

COUNCIL

Wednesday, 26th July, 2023
Time of Commencement: 7.00 pm

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Present: Mayor - Councillor Simon White (Chair)

Councillors:	Adcock	Grocott	Richards
	Barker MBE	Heesom	Skelding
	Bettley-Smith	Holland	Stubbs
	Brockie	Fox-Hewitt	Sweeney
	Brown	Hutchison	J Tagg
	Bryan	Johnson	S Tagg
	Burnett-Faulkner	S Jones	P Waring
	Crisp	Lawley	Whieldon
	Dymond	Northcott	G Williams
	Edginton-Plunkett	Panter	J Williams
	Fear	Parker	Wright
	Gorton	Reece	

Apologies: Councillor(s) Allport, Beeston, D Jones, J Waring, G White and Wilkes

Officers:	Geoff Durham	Civic & Member Support Officer
	Martin Hamilton	Chief Executive
	Simon McEneny	Deputy Chief Executive
	Sarah Wilkes	Service Director - Finance / S151 Officer
	Craig Jordan	Head of Planning

Also in attendance:

1. **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

There were no declarations of interest stated.

2. **MINUTES OF A PREVIOUS MEETING**

Resolved: That the minutes of the meetings held on 17th May and 28th June, 2023 be agreed as correct records.

3. **RECEIPT OF A PETITION SUBMITTED UNDER THE COUNCIL'S PETITION SCHEME**

A petition was received asking the Council to review its targets for new housing in the Borough. Mr Hancock gave a presentation on behalf of signatories which was then debated by the Council.

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The Leader stated that it was important to get a Local Plan in place to protect the Borough's green spaces.

Resolved:

- (i) That the contents of the petition be noted and that it be recorded as a consultation response to the First Draft Borough Local Plan. Consultation on the First Draft Local Plan ends on the 14 August 2023.
- (ii) That the petition, alongside a summary of other responses to the consultation on the First Draft Local Plan, be considered at a future meeting of the Economy and Place Scrutiny Committee and Cabinet.

[Watch the debate here](#)

4. MAYOR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

Members were informed of the resignations of Sue Moffat and Stephanie Talbot who were both wished well for their futures.

Councillor Susan Beeson would be taking a brief leave of absence for personal reasons. On behalf of Council, the Mayor sent her best wishes.

The Mayor also made one announcement regarding his Ball on 21st October, 2023 at Keele Hall.

5. APPOINTMENT OF INTERIM MONITORING OFFICER

The Leader introduced a report regarding the appointment of Barbara Beardwell as the Interim Monitoring Officer.

Resolved: That the appointment of Barbara Beardwell as the Council's Interim Monitoring Officer be confirmed in accordance with section 5 of the Local Government & Housing Act 1989.

[Watch the debate here](#)

6. CORPORATE PEER CHALLENGE OUTCOME AND ACTION PLAN

The Leader introduced a report seeking to receive the Local Government Association's (LGA) Corporate Peer Challenge report and the Action Plan.

Peter Fleming and Helen Murray from the LGA gave an update on some key findings and the next steps. A team would return in January, 2024 to see how the Council was progressing with the recommendations that were made.

Resolved:

- (i) That the LGA's Corporate Peer Challenge report be received; and
- (ii) That the Action Plan prepared in response to the LGA's recommendations be approved.

[Watch the debate here](#)

7. CHANGES TO COMMITTEE MEMBERSHIP

The Leader introduced a report advising of changes to committee membership following changes in political group membership. The changes followed the resignations of two Members as announced earlier in the meeting.

Resolved:

- (i) That the urgent decision taken by the Chief Executive to amend the allocation of committee seats to the political groups to reflect updated proportionality requirements (Appendix 1) be noted.
- (ii) That the appointment of Councillor Panter to the newly allocated Conservative seat on the Audit and Standards Committee be noted.
- (iii) That the appointment of Councillor Grocott to the vacant Labour seat on Finance, Assets and Performance Scrutiny Committee be noted.
- (iv) That Councillor Holland be appointed to the newly allocated Conservative seat on the Economy and Place Scrutiny Committee.
- (v) That the vacant Labour seat on the Planning Committee be advised.

