



**PLEASE NOTE THAT PRAYERS WILL BE HELD AT 6.50PM BEFORE THE COMMENCEMENT OF THE BUSINESS OF THE COUNCIL.**

**THE MAYOR REQUESTS THAT ANY MEMBER WISHING TO PARTICIPATE IN PRAYERS BE IN ATTENDANCE BY NO LATER THAN 6.45PM.**

Dear Sir/Madam,

You are summoned to attend the meeting of the Borough Council of Newcastle-under-Lyme to be held in the **Queen Elizabeth II & Astley Rooms - Castle House, Barracks Road, Newcastle, Staffs. ST5 1BL** on **Wednesday, 22nd January, 2025** at **7.00 pm**.

## **B U S I N E S S**

**1 APOLOGIES**

**2 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

To receive declarations of interest from Members on items contained within this agenda.

**3 MINUTES OF A PREVIOUS MEETING (Pages 5 - 20)**

To consider the Minutes of the previous meeting

**4 MAYOR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS**

**5 DEVOLUTION & LOCAL GOVERNMENT REORGANISATION: WHITE PAPER (Pages 21 - 38)**

**6 STATEMENT OF THE LEADER OF THE COUNCIL (Pages 39 - 42)**

To receive a statement by the Leader of the Council on the activities and decisions of Cabinet and items included on the Forward Plan.

**7 REPORTS OF THE CHAIRS OF THE SCRUTINY COMMITTEES (To Follow)**

**8 REPORTS OF THE CHAIRS OF THE REGULATORY COMMITTEES (To Follow)**

**9 QUESTIONS TO THE MAYOR, CABINET MEMBERS AND COMMITTEE CHAIRS (To Follow)**

**10 RECEIPT OF PETITIONS**

To receive from Members any petitions which they wish to present to the Council.

**11 URGENT BUSINESS**

To consider any communications which pursuant to Section B4, Rule 9 of the constitution are, in the opinion of the Mayor, of an urgent nature and to pass thereon such resolutions as may be deemed necessary.

**12 DISCLOSURE OF EXEMPT INFORMATION**

To resolve that the public be excluded from the meeting during consideration of the following report(s) as it is likely that there will be disclosure of exempt information as defined in paragraphs contained within Part 1 of Schedule 12A (as amended) of the Local Government Act 1972.

Yours faithfully

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Gulman', with a horizontal line underneath it.

Chief Executive

## **NOTICE FOR COUNCILLORS**

### **1. Fire/Bomb Alerts**

In the event of the fire alarm sounding, leave the building immediately, following the fire exit signs.

Fire exits are to be found at the side of the room leading into Queens Gardens.

On exiting the building Members, Officers and the Public must assemble at the statue of Queen Victoria. DO NOT re-enter the building until advised to by the Controlling Officer.

### **2. Mobile Phones**

Please switch off all mobile phones before entering the Council Chamber.

### **3. Notice of Motion**

A Notice of Motion other than those listed in Procedure Rule 14 must reach the Chief Executive ten clear days before the relevant Meeting of the Council. Further information on Notices of Motion can be found in Section B5, Rule 4 of the Constitution of the Council.

Officers will be in attendance prior to the meeting for informal discussions on agenda items.

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# Agenda Item 3

*Council - 20/11/24*

## COUNCIL

Wednesday, 20th November, 2024

Time of Commencement: 7.00 pm

[View the agenda here](#)

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**Present:** Mayor - Councillor Barry Panter (Chair)

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

**Apologies:** Councillor(s) Dymond, Northcott and Wilkes

<b>Officers:</b>	Gordon Mole	Chief Executive
	Simon McEneny	Deputy Chief Executive
	Anthony Harold	Service Director - Legal & Governance / Monitoring Officer
	Sarah Wilkes	Service Director - Finance / S151 Officer
	Nesta Barker	Service Director - Regulatory Services
	Sam Clark	Service Director - IT & Digital
	Joanne Halliday	Service Director - Commercial Delivery

### 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 25 September, 2024 be agreed as a correct record.

### 3. **MAYOR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS**

## **Council - 20/11/24**

The Mayor advised Members of his Christmas Carol Service at All Saints Church in Madeley on Sunday 8<sup>th</sup> December at 630pm. All Members were invited to attend.

On Sunday 24 November the town will be commencing its Christmas festivities with a market, entertainment and food, followed by the switching on of the Christmas lights. The Mayor encouraged all Members to attend.

The Mayor stated that, on 1<sup>st</sup> December it would be his pleasure to attend 100<sup>th</sup> birthday celebrations of a lady in Clayton. The family had requested the Mayor's attendance and he would be presenting her with a little gift on behalf of the Council.

### **4. WALLEYS QUARRY - ODOUR ISSUES UPDATE**

The Leader introduced a report updating Members on the latest position regarding the odours at Walleys Quarry.

Complaints had risen and monitoring equipment was showing high spikes, particularly on the equipment at Maries way. In October, 290 complaints of foul gas odours were received, more than the same period over the last three years and up until today, 339 complaints had been received this month. The Council was still not seeing any action from the Environment Agency (EA). A public inquiry had been requested but had been knocked back by both the previous and current governments.

Members were asked to approve the allocation of more money to the fighting fund for legal action. The Council had employed King's Counsel and there were experts working on the case to lead to legal action.

There were things happening at the quarry that were outside of the Council's powers – even from an abatement notice point of view; this included the parking up of lorries. The County Council has a team that were looking into this. The police were also taking action.

The Council was doing all that it could; lobbying government, whether that was to hold the EA to account or having put the abatement notice in place. Officers were monitoring the site closely to see if there were any further breaches of the abatement notice.

Councillor Sweeney stated that the situation was getting no better and earlier today it could be smelt in Clayton which was rare. The Council was doing what it said it would do and was being done in different tranches.

Councillor Dave Jones stated that it was critically important that Council secure legal action in response to breaches of the abatement notice. The landfill site had been a plague over the past month with a number of real high-odour days. The odour had landed on Keele Campus, causing several issues including affecting an open day with prospective students turning up on a day when the smell was horrendous. This could have huge ramifications, not just for the university but also for residents of the Borough who rely on the contribution to the economy that the university provided. Lorries had also become a problem. The police had been contacted on a number of occasions when lorries had been parked on Keele Bank and traffic had been forced to cross an unbroken single line on the highway, which was against the law. However, the police had stated that matters were not in themselves criminal. The Leader was asked that, in conversations with the Deputy Police and Crime

Commissioner, to raise that on occasions it had been difficult to understand why the police were not acting when motorists lives were being put at risk.

Councillor Bettley-Smith stated that in the past week the smell had been in the Brampton, town centre, Thistleberry and even Betley. It was outrageous that the Council was having to spend council tax payers money on taking this action because the EA had failed.

Councillor Stubbs made a request to stop heading the committee reports as 'Odour issues'; it was not just a smell/odour, it was an environmental issue. A Silverdale resident had approached Councillor Stubbs and asked that the Council stop calling it a smell/odour as it downplayed the true impact that the site was having on its surroundings.

Councillor Adcock agreed with the previous comment, stating that it was pollution. Hydrogen Sulphide was a toxic gas which was causing harm to residents of the Borough. The current situation was totally predictable, looking at the trends of when it worsened with weather patterns and months of the year. Residents were losing faith – not seeing the point in reporting it. The inquiry that this Council held over the summer showed some damning evidence but a public inquiry still had not yet been secured and again the EA still had not taken the report seriously. The Leader was asked for reassurance that this issue had been discussed for a long time and the Council had been fighting this for a long time when other agencies had not been taking it seriously.

Councillor Whieldon had a couple of concerns; referring to paragraph 9 of the report, where the Chartered Institute of Waste Management (CIWM) stated that Walleys Quarry Limited were not part of its membership and therefore could not pursue the line of investigation. Googling Walleys Quarry, their website stated that they had a welcome visit from the CIWM in March. In addition, Red Industries referred to a primary phone number on the CIWM site.

Councillor Fear agreed with Councillor Dave Jones' comment regarding the impact on the important organisations in the Borough. Residents were assured that this Council was fighting wholeheartedly on this issue. The Borough had now been let down by two national governments and betrayed by the EA. Councillor Fear also referred to the lorries and made a plea to the police to deal with the traffic hazards.

The Leader stated that it was right to point out Keele University, an international establishment suffering the odours – smells and gases. It also affected local schools.

The Leader stated that he would continue reporting issues to the police. He agreed that the odours were more than just a smell but for the report, because of the Council's Statutory Nuisance role – it was an odour issue so that is what they had to be referred to as. The Leader stated that he referred to them as 'gas odour issues' in his opening remarks.

The Leader assured that the public would be kept up to date with as much information as possible going forward.

- Resolved:**
- (i) That the action being taken by the Council in respect of legal action against Walleys Quarry Ltd for alleged breaches of an Abatement Notice, which obliges the operator to not create or allow statutory odour nuisance, be noted and endorsed.
  - (ii) That the continued and increasing level of complaints in

- respect of odours at Walleys Quarry, be noted.
- (iii) That the additional funding allocation of £400k (£250k from the General Fund Reserve, £150k from the Budget and Borrowing Support Fund), be approved for costs associated with legal action, and delegate to the Chief Executive and Section 151 Officer, in consultation with the Portfolio Holders for One Council, People and Performance and Town Centres and Finance, to draw down and remit such funds as are necessary for this action.

