

STATEMENT OF THE LEADER OF THE COUNCIL TO FULL COUNCIL – 16TH DECEMBER 2020

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 has met 3 times since the last Full Council - 14 October, 11 November and 9 December. A selection of decisions are detailed under item 3 of this report.

2. **Back on Track – Coronavirus Pandemic Recovery Plan Update**

Following the end of the second lock-down, the Borough entered Tier 3 restrictions on 2nd December and cases of Coronavirus have continued to fall during this recent period.

The end of lock-down enabled our town centres to reopen safely but the hospitality industry has remained closed during the usually busy run up to Christmas.

The Council is continuing to focus on supporting vulnerable people and businesses whilst maintaining Council services and focussing on the economic and financial recovery. With the vaccination programme now taking place there is hope for a return to a sense of normality by next spring.

In recognition for the hard work of Council staff and dedication to the residents of the Borough during this difficult time and as a heartfelt thank you, after discussions with the Trade Unions a decision has been made to grant each member of staff an additional 2 days' annual leave. I hope that this goes some way to reflect all our appreciation for the Council's key workers who have kept services going. The 2 days leave can be taken at any time over the next 2 years.

3. **Cabinet Decisions**

3.1 **Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) 2021-2026 & Draft Budget Saving Plans 2021-2022**

Cabinet has endorsed a draft MTFs and set of budget saving proposals. These reflect the outcome of a comprehensive review of the Council's services and budgets to take account of the ongoing Coronavirus pandemic and to set the Council on a new "One Council" approach to ensure continued improvement in services to our residents whilst keeping within budget assumptions as set out in the MTFs.

3.2 Temporary Accommodation Provision from 1 November 2020 – 31 March 2021

Cabinet approved two short-term contracts for temporary accommodation with Open Door, Stoke-on-Trent for the provision of support for homeless people in the Borough. This followed a review and mini procurement exercise to identify the best accommodation options and costings to enable the Council, as quickly as possible, to help those who find themselves homeless.

3.3 Jubilee 2 Update

Cabinet received a report on actions to resolve the ongoing building defects at J2 involving the leaking roof, aqua sauna and swimming pool. A good working relationship has now been established with the contractor, Morgan Sindell, which is allowing these defects to be addressed. Whilst work is ongoing, the indications are positive for a successful resolution of these issues.

Cabinet also requested a full survey of work to be undertaken to identify any further defects as well as a time line of when the present defects became known.

3.4 Kidsgrove Town Deal

The Kidsgrove Town Deal Investment Plan (TIP) has now been submitted to the Government in a bid for £25m of funding to help improve health and wellbeing, regenerate Kidsgrove town centre and drive growth and opportunity through enhanced enterprise and job opportunities. The Council hopes to hear in the New Year if these exciting proposals will get the green light from the Government.

An excellent video has been produced to show case the schemes within the Kidsgrove town deal TIP and can be viewed can be viewed at:

<https://youtu.be/kFw635Iijlo>

3.5 Knutton Masterplan

Cabinet approved, in principle, the Knutton Masterplan for public consultation, which was jointly commissioned by the Council, Aspire Housing and Staffordshire County Council, outlining opportunities for new housing investment in the Knutton area and improvements to the quality of community facilities and the local environment.

3.6 Proposed Extension to Newcastle Crematorium Grounds and Development of Adjacent Land off Chatterley Close

Cabinet received a report about the proposed extension to the grounds of the Crematorium in Bradwell to meet the needs of residents of the Borough for the next 30 years and the development of the remainder of the adjacent land for residential use with associated green space and community facilities.

A consultation with local residents will take place in early 2021 and will be reported back to Cabinet before any final decision is taken.

3.7 Financial and Performance Review Report Second Quarter (July – September) 2020 – 2021

Cabinet members reviewed the Performance Data for the second quarter and noted that 82% of key indicators were on target and outlined measures that had been put in place as a result of the Coronavirus pandemic.

It was noted that occupancy of the market stalls was above target with some of the events markets over the summer having up to 93% occupancy.

The Finance & Asset Performance Scrutiny Committee will review the Finance and Management Report at its meeting on 14th December 2020.

3.8 North Staffordshire Local Air Quality Plan – Outline Business Case

The Outline Business Case (OBC) was approved for submission to the Government including the preferred option for delivering compliance with statutory limits on roadside nitrogen dioxide (NO₂) concentrations in the affected area in the shortest possible time.

Cabinet requested consideration of an exemption for electric and ultra-low emission vehicles from the proposed bus gate restriction on Basford Bank and will also be making representations to the MP for Newcastle-under-Lyme requesting him to lobby for a review of the Ministerial Directions in light of changing circumstances due to the Coronavirus pandemic.

3.9 Local Plan Update

Cabinet has requested a review of the Joint Local Plan process and the option of progressing a stand-alone Borough Plan.

The Joint Local Plan with Stoke-on-Trent was conceived 7 years ago and the original and subsequent timetables have been continually missed raising concerns about the continued relevance of the strategic and preferred options and associated consultations with the public dating back to 2017.

The review will focus on the implications of Brexit, the COVID-19 pandemic and the Government's Planning White Paper. The views of partners and stakeholders will be sought and a further report brought to Cabinet in January.

3.10 Sustainable Environment Strategy

Cabinet have approved the adoption of a Sustainable Environment Strategy and Action Plan for the Council and Borough. This sets out the Council's ambition to be a leader in caring for and enhancing the local environment for quality of life of residents now and in the future.

3.11 Brampton Museum Redevelopment Project

A contractor has been approved for the redevelopment project at the Borough Museum. This will include the creation of a new dedicated temporary exhibition space, reconfiguration of rooms to expand the capacity of the archive to create a dedicated research area and improvements to the ground floor galleries to better show case the collections and engage visitors of all ages.

3.12 Proposed Residents Funeral Service

Cabinet have approved a Residents Funeral Service, which will include more affordable options for both cremations and burials that will increase resident's choices and address the rising costs of funerals and the potential hardship this can cause to some bereaved families.

4. **Forward Plan**

The Forward Plan can be found at:-

<https://moderngov.newcastle-staffs.gov.uk/mgListPlans.aspx?RPId=118&RD=0>

Councillor Simon Tagg
Leader of the Council