

COUNCIL

Wednesday, 22nd November, 2023

Time of Commencement: 7.00 pm

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Present: Mayor - Councillor Simon White (Chair)

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

Apologies: Councillor(s) Barker MBE, S Jones and Lawley

Officers:	Geoff Durham	Civic & Member Support Officer
	Martin Hamilton	Chief Executive
	Simon McEneny	Deputy Chief Executive
	Sarah Wilkes	Service Director - Finance / S151 Officer
	Georgina Evans-Stadward	Service Director - Strategy, People and Performance
	Nesta Barker	Service Director - Regulatory Services
	Anthony Harold	Service Director - Legal & Governance / Monitoring Officer
Craig Jordan	Service Director - 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 meeting held on 20 September, 2023 be agreed as a correct record.

3. **MAYOR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS**

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The Mayor made the following announcements:

- Thanks were given to everyone involved with the Mayor's Ball last month which raised £27,126
- The Mayors Fireworks event raised £3000
- The Mayor's Christmas Carol Service would be held on Sunday 17 December at St Giles' Church, commencing at 6pm
- Members were asked to clear out their unwanted emails to free up storage space on their electronic devices.

4. APPOINTMENT OF MONITORING OFFICER

The Leader introduced a report regarding the appointment of Anthony Harold as Monitoring Officer.

Resolved: That, in accordance with s5 of the Local Government & Housing Act 1989, Council, Anthony Harold be appointed as the Council's Monitoring Officer.

[Watch the debate here](#)

5. APPOINTMENT TO COMMITTEES

The Leader introduced a report advising of changes to committee membership following the appointment of Councillor Craig Skelding to Cabinet, replacing Councillor Jill Waring and a change in Labour group representation on the Finance, Assets and Performance Scrutiny Committee.

- Resolved:**
- (i) That the following changes to committee membership be agreed:
 - Councillor Jill Waring to replace Councillor Skelding on Economy and Place Scrutiny Committee
 - Councillor Jill Waring to replace Councillor Skelding as substitute on the Finance, Assets and Performance Scrutiny Committee
 - Councillor Lewis to replace Councillor Grocott on the Finance, Assets and Performance Scrutiny Committee
 - Councillor Grocott to become substitute on the Finance, Assets and Performance Scrutiny Committee
 - (ii) That Council receive and approve nominations for any other changes to committee places, in line with the political proportionality of the Council.

The Leader introduced a supplementary report on this item following Councillor Beeston now sitting as an Independent member.

- Resolved:**
- (i) That Councillor Beeson be appointed to the Planning Committee as an Independent Member
 - (ii) That Councillor Dave Jones take the vacant seat on the Economy and Place Scrutiny Committee

- (iii) That the Labour Group advise the Monitoring Officer by close of business on Friday 24th November which member was to be removed from the Planning Committee

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6. LOCAL PLANNING ENFORCEMENT PLAN

The Portfolio Holder for Strategic Planning, Councillor Fear introduced a report seeking approval and adoption of an updated Planning Enforcement Plan. A copy of the Plan was appended to the report.

The report had previously been considered by the Planning Committee.

Councillor Brown referred to page 42 which showed 'non-compliance with Section 106 Planning Obligations' as a low priority and asked why this was the case when there had been cases of planning enforcement having a detrimental effect on the amenity or privacy of neighbours.

Councillor Fear stated that the prioritisation referred to dealing with immediate damage that could be done by breaches in Planning legislation and the rapidity in which the Council needed to respond.

Resolved: That the Planning Enforcement Plan be approved and adopted.

[Watch the debate here](#)

7. STATEMENT OF THE LEADER OF THE COUNCIL

The Leader, Councillor Simon Tagg presented the statement that had been circulated about the activities and decisions made by Cabinet to allow questions and comments. Reference was made to the Council's best ever success in Britain in Bloom, which was outlined at paragraph 9 of this Statement.

Questions were raised and responses were provided as follows.

On paragraph 2 – Walleys Quarry Update

Councillor Adcock asked the Leader for reassurance that, following the problems encountered with the monitoring equipment, should the issue worsen again the Council would not hesitate to act and use the powers available to it.

The Leader confirmed that the Council were continuing to monitor the Abatement Notice's trigger points and would pursue it if necessary. Use of the Council's own hand held devices had increased since the news of the incorrect readings from the monitoring stations.

