

COUNCIL

Wednesday, 6th April, 2022
Time of Commencement: 7.00 pm

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Present: Mayor - Councillor Kenneth Owen (Chair)

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|--------------|-------------------|-----------------|------------------|
| Councillors: | Gillian Burnett | Dave Jones | Stephen Sweeney |
| | Silvia Burgess | Tony Kearon | Simon Tagg |
| | Jennifer Cooper | Helena Maxfield | John Tagg |
| | John Cooper | Paul Northcott | June Walklate |
| | Julie Cooper | Mark Olszewski | Paul Waring |
| | Sylvia Dymond | Barry Panter | Gillian Williams |
| | Andrew Fear | Andrew Parker | John Williams |
| | Andrew Fox-Hewitt | Sarah Pickup | Ruth Wright |
| | Gill Heesom | Bert Proctor | Jill Waring |
| | Mark Holland | Marion Reddish | David Grocott |
| | Graham Hutton | Kyle Robinson | |
| | Trevor Johnson | Mike Stubbs | |

Apologies: Councillor(s) Annabel Lawley, Sue Moffat, Amelia Rout, Elizabeth Shenton, Simon White and Gary White

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| Officers: | David Adams | Executive Director of Sustainable Development and Operations |
| | Geoff Durham | Mayor's Secretary / Member Support Officer |
| | Martin Hamilton | Chief Executive |
| | Daniel Dickinson | Head of Legal & Governance /Monitoring Officer |
| | Sarah Wilkes | Head of Finance / S151 Officer |

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 23 February, 2022 be agreed as a correct record.

3. MAYOR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

Group Leaders spoke on the terrible situation happening in Ukraine, stating that the Borough of Newcastle under Lyme stood with them and that the Council was doing everything it could to help to support them.

A minute's silence took place to remember the victims.

Group Leaders paid tribute to the twelve Members who were not standing in the upcoming elections. In addition, tribute was paid to Angela Mayer who was standing down as Macebearer. Jenny Otter was welcomed as her replacement.

The Mayor thanked everyone who had helped him to raise over £1300 at his Charity Ball.

[Watch the debate here](#)

4. RECEIPT OF PETITION UNDER THE COUNCIL'S PETITION SCHEME

A petition had been received regarding St Peter's Methodist Church and buildings which were scheduled to be sold by auction later this year.

The petition was asking the Council to write to the Methodist Church to make it clear to them, the level of community and Council support there was to save St. Peters. It was hoped that, by working together, the Methodist Church could be persuaded to take a community minded view and sell St. Peters to a group that would retain it for the community, even if that meant getting a lower capital return.

Following the presentation, Members debated the petition. The Leader advised that the Council had given the Asset of Community Interest status which gave a six month period where the community could work together to try and raise funds to purchase the building.

The Leader proposed that this Council asks the Chief Executive to write to the Methodist Church to inform them of the level of community support for the campaign to save St. Peter's and to urge them to consider accepting a bid from the community even if that meant getting a lower capital receipt for the site. In addition, the Leader proposed that Ward Members convene a meeting at the first available opportunity between the various community groups that were representing the people of the Westlands and meet with the Superintendent of the Methodist North Staffordshire Circuit to discuss the importance of continuing community use on this site. Councillor Holland seconded this.

- Resolved:**
- (i) That this Council ask the Chief Executive to write to the Methodist Church to inform them of the level of community support for the campaign to save St. Peter's and to urge them to consider accepting a bid from the community even if that meant getting a lower capital receipt for the site.
 - (ii) That Ward Members convene a meeting at the first available opportunity, between the various community groups that are representing the people of the Westlands and meet with the Superintendent of the Methodist North Staffordshire Circuit to discuss the importance of continuing community use on this site.

[Watch the debate here](#)

5. CALENDAR OF MEETINGS 2022-2026

Consideration was given to a report asking Members to approve the Calendar of Meetings for the period 2022 to 2024.

Resolved: That the draft Calendar of Meetings 2022 to 2026 be approved.

