consultation, prioritising service protection. New technology in street cleaning and refuse collection had had a positive effect. Funding from the Civic Growth Fund had helped to enhance parks and open spaces with tree planting and the Grassland Management Strategy and wildflower meadows.

Councillor Richards asked what steps the council would take to reduce reliance on temporary accommodation as referred to in in section 2.10 and what evidence there was that the proposed steps would be successful as well as reduce future financial pressures.

Councillor Adcock expressed his support for the proposal, commenting that many residents were struggling financially and it was encouraging to see that the Council tax increase was remaining below 2% and that priority services were being protected.

Councillor Grocott referred to the refitting of the G2 facilities and asked where extra investments would go next given that other places like Kidsgrove and various community centres were also in need of refurbishment.

Councillor Holland said that no alternative to the current budget proposal had been put forward and thanked the administration for finding money in the Civic Growth Fund to extend concessions on parking tariffs and for the freeze on sports fees.

Councillor Fox-Hewitt noted that there had been an 18% reduction in the headcount of Council's workforce and commented that an alternative budget had been proposed in the past resulting in no fiscal changes.

Councillor Fox-Hewitt also referred to the £781,000 staffing related savings that have been identified and requested some clarity on what the roles are and how those savings had been realized.

Councillor Fox-Hewitt finally asked that specific examples of the projects be provided in relation to the Civic Growth Fund allocations of £125,000 for place development and £50,000 for digital delivery, as well as how those outcomes would be monitored to ensure long-term savings or economic benefits.

The Mayor invited the Leader to respond to questions raised.

The Leader stated that the pool's business rates and reductions would benefit the City and County Councils and that investments were being distributed at the detriment of district councils.

In terms of scrutiny, there had been a record of delivery over the past eight years with £10 million savings realised which suggested that there was a good chance of delivering the current budget plans. There was always a risk as with everything but the Council was working with specialist advisers on the treasury side and with Capital and Centric on the regeneration side.

The agreement for the regeneration projects had been agreed almost unanimously and the designated contractors would be the ones who would be buying those assets and giving capital receipts as part of the deal and arrangements. Online consultations had taken place under the oversight of this administration since 2018 giving residents a chance to participate and have their say in the proposals year after year.

In relation to the cost of maintenance of facilities, external fundings had been brought in including through the environmental scheme with the J2 solar panels. Kidsgrove Sports Centre was also back in use after being closed, as well as the pump track in Newchapel.

The Leader clarified that due economy should be understood as a proper careful and appropriate management of resources ensuring expenditure were necessary and reasonable and not wasteful.

Councillor Dave Jones left the meeting.

The Leader stated that the budget proposed was balanced and kept the Council Tax increase down to 1.99% i.e. 10 p a week for over 95% of households which was the key message coming out along with protecting frontline services.

Finally about the staffing savings there had been no redundancies. Efficiency and changes of way of working had led to reduction in the headcount as part of good and sensible governance of the Council.

The Leader concluded by saying that the budget was prudent, fair and forward-looking, reflecting the views of residents.

The Mayor suspended the meeting to allow members who had left the room to return to their seats.

A named vote was taken in respect of the proposed budget:

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

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DYMOND	N	NORTHCOTT	Y	G WILLIAMS	Absent
EDGINGTON-PLUNKETT	N	PARKER	Y	J WILLIAMS	Absent
		REECE	N	WRIGHT	N

In Favour (Y) – 24

Against (N) – 12

Abstain – 0

Resolved: That recommendations (a) to (o) as set out in Appendix 1 to this report, be approved.

[Watch the debate here](#)

6. PAY POLICY STATEMENT

The Leader introduced a report seeking Council's approval of the Pay Policy Statement for 2026/27 and moved the recommendation.

This was an annual requirement of the Localism Act, 2011 setting out the remuneration of chief officers and the lowest paid employees and the changes in roles and titles of senior officers.

Councillor Sweeney seconded the recommendation.

Resolved: That the content of the Pay Policy Statement for 2026/27, as set out at Appendix A be approved, with a view to this being published on the Council's website by 31st March 2026.

[Watch the debate here](#)

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

Question from Councillor Joan Whieldon to the Leader of the Council:

"I welcome the decision to set up of a Cabinet Inquiry Panel to hold Labour's forced local government reorganisation plans to account. People across Newcastle Borough expect full transparency and a proper public debate, and this panel is a vital step in ensuring our Borough's voice is heard and defended.

Can the Leader of the Council confirm whether Newcastle's MP, Adam Jogee, will be invited to attend, contribute and answer questions at the first meeting?

Residents still don't know his stance on the future of our Borough, and it's time we heard clearly where he stands."

The Leader stated that he was pleased that it had been agreed to set up a Cabinet Panel as it was important to scrutinise the Government's actions.

The intention was to invite all of the Borough's MP's along to meetings in order to ascertain their views on local government reorganisation.

Councillor Whieldon asked a supplementary question:

"If the Leader was having trouble contacting Adam Jogee MP it may be useful to get a secondary communication through his secretary."

The Leader responded that communications would be opened with the MP's office once a date had been set in order to get their views. It was known that the MP had already voted in favour of the Local Government Reorganisation and therefore this Council needed to know what they would be doing over the next few months.

Question from Councillor Phil Reece to the Leader of the Council:

"Several local residents have contacted me regarding the recent departure of the charity 'Friends of the Guildhall' from the Guildhall building. Given that this charity was established specifically to maintain the Guildhall as a public asset and ensure its long-term viability, could the Leader please:

- clarify the specific reasons why the Friends of the Guildhall have had to vacate the premises?
- confirm what steps are being taken to ensure the Guildhall remains a public building that is both open to and accessible for use by the local community?"

The Leader stated that the Guildhall was run by Support Staffordshire. The Friends of the Guildhall Group was set up and were handling the front area reception but an agreement had been reached between both parties for Support Staffordshire to take over the front office with some of the 'Friends of' staff becoming part of Support Staffordshire.

Councillor Reece asked a supplementary question:

"Would Support Staffordshire continue to provide a public protection service supporting people with computer access for services such as bus passes, blue badges etc.?"

The Leader responded that it was his understanding and that it was also to enhance services; he would raise that question with them.

[Watch the debate here](#)

8. RECEIPT OF PETITIONS

No petitions were received.

9. URGENT BUSINESS

The Mayor announced an item of urgent business: to consider a report on Elections – Scale of Fees and Charges.

The report had been considered urgent in order to confirm the position with Council ahead of the May elections.

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The Leader introduced the report which set out the fees paid to the Returning Officer and elections staff and moved the recommendation as it had now been confirmed that elections would be taking place in Newcastle-under-Lyme.

Councillor Holland paid tribute to the election staff and those who assisted every year on election days.

Resolved: That the proposed election fees for 2026/2027, as set out in Appendix One to this report be noted and agreed.

[Watch the debate here](#)

10. DISCLOSURE OF EXEMPT INFORMATION

There was no confidential business.

Mayor - Councillor Robert Bettley-Smith
Chair

Meeting concluded at 8.28 pm