

**STATEMENT OF THE LEADER OF THE COUNCIL TO FULL COUNCIL –
10th APRIL 2024**

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 met on 6th February and 19th March, detailed below is a selection of decisions and other actions of the Leader and Cabinet since the last Leader's Statement

2. **Newcastle & Kidsgrove Regeneration update**

Regeneration across the borough continues to gather pace:

- **Town Centre Future High Streets Fund** – investing £11m of capital grant in redeveloping key town centre sites including the 450-space Castle car park at the Ryecroft, redevelopment of York Place, and rejuvenation of the historic market.
- **Newcastle Town Deal** – investing £23.6m of capital grant in strategic developments and projects including the redevelopment of the Midway car park, active travel links, digital infrastructure, Astley Centre for Circus, Keele In Town as well as regeneration projects in Knutton and the Wammy.
- **Kidsgrove Town Deal** – £16.9 million invested in delivering the refurbishment of Kidsgrove Sport Centre, enabling the building of Chatterley Valley West with the aim of creating up to 1,700 jobs, improvements to the train station and the creation of a single public hub in the town centre, opening up the access to the Trent & Mersey Canal towpath and making the route into town more attractive to visitors.
- **UK Shared Prosperity Fund** – investing £4.8m of revenue grant on projects that will deliver programmes of interventions to people and skills, businesses and communities and places, including Keele University's provision of digital skills training for the public in the town centre along with community and environmental projects.

Brochures highlighting what's happening in Newcastle and Kidsgrove town centres have been launched to promote Levelling Up in the Borough and can be viewed here: <https://www.newcastle-staffs.gov.uk/news/article/234/new-brochures-promote-investment>

3. **Procurement of Streetscene and MMF Vehicles & Plant**

Cabinet gave the go ahead for significant investment to aid the sustainable transition of the Council's grounds maintenance operations to electric vehicles, aligning with our ambitious net zero carbon emissions target by 2030.

The decision to replace the aging Streetscene fleet with electric pickups demonstrates a commitment to reducing emissions and investing £420,000 in six replacement EV pickups is a crucial step towards decarbonising the council's vehicle fleet.

The recent decision to take over highway grass-cutting operations on behalf of the County Council, in response to residents' requests for more frequent verge maintenance, demonstrates our dedication to meet the communities' aspirations and good environmental stewardship. With Newcastle-under-Lyme being the current Britain in Bloom overall national champion, the council is determined to uphold its reputation for well-maintained and aesthetically pleasing parks and green spaces in the borough.

4. **Newcastle Town Deal Digital Infrastructure Project update**

Cabinet endorsed a proposal that will bring gigabyte capacity broadband connections to areas of Newcastle to help connect businesses, homes and community centres within the Town Deal area.

This will involve laying up to 50km of fibre network and establishing 'distribution hubs' at community centres allowing free Wi-Fi access to be provided to those with limited or no internet access. The initiative aligns with the aim of the government's levelling up agenda aiding the regeneration of communities and to stimulate economic growth as part of the Town Deal investment by providing open access infrastructure.

5. **Electric Vehicle Charging Points for Castle Car Park**

With construction of the new Castle Car Park now underway, Cabinet awarded a contract for the provision of electric vehicle (EV) charging points.

The initial installation of 22 charging points on the ground floor of the car park is designed to meet demand as there becomes a greater number of electric vehicles. In addition to visitors to the town, the car park will cater for the new residential developments and the potential hotel development planned for the Ryecroft site.

6. **Tree & Biodiversity Management Plan**

Cabinet approved the adoption of the Tree and Biodiversity Management Plan which sets out the Council's approach to managing its current and future tree stock as well as planted meadowland and other environmental improvements.

A key part of the Council's Sustainable Environment Strategy is protecting and enhancing biodiversity which will play a major part in tackling climate change. Since 2018 the Council has focused work programmes such as tree planting through its urban tree planting strategy and planting wildflower meadows on the council's green spaces including over 60 preserved as carbon capture areas.

To date nearly 15,000 trees have been planted in the first four phases of the strategy with phase five currently underway. As agreed at Full Council in February, the strategy is being rolled out to rural villages in the borough.

7. **Sport England Swimming Pool Support Grant to Kidsgrove CIO**

Kidsgrove Sports Centre is to benefit from Sport England's Swimming Pool Support Fund to install solar panels and a Combined Heat and Power (CHP) unit in the centre. The Trustees believe the grant allocation of £235,375 will help to reduce high energy costs which have increased since the start of the war in Ukraine.

The Sports Centre continues to go from strength to strength with membership buoyant and good community use of the building since it reopened in July 2022.

8. **Museum wins awards**

Brampton Museum's all-round excellence has been recognised with a top award. The museum took first place in its category at the Enjoy Staffordshire Tourism and Good Food Awards. In addition to winning the 'Small Visitor Attraction of the Year' category, the Brampton took two bronze and a 'highly commended' in three other classes.

Figures comparing spring 2023 to the year before showed a 62 per cent increase in visitors, with numbers boosted by the museum's series of events celebrating the Borough's 850th anniversary.

Congratulations to the dedicated staff and volunteers as the 'best of class' in Staffordshire, the Museum will now go forward to the national competition.

9. **Forward Plan**

The Forward Plan can be found at: -

<https://moderngov.newcastle-staffs.gov.uk/mgListPlanItems.aspx?PlanId=157&RP=118>

Councillor Simon Tagg
Leader of the Council