

COUNCIL

Wednesday, 2nd September, 2026

Time of Commencement: 5.00 pm

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Present: Mayor.Councillor Christopher Bailey (Chair)

Councillors:	Beeston	Downs	SainReiners
	Casey-Hulme	Evans	Saxton
	Heesom	Fisher	Sedgley
	Holland	Gullis	Shaw
	Hutchison	Harrison	Simpson
	D Jones	Harrison	Sparks
	Renshaw	Jellyman	Stevenson
	S Tagg	Lefroy	Swain
	Turnock	Machin	Tift
	Whitmore	Rogerson	Walton

Apologies: Councillor(s) Barber, Bettley-Smith, Chamberlain, Clarke, Fear, Parker, J Tagg, Whieldon, Kasperowicz, Ashworth, Wood and Westcott

Officers:	Gordon Mole	Chief Executive
	Simon McEneny	Deputy Chief Executive
	Olwen Brown	Interim Service Director- Legal and Governance/Monitoring Officer
	Andrew Bird	Service Director - Sustainable Environment
	Joanne Halliday	Service Director - Commercial Delivery
	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. LOCAL GOVERNMENT REORGANISATION

A Motion concerning the Council's response to the Ministerial announcement of 16 July, 2026 relating to Local Government Reorganisation (LGR), was proposed by Councillor Simon Tagg and seconded by Councillor Holland.

Councillor Tagg stated that it had now been confirmed that Newcastle-under-Lyme Borough Council would be abolished and a new authority created with Stoke on Trent and Staffordshire Moorlands. The decision did not reflect the wishes of the residents

of the Borough – with more than 11,000 people signing a petition and it was felt that reorganisation of the current local government structure in Staffordshire was not necessary.

There were also financial concerns regarding savings, the cost of transition and how existing debts and liabilities would be managed. Newcastle residents should not be expected to take on Stoke-on Trent's tax burden. The Government should explain why the model was selected and what evidence supported the decision.

This Council should be able to continue challenging where the decision had been made. As the Leader had recently met with Adam Jogee MP, Councillor Tagg asked for an update on what actions the MP was taking to fight this.

It was welcomed that the Council had written to the Secretary of State seeking clarification on the reasons behind the decision. The Leader was asked to clarify when the Council received legal advice, why it took until yesterday for the letter to be sent when the Council only had until 15 October to challenge the decision. The key question was whether the decision was reached lawfully, fairly and in accordance with the Government's own criteria.

Counsel's further advice would be welcomed on what alternative routes could be available to the Council, for example, an opportunity to challenge future structural change order or influence parliamentary scrutiny around the proposal.

The Council's position would be strengthened if it could work alongside other authorities sharing its concerns. The Leader was asked if he had approached the Leader of Staffordshire County Council regarding joint legal action and if so, what the response was.

Councillor Holland, in seconding the Motion stated that larger unitary authorities were less representative, less accountable and more remote from the communities they served. For Newcastle, LGR would mark the end of 853 years of history and identity and its residents would face large financial debts from another Authority.

Councillor Holland felt that LGR should not be happening – but to have the worst version imposed on this Council added insult to injury and deserved to be resisted. The Administration and officers were urged to leave no stone unturned in bringing to light any defects in the Government's reasoning.

An amendment to the Motion – shown on pages 7 to 9 of the agenda, had been proposed by Councillor Gullis and seconded by Councillor Shaw.

In proposing his group's amendment, the Leader stated that on the day that advice was received, a decision was made to start the work to issue the pre-action letter that had now been sent out. The Government now had 14 days to respond and the Council would then see their method behind the decision making. Following which, a legal opinion would be sought to see if the Council had a case to take the Government to court. However, the Council needed to be aware of the consequences of the decision which could cost millions of pounds being spent on a judicial review and, if unsuccessful, any legal costs could be imposed upon this Council.

Nobody in Newcastle wanted LGR. The previous Administration had run a petition which had made it clear that it was opposed to. Almost £800m of Stoke on Trent City

Council's debt was about to be absorbed by Newcastle residents. A new Authority would not, therefore, be financially viable from day one.

The amendment to the Motion acted as an important update as to the actions this Authority had taken. It was hoped that all Newcastle MP's would make it clear to Government that LGR was not wanted.

The Deputy Leader seconded the amendment. He stated that he had written to the Leader of Stoke-on-Trent City Council on 6 August asking twelve questions, mainly regarding the £791m borrowing debt, the actions they would take and how the debt would affect any future combined Authority following LGR. The response received on 20 August only answered one question. They would not sign a joint letter from all concerned councils asking Ministers for confirmation that any future combined Authority would not inherit Stoke-on-Trent's debts.

Councillor Ashworth had stated that all financial governance, operational and implementation matters would need to be considered – including the opening balance sheet of the new Authority. The assets, liabilities, reserves, borrowing, funding arrangements and service responsibilities would be transferred from existing councils.

