

COUNCIL

Wednesday, 5th April, 2023
Time of Commencement: 7.00 pm

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Present: Mayor - Councillor Gillian Burnett (Chair)

Councillors:	Allport	Heesom	Stubbs
	Barker MBE	Holland	Sweeney
	Beeston	Fox-Hewitt	J Tagg
	Bettley-Smith	Hutchison	S Tagg
	Brockie	Johnson	Talbot
	Brown	D Jones	P Waring
	Bryan	Northcott	Whieldon
	Crisp	Panter	G White
	Dymond	Parker	S White
	Edginton-Plunkett	Reece	Wilkes
	Gorton	Richards	G Williams
	Grocott	Skelding	J Williams

Apologies: Councillor(s) Adcock, Fear, S Jones, Lawley, Moffat, J Waring and Wright

Officers:	Geoff Durham	Mayor's Secretary / Member Support Officer
	Martin Hamilton	Chief Executive
	Simon McEneny	Deputy Chief Executive
	Daniel Dickinson	Service Director - Legal & Governance /Monitoring Officer
	Sarah Wilkes	Service Director - Finance / S151 Officer
	Roger Tait	Service Director - Neighbourhood Delivery

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 15 February, 2023 be agreed as a correct record.

3. **MAYOR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS**

The Mayor made two announcements:

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- Members who had attended the Mayor's Ball last Friday were thanked for their support. The event had raised over £2100 for the Mayor's Charity Fund.
- A celebration service for the coronation of King Charles III would take place on Sunday 7th May, 2023 at St Giles' Church.

Councillor Dave Jones was invited to speak on behalf of former Councillor Silvia Burgess who wished to thank Members and officers for their support during her recent bereavement.

[Watch the announcements here](#)

4. WALLEYS QUARRY UPDATE

The Leader, Councillor Simon Tagg introduced a report updating Members on the Statutory Odour Nuisance assessments in relation to Walleys Quarry. An addendum to the report was tabled at the meeting.

The report assessed evidence collated during the 5 month period where the abatement notice had been upheld.

Residents who were interested in the abatement notice procedure were urged to read towards the end of the report, which indicated what the Council and the Environment Agency (EA) could achieve.

Concerns were raised about the EA's plans to decommission the monitoring station (MMF6), situated at Newcastle Fire Station. The current four stations constituted a monitoring network across the affected areas. The Leader was asked to confirm that the Council would ask the EA that the monitoring station (MMF06) must remain.

Some residents had experienced problems with the online forms for reporting issued. The Leader was asked if those problems had been resolved.

Resolved: That the report and its contents be noted.

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5. STATEMENT OF THE LEADER OF THE COUNCIL

The Leader presented the statement that had been circulated and provided an update on the activities and decisions made by himself and the Cabinet to allow questions and comments.

The Leader gave a couple of updates on the published report. In respect of Paragraph 2, a comprehensive Peer Review was completed last week and the feedback had been very positive and a report would be brought to Full Council later in the year.

The Heroes Awards were held at the Mayor's Charity Ball at Keele last Friday. The Leader congratulated the winners of the three awards: Community Champion – Briony Bowler; Young Hero – Hannah Wollas and Lifetime Achievement – Jim Worgan.

Questions were raised by members as follows.

On paragraph 2 – One Council update

Councillor Parker asked the Portfolio Holder for Finance, Town Centres and Growth for an update on the programme of events for the ‘award winning’ markets for the rest of this year.

Councillor Sweeney advised that the events included Artisan Markets; Vegan Festival, Record Fair; Greyhound Gap; King’s Coronation Market; Young Traders Market, mini markets and antiques markets. Other events included a ten metre inflated bubble of CO₂ which was touring the County, Armed Forces Day celebrations and working with the BID for the Lymelight Festival. These events would be added to as they came along.

On paragraph 3 – the Coronation and 850 celebrations:

Councillor Gorton asked for the actual number of nominations received for the recent Heroes Awards, broken down into categories.