[Watch the debate here](#)

## 5. **GAMBLING POLICY 2024**

The Portfolio Holder for Finance, Town Centres and Growth introduced a report seeking to adopt an updated Gambling Licensing Policy.

The draft Policy has been seen by the Licensing and Public Protection Committee last month. The consultation had been completed and it was now here to be approved. The Policy would be published on 3 January, 2025, subject to its approval this evening and then implemented on 31 January, 2025.

No major changes had been made to the policy but a few typographical errors had been corrected and dates changed.

Councillor John Williams referred to page 10 of the Policy – paragraph 15 – protecting children and other vulnerable persons from being harmed by gambling. He stated that he would like the Health, Wellbeing and Environment Scrutiny Committee to do a piece of work on this element, such as organisations within the Borough that could be contacted.

Councillor Stubbs asked the Portfolio Holder what principles had been inserted into the document from a Newcastle point of view. The document did mention a local area profile and the Portfolio Holder was asked if an opportunity had been missed to talk about issues in Newcastle and included specific figures.

Councillor Gorton had an understanding that the Local Government Association had recommended that the Council should provide training for front line staff, who could then direct people to websites and agencies to help with problem gambling. He asked if the Council provided such training and if not, should it be doing so.

Councillor Brown referred to page 29 of the agenda, paragraph 1.3 bullet point 9 which stated that national charities had been consulted. An example of one of the charities was requested. Also, Councillor Brown had concerns for the use of the term 'vulnerable adults' as it was difficult to determine which adults would go on to develop a gambling dependency. She asked how the Council could ensure that those people were identified and protected.

Councillor Whieldon stated that she had concerns regarding the television adverts put on by organisations to warn people of the dangers of gambling. There had to be cautious as to how much responsibility the Council took on.



Responding to the Comments, The Portfolio Holder for Finance, Town Centres and Growth referred to a local area profile where a lot of these things were investigated but online gambling was nothing to do with the Council or the Policy. Councillor Sweeney stated that it could be taken to the Health, Wellbeing and Environment Scrutiny Committee.

The Leader agreed that a Scrutiny review would be ideal and should be raised at the next meeting of Health, Wellbeing and Environment Scrutiny.

Regarding the training of officers, the Leader stated that in the Council's licensing function officers offered training to establishments.

**Resolved:** That the updated Gambling Licensing Policy appended to this Report, be adopted, as recommended by the Licensing and Public Protection Committee.

[Watch the debate here](#)

## 6. **PROPOSED ANIMAL WELFARE CHARTER**

Councillor Rupert Adcock introduced a report seeking approval to adopt an Animal Welfare Charter for Newcastle-under-Lyme. A Motion had been passed at Full Council on 24 January, 2024 and the conclusions were set out at paragraph 1.1 of the report.

The draft Animal Welfare Charter had been considered by the Health, Wellbeing and Environment Scrutiny Committee in September and by Cabinet in October.

Councillor Adcock was aware of neighbouring authorities that had also developed similar motions and stated that, by working together in writing to the Government for an outright ban, many voices would be better than one.

The Portfolio Holder for Sustainable Environment seconded the motion stating that The Charter would protect the welfare of animals.

Councillor Gorton asked if his suggestion that a version of the Charter be made available for use in Newcastle schools be taken forward and also, would there be a commitment to review the Charter in the future.

Councillor Whieldon stated that the downflow of the Charter into schools would be wonderful. Referring to Councillor Adcock's statement about working with other authorities, she stated that best practice did not happen enough.

Councillor Reece suggested that the Charter be reviewed in one year's time, particularly recommendation two – canvassing other local authorities and then maybe to canvass Government.

Councillor Adcock agreed that it would be appropriate to review the Charter in twelve months and to take it through the Health, Wellbeing and Environment Committee, looking at the progress made on canvassing other authorities and anything within the Charter that members of the Scrutiny Committee wished to comment on.

The Leader stated that animal welfare was important and getting more authorities to sign up to a policy would be really good. Councillor Gorton's suggestion regarding taking the Charter into schools was a good idea. The Council already visited schools

to talk about recycling and the Portfolio Holder for Sustainable Environment was already in discussion with officers to take this into schools too.

Regarding the use of pesticides, this Charter fitted with other policies and charters of the Council, including the Nature Recovery Declaration.

- Resolved:**
- (i) That the Animal Welfare Charter be approved and adopted, subject to any further amendments, noting the comments from the Health Wellbeing and Environment Scrutiny Committee and Cabinet.
  - (ii) That officers be authorised to canvass other local authorities to establish the appetite for collectively writing to the UK Government urging a ban on the giving of live animals as prizes on public and private land.

[Watch the debate here](#)

## 7. COMMITTEE MEMBERSHIP AND APPOINTMENTS TO OUTSIDE BODIES

The Leader introduced a report to note changes in political proportionality following a change in political balance of the Council, resulting in changes to committee membership and to appoint a member to the Charity of Sir John Offley, Madeley.

Wendy Brockie was wished well for the future and thanked for her time as a Councillor.

Councillor Jones stated that Wendy had been a fantastic Councillor and vociferous supporter for Town Ward and all of its interests. Wendy was wished well, including congratulations on the birth of her first grandchild. The Leader wished to be associated with these comments.

- Resolved:**
- (i) That the change to political balance of the Council following a vacancy as a result of implementation of Section 85(1) of the Local Government Act 1972, be noted
  - (ii) That as a result of this change, it be noted that the seats allocated to the Conservative Party on the Finance, Assets and Performance Scrutiny Committee be increased by one seat, with a corresponding decrease of one seat for the Labour Party.
  - (iii) That the nomination of a member of the Conservative Party to the Finance, Assets and Performance Scrutiny Committee, be approved.
  - (iv) That it be noted that, following a by-election for Madeley in July 2024, the Council is asked to nominate a Trustee to the Charity of Sir John Offley, and endorses the nomination of Cllr. Jill Whitmore to this position

[Watch the debate here](#)

8. **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 2 – Newcastle Town Centre Regeneration Update

Councillor John Williams raised concerns regarding all the works commencing at the same time and impacting upon businesses and asked the Leader and Portfolio Holder to speak with businesses in the town to ensure that they were on board with safety aspects and traffic controls in the town.

The Leader agreed and stated that officers did a lot of work with businesses in Merrial Street in preparation and it would be the same with the Midway. It needed to be ensured that traffic movements were taken care of.

On paragraph 3 – Contract Award for the Digital Infrastructure Project

Councillor Holland asked the Leader to outline how the distribution hubs at Community Centres would work and what benefits would be seen by the community.

The Leader stated that it was good news for the Town Deal areas. Rural areas would be part of a procurement for gigabit broadband.

ITS Technology, the company that had been awarded the contract for the work had a good track record for delivering. It was hoped that there would be eleven public sector buildings and sixteen community facilities connected to the network. Part of the development included the creation of a local digital community hub which would include digital inclusion skills and training to the public over the next five years and also possibly connecting community centres across the Borough.

Councillor Richards asked the Leader if the Borough Council was working with the County Council and utility companies to ensure that, once rolled out, the roads and footpaths were put back into a good stated of repair.

The Leader stated that the County Council did have a protocol when working with contactors digging up roads. There was a network programme and officer team at the County Council to oversee this. Our officers were working with the provider too.

On paragraph 4 – Borough Local Plan Update

Councillor Lewis asked if the information contained within the report was the raw data of just the responses that had been acknowledged.

The Portfolio Holder for Strategic Planning stated that feedback had been collated by theme so that only one response was required to avoid replication. All comments

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were being recorded and put onto the website and all of the comments would be forwarded to the independent inspector.

Councillor Crisp asked the Portfolio Holder for Strategic Planning if he agreed that the progress made on the local plan made the Borough's green spaces safer and was a vindication of the Council's decision to go ahead with a bespoke plan for Newcastle.

The Portfolio Holder stated that he was 100% behind the local plan. By identifying specific areas for development, green spaces were made safer. However, the Government could still change the rules. The Portfolio Holder stated that he was never in favour of a joint local plan as the City's interests differed from our own.

Councillor Adcock asked what steps were being taken to ensure that the next steps of the process go smoothly.

The Council was working hard to ensure that the consultation responses were put together ready to go to the Inspector. In addition, people had been spoken with to ensure that the plan, when presented to the Inspector, had no legal pitfalls. In October, a sum of money was voted through by Cabinet to ensure that the inspection ran smoothly. It was uncertain how long the Inspector would take. Officers were thanked for securing a substantial grant from the Planning Skills Delivery Fund.

Councillor Moss asked for confirmation that there was at least one group that had come forward to run the proposed village hall in Knutton and what was the current status of the project to build it.

The Portfolio Holder for Finance, Town Centres and Growth stated that nothing was set in stone as yet, however, the Council was working fast to recruit members to this and was underway at present.

Councillor Gorton asked if it could be taken that no changes to the plan had been made as a result of the consultation exercise. In addition, when was it anticipated that the Borough's local plan would be submitted to the Inspector.

