

**STATEMENT OF THE LEADER OF THE COUNCIL TO FULL COUNCIL –
20th SEPTEMBER 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 is due to meet on 19th September 2023, detailed below is a selection of decisions and other actions of the Leader and Cabinet since the last Leader's Statement.

2. **Town Centre Regeneration Update**

The regeneration of Newcastle town centre has taken another step forward. Multi-million pound developments as part of the Future High Street Fund and Town Deal, including homes, offices, shops and public open spaces, are progressing as part of the York Place and Midway redevelopment projects.

The Cabinet has been asked to agree to appoint nationally renowned property developers, Capital & Centric, to bring this vision to life. Their sustainable approach, which includes retaining parts of the original building's frame, aligns with the vision for York Place, emphasising environmental responsibility and cost-effectiveness. With these developments, our aim is to enhance footfall, support local businesses, and establish the town as a vibrant hub for residents and visitors.

Capital & Centric have a reputation for innovative and energy-efficient developments and will further enhance the social value of these exciting proposals.

The construction of Castle Car Park, a replacement for Midway, begins this month, creating a safe, well-lit area crucial for upcoming hotel and housing projects on the Ryecroft.

3. **Medium Term Financial Strategy (2024/25 to 2028/29)**

In preparation for its 2024/25 budget, Cabinet received the Medium Term Financial Strategy. The Council is financially stable and engaged in significant regeneration projects although it is experiencing inflationary costs and growing service demands that are affecting all councils across the country. The focus, as in previous years, revolves around resource efficiency, savings and income generation. The Council has a successful track record since 2018, saving over £10 million from budgets, while enhancing essential services like recycling and investing in projects such as the refurbishment of Kidsgrove Sports Centre.

An anticipated additional £2.75 million of saving are required due to the national pay award, inflationary pressures, and the rising demand for short-term assistance from families facing homelessness, resulting in increased spending to support vulnerable residents. Cabinet has decided to write to the government and local MPs emphasising the necessity of adequate central government support to meet the growing demands on the Council budget.

4. **Asset Management Strategy 2023-2028**

The Council is updating its borough-wide Asset Management Strategy to align with ongoing substantial investment in Newcastle and Kidsgrove town centres as well other areas of the borough. Since 2018, the Council has successfully raised capital by selling surplus Council land and buildings, earmarking the proceeds for community projects, equipment upgrades, and maintenance. This proactive asset management approach has generated £6.1 million for these investments by maximising asset value for taxpayers.

The refreshed Strategy includes plans for the £30 million development at Ryecroft and York Place, long-term regeneration initiatives in Knutton, and a shared public services hub in Kidsgrove. Furthermore, it explores the potential of various sites for an ongoing disposal programme, which will include local consultation, emphasising the Council's focus on sustainable development and prudent resource management.

5. **Local Planning Enforcement Plan**

Cabinet was asked to adopt a new Planning Enforcement Plan which outlines the Council's powers to enforce planning regulations, ensuring that development aligns with local and national policies and contributes to social, economic and environmental objectives.

While the Council also has strong policies to address issues like noise, odours, air quality and litter, this Plan specifically focuses on planning-related enforcement. The Council's Enforcement Team possesses broad authority to act in the public interest when breaches of planning control are considered. The Plan reflects the Council's commitment to impartial, timely and transparent investigations, guided by principles of proportionality and legality, while maintaining communication with all stakeholders involved.

6. **Delivery of a Homeless Hub**

The Council has gained funding to further address the issue of rough sleeping in the borough and is proposing a new facility to offer safe emergency accommodation and practical guidance to individuals experiencing homelessness, as well as providing shelter.

The facility will be operational both day and night, delivering access to essential services such as healthcare, financial advice, and hygiene facilities, aiming to prevent individuals from spending multiple nights on the streets.

Up to £1 Million funding has been secured through a successful bid to the UK Shared Prosperity Fund, this will be used to offer a location where those in need can access various support services, ultimately improving the well-being of the homeless population and alleviating the strain on resources of the health service.

7. **Future Delivery of Occupational Health Services**

In line with the Council's commitment to the wellbeing of its workforce and sickness reduction action plan, Cabinet was asked to approve a procurement for a renewed Occupational Health Service. Our Occupational Health services serve as a versatile resource, assisting both employees and managers throughout the entire employment journey. As the current service contract approaches its end, the aim is to establish a robust and supportive service model, thereby enabling the Council to sustain its commitment to staff health, reduce sickness absence, and uphold our compliance with Health and Safety obligations.

8. **Financial & Performance Review Report 1st Quarter 2023-24**

Cabinet received a report detailing first Quarter performance. At the end of June 2023, the Council had 76% of measures on track to meet the 2023-24 target.

Our new suite of performance measures has been specifically designed to challenge and stretch teams to deliver specifically against our new Council Plan in a push to focus on the aspects of service that matter most to our residents.

Performance continues to be strong in key areas of the Council including planning, Town Centres, sports, and leisure.

Where we are seeing areas highlighted for improvement, such as sickness absence, action plans have been developed to focus on the cause of concerns and we continue to monitor progress.

9. **Forward Plan**

The Forward Plan can be found at: -

<https://moderngov.newcastle-staffs.gov.uk/mgListPlanItems.aspx?PlanId=149&RP=118>

Councillor Simon Tagg
Leader of the Council