

COUNCIL

Wednesday, 10th April, 2024
Time of Commencement: 7.00 pm

[View the agenda here](#)

[Watch the meeting here](#)

Present: Mayor - Councillor Simon White (Chair)

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

Apologies: Councillor(s) Allport, S Jones and Stubbs

Officers:	Geoff Durham	Civic & Member Support Officer
	Simon McEneny	Interim Chief Executive
	Sarah Wilkes	Service Director - Finance / S151 Officer
	Georgina Evans-Stadward	Service Director - Strategy, People and Performance
	Andrew Bird	Service Director - Sustainable Environment
	Anthony Harold	Service Director - Legal & Governance / Monitoring Officer

1. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor Dave Jones and interest on an item contained within the Leader's Statement ('Keele in Town') as an employee of Keele University and would not take part in the debate on that item.

2. MINUTES OF A PREVIOUS MEETING

Resolved: That the minutes of the two meetings held on 14 February be agreed as correct records.

3. MAYOR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

Council - 10/04/24

The Mayor had no announcements to make.

4. APPOINTMENT OF CHIEF EXECUTIVE

Gordon Mole left the room during consideration of this item.

The Leader introduced a report seeking Council's formal agreement to the appointment of the new Chief Executive and the extension (if required) to the current interim arrangements. The Leader advised Council of Gordon's previous experience.

Following Council's approval of appointment, Gordon addressed Council stating that he was delighted to have been appointed, to give continuity of officer leadership and to bring some new perspective and insights as the Borough further develops its key agenda.

- Resolved:**
- (i) That the appointment of Gordon Mole as the Council's Chief Executive (including the statutory roles of Head of Paid service, Returning Officer and Electoral Registration Officer) such appointment to commence from a date to be agreed between Mr Mole and the Leader of the Council.
 - (ii) That Mr Mole be appointed on a salary of £116, 530.65 per annum (plus expenses for additional election related duties).
 - (iii) That should it be required, for the current interim arrangements to be extended for up to a month should a start date for Mr Mole fall outwith the agreed acting up period for Mr McEneny (originally approved for up to 3 months).

[Watch the debate here](#)

5. ELECTIONS - SCALE OF FEES AND CHARGES

The Leader introduced a report which set out the proposed fees to be paid for undertaking the various duties in connection with the Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner Election being held on 2 May, 2024.

- Resolved:** That the proposed election fees for 2024-25, as set out in Appendix 1, be noted.

[Watch the debate here](#)

6. WALLEYS QUARRY ODOUR UPDATE

The Leader introduced a report updating Council on the latest position regarding the odours associated with Walleys Quarry.

A breach in the Abatement notice, earlier this year had been announced by officers yesterday and legal action was being prepared against the operator.

Officers would now work up a legal case with King's Counsel advice, which would take as long as was necessary. No time limit on this should be set as officers needed to have a watertight case and for the legal action to be sound.

The Environment Agency (EA) had recently issued a brief suspension notice however, the Council still urged them to issue a closure notice and ensure that the site be capped off and restored.

Reference was made to the funding for legal action. The Council had put £300,000 into the Walleys' reserve fund at the Budget setting meeting in February and a further £300,000 could be drawn down from reserves, as and when it was needed.

The recently formed Walleys Quarry Working Group had, this week, met for the first time and had put together a Work Programme.

Councillor Dave Jones stated that his Group would be supporting this item and stated that it was a shame that it had reached the stage where the Council had to use its Abatement powers.

Councillor Bettley Smith raised two points – as ward Councillor and as Chair of the Working Group, firstly, welcoming the issuing of the letter to Walleys Quarry notifying them of the breach of the abatement notice. Regarding the Working Group, Councillor Bettley Smith stated that it had been very constructive, agreeing a way forward. A further meeting had been arranged for 1 May, 2024.

The Leader stated that the public would be kept updated as much as possible

- Resolved:**
- (i) That the contents of this update report, be noted.
 - (ii) That the breach of the Council's Abatement Notice, be noted.
 - (iii) That it be noted that the Council has issued a letter to Walleys Quarry Ltd notifying them of the breach of the Abatement Notice.
 - (iv) That it be noted that the Council will continue dialogue with Partners via the Strategic Coordinating Group regarding any further enforcement activities to seek to alleviate the suffering of the community.
 - (v) That it be noted that the Council's legal team have been instructed to prepare appropriate legal proceedings in line with the above.
 - (vi) That it be noted that the £300k Walleys Quarry Reserve to undertake the above and if additional funds are required, a separate report will be brought to Council in due course

[Watch the debate here](#)

7. CORPORATE ENFORCEMENT POLICY

The Leader introduced a report regarding the requirement to update the current Corporate Enforcement Policy.