The Portfolio Holder advised that were a material concern to emerge from the consultation, the plan would come back to Council. Confirmation was given that, according to officers, it was not the case. It was hoped that the plan would be submitted to the Inspector by the end of the calendar year.

Councillor Fox-Hewitt asked if the comments and the Council's response to the themes that were mentioned, whether they be that the Council was happy with the extant plan or amendments in response to those themes were to be made; would they be shared with Scrutiny or Council prior to the plan being submitted to the Planning Inspector.

Responses would be made public but the Portfolio Holder for Strategic Planning would check with the Service Director – Planning that that was correct and would get back to Councillor Fox-Hewitt.

### On paragraph 5 – Quarter 2 Finance and Performance Report 2024/25

Councillor Stubbs referred to the Kidsgrove Fund – Kidsgrove Station, the Shared Services Hub and the Canal Enhancement Scheme had all stalled for at least six months and 84% of the management budget had already been spent. He asked the

Leader or Portfolio Holder if they could ensure that the money would not be sent back due to delays on site.

The Leader stated that the Council needed to ensure that the money did not go back. The scheme was developing and was currently going through a sub-group arrangement where plans were being clarified so it was hoped to get those through the Town Deal Board and through the necessary planning procedures. Members were advised that the canal scheme was progressing.

Councillor Whieldon referred to the recent Castle Classics car show held in the town and asked if there were any plans for the event to be repeated and similar ones held.

The Portfolio Holder for Finance, Town Centres and Growth advised that Castle Classics would not only be repeated but would be three times bigger on 15 March, 2025. It would include military vehicles and scooters. The Christmas lights switch on would be taking place on 24<sup>th</sup> of this month and on 30<sup>th</sup>, Keele Brass Band would be in town and on 14<sup>th</sup> December a food festival would be held and on 24<sup>th</sup> December there would be an antiques forum.

Councillor Bryan asked the Portfolio Holder for Sustainable Environment what plans there were to increase the volume of food waste collections in the Borough.

The Portfolio Holder for Sustainable Environment stated that all waste and recycling targets were being met. In the last quarter, property and resident participation in food waste collection had increased to 45.4%. This positioned the Council well for the forthcoming Simpler Recycling legislation which was expected in 2025 for business waste and in 2026 for household waste. The Council would be providing recycling services to its current commercial customers, including separate food waste collections from April, 2025. Food waste collection from flats would also be rolled out during the next year.

Councillor Holland welcomed the performance indicators falling under the Sustainable Environment Portfolio which included four 100% in street environmental cleanliness. He also welcomed the 99.96% collection statistic in waste and recycling collections which equated to, out of every 10,000 collections, the Council had missed four.

#### On paragraph 6 – Civic Pride Campaign

Councillor Paul Waring asked the Portfolio Holder what actions were being taken to address the issues raised by residents regarding safety and cleanliness in the Borough.

The Portfolio Holder for Sustainable Environment stated that over the last year, the Council had been implementing the same in-cab and back office system that was successfully used in the recycling and waste service into streetscene servers. The software system, supplied by Bartec was the first to be implemented and the location was noted digitally of every litter bin in the Borough that the Council serviced. The use of each bin could be monitored digitally, to assess the emptying frequency and adjusted if required. It also indicated if the correct size bin was being used.

Councillor Lewis stated that, as part of Civic Pride, she would like to see the Council working alongside volunteer groups to maintain areas such as St James' Church yard in Audley. Could wardens be brought in across the Borough.

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The Portfolio Holder for Sustainable Environment had visited the churchyard and met with volunteers. He had mentioned to the Parish Clerk that it would be best if she dealt directly with the Streetscene Manager to ensure that everything was being done properly. The Portfolio Holder would check with the officer to see if that was still functioning.

The Leader stated that there were community wardens in Kidsgrove who were funded by the Town Council and people in Madeley carried out community clean up jobs so, working with Audley Parish Council was key.

Councillor John Williams welcomed this which brought together the Police, County Council, the BID and Borough Council. Reference was made to the paragraph regarding moving out into the communities and stated that the Council needed to be the leaders on this but felt that that was not the case. He mentioned that the grass in Douglas Road, Cross Heath and other areas of the Borough had not been cut for twelve months and he hoped that in the future, the Council would be leading with the different partners out in the communities.

The Leader stated that the issue at Douglas Road had been raised before and agreed that this first year – where grass had been left longer should be reviewed and the Health Wellbeing and Environment Scrutiny Committee could take that on and there were plans to set up a scrutiny working group looking at the Borough's parks and open spaces and part of that could be to look at reviews of the grass cutting.

Councillor Burnett-Faulkner asked the Portfolio Holder for Community Safety and Wellbeing to advise how the Council was working with partners to tackle anti-social behaviour (ASB) and how it was being highlighted this week – 'Anti-Social Behaviour Awareness week' and with upcoming events.

The Portfolio Holder stated that the Council was taking part in a national initiative to tackle ASB working closely with Staffordshire Police and Aspire Housing to ensure that residents and stakeholders were healthy, happy and able to enjoy living in a safe environment. This week, Staffordshire Police and Aspire Housing were delivering themed events running until 24 November. High visibility patrols would take place in known hotspots in the town centre, Chesterton and Kidsgrove. There had been a mobile police station in Kidsgrove today as part of 'Let's Talk – Anti Social Behaviour Day' and it would be based at the Salvation Army in Chesterton tomorrow.

Councillor Reece on his way to this meeting had met a resident of May Bank who pointed out some broken glass and other debris from a road traffic accident about four weeks ago. Councillor Reece urged the Council to get behind local people.

Councillor Gorton asked the Leader for more information on how the campaign would be taken forward, how would other areas of focus be selected and how would elected members be involved in the planning and implementation of future schemes.

The Leader welcomed the positive comments. The Council did not have the resources to spread Civic Pride across the Borough straight away but can work with partners. A lot of the work that was already being done did fall under Civic Pride – such as tackling fly tipping and graffiti work. The Launch week was currently being evaluated to see where to go next and he would write to local members for their views. Scrutiny could also play a part and there were many ways that Civic Pride could be expanded beyond litter picking – by making it a community effort for example.

Councillor Parker referred to the Remembrance Day parade at the cenotaph Stating that crowds seemed to increase yearly. It was good to see poppies on the Capital and Centric hoardings and scaffolding across the road which also had a Remembrance Banner on it. Councillor Parker was pleased to see progress being made on the three sites in the town centre and asked the Leader if he agreed that the extra people living and working in the town would mean even more people congregating at the cenotaph in future years.

The Leader agreed that it was a growing event. Regarding the hoardings, the developer had been contacted and at the Leader's request worked with the Council to put the poppies on the hoardings.

The new developments would have hundreds of people living and working in the town centre with the new Astley Place development overlooking the cenotaph.

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

[Watch the debate here](#)

## 9. **REPORTS OF THE CHAIRS OF THE REGULATORY COMMITTEES**

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

Members were advised that none of the Scrutiny Committees had met since the last Full Council meeting.

**Resolved:** That the reports be received.

[Watch the debate here](#)

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

Question from Councillor Mandy Berrisford to the Portfolio Holder for Strategic Planning

"The portfolio holder will be aware that a date of 8<sup>th</sup> September was set, by Court Order, for the removal of the baled waste from land at Doddlespool Hall Farm, in the Betley area of my ward. Last Sunday evening (17 November), at about 17.00, I was contacted by concerned residents about a fire on the land at Doddlespool Hall Farm. They informed me the fire brigade had been called. Can the portfolio holder assure me that the Environment Agency has checked the court order has been complied with and the baled, or indeed other waste, was not the source of the fire? Can the portfolio holder also assure me that the relevant Borough Council Officers have confirmed that, since the fire on Sunday evening, there is no ongoing risk to residents?"

The Portfolio Holder for Strategic Planning stated that it had not been possible to confirm whether the fire concerned baled waste or other types of waste on site. The Portfolio Holder did confirm that the Environment Agency (EA), via a court order had required the removal of waste by 8 September, 2024 but the understanding was that the court order had not been complied with. Any further legal action would have to

be pursued by the EA. The EA had been approached by the Council for comment but, as of yet, had not received a response.

The Council, in conjunction with Staffordshire County Council and Cheshire East Council and the EA were currently undertaking a joint investigation with the intention of taking enforcement action against breaches of planning permission and the illegal deposition of waste at the site.

Councillor Berrisford asked a supplementary question:

“Adam Jogee MP had spoken strongly and passionately about waste crime and air quality issues in two recent Westminster Hall debates on 5 September and 14 November respectively. He mentioned the land at Doddlespool Hall Farm saying that something must be done very urgently. Will the Portfolio Holder press the EA and the MP to take the necessary action to ensure that the Doddlespool Hall Farm site is compliant with statutory requirements. Will the Portfolio Holder ask the MP to press the Minister to hold an inquiry into the waste crime and related failings of the EA. Finally, given the baled waste remained on the land at Doddlespool Hall Farm for several years, after being reported to the EA as an environmental hazard does the Portfolio Holder have faith in the EA and would he regard the EA as no longer being fit for purpose.”

The Portfolio Holder stated that he would be happy to write to the EA and MP. It was a long standing problem that needed resolving. He welcomed the MP’s words on this and hoped that the MP would be working behind the scenes to pressurise the EA to do their job. The Portfolio Holder did not have confidence in the EA and had not for a long time and considered them to be no longer fit for purpose.

