

NEWCASTLE-UNDER-LYME BOROUGH COUNCIL



**EXECUTIVE MANAGEMENT TEAM'S
REPORT TO**

Council
18 March 2021

Report Title: Walleys Quarry - Officers Incident Report
Submitted by: Executive Director – Operational Services
Portfolios: Environment and Recycling
Ward(s) affected: Wards in south, central and north Newcastle.

Purpose of the Report

To report to Council the environmental incident that occurred over the weekend of 26th – 28th February 2021

Recommendation

1. That Council receives the report.

Reasons

To make Council aware of the significant incident that occurred over this period, the level of complaints that were received and the actions that were taken.

1. Background

- 1.1** Over the weekend of 26th - 28th February the Council received around 2000 complaints about odours in the town, representing a very significant increase in the general level of public reporting of these issues. The majority of these were via the Council's online reporting route, although over 200 came in as telephone complaints.
- 1.2** The Council's online reporting facilitates immediate sharing of anonymised complaints with the Environment Agency and with RED industries who operate the quarry.
- 1.3** Subsequently, the Council has received communications from a range of organisations in the Borough raising concern about the odours and the impact of these on their operations.
- 1.4** To assist Members consideration of this report, the following odour scale is referred to in the following sections:

| Odour Strength | Intensity Level | Comments |
|--|-----------------|---|
| No odour/not perceptible | 0 | No odour when compared to the clean site |
| <i>The Odour Detection Threshold (ODT) of 1 ou_v.m³ is somewhere between 0 and 1</i> | | |
| Slight/very weak | 1 | There is probably some doubt as to whether the odour is actually present |
| Slight/weak | 2 | The odour is present but cannot be described using precise words or terms |
| Distinct | 3 | The odour character is barely recognisable |
| <i>VDI 3940 says that the recognition threshold intensity is generally 3-10 times higher than the ODT (i.e. 3-10 ou_v.m³)</i> | | |
| Strong | 4 | The odour character is easily recognisable |
| Very strong | 5 | The odour is offensive. Exposure to this level would be considered undesirable |
| Extremely strong | 6 | The odour is offensive. An instinctive reaction would be to mitigate against further exposure |

2. Issues

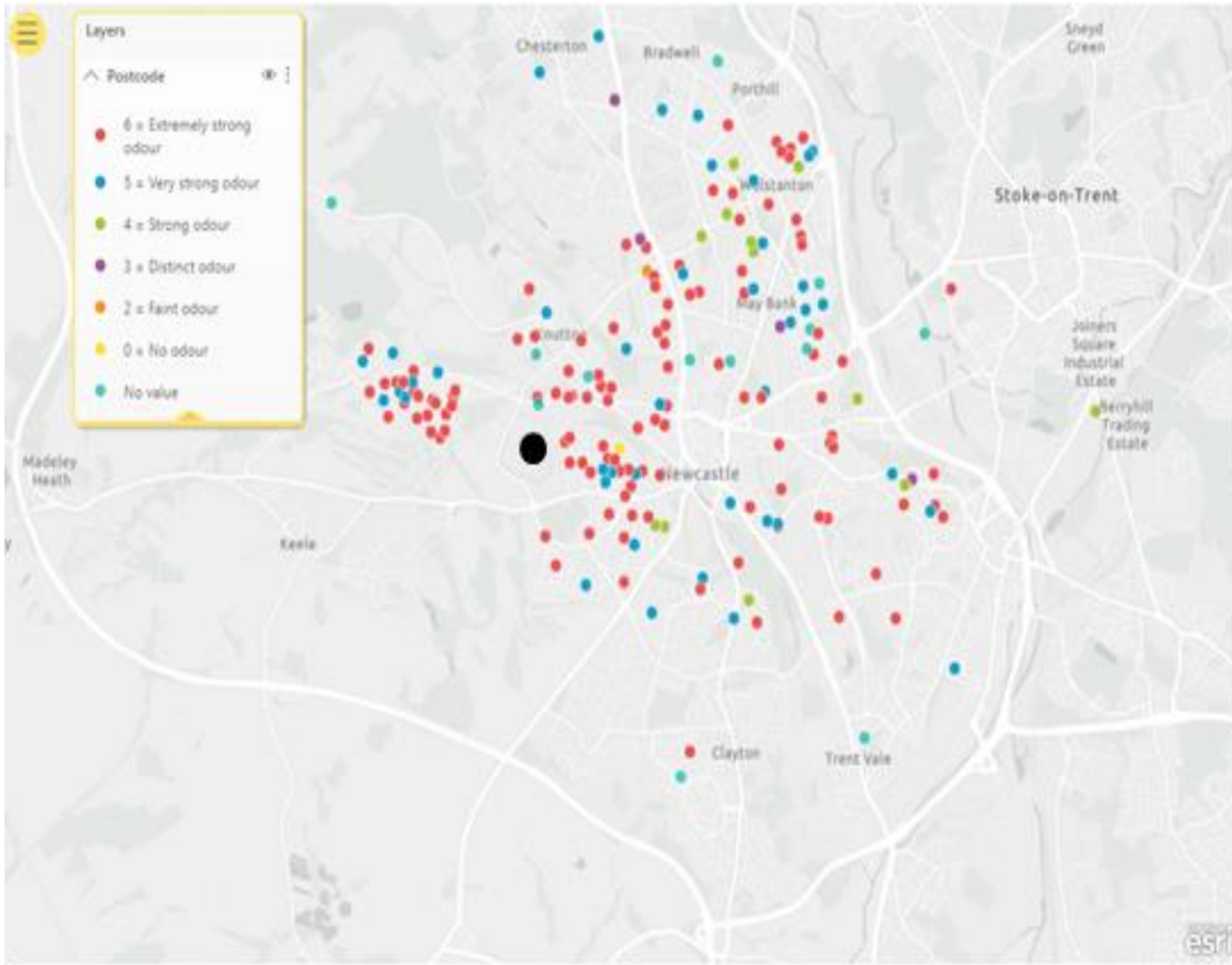
2.1 On 27th February officers became aware of a large number of complaints (276) from across the borough and into Stoke on Trent which had come in overnight. Officers living in the borough liaised on the morning of 27th February to discuss the overnight reporting, compare local conditions and discuss required action.

