

COUNCIL

Wednesday, 24th January, 2024
Time of Commencement: 7.00 pm

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Present: Mayor - Councillor Simon White (Chair)

Councillors:	Adcock	Grocott	Stubbs
	Allport	Heesom	Sweeney
	Barker MBE	Holland	J Tagg
	Beeston	Fox-Hewitt	S Tagg
	Bettley-Smith	Hutchison	J Waring
	Brockie	Johnson	P Waring
	Brown	D Jones	Whieldon
	Bryan	Lawley	Wilkes
	Burnett-Faulkner	Northcott	G Williams
	Crisp	Panter	J Williams
	Dymond	Parker	Wright
	Edginton-Plunkett	Reece	Lewis
	Fear	Richards	Moss
	Gorton	Skelding	

Apologies: Councillor(s) S Jones and G White

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

1. **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

There were no declarations of interest stated.

2. **MINUTES OF A PREVIOUS MEETING**

Resolved: That, subject to the inclusion of Councillors' Lewis and Moss as being in attendance, the minutes of the meeting held on 22 November, 2023 be agreed as a correct record.

3. MAYOR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Mayor made one announcement:

The Mayor's Civic Mass would be held on Sunday 25 February, 2024 at the Holy Trinity Catholic Church, commencing at 11am.

4. ANNUAL REPORT 2022/23

The Leader introduced a report on the Council's Annual Report for 2022-23 which provided a summary of work and outcomes achieved during the first year of the Council's 2022-2026 Council Plan. Some of the achievements were outlined at paragraph 2.2 and expanded upon by the relevant Portfolio Holders.

Councillor Gillian Williams referred to the creation of the Neighbourhood Delivery Team under paragraph 2.2 and asked who the people were, what they did and how they could be contacted.

The Leader asked the Portfolio Holder for Sustainable Environment, Councillor Hutchinson to contact Members with the contact details of the officers and team that was set up under the Service Director – Neighbourhood Delivery.

Councillor Gorton queried why one of the recommendations was to receive and consider the Annual Report for 2022-23 but it was already in the public domain.

The Leader stated that the Annual Report had already been to Cabinet and the purpose this evening was to receive it.

- Resolved:**
- (i) That the Council's Annual Report for 2022-23 be received.
 - (ii) That the achievements of the Council over the reporting period be recognised.
 - (iii) That the publication date of the Annual Report going forward – September each year, be noted.

[Watch the debate here](#)

5. POLLING DISTRICTS AND POLLING PLACES REVIEW

The Leader introduced a report seeking approval of amendments made to polling districts and places, following a review.

Councillor Dave Jones stated that at least one polling station was being relocated back into a school and asked the Returning Officer if he would like to make a comment on what impact that would have on the pupils.

The Chief Executive stated that, in the review, they had tried to minimise the use of schools but if there were no alternative places, local schools did have to be used.

The Leader stated that the school in question had been happy to take the polling station back and had requested it.

- Resolved:** That the amendments to the polling districts and polling places, as set out in the report, be approved.

[Watch the debate here](#)

6. STATEMENT OF THE LEADER OF THE COUNCIL

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. Reference was made to the Council's Annual Report and the Leader stated that this Council 'made things happen' and this Statement reflected that.

Questions were raised and responses were provided as follows.

On paragraph 1 – Cabinet Meetings

Councillor Fox-Hewitt expressed concerns at a decision taken at Cabinet on 16 January regarding the future delivery of the Communications Service – being outsourced and managed by Staffordshire County Council. Councillor Fox-Hewitt felt that this should have been subject to scrutiny.

The Leader was asked if he would engage in a small stakeholder consultation including members, external partners, local businesses and residents before committing to outsourcing this vital element of council delivery.

The Leader stated that the item was not called-in when it could have been. The County Council had already been delivering the service for around twelve months due to Communications Officers' retiring or going on maternity leave. The cover from the County Council had worked well and the County did work for other Authorities too.

No consultation would be carried out. The matter had been discussed at Cabinet and was not called-in. There was potential for it to be looked at by the Finance, Assets and Performance Scrutiny Committee in the future.

On paragraph 2 – Walleys Quarry Update

Councillor Bettley-Smith asked the Leader if he agreed that the stink was as bad as ever and would he consider that the inactions of the Environment Agency (EA), along with their failed monitoring systems was unacceptable and an outrage. In addition, did the Leader agree that this now needed a full public inquiry.