Question from Councillor Paul Waring to the Leader of the Council

“A key part of the Kidsgrove Town Deal funding is £3.65m to deliver an improved, modern Kidsgrove station building, a new transport interchange, and a 200-space car park. There has been concern for some time about the risk to the Kidsgrove Station project because of abnormal ground conditions that has led to a significant funding gap. It was announced by the previous government in February 2024 that Kidsgrove would benefit from Network North funding as part of an uplift in the Local Transport Fund (LTF) as the result of the cancellation of the Birmingham to Crewe section of the HS2 project. There has been uncertainty about if the new government would honour that commitment. Can the Leader provide an update on the funding situation?”

The Leader thanked Councillor Waring for his work on the Kidsgrove Town Deal. Prior to the General Election, the Council was told that the funding shortfall, created by the need for groundworks around the station would be funded by money displaced by the HS2 money scheme following the cancellation of HS2 and there would be an uplift in the local transport fund. Neither the Council or County Council had heard from Central Government regarding this. News was expected in the recent budget from the Government but, to date, nothing had come through. The additional money would need to be in place by early next year so that the project could proceed at pace. A delay from the Government would put the project at major risk. The Leader stated that he had written to David Williams MP on 7 November stating the facts and history of this case but as yet no reply had been received but it was hoped that it was being worked on.



The previous MP, Jonathan Gullis had been good at lobbying the Government, taking the Secretary of State to Kidsgrove. It was not yet known if HS2 was back on as yet. There were moves to try and reinstate a line between Birmingham and Manchester.

Question from Councillor Robert Moss to the Leader of the Council

“In regard to the Knutton war memorial what maintenance does the Council carry out and with what frequency does it occur?”

The Leader stated that the change of land ownership, previously NHS land with the former clinic in Knutton came over to the Council as part of the purchases with the Town Deal. The war memorial was now on Council owned land and it was right that in future the Council would look after it. The Leader congratulated the fire service, firefighters and community who had brought the memorial back to good condition and going forward needed to be kept in that condition. The Leader assured that it would be put onto the rota to be looked after.

There had been a number of enquiries regarding the maintenance of the Wolstanton memorial too and earlier in this meeting had referred to the cenotaph in the town centre. Conversations had taken place with the Chief Executive regarding the using of Civic Pride to work with community groups and using funding streams and council staff to ensure that the memorials were a credit, particularly next year for the 80<sup>th</sup> anniversary of VE Day.

Councillor Moss asked a supplementary question:

Before asking the question, Councillor Moss stated that himself and a Mr Ian Egan cleaned up the war memorial in Knutton for five hours on the 7<sup>th</sup> November and the fire service turned up to wash down the slabs at Councillor Moss' request.

“ May I request to be sent the maintenance programme for 2025 and be given assurances that the Knutton monument would be in good order for Remembrance Sunday in 2025”

The Leader asked that the Portfolio Holder contact Councillor Moss after this meeting to confirm those arrangements”.

Question from Councillor Fox-Hewitt to the Portfolio Holder for Finance, Town Centres and Growth

“Can the portfolio holder confirm if an impact assessment or viability report has been undertaken following the decision by Lucideon to withdraw from the Chatterley Valley Business park, and cancel their planned bespoke HQ, citing a substantial increase in costs for the site?”

The Portfolio Holder for Finance, Town Centres and Growth stated that no impact assessment had been undertaken on Lucideon's decision to withdraw from the Chatterley Valley Business Park. It was not deemed necessary as the Council was actively working on an alternative site with a company who wished details to

remain confidential at this time. It was also worth mentioning that the Chatterley Valley site was in private ownership and the part that Lucideon were interested in was one of the smaller plots available. The Council was aware that a whole development was now being actively marketed by the developer/owner Howarths who were confident that all plots would be occupied and the units and employment opportunities would be delivered. But, as with all such developments in this arena with the continuing worsening economic situation it was a challenge.

Councillor Fox-Hewitt asked a supplementary question:

“Is the Chatterley Valley West project still going to deliver the 1700 jobs and £72m gross value added per annum as promised as part of the business case for the Town Deal”,

The Portfolio Holder for Finance, Town Centres and Growth had heard that it was. It was a private company that were running it and they would obviously want a return from their investment and he saw no reason why they should not get it. They were actively marketing the entire site, the County Council had put some money into it for the roadworks and this Council had put money into it from the Town Deal Fund to open the site up.

Question from Councillor Andrew Fox-Hewitt to the Portfolio Holder for Community Safety and Wellbeing

“Following the news that nine fire stations/teams have withdrawn from the Staffordshire Fire and Rescue Service 'three person crewing trial', whereby staff assert that the service is violating the management Health and Safety Regulations 1999, can the portfolio holder provide an assurance that the administration still have full confidence in the trial, and an assurance that both fire fighter and public safety here in Newcastle is not at risk as a result of this trial continuing.”

The Portfolio Holder stated that Staffordshire Fire and Rescue Service had the operational responsibility for crewing arrangements, including for this trial. They would continue to keep partner agencies advised of the findings of the trial ahead of a decision at the end of the year. Initial feedback had been that response times since – some cases had been improved but it was understood that senior fire officers also acknowledged that concerns had been raised that they would seek to address. The Council worked closely with the fire service including, in responses to recent fires at Walleys Quarry and Kidsgrove and had worked in strong partnership with the service and the incident management of the Walleys Quarry odour issues, referenced in the earlier Council report where the fire service had led on chairing agency coordination.

Councillor Fox-Hewitt asked if the administration still had full confidence in the trial having articulated support for it in the appearance before Scrutiny Committee so did the administration still support the trial.

The Portfolio Holder stated that the fire and rescue service had the operational responsibility but as they were aware of the issues and looking into them she was

reassured that they would continue to work within their safety guidelines. An update would be given by them to the Scrutiny Committee next year.

Councillor Fox-Hewitt asked a supplementary question:

“Can the Portfolio Holder update Council as to whether the Newcastle and Kidsgrove Fire Stations were still operating under that trail, given that they service and represent the safety of our residents”.

The Portfolio Holder advised that this would be looked into and a response provided to Councillor Fox-Hewitt.

[Watch the debate here](#)

**11. RECEIPT OF PETITIONS**

No petitions were received.

**12. URGENT BUSINESS**

There was no urgent business.

**13. DISCLOSURE OF EXEMPT INFORMATION**

There were no confidential items.

**Mayor - Councillor Barry Panter  
Chair**

Meeting concluded at 8.57 pm

The Mayor advised that refreshments, provided by the Leader and Deputy Leader would be available to mark this being the last meeting before Christmas

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## NEWCASTLE-UNDER-LYME BOROUGH COUNCIL

### CABINET'S REPORT TO COUNCIL

22 January 2025

**Report Title:** Devolution and Local Government Reorganisation: White Paper

**Submitted by:** Leader of the Council

**Portfolios:** One Council, People and Partnerships

**Ward(s) affected:** All Wards

<u>Purpose of the Report</u>	<u>Key Decision</u>	Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	No <input type="checkbox"/>
To seek the endorsement and support of full Council for actions to preserve the borough following the release of the English Devolution White Paper in December 2024.			
<b><u>Recommendation</u></b>			
<p><b>That Council:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Notes the contents and implications of the English Devolution White Paper.</li> <li>• Pledges to stand up for the historic independence of the Borough.</li> <li>• Supports the petitioning of residents in relation to the preservation of the Borough.</li> <li>• Calls for Newcastle-under-Lyme's Members of Parliament to support the Borough's preservation, and that they engage with Government Ministers in stating the case for the Borough.</li> <li>• Asks the Leader &amp; Chief Executive to write to the Deputy Prime Minister and relevant Ministers stating the Council's position.</li> <li>• Enables the Leader to take forward necessary discussions and actions with Government and others and report these to the next suitable full Council.</li> </ul>			
<b><u>Reasons</u></b>			
This report outlines the contents of the English Devolution White Paper released on 16 <sup>th</sup> December 2024, its implications for borough and district councils, and an initial response to the likely impacts on the Borough. The report further seeks endorsement of a campaign to stand up for the independence of the Borough, as set out its charter in 1173, and through subsequent local government reorganisations.			

## 1. **Background**

- 1.1 Following the release of its English Devolution White Paper on 16<sup>th</sup> December 2024, Government has expressed its intention to seek devolution settlements in every part of the United Kingdom, with the creation of new governance arrangements at revised population sizes.