Councillor Dave Jones asked the Leader if the Secretary of State had given any reason for declining a simple request to hold a public enquiry into the failings of the Environment Agency (EA).

The Leader stated that he would distribute a letter that he sent on behalf of the Council, along with the Leader of Staffordshire County Council in which the Secretary of State had indicated that there was to be an independent inquiry by DEFRA into the failures of the EA.

Councillor Stubbs asked the Leader when the Council would receive the correct data.

The Leader advised that there had been a meeting of the Staffordshire Health Scrutiny Committee at Castle House on Monday 20th November to which the EA did not turn up. The corrected data could be received in the new year.

All of the monitoring stations had now been recalibrated and reporting data on a weekly basis.

Councillor Fox-Hewitt moved a motion to amend the recommendation of this report to include the following:

‘That Council agrees that the Leader of the Council will write to the Secretary of State admonishing them for the failure to support this Council’s request for a public enquiry; to ask them to reconsider their decision and invite the minister or their representatives to meet with representatives of this Council to discuss our concerns.’

The Leader supported this amendment.

On paragraph 3 – Newcastle Town Centre Regeneration

Councillor Brockie asked the Leader for assurance that all elected members would be given the opportunity to meet with the representative of the providing companies and see a detailed presentation on what is being proposed for the town.

The Leader referenced the Special Meeting of the Finance, Assets and Performance Scrutiny Committee on 9 November at which this item had been debated following a Call-In. The Capital and Centric Business Model had been explained, along with the financial details. This Council, relevant Scrutiny Committees and the Planning Committee would all have an input as the plans moved forward.

Councillor Allport asked for assurance that the plans for the refurbishment would retain focus on accessibility to the market area.

The Leader stated that the Ryecroft development was about residential accommodation with the hotel and the York Place development would open up and connect that part of the town.

Councillor Gorton asked for more information regarding the rent free stalls for traders on Mondays, in terms of the start date, whether it would be launched on a trial basis and would the stalls be offered on a first come, first served basis.

The Portfolio Holder for Finance, Town Centres and Growth, Councillor Stephen Sweeney stated that there would be sixty stalls on the first day and the take-up of them would be assessed.

Councillor Wright asked what control and supervision there would be for the provision of short stay parking bays at weekends and asked if the costs of supervision were factored in to the cost of maintaining the area.

The Leader stated that the ‘nipper’ parking would be on days when there were no event markets taking place. The Council’s Multi-Function Teams (MFT) would enforce the parking spaces.

Councillor Richards asked what was being done to ensure that the needs of the town centre were represented to the police authority and if the Council's own resources were being properly and fairly deployed in terms of antisocial behaviour.

The wardens who were part of the MFT would be out and about and would liaise with the police. There was also the CCTV system operating in the town centre and Public Space Protection Orders were also in place.

Councillor Sweeney stated that the regeneration of the town centre did not just include the Ryecroft and York Place developments. Previously vacant units were being brought back into use and there was an idea to have a large television screen at the bottom of the town. Reference was made to the Keele University Hub coming into the Ironmarket. Councillor Dave Jones declared an interest here as he worked for the University and had been involved with that project.

The Leader agreed with Councillor Sweeney stating that it had all been made possible by the Government grants.

Councillor Fox-Hewitt stated that there did need to be a strategy with working with the police to increase the number of dispersal orders.

On paragraph 4 – Sustainable Environment

Councillor Gary White asked the Leader how the infrastructure and cabling would be treated when the solar farm at Keele Cemetery was installed.

The Leader stated the Council was looking to use the highway for the cabling and it would all be detailed in the planning application

Councillor Reece asked for assurance that the Council had the resources to maintain the trees being planted under the Urban Tree Planting Strategy.

Councillor Adcock welcomed the planting of the trees and the introduction of the Tree and Biodiversity Management Plan and asked when that would be coming before committee to be scrutinised.

The Portfolio Holder for Sustainable Environment, Councillor David Hutchison confirmed that there was a Tree Management Plan which was being developed into a Borough Council Bio-Diversity Management Operations Plan. It was hoped that the Plan could be presented to the next Health, Wellbeing and Environment Scrutiny Committee but it had missed the deadline. The Plan would be completed within the next week and Councillor Hutchison stated that he would email the Plan out to all Members once finished. The Plan would then be considered at the next meeting of the Health, Wellbeing and Environment Scrutiny Committee in the new year.

