

STATEMENT OF THE LEADER OF THE COUNCIL TO FULL COUNCIL – 17 NOVEMBER 2021

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**

A selection of items and decisions of Cabinet since the last Leader's Statement are detailed below.

2. **Review of COVID Impact**

Cabinet received a report detailing the overall impact of the Covid-19 pandemic and lockdowns on the Council and the borough as a whole. This included the impact on the economy and community, Council services, the town centre and the finances of the Council. It also outlined how the Council is playing a leading role in supporting economic recovery in the borough

The many innovations made during the pandemic have been incorporated into the One Council Programme. I would again like to thank all staff and Members for their continued hard work and dedication for borough residents.

3. **Local Plan Issues and Strategic Options**

The Council has launched a Strategic Options consultation as part of the new Borough Local Plan, this runs until 13th December and considers the need for housing, employment and other development as well as options for growth.

It is important to remember at this stage that individual sites for any future housing and employment are not being designated. Before any decisions are made about what land is required for the future, it is vital that the Council hears residents' views on the issues and options. Follow this link to the consultation portal: -

<https://consult.newcastle-staffs.gov.uk/>

4. **Town Centre Car Parking Strategy 2019–2029 Update**

Cabinet agreed as part of the update to the Car Parking Strategy free parking on the Midway car park from 9am-1pm which commenced on 1st October and running throughout Christmas and the New Year period. This runs alongside and compliments the £1 after 1pm incentive scheme in operation across all town centre car parks.

These measures are aimed to support the Covid recovery plans for town centre businesses, including the historic market and means that Newcastle town centre now has some of the most competitive parking charges in the area.

5. **Medium Term Financial Strategy 2022/23 to 2026/27**

Cabinet endorsed the draft MTFs report which set out the Council's four year spending and funding plans and is a framework for the development of the detailed budget for 2022/23 which will be agreed at the February Full Council meeting.

6. **Jubilee 2 Structural Survey and refurbish of the Health and Fitness Offer**

Cabinet has continued its focus on Jubilee 2 to address the building faults which have hampered operation of building for several years. Morgan Sindall, the contractor who built J2, has worked positively with the Council to resolve these issues, although works to the roof and gutters remain ongoing.

The Council and Morgan Sindall have jointly commissioned a survey of the building to identify any further defects, and this has identified a number of further minor issues. Officers will now work with Morgan Sindall to get these matters resolved.

Alongside this remedial work, Cabinet have approved the refurbishment of the gym and provision of new gym equipment, ensuring that the facility is able to provide an excellent offer to J2 members restarting their gym membership following the Covid lockdowns.

7. **Energy Efficiency Programmes for Newcastle-under-Lyme**

As part of the Council's commitment to supporting vulnerable households to help deliver energy efficient improvements to their homes, Cabinet agreed an energy company obligation, a commitment to Staffordshire Warmer Homes and further funding for the Beat the Cold initiative.

Given the recent significant rise in energy costs this is more important than ever that we work with partners to help alleviate fuel poverty, improve energy efficiency and tackle the financial burden of energy bills, particularly for those on low income.

8. **Air Quality Update**

An update was provided to Cabinet relating to the North Staffordshire Local Air Quality Plan (NSLAQP) and in particular the requirement for a bus gate on the A53 Etruria Road. Cabinet supports the exemption of ultra-low emission vehicles and emergency services vehicles from the proposed bus gate and also requested modelling for the exemption of low emission vehicles and additional modelling of current/future post Covid traffic patterns.

I have written to the Government requesting that the bus gate be removed as soon as natural compliance can be proven to have been achieved and is maintainable, without the bus gate.

The Council is taking this approach in an attempt to minimise the potential disruption the bus gate will cause to borough residents and businesses. The Cabinet is lobbying local MPs in this respect.

9. **One Council Programme**

Cabinet received an update on One Council Programme following the launch at the end of October of the “One Front Door” model based around a new website and streamlined customer service offer for our residents and local businesses, which will see more queries successfully resolved at the first point of contact.

Kidsgrove Customer Service Centre has reopened to the public on Thursdays from 9am to 1pm mirroring the opening hours of Kidsgrove Town Council following easing of the Covid restrictions. A booking system is in place for face-to-face meeting, if appropriate, on other days.

10. **Finance and Performance Review Report – First & Second Quarter 2021-22**

Cabinet reviewed the performance data for Quarters one and two and noted that performance across the Council remains strong, with the majority of targets being met or within tolerance.

Memberships of J2 continue to grow steadily after the significant disruption of periods of full and partial closure during the lockdowns. Participation in food waste collection is also increasing, reducing the proportion of residual waste. The town centre market continues to grow with a series of successful specialist events providing attractions for shoppers to visit the town and support local businesses.

11. **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