- 1.2 The Government has indicated that it is seeking the creation of new unitary authorities at a population size of some 500,000 residents, and Strategic Authorities at a population level of 1.5 million.
- 1.3 Civil servants have not yet provided any detail about criteria for exceptions to these criteria, or on the precise mechanism of their implementation. They have indicated that the forthcoming letter from the Minister for Local Government formally inviting LGR proposals will set out this detail by the end of January 2025. There will then be a consultation and response period until March (6-8 weeks).
- 1.4 In September 2024, prior to the release of the White Paper and at the Government's request, the Staffordshire Leaders Board submitted its collective devolution plan to Government. This covered key themes:
  - 1.4.1 Devolution must work for all: plans must reflect and respond to a deep understanding of local needs and opportunities. That is what our authorities have been working hard at over the summer.
  - 1.4.2 Form must follow function: if we are to accept another layer of governance in the county, at additional cost to the people of Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent, then the prize in terms of devolved functions, powers and resources has to be significant.
  - 1.4.3 Governance has to be inclusive: our Leader's Board works because all local authorities get to participate and contribute, and we want to ensure that this is also the case in any devolved arrangements.
  - 1.4.4 Commitment to subsidiarity: devolution should be to the most appropriate level of governance for the function in any question, and that should mean a combination of county-wide, local authority level and, perhaps most importantly, community level. We seek a devolution deal that gives us flexibility to make those judgements together.
- 1.5 The devolution proposal focused on five key areas, linked to the Government's missions and the Staffordshire Leaders' Board priorities:
  - Economic Development
  - Skills
  - Energy and Environment
  - Transport
  - Housing and Regeneration.
- 1.6 It should be noted that there was no reference to forced local government reorganisation in the Labour Party Manifesto put before voters ahead of the General Election held on 4<sup>th</sup> July 2024.
- 1.7 On 7<sup>th</sup> January 2025, Cabinet considered an urgent report prepared by the Leader of the Council setting out actions to press for preservation of the borough and approved recommendations to take forward, including actions for full Council to stand up for the borough.

## 2. Issues

- 2.1 The Loyal and Ancient Borough of Newcastle-Under-Lyme traces its history back to 1173, when records show that Henry II had granted a charter to the town and gave

strong support to the early borough over the next decade. Further royal charters have been granted to the borough by Kings Henry III, Edward I, Edward II, and Richard II, Queen Elizabeth I, Kings Charles II, James II and Queen Victoria.

- 2.2 The late Queen Elizabeth granted a new borough charter in 1974, following the Local Government Act of 1972.
- 2.3 This rich history was recently celebrated in the 850<sup>th</sup> anniversary events of 2023, and subsequent legacy activity. These events demonstrated a strong local association with the borough, including residents, civic groups, businesses and community organisations recognising the visit of the late Queen Elizabeth's visit in 1973 to mark 800 years of the borough, and the statue to this visit was unveiled in 2024 in Queens Gardens.
- 2.4 In 1995, North Staffordshire governance arrangements changed further with the creation of the unitary authority of Stoke on Trent. Through this change, Newcastle-Under-Lyme retained its borough status. The city subsequently trialled an elected mayoral model of governance, later abolished.
- 2.5 On 16<sup>th</sup> December 2024, the Government published its English Devolution White Paper. This set out both a desire to see local authorities work collaboratively, as had been extensively trailed by Ministers, but also set out a plan for local government reorganisation, which had not been shared with district and borough councils. Within this White Paper, the Government has stated that it wishes to see the rapid creation of new, far larger local authorities on a unitary basis, and with it the abolition of existing and historic boroughs, including Newcastle-Under-Lyme.
- 2.6 The reorganisation of local government is intended to happen within the lifetime of the current parliament, with all new structures in place by 2028. The Government is likely to have a policy preference for creating Combined County Authorities or other Strategic Authorities in which districts are not constituent members. It is also likely that the Government will prefer areas to undergo Local Government Reorganisation alongside creating new Strategic Authorities. Guidance is awaited on this, expected by the end of January.
- 2.7 Government officials have indicated that differing proposals may be submitted for an area, with Ministers selecting proposals which most closely match the criteria to be brought forward in the guidance following the publication of the White Paper.

### Borough Council Delivery

- 2.8 The Borough Council has demonstrated that it can focus and influence actions and decisions at a local level, close to residents, across areas which matter to them. This has recently included a number of key interventions.
- 2.9 Regeneration & Planning – developing working partnerships with developers and investors, our local social landlord and community interest groups, delivering a town centre regeneration programme in both Newcastle and Kidsgrove supported by Levelling Up funds which is responsive to both local need and investor opportunity. Forging and maintaining partnerships with national and local bodies has been both possible, and through nimble decision making has seized investment opportunities where a greater level of bureaucracy and more remote decision making may have stalled progress.
- 2.10 The Borough Council's dedicated focus on supporting the community with the extensive and ongoing issues at Walleys Quarry would likely not have been a priority.

for a larger, more remote authority with multiple demands. This included the Council being bold in using its powers and pressing for permission to pursue legal action against the operators when other agencies were not doing so.

- 2.11** The increased attraction to visitors of the Brampton Museum, attracting investment and greater footfall, expanded facilities and usage by local groups. As the Borough Council's primary cultural facility, efforts have been focused on supporting growth and a heritage-led cultural offer for the borough. These advantages may be lost if the Borough is submerged into a larger Council.
- 2.12** A strong leisure offer, built on local partnerships. Recognising that differing models of delivery work better in local places, the Council has both invested in the Jubilee 2 centre, working with the healthcare sector, local users and groups, but has also supported and secured investment for the community-run Kidsgrove Sports Centre, both facilities providing a complimentary offer across our two towns and the wider borough.
- 2.13** Civic Pride – from its award winning Britain and Newcastle in Bloom achievements, to the introduction of the Civic Pride campaign to work with partners, residents, voluntary organisations and businesses, local people have demonstrated their desire to get behind borough-focused activities which support making our places cleaner, safer and friendlier.
- 2.14** Net Zero and Sustainability – the Council has been able to adapt its working practices, investment and service delivery to ensure it meets its ambitious targets set out when it declared a climate emergency, including tree planting, planning, fleet and assets, and has worked with the private and academic sectors in developing borough-level initiatives. The ability to control these changes at a local level have been a near 70% reduction in our controlled carbon emissions.
- 2.15** The Local Government Peer Challenge reported in 2023 that Newcastle-Under-Lyme Borough Council was delivering quality services for its residents, and that particularly it had strengths in the following areas:
- Strong pride of place and Newcastle-under-Lyme has a distinct identity
  - Partnership working is particularly strong and the role it has in bringing others together to collaborate is highly valued
  - Clear leadership from the Cabinet and senior officers
  - Finances are healthy, and actively managed, which places it in a stable position
  - Officers are recognised as important assets for us and they are committed and keen to deliver for the communities
  - The Council has set out its ambitions for the place and our community and attracted enviable amounts of Government funding to deliver physical regeneration.

### **3. Recommendation**

#### **3.1** It is recommended that Council:

- Notes the contents and implications of the English Devolution White Paper.
- Pledges to stand up for the historic independence of the Borough.
- Supports the petitioning of residents in relation to the preservation of the Borough.



- Calls for Newcastle-Under-Lyme's Members of Parliament to support the Borough's preservation and will engage with Government Ministers in stating the case for the Borough.
- Asks the Leader & Chief Executive to write to the Deputy Prime Minister and relevant Ministers stating the Council's position.
- Enables the Leader to take forward necessary discussions and actions with Government and others and report these to the next suitable full Council.

#### **4. Financial and Resource Implications**

- 4.1 The resource implications for reorganisation cannot be fully assessed without further information from Government, and no figures or investment case has been provided to date.
- 4.2 In relation to demonstrating effective working together with other authorities, the Borough Council has worked extensively with Staffordshire County Council and fellow district and borough councils in identifying working arrangements that provide good value for money where these partnerships make sense. These arrangements are locally agreed, dictated by need, not by blanket application. They are not limited by immediate proximity, and in some cases extend beyond local authority partnerships.
- 4.3 Locally-determined arrangements have included co-location of office premises with Staffordshire County Council and Staffordshire Police at Castle House, bringing financial and other benefits including a reduction in carbon emissions, a significant annual revenue saving through a reduction in running costs.
- 4.4 Joint working arrangements include those with the County Council – internal audit, communications and legal support, and with other Councils including out of hours response, CCTV and building control.
- 4.5 The Borough Council has had a strong collaboration with the County Council on regeneration and economic development, bringing in over £55M into the Borough of UK Government Levelling Up funding.
- 4.6 In return, the County Council has benefited from significant shares of UK Levelling Up High Street Fund and Town Deal funding (over £2m of funds distributed).
- 4.7 Through the Staffordshire Sustainability Board, best practice learning and a joint communications plan have brought tangible benefits to help authorities focus on net zero and sustainability whilst retaining control of their programmes and targets.

#### **5. Major Risks & Mitigation**

- 5.1 Much remains unknown of detail at this stage so mitigation measures cannot yet be fully considered. Potential risks at this stage include staff recruitment and retention, a reduction in service delivery under a larger local authority, a potential 'democratic deficit' as elected members may be reduced in number and further from residents and a need to focus on reorganisation rather than get on with the day job of service provision.
- 5.2 *Financial sustainability* – Over recent years, the Council has delivered a balanced budget based on efficiencies across its services and investment in the borough whilst seeking to maintain optimum delivery for residents. It is unknown at what stage in a reorganisation process would restrict spending or borrowing, or whether areas in a much worse financial position would be prioritised over Newcastle.

**5.3** *Effectiveness of change* – There is a lack of proven success where local government reorganisation has taken place elsewhere in the country to date, and at this stage limited detail on the business case/benefits of the approach being described in the White Paper.

## 6. UN Sustainable Development Goals (UNSDG)



## 7. One Council

**7.1** Please confirm that consideration has been given to the following programmes of work:

One Commercial Council

The reorganisation of local government would change the commercial asset holding of councils, for example leisure centres and museums, and decisions would be made on these at a unitary level. The exact nature of changes is unknown at this stage.