[Watch the debate here](#)

8. STATEMENT OF THE LEADER OF THE COUNCIL

The Leader presented the statement that had been circulated about the activities and decisions made by Cabinet to allow questions and comments.

The Leader provided a verbal update on two items: national judging for Britain in Bloom would take place on 27th July at Castle House and there had been a large incursion of travellers on Wolstanton Marsh; the Council had obtained the Section 78 order and they had been moved off the site in the evening.

The Leader thanked the local Newcastle LPT Police Commander for his proactive approach to the removal of travellers.

Questions were raised and responses were provided as follows.

On paragraph 2 – Walleys Quarry Odour Issues

Councillor Adcock advised that there had been good feedback on the Community Engagement event held at the Fire Station and asked the Leader if he would support another such event, should there be demand for it.

The Leader stated that he would support such an event and hoped the Environment Agency would arrange another in the community soon.

On paragraph 3 – Town deal and Future High Street Fund

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Councillor Brockie asked for assurance that the scale and appropriateness of developments in the town centre would remain under active review.

Councillor John Williams asked for assurance that the Ryecroft site would be designed and built to complement the existing town centre.

The Leader stated that there was a blueprint for the development that had been to Cabinet, part of which was about having a good standard of design on the sites which would complement existing buildings and any other buildings on the Ryecroft.

Councillor Williams also asked if the proposed Wammy Changing Rooms could be used for other sporting activities in the area.

Councillor Parker asked the Portfolio Holder for Finance, Town Centres and Growth how the relocation of the remaining York Place tenants was progressing.

Councillor Sweeney stated that there were two tenants still on there, the Cooperative Bank and Specsavers, both were scheduled to vacate by Christmas and would be remaining in the town centre.

Councillor Paul Waring made reference to the Shared Services Hub which would improve Kidsgrove Town Centre.

Councillor Gorton asked the Leader for reassurance that the Philip Astley Centre would not be a stand-alone body but would work with the Museum, Newcastle College and other performing arts groups.

Councillor Gorton also asked the Leader if he would impress upon the team who take the project forward that collaboration, particularly with overseas links, would be essential to its success.

The Leader stated that Andrew Van-Buren was part of the steering group for the project and he did have links overseas, particularly in Monaco and with Newcastle College.

Councillor Fox-Hewitt asked if he was correct in his understanding that the amount spent on the performing arts centre had increased by £100,000.

The Leader confirmed that there was no increase in spending.

On paragraph 4 – Sustainable Environment Update:

Councillor Panter asked the Portfolio Holder for Sustainable Environment for the progress in the Council's adoption of Hydrated Vegetable Oil (HVO) for the Council fleet, effect on vehicle emissions and any financial advantages in adopting it.

Councillor Hutchison advised that the Waste and Recycle Fleet had all been running on HVO since March, 2023. No new CO2 would be released into the atmosphere. All raw materials were checked and verified by the Department of Transport. In addition, CO2 emissions of the vehicles had been reduced by 90%. HVO was purchased on the open market, with any price fluctuations being monitored and buying when appropriate, saving the Council and its residents thousands of pounds.

On paragraph 5 – Active Lifestyles Strategy:

Councillor Stubbs referred to the removal of nine 850 Anniversary banners on the main road through Kidsgrove and their replacement with banners advertising a fast food outlet which was located within Cheshire East.

The Leader stated that these were hired out spaces by the County Council and he had taken the matter up with the relevant director at the County Council.

Councillor Dymond asked the Leader to confirm if any funding had been allocated for new or refurbished tennis courts in Clough Hall Park, Kidsgrove.

The Leader advised that the Council had applied to the Lawn Tennis Association for funding, so any further streams of funding coming from that come forward, could be used for the refurbishment. Also, if there was any re-profiling of Town Deal Funding it could be put into enhancing sports facilities and the tennis courts could then be put forward for inclusion.

Councillor Burnett-Faulkner welcomed the Strategy and made reference to the first anniversary yesterday, of the reopening of Kidsgrove Sports Centre which was celebrated with an open day.