[Watch the debate here](#)

6. LOCAL ELECTIONS FEES AND CHARGES

Consideration was given to a report asking Members to note the proposed election fees for 2022/23.

Resolved: That the proposed election fees for 2022/23, as set out in Appendix 1 of the agenda report be noted.

[Watch the debate here](#)

7. NOTIFICATION OF URGENT DECISION

Consideration was given to a report asking Members to note an Urgent Decision, taken by the Chief Executive regarding the acceptance of a funding bid for social housing decarbonisation.

Resolved: That the Urgent Decision taken by the Chief Executive, be noted.

[Watch the debate here](#)

8. STATEMENT OF THE LEADER OF THE COUNCIL

A report was submitted which provided an update to Members on the activities and decisions of the Cabinet, together with the Forward Plan.

In respect of Paragraph 2, the Leader was asked to update Members on the number of people within the Borough who had put their names forward to be sponsors for displaced people from Ukraine.

The Leader stated that the Government had opened the scheme for Ukrainian relief and also, possibly for people to come to the UK to seek refuge. At this time there were twenty people within the Borough who had put forward to be sponsors and there were hundreds across the County. This Council had a role to play when people arrived as funding had been received from the Government to ensure that payments and subsistence costs and payments to the families that took them in were made. The Council also had to carry out checks on those properties.

Regarding Paragraph 3, The Leader was asked if he agreed that it was disappointing that the site operator of Walleys Quarry and their legal team were using every opportunity to delay the court proceedings that this authority had brought and could Members be reassured that that everything was being done, within the Council's power to stop the stink.

Reference was made to the third paragraph regarding the health risk assessment of the UKHSA and the small risk to lifetime physical health.

A question was asked why the air quality measures, in place in some parts of the Borough could not cover the whole area which would include the quarry.

The Leader agreed that the situation had not improved and complaints had been increasing again with 224 reports to the Council – week ending 14 March, the following week there were 412 complaints and 243 the following week.

The Council had seen regulatory failure of the Environment Agency and in the last couple of days there had been announcements of Category 1 breaches. The Council had tried complaining to them and had got rebuffed by their Chief Executive, therefore the Parliamentary Ombudsman had now been approached.

The trial which should have commenced in June, would have a pre-trial review on 30 September with the final hearing scheduled for 24 October, 2022.

Members agreed that they were disappointed in the failings of the Environment Agency.

A surprise inspection at the site had taken place last week which brought about a reduction in the number of vehicles turning up to use the site. The Leader was asked if the Council could explore the setting up of a meeting with Government and partner agencies to bring about some robust and sustained scrutiny and enforcement by those agencies.

The Leader agreed that this needed to be done and the Council had been having discussions, particularly with the County Council.

In respect of paragraph 4, the Leader was asked if he agreed that the blueprint for the Ryecroft site would make a difference to the town centre businesses who wanted to bring in more people to shop. The Leader was also asked if he agreed that it was a shame that this approach was not taken by the previous administration instead of the student and retail schemes.

The Leader stated that the blueprint was taking shape and was deliverable, especially with the receipt of the Future High Street Funding from the Government. The previous scheme of student accommodation and retail had included a retail scheme that was too big for the speciality shops and too small for the bigger companies. There was now a large amount of student accommodation in the town.

It was asked whether the housing for over fifties would be mostly social housing or private apartments. In addition, the Leader was asked who would receive the cash receipts from the proposed new multi storey car park.

The Leader stated that the Aspire headquarters would have 200 people working there, which would also bring visitors to the building. These people would come from the bus station, walk through the town and could use the shops or have lunch, generating footfall. Regarding the car park, this would be owned by the Council replacing the Midway and would be 'electric vehicle ready', therefore all cash receipts would come to the Council.

Regarding paragraph 5, thanks were given to the administration and all those involved in helping the investment into Kidsgrove come into fruition. In addition, Kidsgrove Sports Centre was now nearing completion which would be a benefit to all.