The Leader stated that he could not break them down into categories but there were 24 nominations overall.

On paragraph 4 – Housing Assistance Policy 2023:

Councillor John Williams referred to a recent Sentinel report stating that a resident who had been accepted for a grant and the work had not been carried out satisfactorily. A point had been made by this Council that the work would be brought ‘in-house’ and managed by the Council. Councillor Williams asked for clarification.

The Portfolio Holder for Community Safety and Wellbeing advised that it used to be a commissioned service in partnership with Staffordshire County Council. From 1 April, 2023 it was brought ‘in-house’ whereby the Council would work with the team. People had been taken on to do the casework and deal with contractors.

On paragraph 5 – Support with the cost of living and high energy prices:

Councillor Crisp asked the Portfolio Holder for Finance, Town Centres and Growth to advise what additional financial support was being given to residents in respect of rising bills and how much, in total, had the Government given to help residents across the Borough.

Councillor Sweeney advised that there were currently three schemes operating: Council Tax support which was £25 per household; Energy Bills Support Scheme Alternative Funding, £400 per household; Alternative Fuel Payment Alternative Fund, £200 per household. These funds had to be applied for from the Government who then process them and send the details to this Council for payment. At present, £48,400 had been given out for the Energy Bills support.

Since Covid, through Government funding, the Council had given out £51 million, £8 million of that being cost of living support.

On paragraph 6 – Procurement of new street sweepers:

Councillor Fox-Hewitt asked the Portfolio Holder for Environment and Recycling if the efficiency of the new machines would enable the restoration of street cleansing routes that had been cut in the last two years.

The Leader advised that there had been no cuts to routes but the service had been changed to respond to hot spots. There had been an increase in litter since Covid and there was a need to educate in schools, through litter picking for example.

Councillor Hutchison asked if there was any further information on the new road sweepers.

Councillor Johnson advised that Cabinet had approved five replacement street sweepers to be acquired by summer, 2023. Fourteen replacement refuse collection vehicles had also been approved.

On paragraph 7 – Financial and Performance Review Report – Third Quarter 2022-23:

Councillor Brockie asked, in respect of sickness absences, would staff affected by the changes through One Council have their contracts protected, employment rights upheld and a suitable level of risk assessment put in place to protect them and the public they serve.

The Leader stated that there were measures in place. The One Council programme was working with staff. The Administration was working with the HR team and the Unions.

Councillor John Williams asked what value had been achieved for the Ryecroft site and what internal and external audits had taken place on the value for money exercises on the value of the land.

The Leader stated that there would be a report to Cabinet when Aspire took on a large part of the site. Discussions were still ongoing with the County Council regarding the former Sainsburys site. Everything was in place to ensure that the Council got value for money.

Councillor Holland encouraged Members to look at the new format for reporting matters such as sickness absence which was reported at the last meeting of the Finance, Assets and Performance Scrutiny Committee. Members were further encouraged to suggest alternative priorities/key indicators to the Scrutiny Committee or to the Administration.

There were no comments or questions on paragraph 8 – the Forward Plan.

Resolved: That the statement of the Leader of the Council be received and noted.

[Watch the debate here](#)

6. REPORTS OF THE CHAIRS OF THE SCRUTINY COMMITTEES

The reports for the Health, Wellbeing and Environment Scrutiny Committee and Economy and Place Scrutiny Committee had been circulated with the agenda.

A verbal update was given for the Finance Assets and Performance Scrutiny Committee detailing the items discussed at previous meetings.

Resolved: That the reports be received.

[Watch the debate here](#)

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

Reports for the Licensing and Public Protection Committee and the Planning Committee were attached to the agenda as supplementary items.

The Audit and Standards Committee had not met since the last Full Council meeting.

Resolved: That the reports be received.