The Leader agreed and stated that at the last Full Council meeting there had been a request to write to the Secretary of State and at the following Cabinet meeting that request was upgraded to include writing to the Prime Minister also. As of today, the Leader had received no response so the matter had been taken up with the local MP to try and get a response in regard to the public inquiry.

Councillor Brown asked the Leader if the Council had evaluated any new data and any links to ill health from the emissions, now that the EA monitoring stations were calibrating correctly. If this was the case, could the report be shared immediately.

The Leader stated that the Council was not doing the re-evaluation. The EA had brought in an independent body to do it. Once the data was available, the Health Agency could give its view on the health impacts.

Councillor Lawley asked, in light of the increase in complaints to the Council and EA, had the Council approached Walleys Quarry to establish what the cause of the increase in odours and emissions was and if so, what was the response.

Council - 24/01/24

The Leader stated that the Council's Chief Executive had regular meetings with Walleys Quarry and they were aware of the complaint data and spikes in the monitoring. The EA was the regulator of the site who could put measures into place but the Council did have its Abatement Notice process and officers were evaluating the latest conditions and seeking advice on next steps.

Councillor Adcock asked the Leader if he agreed that the situation had gone on far too long and that the EA should release their historical data, release the results of their long running criminal and regulatory investigations and consider a strong case for a closure notice.

The Leader agreed and stated that three years had passed since the Council passed a Motion at a special meeting condemning the EA's lack of response.

Councillor Whieldon asked the Leader if he agreed that the excuses being given by Walleys Quarry were ridiculous and ill-founded and were hiding behind them.

The Leader stated that operators are there to make money out of a process and needed to be kept in check by the 'permit authority' – the EA who were letting the Borough down. The Council was trying to hold the EA to account with demands for a public inquiry and also asking them to take action.

There had been an announcement on social media where the EA had stated that they felt that Walleys Quarry were not doing all that they could.

Councillor Dave Jones asked the Leader what the Council was going to do to finally put an end to the situation at Walleys Quarry.

The Leader stated that there did seem to be light at the end of the tunnel with the EA's mood change and the Council was calling on them to act on their responsibilities to cap and close the site.

Councillor Fear stated that this issue had totally united the Council. It was annoying that the Council had had to fight the people who were meant to fight for us. The Council had had no help from the EA at all. The Leader was asked if he agreed that now that there was some leadership at the EA, it was time for them to show what they were made of and get a return on the issues.

The Leader agreed and stated his annoyance at not receiving a response from the Prime Minister and had asked the local MP to chase it up.

On paragraph 3 – Technology Strategy 2023-2028

Councillor Burnett-Faulkner asked the Leader to confirm that face-to-face contact would also continue for Kidsgrove residents.

The Leader stated that refurbishment was currently taking place in Kidsgrove Town Hall and upon completion the Tuesday and Thursday morning face to face availability would be resumed.

Through the Town Deal funding there was potential for a shared service hub and different ways of working with the Town Council.

On paragraph 4 – Chatterley Valley West

Councillor Brockie asked the Leader for confirmation that appropriate consideration would be given to local developers and employers when constructing and populating the units and that local employment opportunities in technology and logistics would be considered.

The Leader stated that one of the aims of the site was to have larger units. The Council already had starter units but not the bigger ones for businesses that had grown to move into. Businesses could also be brought into the Borough which would be future jobs for people.

Councillor Gorton asked the Leader how the forecast for generating up to 1700 jobs had been arrived at and if it would be better for the Council to ask the Economy and Place Scrutiny Committee to undertake an assessment of the project to identify all of the benefits.

The Leader stated that the estimated number of jobs that could be generated was included in the Town Deal Business Plan. The Town Deal Plans were scrutinised by the Economy and Place Scrutiny Committee on a regular basis.

Councillor Waring stated that the development would be of benefit to residents of Kidsgrove and surrounding areas, irrespective of the number of jobs being created.

Councillor Stubbs referred to the closure of Peacock Hay Road stating that the road should open in June, 2024. The Leader was asked for assurance that this would be the case.