Newcastle's finances were currently sound, with proper accounting rules and regulations being followed. Stoke-on-Trent's Executive Summary stated that 'the financial sustainability of the Council remained fragile with continued reliance on EFS remaining critical to long term resilience'.

On 19 August, the Government had confirmed that it would not write off any of Stoke-on-Trent's debt.

The amendment was not accepted by Councillor's Simon Tagg and Holland, who wished for the amendment to be debated further.

The amendment was debated.

Councillor Holland stated that the original Motion did require changes as events had moved on and there did seem to be agreement, overall, from Members.

Councillor Lefroy stated that the UK, particularly England, had fewer councillors per head of population than almost any other country in Europe with more than 2000 per councillor. LGR would reduce representation in Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent by two thirds. The number of councillors representing local people would reduce by two thirds.

Councillor Lefroy referred to the start time of this evening's meeting – 5pm. It had already proved difficult for some Members to attend but, unitary authorities held their meetings during the day and therefore, more Members in full time employment would be excluded from local democracy as a result.

Councillor Lefroy reiterated that LGR was not wanted and stated that a referendum should have been held.

Councillor Hutchison stated that the previous Administration's Cabinet had submitted a 300+ page proposal showing that Newcastle could and should be a stand-alone unitary authority and the response from Government had been one or two

paragraphs long. The decision made was not evidence based or in the interests of residents of the Borough and should be challenged.

Councillor Whitmore spoke in her dual capacity as a Madeley Borough and Parish Councillor stating that LGR threatened the identity of Madeley as it would strip away local voices. Decision makers who had never been to Madeley would decide on its future, controlling planning decisions, fields and funds.

Councillor Heesom stated that she was sure that the fight to save the Borough Council, its identity and local democracy was agreed by all Members to do their best for residents and work together.

Councillor Simon Tagg stated that his group would support the amendment. Reference was made to Stoke-on-Trent's debt stating that he thought that the whole County may have to pick up some of the debt. The Borough's assets needed to be protected from, as Councillor Shaw had mentioned, asset stripping to cover some of the debt. This could be done through Fields in Trust and other means. He asked the Leader if he had approached the Leader of Staffordshire County Council regarding possible joint legal action and if so, the response received.

The Leader stated that the Administration had looked at Fields in Trust and work continued to put sites under that protection. He had also liaised with Parish Council's to protect land within their Parish. Referring to the amendment, the Leader stated that it outlined the work that the Authority had been doing since the decision had been made by the Government – to impose LGR upon this Council rather than pulling it and having an open dialogue on Strategic Mayoral Authorities.

The Leader stated that he would not risk spending millions of pounds on a court case if it could not be won. The money would be better spent protecting and investing in the Council's assets.

A vote was taken on the amendment and it was accepted.

A debate was then held on the amended Motion, which was now the substantive Motion.

The Deputy Leader stated that LGR showed a total disregard for the lives and concerns of local residents. The Council would continue to do its utmost to ensure that residents' rights and services were protected and provided for if LGR went ahead.

Councillor Jones agreed with Councillor Lefroy's comment regarding the reduction in the level of representation. Similarly, as he believed in devolution, Councillor Jones' view was that decisions were best made close to those people they impacted. The current system meant that decisions on education and social care were made in Stafford and Councillor Jones stated that right from the very start, it had been his belief that a unitary authority for Newcastle was the best way forward. He would support the Motion as it protected the Council's position.

Councillor Holland stated that decision that the Government was the wrong one because of the injustice that was being done to local people.

Councillor Simon Tagg asked the Leader to update Council on any discussions he had had with Staffordshire County Council. If Newcastle were to go down the route of legal action it would be better if it was with the County Council.

Reference was made to a point regarding having a Mayor of Staffordshire through a Strategic Mayoral Authority. Councillor Tagg stated that in the Spring it had become clear that such Mayors would be able to raise Council Tax uncapped.

Councillor Tagg asked the Leader if there could be a Cabinet Panel to discuss LGR. In the Autumn, there would be a Committee which would look into setting up the new Authority with the Leader attending as Newcastle's representative and it would be useful if he could report back to a Cabinet Panel.

The Leader stated that everyone was united in not wanting LGR to go ahead and were all seeking the correct legal advice and expertise as to what could /could not be done. The Leader and Cabinet would be working hard to engage proactively in future joint voluntary committees to ensure that the interests and traditions of Newcastle Borough Council were put first and foremost and that residents had every protection possible.

A vote was then taken on the Motion, as amended, and was carried.

For:	31
Against:	--
Abstain:	--

[Watch the debate here](#)

Mayor.Councillor Christopher Bailey
Chair

Meeting concluded at 6.15 pm