Council - 10/04/24

The Policy had previously been through Cabinet and Scrutiny and set out the Council's approach to regulation and enforcement across all service areas – except Planning which had its own enforcement policy.

Resolved: That the Corporate Enforcement Policy 2024 be approved.

[Watch the debate here](#)

8. 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 Annual Report and the Leader stated that this Council 'made things happen' and this Statement reflected that.

Questions were raised and responses were provided as follows.

On paragraph 2 – Newcastle and Kidsgrove Regeneration Update

Councillor Holland stated that a lot of levelling up money had gone unspent and said that it was great that this Authority was delivering the levelling up money awarded to it.

Councillor Holland referred to a document, produced by the Labour Party as part of the local elections campaign and raised concerns at a quote from the paper "we will widen devolution by asking all Councils, outside of an existing or combined authority to begin preparatory work to join together". Councillor Holland was concerned that this was a plan to take away Newcastle Borough Council's independence. The Leader was asked if he too felt that this was a concern.

The Leader had read the document and shared the concerns stating that it was something that this Council needed to be aware of. All Groups had stated in the past that they wanted to keep the independence of the Borough. The Leader stated that he was prepared to write to all of the candidates for the upcoming elections asking them to commit to preserving the history, integrity and independence of the Borough.

Councillor Parker asked the Portfolio Holder for Finance, Town Centre's and Growth for an update on the developments for the free market on Monday's.

The Portfolio Holder for Finance, Town Centre's and Growth stated that Monday's had always been the quietest day on the market so a decision was made to make Monday's a free market day. Prior to the decision, average usage had been four stalls and now was nearer to ten and on one day there had been fourteen new traders using twenty five stalls.

On paragraph 3 – Procurement of Streetscene and MMF Vehicles and Plant

Councillor Gary White welcomed the fact that electric technology was being embraced across the Borough and asked Council to recognise that there was only 22% of the UK generating electricity through solar and wind power. Keele University were leading the way in terms of green hydrogen. The Leader was asked if there was any intention to liaise with the University on this approach.

The Leader referred to a previous paper to Cabinet regarding a possible solar farm in Keele Cemetery. A report would be going to Cabinet later in the year with an update on that, and the work being done with Keele University.

The Council was liaising with the University regarding hydrogen power.

Councillor Edgington-Plunkett welcomed this and asked the Portfolio Holder for Sustainable Environment, apart from the six electric pick-up vehicles, what was the rest of the Council's fleet like and were any still to be replaced and were there plans for all streetscene vehicles to become electric powered.

Councillor Edgington-Plunkett asked the current position in terms of the grass cutting, when the first cut would be done and how many cuts throughout the year.

The Portfolio Holder for Sustainable Environment stated that the roadside verge mowing had started in mid-March and would continue through to mid-October with a frequency of eight times per year with any cuttings falling on walkways or cycleways being put back on to the verges.

There were now twelve vehicles in the streetscene fleet, half of those being electric and the other half using the hydro-treated vegetable oil.

On paragraph 4 – Newcastle Town Deal Digital Infrastructure Project Update

Councillor Gary White welcomed this project within the Town Deal Region and asked the Leader, when opportunities arose to engage with the relevant authorities and private infrastructure, please could he do so on behalf of the rural communities.

The Leader stated that there was a County plan to get as many people as possible in the rural communities connected by 2026. There was funding available and voucher schemes for residents to club together. The Leader would ensure that Councillor White was in touch with the County Officers regarding this to ensure that he could get Madeley, Betley and the other rural areas up and running.

Council Adcock asked the Leader, as well as Community Centres, what other places would benefit from this infrastructure and where would it be placed.

The Leader stated that Community Centres could be the hubs for this project. Other council owned facilities and county libraries would also be able to be used as well as other public realm material such as CCTV poles and lamp post network. The project was being carried out by the private sector and, through the Town Deal Funding, money had been invested so that the project could happen sooner.

On paragraph 6 – Tree and Biodiversity Management Plan

Councillor Adcock asked the Portfolio Holder for Sustainable Environment if officers would be monitoring the survival rate of newly planted trees as a percentage (approximately 25%) would not make it to full maturity. In addition, would any trees, not surviving, be replaced.

The Leader stated that the 25% was a national figure. There were circumstances where trees would not survive, including vandalism but the Council would look to go back and replace them and there was funding to do that.