Councillor Skelding congratulated Kidsgrove Sports Centre on its first anniversary of re-opening. They had set a target of recruiting 700 members within the first year and, as of yesterday they had over 1100 signed up members. In addition, they had a target of teaching 500 children to swim within the first year - this figure currently stood at 750.

Councillor Crisp asked what the membership figures were for J2 and if they had been affected by Kidsgrove Sports Centre.

The Leader echoed members comments and stated that there were currently 3330 members at J2, a ten percent increase on pre-lockdown levels. There had been no impact from Kidsgrove Sports Centre – they actually complimented each other.

On paragraph 6 – Financial and Performance Review Report – Fourth Quarter 2022-23:

Councillor Panter asked the Leader if he agreed that the Borough Museum, with its new extension, was a true asset and a place to celebrate the cultural history of our Loyal and Ancient Borough.

The Leader shared these comments. It had really come into its own during this anniversary year.

Councillor Bettley-Smith asked the Leader if he agreed that the Council was taking the matter of long term sickness very seriously and if he was content with the actions being taken.

The Leader confirmed that the Council was doing all that it could to address the matter, some of which was still stemming from the Covid outbreak through health service delays, which were affecting some staff awaiting treatment operations. FAPS Scrutiny Committee had asked for a detailed report on the issue at its next meeting.

There were no comments or questions on paragraph 7 – Corporate Peer Challenge and Action Plan.

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](#)

9. 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](#)

10. REPORTS OF THE CHAIRS OF THE REGULATORY COMMITTEES

Reports for the Licensing and Public Protection Committee and the Audit and Standards Committee were attached to the main and supplementary agendas.

A verbal update was given for the Planning Committee detailing the items discussed at previous meetings.

Resolved: That the reports be received.

[Watch the debate here](#)

11. MOTIONS OF MEMBERS

A Motion was received concerning Fire Appliance Crewing proposed by Councillor Stubbs and seconded by Councillor Brockie.

Following a debate on the substantive motion, a vote was taken.

In Favour (Y) – 14
Against (N) – 21
Abstain – 0

The Motion fell.

[Watch the debate here](#)

12. QUESTIONS TO THE MAYOR, CABINET MEMBERS AND COMMITTEE CHAIRS

Nine questions were received:

1) Question from Councillor Gorton to the Leader of the Council:

“The publication of the draft Local Plan, which highlights the importance of residents having access to public transport, coincided with the decision by First to axe the bus

service between Audley and Hanley. The frequency of services on other routes has also been reduced.

Does the Leader of the Council agree that the time is right to: a) reconsider the current arrangements for operating bus services across the Borough; b) for the Borough Council to work with the City Council and other authorities across Staffordshire to put in place a new structure for providing bus services which could involve services being run by new bus operators?"

The Leader stated that this was in relation to Route 7 that originally came through Audley which had been picked up by D&G. The Council did not have any specific powers around bus services but did feed into the County wide Policies. The Government had brought forward a national Bus Strategy that was asking County Councils / Highways and Transport Authorities to set up enhanced partnerships with the bus services and to bring forward an improvement plan. The Council was working with the County Council through the Leaders Board and was looking to put in a bid to Government for devolved powers, one of which could be around the area of transport. There could also be a North Staffordshire Bid Public Transport Improvement which would include bus services.

2) Question from Councillor Edgington-Plunkett to the Portfolio Holder for Sustainable Environment:

"In the Leader's statement it expresses that the administration will continue to improve the recycling and waste service, can the portfolio holder for sustainable environment please tell the residents and members what his action plan is for this service to improve? It also states that agency staff will be employed to help with the service, can the portfolio holder also inform members how many agency staff will be employed, how much this is costing the council and how many colleagues in the waste and recycling service are currently off on long term sickness?"

Councillor Hutchison stated that there were 7 staff currently on long term sick leave out of a workforce of approximately 77 drivers and loaders. Pressures within the NHS were leading to appointments being cancelled and therefore delaying actions to help staff back into work. Against this, short term sickness causes temporary service disruption.

To increase resilience, the Council was increasing the driver / loader team posts through existing staff who would be able to do both. Four new drivers had been recruited and the Council would be advertising for four more. The Council was in the process of developing a Workforce Strategy to attract younger people with career progression opportunities.