One Digital Council

It is probable that newer, larger councils would need to align digital systems, the resource for which is not known.

One Green Council

Newcastle Borough Council has declared a climate emergency and has developed its sustainability programme to meet a 2030 net zero target for its scopes 1 and 2 emissions. Other local authorities are at different stages of implementing net zero approaches.

## 8. Key Decision Information

**8.1** This is a key decision as the White Paper may affect residents in all wards.

## 9. Earlier Cabinet/Committee Resolutions

**9.1** Cabinet – 4<sup>th</sup> June 2024 – Staffordshire Leaders Board Joint Committee

**9.2** Cabinet – 9<sup>th</sup> January 2025 – Devolution and Local Government Reorganisation: White Paper

## 10. List of Appendices

10.1 Appendix 1 – Staffordshire Leaders Board submission to UK Government.

11. **Background Papers**

11.1 [English Devolution White Paper](#), December 2024, HMSO.

## Appendix 1: Staffordshire Leaders Board Submission to UK Government



**Angela Rayner and Jim McMahon**

Deputy Prime Minister, and Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government / Minister of State, Housing, Communities and Local Government

House of Commons

London

SW1A 0AA

My Ref: AW / TK

Date: 30 September 2024

Dear Angela Rayner and Jim McMahon

**Ref: Staffordshire Devolution**

As the Leaders of all the Councils in Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent, we are writing to you as a united force to share our future intention to partner with the Government to deliver shared growth and remove barriers to opportunity.

Like you, we want to see tangible and sustained economic growth that improves living standards where it counts - in our cities, our towns and our villages - the places where people live.

Serving over 1.1 million residents across the county and city, the Staffordshire Leaders Board (a joint committee) is already hard at work delivering on Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent's extraordinary economic and place potential.

Since the Leaders Board was established in 2022, we've been exploring how devolution can benefit the area as one of our key priorities. We are committed to this collaborative effort and are ready to work with Government to do more.

Our approach is based on four core principles:

- Devolution must work for all: plans must reflect and respond to a deep understanding of local needs and opportunities. That is what our authorities have been working hard at over the summer.
- Form must follow function: if we are to accept another layer of governance in the county, at additional cost to the people of Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent, then the prize in terms of devolved functions, powers and resources has to be significant.
- Governance has to be inclusive: our Leaders Board works because all local authorities get to participate and contribute, and we want to ensure that this is also the case in any devolved arrangements.





- Commitment to subsidiarity: devolution should be to the most appropriate level of governance for the function in any question, and that should mean a combination of county-wide, local authority level and, perhaps most importantly, community level. We seek a devolution deal that gives us flexibility to make those judgements together.

Over the summer, we have thought through our opportunities and our asks under five main themes:

- Economic Development
- Skills
- Energy and Environment
- Transport
- Housing and Regeneration.

This work is captured on the enclosed sheets and could provide the basis for a rich dialogue with Government.

Beyond that, we reserve our position on the preferred model of devolution until we have seen the promised devolution framework and guidance. However, we do welcome your ongoing commitment to flexibility on the governance arrangements for devolved powers. Most significantly, whilst there are benefits to elected mayors for some areas, this is not a model which is suitable for Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent.

As you will see from the enclosed materials, we have made an excellent start. We will now await the further Government guidance so that we can continue to develop our collective position, working closely with you and your officials.

Yours sincerely





**Alan White**  
Leaders Board Chair  
Leader of Staffordshire County Council

**Jane Ashworth**  
Leaders Board Vice Chair  
Leader of Stoke-on-Trent City Council

**Tony Johnson**  
Leader of Cannock Chase District Council

**Mick Fitzpatrick**  
Leader of East Staffordshire Borough Council

**Doug Pullen**  
Leader of Lichfield District Council

**Simon Tagg**  
Leader of Newcastle-Under-Lyme Borough Council

**Kath Perry**  
Leader of South Staffordshire Council

**Aidan Godfrey**  
Leader of Stafford Borough Council

**Mike Gledhill**  
Leader of Staffordshire Moorlands District Council

**Carol Dean**  
Leader of Tamworth Borough Council



## Economic Development

### The case for change / key opportunity areas:

- **Strategic Economic Policies:** Strengthen the capability and skills of local firms and residents based on local economic geography. This would include consolidating local growth plans to link development opportunities more effectively and take a structured approach to the development of commercial/enterprise spaces.
- **Local Allocation of Funding Programmes:** Target opportunity and wealth creation to address local needs.
- **Enhanced and coordinated private sector investment** through reinstating priority areas eligible for grants or other fiscal incentives.
- **Greater retention of local business rates** potentially related to specific areas or development zones to ensure the local area benefits from future economic growth.
- **Integrated longer-term funding streams for business support** in a form that supports local economic priorities. The ability to strengthen support and provision for budding entrepreneurs particularly, where they are not from conventional business backgrounds, who live in disadvantaged neighbourhoods, are in receipt of Universal Credit or who are straight out of college.
- **Creating green technology jobs** in a concentrated area linked to the Major Urban Area through a green corridor with public transport improvement including the Green Innovation Corridor/the M54 Jct2 and i54 and the A50 A500 Manufacturing Corridor.
- **Strategic approach to ensure delivery of sustainability priorities including for green industries, investment sites, green technology jobs, skills, clean energy and transport;** this could include facilitation of sustainable supply chain programmes, supporting compliance, provide advice, funding and incentivisation.
- **Address local need and root cause of issues** such as worklessness, NEET, economic and health inequality through targeted interventions.
- **Coordinated support for Community Enterprise and Co-operatives:** Developing community enterprise through micro-grants, community finance, and asset transfers.
- **Economies of scale across the whole geographical area;** reduced tendering exercises resulting in greater efficiency and less duplication; using collective weight of anchor institutions.

### Key asks:

- **Longer-term agreements for capital regeneration/economic development** with multi-year funding settlements and powers to support direct delivery and ending of competitive funding pots for economic development. Replace with direct allocations.
- **Extension and potential expansion of Enterprise Zone(s):** Nationally supported, locally defined economic development priorities and programmes supporting local sectors.
- **Devolved investment funds for regeneration** of town and city centres and land remediation
- **Funding and powers devolved to locality to support local control and direct delivery** to unlock employment sites, homes, and job-generating schemes. Including business start-up, skills development, job creation initiatives and expansion support.
- **A greater level of innovation investment** to support innovation activity within key industries and economic ambition including Development of crea-tech cluster, Development of concept of International Centre for Ceramics, building on World Craft City status.
- **Single settlement for business support activity** to bring greater local control and the assurance of longer-term funding.
- **Employability programmes** to address economic inactivity in communities with high worklessness and NEET or where there are physical and mental health problems.
- **Continuation of UKSPF & REPF** [and Levelling Up] or funding equivalents with direct allocation to localities to remove the need for bidding and an ongoing funding commitment.
- **Pooled funding for local business support** e.g. start-up, post start up, R&D/innovation etc to be delivered at a local level.
- **Ability to be more innovative with local taxation** to deliver economic growth, e.g. business rate retention, Capital Gains Tax and Stamp Duty.
- **Equitable availability and distribution of housing growth incentives**
- **Carbon reduction funding package** to support businesses to achieve Net Zero and produce cost savings.
- **International trade partnership** between the devolved area and central government



## Difference to the area:

These initiatives aim to create a more robust and resilient local economy, fostering innovation, sustainability, and inclusive growth.

- **Improved local economic development** by aligning national support with local priorities.
- **Sustainable growth and regeneration** through longer-term funding and direct delivery powers.
- **Increased employment opportunities** by unlocking employment sites and supporting job-generating schemes including the Green Innovation Corridor.
- **Delivery of a single settlement for business support activity.**
- **Facilitation of additional borrowing for business support activity** based on the certainty of funding and business rate retention.
- **Enhanced innovation and competitiveness** within key industries.
- **Greater local control and efficiency** in business support and economic development activities.
- **Reduced economic inactivity** and improved employability in high-need communities including NEET.
- **Fostering local entrepreneurialism**; building on relationships with our university partners to provide facilities, advice and training around innovation required to support new and existing start-ups and spin outs across the county.

## Education, Employment and Skills

### The case for change / key opportunity areas:

- **Skills development:** Devolution of responsibility, funding, and powers to develop education, employment, and skills provision at the local level.
- **Develop, inform and support new career pathways:** linked to local need and growing industries
- **Business start-up support:** Enterprise and innovation programs to increase business start-ups and foster an enterprise culture.
- **Green industry:** Green Skills investment programme with local universities

### Key asks:

- **Devolved skills revenue funding to allow local skills commissioning focused on local sector support including:**
  1. 14-19 education support programmes and curriculum improvement powers.
  2. Post-16 education and training provision to allow clear pathways and including targeted work around NEETs to improve levels of attainment and progression at 16 and 19 years.
  3. Adults Skills Plan with clear pathways focussing on level 1/2 skills to create a ladder of opportunity.
  4. Enterprise and innovation programmes targeting local growth sectors and business development skills to increase business start-ups.
  5. Ensure re-investment into communities to enable them to thrive economically and socially.
  6. Careers Education, Information, Advice and Guidance (CEIAG) programmes including the role of colleges, our workforce and lifelong learning.
  7. Programmes and support to tackle economic inactivity and worklessness
  8. Apprenticeship programmes including local control of Apprenticeship Levy
  9. Establishment of a local Skills Advisory Panel
- **Longer-term funding streams:** Integrated funding streams for business support and skills aligned with local economic priorities over the longer term to allow for more effective planning.
- **Devolved capital fund:** For unlocking and facilitating the delivery of strategic employment projects and around development or expansion of FE colleges.