Whilst the Council did not have any officers detailed to work in the community witnessing and assessing odours on this weekend, it was clear from the level of complaints overnight, and from complaints coming in on Saturday that an officer response would need to be put in place, and this was actioned. The response included:

- Contact with the Environment Agency to report the incident and to request a response. The Environment Agency did not deploy any officers to the borough or to the Walley's Quarry site on Saturday 27th or Sunday 28th February, but it is understood that they were in contact with RED Industries.
- Deployment of Staff on Saturday Night/Sunday Morning to conduct an "odour tour" to witness and assess the extent of the problem. This time was selected to coincide with weather conditions generally associated with the problematic odours in the town. Very strong landfill gas odour (Rating 5) was detected at the rear of Castle House at around 10.20. A landfill site boundary tour, which started at around 11.30pm revealed distinct to strong landfill gas odours (Rating 3 to 4) was observed in Barnacle Place, and later at 00.50am a strong (4) to very strong (5) hydrogen sulphide odour within the vicinity of Silverdale Road.

2.2 During Saturday 27th February the Council's online reporting system captured over 1100 complaints the highest daily total since recording began. In addition, the Council was contacted by The University Hospital North Midlands regarding odours which were permeating their buildings, which was communicated to the Environment Agency. On Sunday 28th February the Council received 446 complaints via the online reporting facility.