A question was asked on paragraph 6 regarding the reaching of net zero by 2030, the Council would change its vehicle fleet. The Portfolio Holder for Environment and Recycling was asked what the plans were.

The Portfolio Holder for Environment and Recycling stated that, at present, small adjustments were being looked at on the Euro 6 engines so that bio-fuel trials could commence. The Council was also partnering with Keele University, exploring hydrogen fuel for the next generation of refuse vehicles.

The Leader was asked if the Council could fit an electric vehicle charging point in every car park to be ready for the future.

The Leader stated that this was already in progress. Charging points were going up in some of the town centre car parks and the new Ryecroft car park would be electric vehicle ready.

The Leader was asked if he felt that the third quarter, Finance and Performance Review report was good news.

The Leader agreed that it was good news. The short term staff sickness indicator had been during the Omicron surge. All other indicators were going in the right direction.

Paragraph 8. Retiring Member, Councillor Robinson thanked Councillors and officers and stated that he was taking a lot of experience away with him. He stated that it had been an honour to serve the residents of Butt Lane and Talke.

The Leader acknowledged the comments made and on behalf of all retiring Members thanked officers stating that this was a great 'family' Council.

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 SCRUTINY COMMITTEES**

Reports were submitted for the Committees that had met since the last Council meeting.

The Finance, Assets and Performance Scrutiny Committee met on 24 March for the final meeting of the current cycle. The Chair thanked all of the members of the Committee for the work that they had done

Resolved: That the reports be received.

[Watch the debate here](#)

10. **REPORTS OF THE CHAIRS OF THE REGULATORY COMMITTEES**

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

The Planning Committee had continued to meet on its current cycle. The Chair stated that there had been some good debates on items considered at the meetings. The Chair thanked all Members who had sat on the Committee and particularly the Vice Chair, Councillor Reddish.

Resolved: That the reports be received.

[Watch the debate here](#)

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

Councillor Fox-Hewitt asked the Leader the following:

Could the Leader provide the following information to Members:

What was the total headcount of employees, employed by the Council on 1 January, 2018 and what was the headcount as of 31 March, 2022.

The Leader advised that on 1 January, 2018 there were 497 employees and at 31 March, 2022 there were 441.

Councillor Fox-Hewitt asked the Leader to provide an itemised breakdown of which areas of service delivery had seen a reduction in establishments during that period.

The Leader advised that at 1 January, 2018 the Council did not have a functioning HR team, Legal team or Elections team. There was no Town Centre Officer, there was no focus on neighbourhoods and the environmental agenda was non-existent. In addition, the Council did not have a Chief Executive. The Council now had all of these and was moving forward.

Councillor Paul Waring asked the following question:

It is good news about the Governments' £150 Council Tax rebate for residents of the Borough in Council Tax Bands A to D. Could the Portfolio Holder for Finance, Town Centres and Growth update the Council on when people could expect to receive the rebate.

The Portfolio Holder for Finance, Town Centres and Growth advised that the Council had received funding of close on £7.5m from the Government. There was also a discretionary fund of £206,000 which had been received.

Provided they paid by direct debit, people on bands A to D would receive their £150 week commencing 25 April, 2022 into their bank account. People who did not pay by direct debit would have to apply for their rebate.

Councillor Paul Waring asked what happened to those people whose homes fell into bands E to H.

The Portfolio Holder for Finance, Town Centres and Growth advised that there were people who had big houses to run but had not got a lot of money so the discretionary fund would capture these people. People on income related benefits, households containing mature students who aren't eligible to pay Council Tax, people who receive the single occupancy discount would all get the rebate.

[Watch the debate here](#)

12. RECEIPT OF PETITIONS

No petitions were handed in by Members.

13. URGENT BUSINESS

There was no urgent business.

14. **DISCLOSURE OF EXEMPT INFORMATION**

There were no confidential items.

**Mayor - Councillor Kenneth Owen
Chair**

Meeting concluded at 9.09 pm