[Watch the debate here](#)

8. **QUESTIONS TO THE MAYOR, CABINET MEMBERS AND COMMITTEE CHAIRS**

Three questions were received:

Question from Councillor Gorton to the Portfolio Holder for Environment and Recycling:

“I have been told that it is not the policy of the Borough Council to provide new bins for dog waste. Is this correct?”

Councillor Johnson advised that the Council replaced damaged, broken and missing dog waste bins from their current locations. There was no capacity to add new bins as it required additional resources to service them.

Councillor Gorton asked that, given that the number of dogs kept as household pets had increased there would be a greater demand for these bins. In light of this, did the Portfolio Holder think that it was time to review the current Policy.

Councillor Johnson advised that locations could be reviewed by Ward Councillors talking to Street Scene.

Question from Councillor Whieldon to the Leader of the Council:

“As the Leader of the Council is aware, concerns were expressed at the Walley's Quarry Liaison Committee in November 2022 about the Thistleberry Residents Association (TRA) and their continued membership of the Liaison Committee. At the subsequent meeting on 16 March 2023, Walleys Quarry Ltd said they had carried out due diligence, which they refused to share, and said they were satisfied with the TRA and its membership of the Liaison Committee.

Since being elected to the Council last May for the Thistleberry Ward, local Borough Councillors have tried to make contact with the TRA but without success. The TRA have stated they will not provide the names and contact details of the Executive, to us or anyone else, and the TRA will not provide information on meetings and or their contact with residents.

Does the Leader agree with me that there is no evidence the TRA actually represents the residents of Thistleberry and that the Thistleberry Residents Association is being run by somebody who does not live in Thistleberry?”

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The Leader verified what Councillor Whieldon had said. The TRA was being run by someone now living in Betley. For the last six to eight years it had not been a functioning Residents Association as far as the Leader was aware and that needed to be addressed.

Councillor Joan Whieldon asked, despite the due diligence conducted by RED Industries, the Council could not be confident that an Executive for the TRA existed or if any members lived in the Thistleberry Ward. What action was the Leader taking to satisfy himself that the due diligence was carried out by RED in a satisfactory manner and complied with the Section 106 agreement. In addition, could the Leader assure that if RED were not compliant with the Section 106 agreement, that action was or would be taken by the appropriate authorities.

The Leader stated that he had challenged them at the committee and had also spoken to the County Council regarding the requirement for community representation; and that the operator carry that out respectively and fully. It was believed that this had been actioned and that Walleys Quarry Limited had been contacted.

It was expected that evidence of the due diligence would be asked for. It could not be found by anyone who had tried to locate it.

Question from Councillor Brockie to the Leader of the Council:

“Many residents feel that the Sky building has suffered enough and wants putting out of its misery. The people of Newcastle are watching its daily deterioration with dismay, and many feel that it should be brought back into Council ownership. What options, including compulsory purchase, have been considered in order to make the best use of what's left of it?”

The Leader stated that, although it was a scar on the town, it was a private development that the Council could not interfere with, other than checking that the site was safe. It was believed that there was a battle to take control of the site and once that took place, officers had been assured that the development would be completed. During the past week there had been activity on the site and it was hoped that it would be completed as per its planning permission.

Compulsory purchase would be problematic for the Council as it was not seen as a dead site and would also divert money away from the regeneration projects and risk the delivery of those projects. The new owner of the site would be held to account and hope that they would continue with the development.

Councillor Brockie sought reassurance that the prospect of diverting money away from the regeneration projects did not put the Administration off looking at the feasibility of having some input into what happens to the building. Could assurance be given that any checks on stakeholders could be looked into as thoroughly as possible.

The Leader confirmed that the Council would do what it could.

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9. RECEIPT OF PETITIONS

No petitions were received.

10. **URGENT BUSINESS**

There was no urgent business.

11. **DISCLOSURE OF EXEMPT INFORMATION**

There were no confidential items for consideration.

**Mayor - Councillor Gillian Burnett
Chair**

Meeting concluded at 8.11 pm