2.3 The maps below shows the spread of complaints on Friday 26th Saturday 27th and Sunday 28th February.

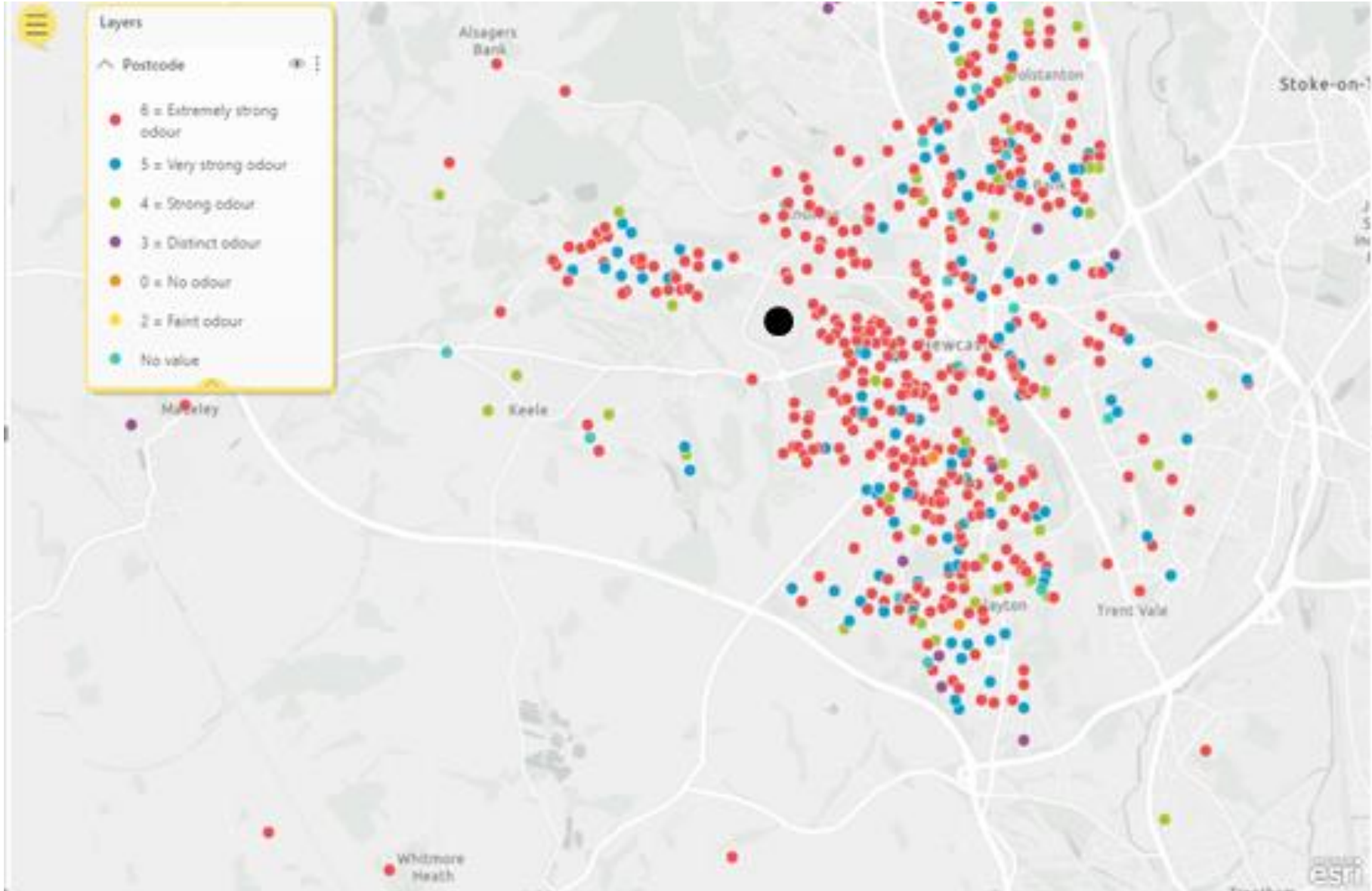


276

Count of Date
Submitted

26th February

● Walley's Quarry

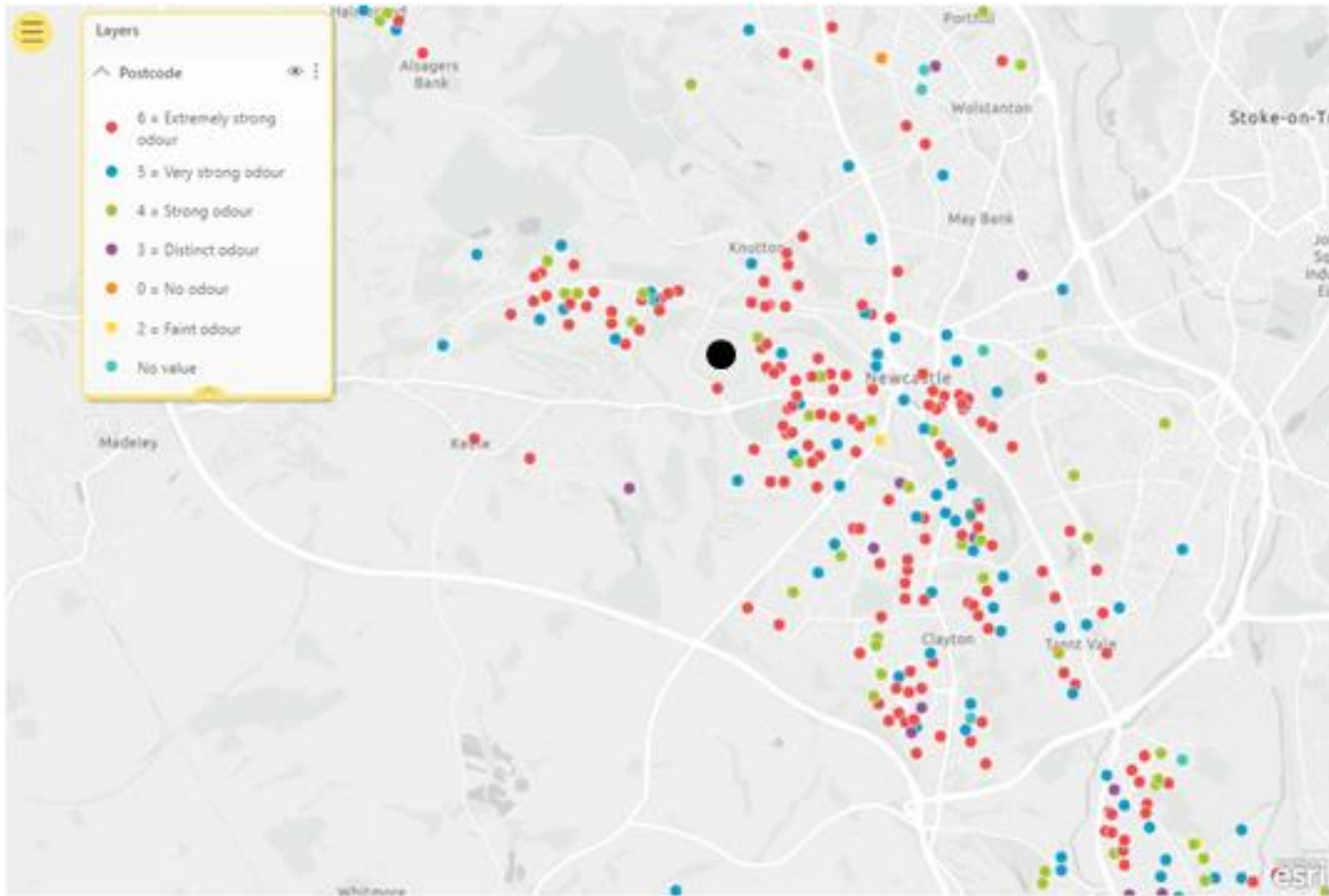


1127

Count of Date
Submitted

27th February

● Walley's Quarry



446

Count of Date Submitted

28th February

● Walley's Quarry

2.4 Environment Agency Response

From discussions with the Environment Agency following the weekend incident it has become apparent that in addition to not deploying staff to the site or borough to witness and assess the problem, the air monitoring unit which the Environment Agency had deployed on Gallingle View on 24th February did not have an electricity supply. As a consequence, the Environment Agency failed to collect any monitoring data during this incident.

In press statements, the Environment Agency has indicated that the incident “may be linked to work associated with new gas wells drilled by RED Industries to better manage landfill gas”, although RED have indicated that they were not drilling gas wells on the weekend in question. Subsequently, the Environment Agency reported that surface water which had drained from the landfilled waste, and not managed adequately, had the potential to cause odour and was deemed to be a breach of their permit.

2.5 Representations Following the Incident

Following the Incident the Council has received representations from a range of agencies concerned about the impact of the odours generally, or on this weekend in particular, on their operations. Representations, many of which are attached in Appendix 1, have been made by:

- Aaron Bell MP
- Newcastle BID
- Keele University
- Staffordshire Fire & Rescue Service
- Office of the Staffordshire Commissioner
- Local Businesses
- Local Schools

2.6 Conclusion

- a) The weekend of 26-28 February saw a record number of complaints raised about foul odours believed to be from the Walleys Quarry landfill site in Silverdale. The Environment Agency, which is the body responsible for regulating the site and ensuring operations are in compliance with its permit, collected no first hand evidence of the incident, having deployed no officers to the incident and not having the air monitoring equipment in operation.