The Leader stated that the original contractor had gone bust and the County Council had taken the work over. Cllr David Williams, the Portfolio Holder for Highways at the County Council would welcome an email from Councillor Stubbs.

Councillor Sweeney stated that this was good news and supported the scheme,

On paragraph 5 – Borough Local Plan Consultation Responses and Next Steps

Councillor Gorton stated that only 13% of consultation respondents had used the online portal. The Leader was asked if he was surprised at the low level and if the Council should take note of reluctance to use an online portal for future consultations.

The Portfolio Holder for Strategic Planning, Councillor Fear stated that the survey received an excellent response and each would be taken into consideration. When the portal was designed, initial teething problems that had been encountered with the previous one had been noted and lessons learnt. There would be further improvements made on future portals. There were questions of the ages of respondents, some of whom would prefer to write in.

Councillor Brockie asked for assurance that, through the planning process, developers would be reminded to contribute to or provide social housing and the level of compliance appropriately monitored.

The Portfolio Holder stated that in regards to consideration of planning applications there were hard and fast policies about the amount of affordable housing and if developers did not comply, applications would not be given permission.

Council - 24/01/24

Councillor Northcott stated that the Government had updated the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) last December and made several changes. The Portfolio Holder for Strategic Planning was asked if the changes to the NPPF would have any impact on the Local Plan.

The Portfolio Holder had read the updated NPPF and felt that there was nothing that would significantly change the direction of nor work on the Local Plan and this view had also been checked with and confirmed by officers.

Councillor Crisp had spoken to residents who were opposed to building new homes had said that the last census had shown a decrease in the population in the Borough. The Leader was asked if that was still the case.

The Leader stated that information received from the Office for National Statistics showed that Newcastle's population was 125,300 (mid 2022 estimate), an increase of 2,300 since the 2021 census. There had been an increase in households in the Borough from 52,600 to 53,400 estimated to go up to 59,000 and then 62,000 between 2029-2039.

Councillor John Williams asked the Portfolio Holder to elaborate upon the planning applications coming in and the affordable housing included in the applications. Months after receiving permission, some developers came back stating that they could not afford to do the affordable housing and it did not get done. Secondly, the Cabinet had asked independent consultants to review calculations of the number of homes required in the local plan. Had the consultants taken into account the type of housing or was it included in another part of the plan.

The Leader stated that policies on affordable housing at Newcastle had been clear for many years and would be in the new local plan. Developers were challenged where necessary in relation to provision but were subject to the National Planning Guidance too.

Councillor Dave Jones asked for assurance that should allocation rates of social housing within developments form part of the local plan, that it would be enforceable at planning committee.

The Portfolio Holder for Strategic Planning stated that the Council had got tough planning policies and they would be defended. Rejected applications would however be entitled to be taken to the Planning Inspectorate for appeal.

On paragraph 6 – Staffordshire County Council Urban Grass Cutting Contract Delivery

Councillor John Williams stated that he had contacted the County Council regarding vehicles parking on grass verges but they had said that they could not stop this from happening. The Leader was asked if something could be done about the grass verges or get the County Council to do something such as placing of posts to stop parking.

The Leader stated that it was a job for County Councillors. Stumps could be put in place and County Councillors had a budget for this or could raise it with the relevant highways people. Councillor Williams was encouraged to contact his local County Councillor.

Councillor Parker welcomed this as, for the past few years, grass cutting had been the most complained about issue in his ward. The Leader was asked if he agreed that this was a promising step in the right direction.

Councillor Sweeney agreed with Councillor Parker. The County Council were cutting their own grass, on the highway. Grass on Westbury Park verges was reaching up to two feet high.

The Leader stated that the key to this was that they had enough cuts per year. The County had reduced this to six cuts and it was now back up to eight. In house there would be more cuts, better quality and happy residents.

On paragraph 7 – Health Inequalities Grant Projects

Councillor Panter asked the Leader how widespread the issues of damp and mould in properties was in Newcastle and what was being done about it.

The Portfolio Holder for Community Safety and Wellbeing, Councillor Heesom stated that there had been ten hotspot wards that had been identified. The issues were identified through either tenant complaints or proactive identification and were then dealt with.

Councillor Reece asked the Leader what the process would be for targeting properties with damp and mould, would it be based on the property or people's health issues.

