

STATEMENT OF THE LEADER OF THE COUNCIL TO FULL COUNCIL – 5th APRIL 2023

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 14th March 2023; detailed below is a selection of decisions and other actions of the Leader and Cabinet since the last Leader's Statement.

2. **One Council Update**

The Council has won a raft of awards, which recognise the resilience, innovation and dedication to high quality services that are central to our One Council Priority.

First up was a Bronze at the iESE Transformation Awards for the One Council Transformation Programme. The judges said: 'The One Council Transformation Programme continues to achieve success in efficiency, cultural improvement and people focussed value to its services.'

Next up was the Enjoy Staffordshire Tourism & Good Food Awards, where the Council picked up another four accolades. The Resilience and Innovation Gold Award went to Newcastle's Market - "The Stones" - in recognition of the push to launch fledgling businesses, its ability to continually diversify and adapt when conditions change, the hard-work keeping the market open for residents, traders and events during the Covid lockdowns and the support provided to traders.

The Brampton Museum landed a trio of awards and commendations in its first year of entering the Staffordshire Tourism Awards. The Museum went on to win Silver in the 'Best Small Visitor Attraction of the Year Awards' and also the 'Ethical, Sustainable and Responsible Tourism Awards' and a Highly Commended in the 'Accessible and Inclusive Tourism Awards'. The awards recognise the achievements of the best tourism attractions

and businesses operating in our county and reflect their hard work and professionalism in contributing to an industry which generates a huge economic impact for our area.

3. **Coronation and 850 celebrations**

The Council has worked with partners on a schedule of events to mark the Coronation of King Charles III over the Coronation Bank Holiday weekend at the beginning of May. These include coronation themed bunting in Queens Gardens and around the Guildhall, a special Market and entertainment in the town centre, live screening of the Coronation at the Brampton Museum and craft activities run by volunteers.

A number of community events have been organised across the borough and it is not too late for residents to organise their own street parties. Applications can be made to the council for road closures via the website: www.newcastle-staffs.gov.uk/roadclosure

The celebration of the 850th anniversary since the Borough gained its first charter gathers pace. Congratulations to the winners of the first Borough Heroes Awards that will be announced at the Mayor's Charity Ball. 850 Lyme forest trees are being planted in Silverdale and a number of talks and film shows are planned throughout April.

Updates on the Coronation and 850 celebrations can be found on the Council's website.

4. **Housing Assistance Policy 2023**

Cabinet has approved a Housing Assistance Policy that will provide financial assistance to eligible residents to help them make modifications to their homes. £1.7m of grant funding will enable individuals who have experienced an accident or illness, or are suffering from a degenerative condition, to adapt their homes to better suit their needs.

The modifications could include fitting easy-access showers, access ramps, stairlifts, or through-floor lifts, among others. The support is also available to residents whose health is at risk from hazards in the home. The funding will help people stay in their homes for longer, particularly given that the latest data shows people in the Borough start experiencing poor health in their 60s and require aid and assistance to live their lives to the fullest.

5. **Support With The Cost Of living And High Energy Prices**

The Cabinet has reaffirmed its commitment to financial support and practical advice for residents facing issues with cost of living and rising energy bills. The Council will distribute around £212,000 as part of the Government's Council Tax Support Fund and is seeking to award a three-year contract worth £210,000 to provide debt and benefit advice services showing a commitment to support those most in need.

Over the last year, the Council implemented several support schemes, including the Energy Support payment, which offered £150 to residents living in council tax property bands A-D. This payment helped alleviate the financial burden on eligible residents and improve their living conditions.

The Council is re-procuring its debt and benefit advice service which aims to stop problems from escalating by offering support ranging from self-help online to phone conversations and face-to-face meetings. Advice and support at the early stages of a personal financial crisis can help prevent further financial hardship and help individuals regain control of their finance.

6. **Procurement of new street sweepers**

Cabinet approved five replacement street sweepers which will be on the street of the borough by the summer. They will be more efficient, covering more ground at a faster pace, and will have a greater capacity, requiring fewer emptying stops per day. The proposal also includes the replacement of 14 bin collection vehicles, which would result in lower running costs and increased reliability.

The new sweepers would be particularly effective in the autumn, with their ability to remove fallen leaves reducing the risk of slippery pavements and blocked drains causing flooding. Additionally, the new fleet of vehicles collecting household, garden and trade waste will largely run on hydrogenated vegetable oil, reducing CO2 emissions by up to 90% of diesel engine output.

These will greatly enhance street cleaning capabilities and have a positive environmental impact.

7. **Financial & Performance Review Report – 3rd Quarter 2022-23**

Cabinet received a report detailing Quarter 3 performance. At the end of December 2022, the Council had 80% of measures on track to meet the 2022-23 target and 75% of all measures show improved performance compared to Q3 of last year.

This is the first quarter that performance is measured against the more ambitious targets set out in the new Council Plan. Across the Council's priority areas, performance remains strong.

Although sickness absence is not meeting its target, support and management processes have been put in place which will help to keep staff in work and, where suitable, redeploy them into alternative roles which support their ability to remain in work. Sickness absence is a national problem which many organisations are experiencing post pandemic.

Referrals into occupational health are now quicker and more thorough and managers are using the advice given to ensure that absence is minimised.

The Council has achieved the Thrive Foundation accreditation which recognises the quality processes and support packages in place to assess the health and wellbeing of staff. This process involves health assessments, wellbeing days and other activities. The next step will be to attain bronze accreditation in the coming year.

8. **Forward Plan**

The Forward Plan can be found at:-

<http://svmma/mgListPlans.aspx?RPId=118&RD=0&bcr=1>

Councillor Simon Tagg
Leader of the Council