### Difference to the area:

These initiatives aim to create a more robust and sustainable local economy, improve the skills of our residents and enable them to meet the future workforce needs of the area, foster innovation, and provide better support for businesses and residents.

- **Economic Growth:** Strengthening the capability and skills of local firms and residents, leading to economic growth, and supporting key opportunities for growth or specialisation.
- **Enterprise and innovation:** Increased levels of commercialisation and a local skills offer which supports local growth sectors
- **Employment:** Addressing economic inactivity and worklessness, leading to increased productivity and better health outcomes.
- **Local Control:** Greater local control and longer-term funding for business support activities.
- **Cross-public sector:** Devolved skills-based approaches to mental health, troubled individuals and youth justice.
- **Better local integrated offer:** Expanded family hubs/family support programme including learning, skills and employment offer.
- **Supporting key local workforce demand:** Benefits for key sectors such as around care workforce

## Environment & Energy

### The case for change / key opportunity areas:

**Strategic collaboration on energy policy** Local energy planning and funding to create green investment zones and develop bespoke local policies for clean energy

- **Delegation of capital funding to meet carbon reduction targets;** this would allow the locality to meet our strategic ambitions around climate mitigation, sequestration and adaptation and be able to direct support to businesses and homes to transition to Net Zero, invest in green technology and retrofit properties.
- **Use Great British Energy to facilitate Green Solutions Grant Funding** to support the reduction of carbon and produce cost savings within businesses.
- **Use Great British Energy to facilitate sustainable supply chain programmes** to support compliance, provide advice, funding, and incentivization.
- **Use Great British Energy to explore the implementation of hydrogen** in heat works and associated infrastructure
- **Enhanced planning regulations and powers around local energy generation and distribution** including network upgrades on major developments and generation around renewables, domestic heating, EV charging/alternative zero emission fuels).
- **Enhanced powers to implement local environmental policies,** in particular surface water infrastructure and flood defence
- **Preferential PWLB borrowing** for climate change projects.
- **Tackling fuel poverty and addressing affordable warmth**
- **Funding and powers to expand localised energy networks** including district heating networks and use of geo-thermal extraction.
- **Build upon the Future Homes Standard** to incorporate residential energy generation requiring solar panels and air source heat pumps.
- **Address current National Grid challenges** to ensure capacity and capability for now and the future.

### Key asks:

- **Development of a local area energy plan to enable the long-term planning on a regional basis.**
- **County and city-wide planning approach to net zero** - Agreement to consider at a county/city-wide level the Planning implications for Climate change to achieve net zero by 2050.
- **Joined up approach to local area energy planning** – this would include renewables, EV charging/alternative fuel infrastructure, geo-thermal extraction etc.
- **Joined up approach to land management** for planning provision of renewable energy, tree planting, etc.
- **Joined up approach to developing green skills** to deliver transition to a green economy
- **Backing for green enterprise** including battery storage.
- **Development of Local Area Energy Plans** and the expansion of district heating network.
- **Enhanced strategic leadership of Local Transport** working with local bus companies to develop a sustainable bus network based on EV/Hydrogen and transition to zero emissions as part of the Local Transport Plan and Bus Service Improvement Plans.
- **Green Skills programmes** in partnership with Keele and Staffs University, local colleges, and employers.
- **Green Capital Investment Fund** to enable new and existing businesses to invest in green tech and reduce carbon emissions.
- **Enhance planning regulations** around energy generation and distribution.

### Difference to the area:

These initiatives and opportunities can collectively contribute to achieving net zero targets, fostering sustainable development, and improving the overall quality of life.

- **Carbon Reduction:** Implementing clean energy policies and green solutions grant funding can significantly reduce carbon emissions and produce cost savings for businesses.
- **Economic Growth:** Backing green enterprises and creating eco-parks can stimulate economic growth and create job opportunities, such as the Green Innovation Corridor/the M54 Jct2 and i54 and the A50 A500 Manufacturing Corridor.
- **Sustainable Development:** Expanding district heating networks and enhancing planning regulations can lead to more sustainable and efficient energy use.
- **Green Skills Development:** Partnering with universities and colleges to develop green skills can prepare the workforce for a transition to a green economy.
- **Strengthening Leadership Partnership Arrangements** across the geography including with our local research institutions to secure a greater level of national innovation funding aligned to our key industries and economic ambitions.



## Transport

### The case for change / key opportunity areas:

- **Delivery of public transport improvements** through the commissioning and funding bus services and aligning the Bus Service Improvement plans.
- **Multi-Modal Journeys and Efficient Exchanges:** It supports multi-modal journeys and efficient exchanges through a joint strategic approach to multi-modal hubs (cars, trains, buses, active travel with EV charging) and provides greater integration for freight and can support a modal shift to public transport by integrating timetables, ticketing, and transport hubs.
- **Transition to Zero Emissions:** There is an opportunity to link transport to energy provision and work with local bus companies on electric/hydrogen fleets.
- **Improve public transport to support economic activity and leisure including the creation of local green transport options,** including metro to M54 Jct2 and i54 site.
- **Development of a Pipeline of Regional Investment Sites,** such as i54, that were identified in the former Regional Spatial Strategies are coming to an end with nothing new of scale on the horizon.
- **Investment in strategic road networks** would allow us to link development opportunities with key transport routes, e.g. A50/A500 corridor and A449.
- **Development and Delivery of Cross-Boundary Transport Schemes:** This initiative supports a whole region approach enhancing commuter links with Birmingham, Manchester and the East Midlands and an opportunity to more effectively integrate local and national transport networks through joint working with Highways England and Network Rail to reduce congestion caused by a predominately car-borne population.

### Key asks:

- **Five-year Highways and Transport Settlement;** Post HS2 settlement focussed on improvements to roads, bus routes and rail stations, enhancing active travel and development of a whole region approach to public transport including the development of a sustainable bus and rail network for travel to work areas.
- **Devolved funding and power** to the area to create transport plans and strategies covering the whole geography and build relationships with neighbouring Transport Authorities. Devolution of greater powers to coordinate strategic infrastructure activity across the area and adjacent authorities to deliver cross-boundary transport schemes.
- **Strategic Planning Powers and National Planning Policy Framework update** to enable better land use and transport planning integration.
- **Greater influence over National Highways and Network Rail decision making.**
- **Confirm the delivery timetable for the M6/M54 link road, M6 J15 Upgrades and A50 Improvements.**
- **Continue/replace UKSPF & REPF funding** with an ongoing commitment.
- **Powers over trunk road improvements within the area.**
- **Devolution of Bus Franchising Powers** to ensure transport routes meet the reality of where people need to travel, particularly in rural areas and under-served residential areas and to provide a stimulus to work with local bus companies around electric and hydrogen fleet.
- **Reduce reliance on bidding for funding** to support a more joined-up approach to Local Transport Plan policy and schemes.
- **Create a devolved capital fund pot** for unlocking strategic employment projects.
- **Development corporation/delivery vehicles** to deliver Invest to save programmes of road repairs.

### Difference to the area:

- **Strengthened leadership and partnership arrangements** across the geography.
- **Addressing Transport Connectivity and integration of transport systems:** Prioritizing travel to education/work in opening and intensifying new bus routes and local rail stations to address the lack of transport connectivity in rural parts of the district.
- **Enhanced economic growth through Inward Investment Opportunities:** Without a devolution deal, there is little certainty over the delivery of large-scale inward investment opportunities.
- **Improved Public Transport:** This initiative will improve public transport, supporting economic activity and leisure.
- **Increased sustainability and reduced environmental impact:** through green transport options.

## Housing, Regeneration & Strategic Planning

### The case for change / key opportunity areas:

- **Strengthened collaboration around land use** to enable strategic decisions to be made to provide additional benefits across the geography, including the opportunity to engage with Homes England on an area wide basis.
- **Compulsory purchase powers** – with the consent of the relevant local authority, devolved powers could enable potential future growth opportunities
- **Planning & Licensing fee powers** - Currently planning and licensing fees are not set locally. If Local authorities were able to have more control over this, re-investment could be made in the local area.
- **Devolved funding** and targeted business rate retention from future growth to create a strategic regeneration and housing enabling fund - Currently there is a lack of tailored funding to target derelict and non-viable locations across the county as a whole and as a result sites are remaining inaccessible to development.
- **Devolved Homelessness prevention funding** - Currently Councils are struggling to deliver tailored homelessness prevention solutions and to provide adequate temporary accommodation for homeless households.
- **Devolved net zero funding** – this would include funding for retrofitting existing buildings to help meet net zero targets.