The garden waste service was seasonal in nature. Agency staff were brought into the service as required to cover absences such as annual leave. This was the most efficient way to manage the variation in resourcing. The aggregate value for agency staff would be in the region of £212,000 per year. The Council was in the process of an Agency Framework Review that would standardise rates and maintain strong governance in terms of training and induction.

Councillor Edgington-Plunkett asked a supplementary question about whether the Portfolio holder thought a union undertaking a consultative ballot for industrial action would add to the recent issues in waste and recycling.

The Portfolio holder stated that a written reply would be issued for this.

3) Question from Councillor Edgington – Plunkett to the Leader of the Council:

The question, regarding J2 had been answered earlier in the meeting and was therefore withdrawn.

4) Question from Councillor Bryan to the Portfolio Holder for Finance, Town Centres and Growth:

“I note that the outturn for 2022/23 shows a favourable variance of £8,000 against the budget. Given the financial pressures that the Council is under, how did you achieve such a positive outcome?”

Councillor Sweeney stated that the actual forecast position compared to the budget set in February, 2022 was continuously monitored by the Finance Team, Corporate Leadership Team and Portfolio Holder in order to detect any significant variances of expenditure or income from the approved amounts. Prompt corrective actions had been taken to ensure that the Council delivered a balanced budget position for the year 2022/23.

Councillor Bryan asked a supplementary question about the Portfolio Holder’s confidence regarding the strong financial management continuing into current and future years.

Councillor Sweeney was very confident. The recent Peer Review spoke glowingly about the Council’s Financial Planning and Management and quoted their findings.

5) Question from Councillor Brown to the Leader of the Council:

“This year, Love Parks’ week runs from 28 July to 6 August. This annual campaign celebrates parks, green spaces, and the dedicated volunteers and workers that look after them all year round. These vibrant, living spaces bring communities together and provide an opportunity to connect with nature in the heart of our cities, towns, and neighbourhoods. Can the Leader provide Council with an update and explanation as to why council has decided not to support this initiative?”

The Leader stated that the Council continued to support such events as Love Parks and other initiative that enabled communities to become actively involved in green spaces and looking after their neighbourhoods. Support and advice was also made available to community groups that want to hold events on their local green spaces and carry out projects to improve them which could be seen through Britain in Bloom. Tree planting in the Council’s carbon catch areas on 60 green spaces that had been protected. Even though the Council had not organised a specific event for Love Parks it was still supported.

Councillor Brown asked a supplementary question about what the Council would be doing at the park during the Parade for Love Parks Week so that she can share it with her residents.

The Leader suggested getting in touch with the Parks team who deal with maintenance and promotion to ask what could be done to help and what they could do to put on an event.

6) Question from Councillor Stubbs to the Portfolio Holder for Finance, Town Centres and Growth:

“The Office of Budget Responsibility has predicted that “Real Household Disposable Income” (The Measure of Real Living Standards here in the UK) per person, is expected to fall by a cumulative 5.7 per cent over the next two financial years. Would the Portfolio Holder for Finance update us how the Borough Council will step in to protect the most vulnerable here in the Borough who are facing the largest two-year fall since records began in 1956-57.”

Councillor Sweeney stated that the Office for Budget Responsibility (OBR) was often wrong and any forecast was rarely completely accurate. Forecasts from the OBR were predictions rather than warnings. Thanks to measures announced at the Spring Budget the predicted recession had gone away. The Government would now follow its economic plan to ensure that living standards continued to rise in the UK. The Government was protecting the most vulnerable with a £94bn package of cost of living support worth £3,300 per household. The Council continued to passport funding out to residents and businesses within the Borough.

Councillor Stubbs asked a supplementary question about the 5% cut equated to a real time cash fall of £1,841 for every household and the £97.2m subsequently withdrawn from the local economy which could affect both the businesses within the Borough and budget setting at the Council.

Councillor Sweeney mentioned the government’s £94bn cost of living package as per the previous question.

7) Question from Councillor Stubbs to the Portfolio Holder for Finance, Town Centres and Growth:

“Nationally, the Conservative Government have crashed the Economy leaving Newcastle Residents to pick up the pieces. Does the Portfolio Holder for Finance agree with the Prime Minister that my residents in Talke and Butt Lane, and residents across the Borough, should “hold their nerve” when it comes to rising interest rates and stubborn inflation, or does he agree with me that the Prime Minister is simply out of touch?”