Councillor Dave Jones welcomed the proposed solar farm in Keele but had some concerns regarding the location as the area was highly visible across and into the older part of Keele Village. He stated that the Council had made significant strides in reducing its carbon emissions. However, Councillor Jones had concerns about the amount of papers being presented at meetings and would support all papers being presented online within a suitable timeframe.

The Leader agreed with Councillor Jones' concerns about the proposed solar farm and stated that the Council needed to ensure that they got it right.

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Regarding paper usage, the Council had made massive strides in reducing that over the years but there was still further to go. Some items on the agenda did have late deadlines and were therefore published on the day of the Committee. The Leader was discussing with officers and IT as to who actually still needed paper copies and opportunities for laptops or tablets to be provided if they did not have their own equipment.

Councillor Fox-Hewitt asked, as part of the Tree and Bio-diversity Plan, were there any plans to scale up the workforce capacity - the numbers within the Council's team, skills, training to meet future demands.

The Leader assured that part of the Plan would be the budget and the staffing implications as it was a change in the way that the Council worked. More trees meant a less requirement for intensive grass cutting.

On paragraph 5 – Borough Local Plan Update

Councillor Grocott asked when the comments from the public consultations would be available on the Council's website.

Councillor Crisp was pleased that the consultation on the first draft local plan ensured a comprehensive engagement process with an eight week consultation period and asked the Portfolio Holder for Strategic Planning for confirmation that the accessibility and inclusivity would continue during the next consultation on the Local Plan.

The Leader stated that the first consultation 'options for sites' was the biggest that the Council had ever done and that had now been surpassed by the latest one. People were able to respond online, via email, by letter or in person.

The Portfolio Holder for Strategic Planning, Councillor Andy Fear confirmed that the suite of consultation measures used for the Regulation 18 plan would go forward with the Regulation 19 plan. Officers were now working through the responses and the findings would be available in the new year.

On paragraph 6 – Town Deal Update – Projects in Knutton

Councillor Moss asked the Leader what support and financial resources would be made available to ensure that a CIC came forward to run the community centre and, should this not be achieved, would it put the whole project at risk.

Councillor Dave Jones asked if there would be flexibility in the people coming forward to run the centre, as the Council had requested, whether they were to do that under a management group rather than a CIC.

The Leader stated that the new community centre needed to be put onto a sustainable footing. The CIC model should be explored as it could apply for outside funding. There were varied levels of Management Committees with some running the centres themselves and some just taking bookings. The aim was to bring in a group that could run the centre, bring in funding and keep it sustainable in the long term.

Councillor Sweeney paid tribute to Alderman Derick Huckfield who had done a great deal for Knutton and been a great advocate. This current scheme would be putting the heart back into Knutton and a great legacy for Alderman Huckfield.

On paragraph 7 – Temporary Accommodation Policy

Councillor Parker asked which property would be purchased for use as a homeless hub. In addition, the Portfolio Holder for Finance, Town Centres and Growth was asked if the Chancellor had responded to his letter as yet.

The Portfolio Holder for Community Safety and Wellbeing, Councillor Gill Heesom stated that, at present the Council was still looking into various properties so there was no definitive answer at this time.

The Portfolio Holder for Finance, Town Centres and Growth stated that no response had been received as yet.

The Leader stated that it was not just Newcastle that was making the case for temporary accommodation – extra funding. More and more cases were coming in seeking temporary accommodation. A joint letter had been sent to the government, signed by over 150 district council leaders. A settlement announcement would be received before Christmas.

On paragraph 8 – Financial and Performance Review Report – Second Quarter 2023-24

Councillor Stubbs asked for a full breakdown of the types of membership at J2 and the ability to compare the breakdown from quarter four of the last financial year and quarters one and two of the current year.

The Leader confirmed that this could be provided and sent to Councillor Stubbs.

Councillor Burnett-Faulkner asked for an update on the current position in relation to the external audit for 2022-2023 financial year.

The Portfolio Holder for Finance, Town Centres and Growth stated that the auditing of the Statement of Accounts had been completed with the exception of the Staffordshire Pension Fund which was awaited from the County Council. At the last meeting of the Audit and Standards Committee, the external auditors had praised the Council for the standard of the accounts produced, the working papers and assistance provided to them during the audit.

Councillor Stubbs asked the Leader to confirm if the markets were not performing well at present and needed special assistance.

The Leader stated that the current administration had revived the markets into a vibrant events market. There would always be days where occupancy was not full. The free market day proposed for Monday's was to bring it into a more vibrant market.