### Key asks:

- **Devolved Powers as listed above**
- **Devolved Funding as above**

### Difference to the area:

- **Strengthened collaboration and strategic coordination** – This would substantially enhance cooperation between neighbouring planning authorities across the area and enable authorities to better understand the needs across the wider area. It would also support the development of coherent strategies to address unmet housing needs, deliver spatial and infrastructure plans and enable greater opportunities for enhanced partnership arrangements with Homes England and local authorities across the geography.
- **Compulsory purchase powers** – with the consent the relevant local authorities, this could assist to unlock sites and locations across the area.
- **Planning & Licensing fee powers** - Having these powers set at a local level would enable reinvestment in the local area.
- **Devolved funding and business rate retention to create a strategic regeneration and housing enabling fund** - Devolved funding would be able to provide targeted interventions towards derelict and non-viable locations which would then assist to unlock land for development and would also promote regeneration opportunities.
- **Devolved Homelessness prevention funding** - Devolved funding would enable more flexibility, innovation and allow authorities to provide tailored homelessness prevention solutions to meet the specific needs of their geography.
- **Devolved net zero funding** - Decarbonizing housing stock and improving energy efficiency can reduce the environmental impact and promote sustainability.

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**STATEMENT OF THE LEADER OF THE COUNCIL TO FULL COUNCIL –  
22<sup>nd</sup> JANUARY 2025**

**Submitted by:**            **Councillor Simon Tagg**

**Portfolio:**                 **All**

**Wards affected:**         **All**

**Purpose of the Report**

To provide an update to Members on the activities and decisions of Cabinet, together with the Forward Plan.

**Recommendation**

**That the statement of the Leader of the Council be received and noted.**

**Reasons**

To update Council Members on the activities and decisions of the Leader and Cabinet and to allow questions and comments to be made on the Statement.

1. **Cabinet Meetings**

Cabinet met on 3<sup>rd</sup> December and 9<sup>th</sup> January, detailed below is a selection of decisions and other actions of the Leader and Cabinet since the last Leader’s Statement.

2. **Walleys Quarry Odour Issue**

The Council has applied to the Planning Inspectorate to be a ‘Principal Party’ actively supporting the Environment Agency (EA) as it fights Walleys Quarry Ltd’s appeal against the Closure Notice issue in November. The Council has compiled extensive evidence, including air quality readings and numerous complaints from residents over the last few years, which will be used to support the EA’s case at the appeal inquiry.

There has been a significant spike in foul gas odours and complaints over Christmas and into the new year with all three monitor stations show historically high readings.

The EA in its update of 16<sup>th</sup> January stated: *“Since the beginning of January 2025, officers have been on site weekly and will continue to carry out regular inspections to ensure that WQL is making progress to complete the series of steps required by the Notice. As we have previously informed you (see 3 January 2025 update), we expect the odour outside the site to reduce as the additional gas infrastructure and capping required by the Notice are completed. The deadlines in the Notice are challenging but reasonable, based on the work which needs to be done. The capping work is due to be completed by 31 January 2025. The significant levels of emissions outside the site have been intensified by the recent period of cold, still weather, which leads to poor dispersion conditions that will magnify the impacts on the community.”*

Using the latest monitoring data, UK Health Security Agency (UKHSA) have undertaken an interim risk assessment. They state: *“UKHSA is aware that residents living near Walleys Quarry Landfill have experienced increased odour pollution from the site throughout December, continuing into January.*

*The air quality data supplied by the Environment Agency (EA), for our December risk assessment, shows that hydrogen sulphide levels over the Christmas period were substantially above the World Health Organization (WHO) odour annoyance guideline level, with continual periodic high spikes of emissions throughout this time. This is consistent with the increase in local complaints sent to the EA and local authority.*

*UKHSA felt it was important to carry out an interim risk assessment, due to increasing levels of odour pollution complaints, along with further raw data being received for early January, showing hydrogen sulphide levels periodically exceeding the WHO short-term health guideline value.*

*The assessment is that while the risk to long-term health is still likely to be small, there is an increased likelihood that some residents could experience short-term health impacts affecting breathing, irritation of the eyes, nose and mouth. These effects should be transient (reduce if exposure declines) however, these higher exposures may exacerbate pre-existing chronic lung conditions.*

*Anyone with health concerns or symptoms should contact NHS 111 or their local GP.”*

Council Officers are continuing to work closely with the EA, UKHSA, County Council, Public Health, civil servants and others via the Strategic Coordinating Group which was set up in 2021 when Walleys became a serious incident. Walleys Quarry is the longest running incident that the Staffordshire Civil Contingencies Unit (CCU) has ever been involved in.

It should be noted that Walleys Quarry Ltd have referred to the capping work currently taking place as ‘temporary’.

There is currently no date set for the Appeal to be heard by the Planning Inspector. I believe it is now imperative that this happens sooner rather than later. I understand that the Secretary of State can ‘call in’ the appeal and expedite it earlier – this now needs to happen.

It is important in the meantime that residents still register complaints to the EA, as the main regulator, by calling 0800 807060, or online at: <https://report-walleys-quarry-smell.service.gov.uk/>

Complaints can also be registered with Newcastle-under-Lyme Borough Council at: <https://www.newcastle-staffs.gov.uk/walleys-quarry/report-problem-concern-walleys-quarry>

### 3. **Borough Local Plan submitted**

The new Borough Local Plan was submitted to the Planning Inspectorate before Christmas. This is the culmination of 4 years of work by the Council’s Planning team. It contains around 4,000 pages of documents detailing the draft Local Plan and supporting evidence including all submissions from consultees and the public for and against the proposals.

Councils are required by Government to have a rolling five-year supply of housing land and specifies which parts of the Borough will be earmarked for different types of development, including homes and employment land over the next 15 years.

By submitting the Plan at pace, it is not directly affected by the Government’s proposals to increase housebuilding quotas announced by the Deputy Prime Minister which would see an extra 2,000 homes required across the Borough.

As per the requirement by the Government, officers will be bringing forward the framework for the next Borough Local Plan in due course.

### 4. **Draft Revenue & Capital Budget and Strategies 2025/26**

Cabinet is proposing a balanced budget which prioritises essential front-line services again this year despite the backdrop of uncertainty in the economy and the national government’s incompetence.

The budget plans which will come before Full Council in February continue the investment in vital community services such as waste collection, street cleaning, and the operation of the J2



leisure centre and Brampton Museum. The Council is also committed to the regeneration of key areas like Ryecroft, Astley Place and Midway which will bring new homes, shops and businesses into Newcastle town centre. In Kidsgrove, jobs will soon be created at Chatterley Valley West employment site and enhancements to the town centre, the canal route and station are in train.

Despite financial pressures and a cut of 4% in core funding by the new Government, the Council has managed to keep the council tax increase to a minimal 7p per week for most residents, keeping the pledge given by its administration to keep the council tax increase below 2%.

Our approach not only supports the local economy but also fosters a strong sense of community with the roll out of Civic Pride initiatives across the Borough, backed by a new Civic Pride Investment Fund.

#### 5. **Car Parking Strategy 2019-29 Update**

Cabinet endorsed the latest update to the Car Parking Strategy which outlined the progress and future plans covering the period up to 2029. Key updates include the development of the new replacement multi-storey Castle Car Park which will feature electric vehicle charging points and modern amenities and enhance user experience when compared with the outdated Midway. Castle Car Park is due to open by the end of January.

The Strategy aims to meet the current and future needs of town centre visitors, businesses, and residents whilst enabling the development of the Midway.

The parking concessions over the Christmas period were well received and the £1 after 1pm remains in place on surface level car parks around the town centre.

#### 6. **Navigation House Refurbishment Contractor Award**

The Council has taken a bold step to advancing its efforts to end rough sleeping in the Borough with the planned conversion of a building near the town centre into a 'homeless hub.' The facility, to be known as Navigation House, will provide safe, secure emergency accommodation and practical support for rough sleepers including showers, laundry facilities, and connections to various services.

The project, funded via the UK Government's Shared Prosperity Fund, aims to offer immediate help without appointments, reducing the need for emergency intervention. The aim is to help those most vulnerable members of our community in a moment of most need, and change the perception of our town centre.

#### 7. **Update on Decarbonisation of the Council's Operational Buildings and Fleet**

Cabinet received a report detailing a sustained reduction in the Council's carbon emissions. A 35% cut over the last few years brings the total reduction in emissions to nearly 70% since the start of the Council's journey. This significant achievement is part of the Council's broader Sustainable Environment Strategy which aims to reach net zero carbon emissions across its operations by 2030.

Key initiatives contributing to this success include the installation of over 100 solar panels on Council buildings which generate substantial green energy and reduce reliance on grid electricity. Additionally, the Council has transitioned its heavy goods vehicle fleet to Hydrotreated Vegetable Oil (HVO), a low-carbon fuel derived from renewable materials like rapeseed and sunflower oil. These efforts are complemented by ongoing projects to minimise waste, increase recycling and offset residual emissions via tree planting.

The Council's proactive approach has not only made great strides in reducing its carbon emissions to combat climate change, but also sets to bring other efficiencies and reduce costs that will help to create budget savings in the future.

8. **Forward Plan**

The Forward Plan can be found at: -

[Browse plans - Cabinet, 2025 – Newcastle-under-Lyme Borough Council](#)

**Councillor Simon Tagg**  
**Leader of the Council**