Councillor Sweeney responded that since 2010 the UK economy had grown faster than France and Japan and was currently outpacing Germany as well as having the fastest growth in the G7. The inflation was falling faster than predicted and interest rates were set independently from governments by the Bank of England.

Councillor Stubbs asked a supplementary question about research suggesting that 3,774 households in Newcastle faced a mortgage penalty of £2,300 per year and where the residents already suffering from a cost of living crisis could find the 8.7 million to cover increased mortgages.

Councillor Sweeney expressed the opinion that this was outside of the scope of the Council.

8) Question from Councillor Stubbs to the Portfolio Holder for Finance, Town Centres and Growth:

“End Child Poverty is an organisation that highlights the real impacts that poverty has on the daily lives of Children across the UK. Would the Portfolio Holder care to comment on the latest figures for Newcastle under Lyme suggesting that around 7,829 children are currently living in abject poverty?”

Councillor Sweeney responded that relative poverty, which was the metric calculated in the research referred to, was a measure of income inequality and not of absolute poverty. Every member of the Council would agree that all children should grow up safe, healthy and cared for with no limitations placed on their potential based on the circumstances of their birth. Evidences to reduce poverty were essential in continuing and no government National or local would ever say otherwise. The best way to lift families out of poverty and support living standards was to work better skills and high wages that is why the Borough Council's corporate priorities included successful and sustainable growing Borough and why its Administration was bring forward a local plan based on well-planned growth, attracting high school, highways, jobs and store area opening up opportunities for all residents. The government had also put those mostly needed a financial support first when it came to financial support as it had been demonstrated through the millions of families supported through the coronavirus pandemic and then through the unprecedented cost of living support packages made available in response to the spike in energy costs.

Councillor Stubbs asked a supplementary question about poverty putting pressure on struggling families and undermining their ability to cope as well as the role of the wider administration to address the 33 percent child poverty rate in Newcastle.

Councillor Sweeney responded that the Council was currently offering £3,000 support to every family.

9) Question from Councillor Stubbs to the Portfolio Holder for Finance, Town Centres and Growth:

“According to the Office for National Statistics, the average family in Newcastle-under-Lyme has seen the price of the weekly food shop rise by a staggering £700 per year. Given there will be an estimated 30,200 households within the Borough directly affected by this, that is a further £21.1M being absorbed by struggling families with minimal help, and indeed my previous questions, would the Portfolio holder agree to join with me in writing to our Local MPs to demand more support from a Government that is currently failing our residents?”

Councillor Sweeney responded that Councillor Stubbs should issue a motion for the Council to debate. Inflation was invidious, eroding the means of all families in the borough and making everything more costly for the Council as an authority. Energy Prices rose sharply in 2022 as a result of the Russian invasion of Ukraine and the cost of producing storing and transporting food shut up along with domestic energy bills. Before the war both Russia and Ukraine ranked among the top three Global exporters of wheat, barely, maize and rapeseed oil, sunflower seed and sunflower oil. Short supply of these Commodities had also pushed up prices on the global market.

Help from the government to tackle the cost of living was provided through the energy price guarantee capping utility bills, the 400 pound Energy bill discount for all households, the 150 pounds council tax rebates, the 650 pounds cost living payment for those on benefits, the 300 pounds pension of cost of living payments, the 150 pound payment for those on disability benefits, the 500 million pound household support fund to provide targeted discretionary support to exactly those low-income families who need that extra help, a 94 billion package in total worth 3 300 on

average per household. The government was doing everything it could to reduce inflation which was a single action that would most help the greatest number of people.

[Watch the debate here](#)

13. RECEIPT OF PETITIONS

The petition pertaining to the Borough Local Plan had been discussed under item 6 of the agenda. No other petitions were received.

14. URGENT BUSINESS

There was no urgent business.

15. DISCLOSURE OF EXEMPT INFORMATION

There were no confidential items for consideration.

**Mayor - Councillor Simon White
Chair**

Meeting concluded at 9.50 pm