The Leader stated that this had only just been agreed at Cabinet and funding had only just been received so a programme would now be put together. It would be good for the Health, Wellbeing and Environment Scrutiny Committee to monitor this going forward.

Councillor Bryan asked how this project would remove the risk of fire risk and accumulated materials as a result of hoarding.

The Portfolio Holder stated that the removal of hoarded materials was something that the Council already dealt with. Unfortunately, once resolved a number of the cases did recur due to a lack of support and addressing the root cause. The project would aim to bring about behavioural change.

On paragraph 8 – 850 Legacy

Councillor Holland paid tribute to everyone involved in organising and coordinating events held throughout the year and it was good to see that the Council and Borough would have a legacy going forward.

Councillor Gorton welcomed the mention that things would be taken forward from the 850th Celebrations and looked forward to the relaunch of the Civic Society and restoration of the Blue Plaque Scheme. Talks that were given at the Museum on various Newcastle Citizens were well organised, well delivered and well attended.

Councillor Fear endorsed what Councillor Gorton had said and mentioned the Apedale Mining Museum which had also been involved in the celebrations. The Leader was asked if the Council would grow the interest generated in the anniversary year.

The Leader endorsed everything that had been said and added that it had been a brilliant year and thanked everyone who had been involved. Taking the legacy forward was important. The Museum were going to set up an event in respect of the Civic Society and Councillor Fear would be going along to that. The Borough Heroes Awards would be held again this year and there would be a Chris Malkin Memorial History lecture looking at the Borough pre-Charter. Councillor Fear would also be giving a lecture on Roman Newcastle.

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

[Watch the debate here](#)

7. REPORTS OF THE CHAIRS OF THE SCRUTINY COMMITTEES

The reports for the Health, Wellbeing and Environment Scrutiny Committee and Economy and Place Scrutiny Committee had been circulated with the agenda.

A verbal update was given for the Finance Assets and Performance Scrutiny Committee detailing the items discussed at previous meetings.

Resolved: That the reports be received.

[Watch the debate here](#)

8. REPORTS OF THE CHAIRS OF THE REGULATORY COMMITTEES

Reports for the Licensing and Public Protection Committee and the Planning Committee were attached to the agenda.

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

Resolved: That the reports be received.

[Watch the debate here](#)

9. MOTIONS OF MEMBERS

A Motion was received concerning banning live animals as prizes, proposed by Councillor Adcock and seconded by Councillor Simon Tagg.

Councillor Dave Jones proposed an amendment to the list of recommendations to include the development of an Animal Welfare Charter for the Borough as the third bullet point.

The mover of the original motion was happy to accept the amendment and suggested that it could be discussed at the Health, Wellbeing and Environment Scrutiny Committee. The seconder of the original motion stated that the Council could commit to putting a charter together, take it through Scrutiny and bring it to Full Council for approval.

Following a debate on the original motion, a vote was taken.

In Favour (Y) – 41
Against (N) – 0
Abstain – 0

The Motion was carried.

[Watch the debate here](#)

10. **QUESTIONS TO THE MAYOR, CABINET MEMBERS AND COMMITTEE CHAIRS**

Three questions were received:

1) Question from Councillor Parker to the Deputy Leader of the Council:

“It was encouraging to see the report that went to Health Scrutiny Committee and was publicised on the Council website about the reduction in crime and anti-social behaviour in the town centre. This helps to counter some of the negative comments that sometimes surround the Town Centre

Can the Deputy Leader please highlight some of the initiatives that have been implemented to bring about this reduction?”

The Deputy Leader stated that Public Space Protection Orders had been implemented; Safer Night’s Schemes; Operation Saltmine; Safe Space; Street Medics; gating, extended CCTV; security marshalls and weekly enforcement meetings.

Councillor Parker asked a supplementary question:

“Does the Deputy Leader have any statistics to back up the good work that is being done in Newcastle?”

The Deputy Leader stated that information provided by the police showed a reduction in anti-social behaviour of 10%; reduction of reported crime 3%; increased engagement with the community and businesses; increase in CCTV cameras; improved partnership working.