- b) The Council continues to liaise with the Environment Agency and partners with a view to securing a solution to the problem of foul odours which impacts on residents and businesses in the borough.
- c) Complaints continue to be received in respect of ongoing odours being experienced. Whilst complaints subsided immediately following this incident, on the weekend of 6th-8th March the Council received almost 1800 reports of odours. Consequently, the Council consider this to be an ongoing incident.
- d) The Council is undertaking more detailed monitoring and assessment of the issues associated with this problem, and further updates will be prepared as information becomes available.

3. **Proposal**

3.1 That the Council receives the report.

4. **Reasons for Proposed Solution**

4.1 To make Council aware of the significant incident that occurred over this period, the level of complaints that were received and the actions that were taken.

5. **Options Considered**

5.1 The options considered in this case are for the Council to receive the report, or if it chooses, not receive the report.

6. **Legal and Statutory Implications**

6.1 There are no legal implications arising from this report.

7. **Equality Impact Assessment**

7.1 There are no equalities implications arising from this report.

8. **Financial and Resource Implications**

8.1 There are no direct financial implications arising from this report.

9. **Major Risks**

9.1 There are no major risks associated with the proposed recommendation.

10. **UN Sustainable Development Goals (UNSDG)**

3 GOOD HEALTH
AND WELL-BEING



13 CLIMATE
ACTION



11. **Key Decision Information**

11.1 The recommendation attached this report is not a key decision

12. **Earlier Cabinet/Committee Resolutions**

13. **List of Appendices**

Appendix 1 – Agency Representations

14. **Background Papers**