Council - 10/04/24

Councillor Gorton stated that Councillors had been pleased to see the publication of this Plan which explained how the Authority would look after the trees, setting out actions needed to ensure that more of the trees survived. The Leader was asked if he agreed that there was scope for involving residents to a greater extent in the delivery of the Plan, possibly asking them to help with annual tree inspections.

The Portfolio Holder for Sustainable Environment stated that the survival risk for newly planted trees not reaching maturity was between 10 and 25%. The risks included adverse weather, water and nutrient stress and accidental or intentional damage.

The Portfolio Holder stated that he had not previously considered public involvement but would bring it up at the Sustainable Environment Steering Group.

A review of managing the Council's tree stock took place in 2018 and £30,000 expenditure per annum was incorporated into the Council's arboricultural work programme. A new software management system called 'easytree' had been incorporated to identify and manage the Council's current and future tree stock of approximately 112,000 trees.

Councillor Reece asked if there was sufficient staff and, in relation to increases in costs, fuel, tools and equipment, was the available money sufficient.

The Leader stated that the Plan outlined the staffing and financing arrangements. Where a large amount of trees were planted, the grass beneath them required fewer cuts and therefore freed up resources in that area of work. From around year fifteen, the trees did need to be maintained more.

On paragraph 7 – Sport England Swimming Pool Support Grant for Kidsgrove CIO

Councillor Jill Waring was pleased that this grant had been awarded to Kidsgrove CIO stating that it was an excellent facility and urged everyone to use it.

The Leader agreed that it was really good news getting this money. A problem for all sports facilities over the last couple of years had been the increased cost in energy and if the Centre could get the solar panels, it would cut down on their energy requirement.

Councillor Crisp asked the Leader how well J2 was doing, including membership since the pandemic.

The Portfolio Holder for Leisure, Heritage and Culture stated that Kidsgrove's membership was now over 1,500 and were on target with all of the projected forecasts.

The membership at J2 stood at 4,025 and pre-covid had only been 2,900, reducing to 600 during the pandemic.

An online booking system had gone live, there was now a J2 app and a kiosk in the foyer of the leisure facility. The app and Kiosk alone had helped to achieve 5,400 bookings during February.

There were child swim classes with around fifteen schools involved and medical professionals could refer people to the wellbeing centre.

On paragraph 8 – Museum wins Awards

Councillor Panter stated that during the Council's 850th celebrations there had been over 44,000 visitors and he was very much looking forward to visiting the Museum during his upcoming term as Mayor of the Borough.

Councillor Fox-Hewitt expressed his gratitude to the staff and volunteers as a parent of young children sharing his interest in history. The Leader was asked if he would write to the team at the Museum, on behalf of Members, thanking them for their work and dedication and that it be explored if there could be some small reward for the staff and volunteers.

Councillor Jill Waring stated that the Museum was the Jewel in the Crown of Newcastle and to win the award for the whole of Staffordshire was brilliant and well deserved.

The Leader stated that he would pass on the comments and ensure that they got recognition. The Museum would now be going through to the national awards and were wished the best of luck.

Councillor Brown was amazed at the range of courses and activities provided by the Museum. All of the staff were friendly and helpful and credit was given to Elise Turner for creating a wonderful array of events.

Councillor Gorton felt that events curated by students deserved recognition. There had recently been an exhibition curated by students from Madeley School and during the first week, around 3,000 people viewed the artwork on show.

Councillor Dave Jones stated that his daughter had been one of the young curators. He stated that there was not much provision in the community to foster art and develop it so the Museum was important for the children and the future for Newcastle.

The Leader stated that over many years the Museum and its grounds had been kept as the Jewel in the Crown of Newcastle and it was amazing to see the children getting involved.

The Portfolio Holder for Leisure, Heritage and Culture echoed all of the comments and stated that the 62% increase in visitors this year equated to over 96,000. He had attended the awards ceremony with the previous Cabinet Member holding this Portfolio and stated that the level of competition was very high.

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

A report for the Licensing and Public Protection Committee was attached to the agenda.

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

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. QUESTIONS TO THE MAYOR, CABINET MEMBERS AND COMMITTEE CHAIRS

There were no questions.

12. RECEIPT OF PETITIONS

There were no petitions.

13. URGENT BUSINESS

There was no urgent business.

14. DISCLOSURE OF EXEMPT INFORMATION

There were no confidential items.

**Mayor - Councillor Simon White
Chair**

Meeting concluded at 8.15 pm