2) Question from Councillor Bettley-Smith to the Leader of the Council:

“I am sure the Leader is familiar with German U Boat (SM U118) that washed onto Hastings’ beach on 15 April 1919. But, for others, two coastguard officials, showed visitors around the submarine daily over several months. Visitors complained about the smell of ‘rotting food’. The two officials died in December 1919 and February 1920, respectively: not due to ‘rotting food’ but due to their prolonged exposure to low levels of chlorine gas. Visitors had no lasting effects. Here we are dealing with Hydrogen Sulphide: but the principle is the same, given Hydrogen Sulphide is poisonous. Therefore, will the Leader, in pressing for a Public Inquiry, insist the relevant authorities consider the long-term health risks, of our residents’, our Council Tax payers, prolonged exposure to the stink from Walley’s Quarry?”

The Leader stated that officers were in regular contact with a range of agencies including the UK Health Security Agency (UKHSA) which had replaced Public Health England and, the UK HAS continued to assess the health risks monthly. They had acknowledged that there was a greater degree of uncertainty with the historic H₂S data up to August 2023. They were therefore only able to consider current exposures. The UK HSA latest health risk assessment covered the period September to November, 2023 and concluded that the risk of long term health problems was likely to be small but could not be excluded at this stage.

The Hydrogen Sulphide data continued to show low level exposure to the population around the landfill site and the two monitoring station sites showed a monthly average concentration in November above the long term lifetime health based grievance value. MMF2 showed a concentration below the guidance value.

The findings of an independent peer review were awaited, due to be released in February.

Councillor Bettley-Smith asked a supplementary question:

“Was the Leader appalled that permission for this outrageous, totally unacceptable landfill scheme was given planning permission by the then Minister responsible, John Prescott. Having been Chief Executive of the Government Decontamination Service as part of DEFRA and having dealt with landfill sites as a chartered surveyor working for the then Minister for Agriculture, the benefit of hindsight was not needed to know that such sites pose significant environmental and public health risks. Would the Leader agree that John Prescott and/or his Labour colleagues appear to have had no regard whatsoever for the environmental and public health consequences of their decision to grant permission for Walleys Quarry landfill and that they did not even consider the economic impact on Keele University, local businesses or the social impact of the disastrous scheme on the community”

The Leader stated that, at the time all Councillors at Borough and County level opposed this and it was overturned by the Secretary of State following advice from Civil Servants. It was the wrong decision and the wrong location for a landfill site. It needed to be borne in mind that if this ever came to a public inquiry, that those responsible were held to account.

3) Question from Councillor John Williams to the Portfolio Holder for Finance, Town Centres and Growth:

“The subway that connects Liverpool Road has been closed since the start of the Development of the new car park on the Ryecroft development site.

Residents young and old living to the north of the town Centre especially in my ward Cross Heath are crossing over a busy dual carriage way to gain access to our Town Centre. Alternatively they have to walk 500 metres to cross by the bottom of West Brampton or walk down the north side of the A34 cross Knutton Lane go under the subway to Bridge Street and walk up the steep bank to the town Centre. Our residents, many of them elderly, have

expressed some frustration because when they walk to the Town Centre to shop and support local businesses or meet up with friends there are forced to make a long detour or cross over a dangerous dual-carriageway. In addition the fencing around the site has created a blind bend for drivers when joining Rycroft from Liverpool Road. Making the junction very dangerous.

Please can the portfolio holder advise on when the Liverpool Road/Rycroft subway is going to be re-opened for pedestrians to access the Town Centre safely, and secondly, please can a communication be put on the website to update residents of on-going works.”

The Portfolio Holder for Finance, Town Centres and Growth stated that the subway would reopen in November, 2024. It had been blocked off as a safety measure and the hoarding works and positioning were in line with guidelines of the Highways Authority.

Councillor John Williams asked a supplementary question:

“The boarding around the site was dangerous as it went right up to a blind bend onto the Rycroft and the hoarding went across the footway which would stop people coming into the town centre to shop”

The Portfolio Holder reiterated that the hoarding works and positioning were in line with the consented scheme that Staffordshire County Council commented on as its role as Highways Authority.

[Watch the debate here](#)

11. RECEIPT OF PETITIONS

There were no petitions.

12. URGENT BUSINESS

There was no urgent business.

13. DISCLOSURE OF EXEMPT INFORMATION

There were no confidential items.

**Mayor - Councillor Simon White
Chair**

Meeting concluded at 9.12 pm