The proposed changes to the market were being brought in so that it did not look empty on the lower occupancy days but temporary stalls would be erected on days with full occupancy. The Leader stated that the success of the market was a tribute to the Council's Town Centre Manager who promoted the market through social media and working with the traders.

Councillor Paul Waring asked the Portfolio Holder for Finance, Town Centres and Growth if he was still confident that the Council would still achieve a balanced outturn at the end of the current financial year.

The Portfolio Holder for Finance, Town Centres and Growth stated that he was very confident. A cost of living reserve of £400,000 had been established in order to safeguard the Council against inflationary increases in utilities and pay. All finances were closely monitored by the Finance Team, Corporate Leadership Team and the Cabinet. As at the close of period 7, the Council was still on track to deliver a balanced outturn.

On paragraph 9 – Success in Britain in Bloom

Councillor Panter congratulated everyone involved in the tremendous achievement. Winning the Royal Horticultural Society Britain in Bloom Award for the whole country was a phenomenal recognition for the Borough and testament to the dedication and hard work of the staff and residents. Councillor Panter asked the Leader if he agreed that in the Council's 850th year, the award would help the Council's bids to be even more successful.

The Leader stated that, this year, more than ever if the Council was going to win the nationals, it had to have a unique selling point which was the 850th Anniversary celebrations and that made all the difference.

Councillor Dave Jones praised the hard work and dedication of Council staff and community volunteers who ensured that, every year the Borough returned a fantastic result in Britain in Bloom. Councillor Jones proposed a round of applause for everyone involved.

Councillor Fox-Hewitt asked if there were any plans for reward and recognition schemes for the Council staff that had put in many hours in all weathers.

The Leader confirmed that there was a thank you every year for those involved. The Council also had a recognition scheme and this year would be looking to recognise all those that had made winning the awards possible.

- Resolved:
- (i) That the Statement of the Leader of the Council be received and noted.
 - (ii) That the Leader of the Council write to the Secretary of State, admonishing them for the failure to support this Council's request for a public enquiry, to ask them to reconsider their decision and to invite the minister or their representatives to meet with representatives of this Council to discuss its concerns.

[Watch the debate here](#)

8. REPORTS OF THE CHAIRS OF THE SCRUTINY COMMITTEES

This item was not considered.

9. REPORTS OF THE CHAIRS OF THE REGULATORY COMMITTEES

Reports for the Licensing and Public Protection Committee, Audit and Standards Committee and the Planning Committee were attached to the agenda.

Resolved: That the reports be received.

[Watch the debate here](#)

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

Two questions were received:

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

“Does the Leader/Portfolio Holder agree that the revival of Newcastle-under-Lyme Civic Society would be an appropriate way of marking the Borough’s 850th anniversary celebrations. Please could he report the action the Council has taken, or proposes to take, to encourage the re-launch of the Civic Society?”

The Leader stated that the 850th Anniversary year had been a tremendous one with many events taking place. Through these events residents and visitors had had more involvement with the town and its organisations and groups. Those groups needed to be brought together to see if they would join the Council in relaunching the Civic Society and the Leader would welcome Councillor Gorton’s involvement with that along with any Councillors.

2) Question from Councillor Parker to the Portfolio Holder for Community Safety and Wellbeing:

“Can the Portfolio Holder please update the Council, as winter approaches, on the work being carried out to reduce rough sleepers in the town centre and how many rough sleepers were there at the last count?”

The Portfolio Holder for Community Safety and Wellbeing stated that at the last count, which took place on 16 November, there had been ten rough sleepers. Throughout the winter months, St George’s Chambers in Merrial Street was utilised as a night shelter and ran from 1 November 2023 to 31 March, 2024 when the Severe Weather Emergency Protocol was active.

Funding had been received from the Shared Prosperity Fund to develop a Homeless Accommodation Hub. Options were being considered but at present there was no particular building in mind.

Councillor Parker asked a supplementary question to Councillor Heesom. Did she know if any of the rough sleepers were ex-Army personnel.

Councillor Heesom stated that there were no ex-Army personnel amongst the rough sleepers.

[Watch the debate here](#)

11. **RECEIPT OF PETITIONS**

There were no petitions.

12. **URGENT BUSINESS**

There was no urgent business.

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13. DISCLOSURE OF EXEMPT INFORMATION

There were no confidential items.

**Mayor - Councillor Simon White
Chair**

Meeting concluded at 8.42 pm