

CABINET

Tuesday, 3rd December, 2024
Time of Commencement: 2.00 pm

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Present: Councillor Simon Tagg (Chair)

Councillors: Sweeney Fear Hutchison
Heesom Skelding

Officers: Gordon Mole Chief Executive
Simon McEneny Deputy Chief Executive
Anthony Harold Service Director - Legal &
Governance / Monitoring Officer
Sarah Wilkes Service Director - Finance /
S151 Officer
Geoff Durham Civic & Member Support Officer
Paul Dutton Senior Media Officer
Sam Clark Service Director - IT & Digital

1. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest stated.

2. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETINGS

Resolved: That the Minutes of the meeting held on the 5 November, 2024 be agreed as a correct record.

3. WALLEYS QUARRY ODOUR ISSUE

The Leader introduced a report updating Cabinet on the latest position with the odours associated with Walleys Quarry, stating that this was a landmark meeting as last week, the Environment Agency (EA) issued Walleys Quarry Ltd with a Closure Notice.

The Leader paid tribute to the community for their hard work over the last few years in fighting this. It was early days; there was an appeals process which, it was believed, the operator would be undertaking. Council officers were thanked for their diligence and commitment in this issue and it would still be ongoing until the very end. Both former and current Council Members and MP's were also thanked for their standing together to fight the problem.

At the last meeting a rise in complaints had been reported and the monitoring equipment was showing spikes. November had been one of the worst months with 842 complaints at the time of publication of the report. The Leader stated that it was still important for residents to continue reporting odours to the Council and EA.

The Council's Chief Executive advised Cabinet that the actions of the Council would now take account of the EA's issuing of a Closure Notice which prohibited Walleys

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Quarry from receiving waste and requiring works on the site over the next few months to bring about the closure of the landfill site.

The Closure Notice, attached to the report at appendix 3, set out the processes. The Council was aware that Walleys Quarry had issued a release stating that they would challenge the Notice.

The Council would continue to take the necessary actions to seek to address matters within its powers.

The Leader stressed that the Council could not provide ongoing commentary on legal actions but would update when it was appropriate to do so.

Cabinet Members agreed that this was a pleasing outcome. Councillor Fear stated that this was not the end but hopefully the beginning of the end of the process and the pressure needed to be kept up. Councillor Sweeney thanked the Leader for the work that he had done and for keeping the issue at the top of the agenda. Councillor Hutchison echoed previous comments and stated that September had brought 105 complaints to the Council, October brought in 269 complaints and November was currently 1057 complaints. Councillor Heesom stated that it was important going forward to manage the closure and any other required actions. Councillor Skelding hoped that, as residents had at times been losing heart, this news would be very welcome.

The Leader stated that the Council needed to ensure that the Closure Notice was permanent and that the site was capped and restored properly and would fight any appeal put forward.

Resolved: That the contents of the update report be noted.

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4. REVENUE AND CAPITAL BUDGET 2025/26 - FIRST DRAFT SAVINGS PLANS

The Portfolio Holder for Finance, Town Centres and Growth introduced a report presenting the refreshed Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) which included the first draft savings being considered to balance the 2025/26 revenue budget and the proposed capital programme for 2025/26 to 2027/28.

The proposed savings and funding strategies were outlined at paragraph 2.4 of the report. The Portfolio Holder announced a below inflation increase in Council Tax of 1.99% which amounted to ten pence per week or less for 95% of households in the Borough.

The identified savings would enable a continued contribution of £250,000 to the Borough Growth Fund which would continue to enable investment in the Council's priorities including significant investment in boosting the sustainability of the environment within the Borough by supporting town centre development.

The draft proposals would assist in formulating a financially robust budget for the council which would continue to ensure financial sustainability whilst also protecting the Council's services.

The Leader stated that it was the makings of a good budget to take to Council next February. Referring to the low percentage increase in Council Tax, the

Administration had made that commitment in 2022 and this would be the third budget where that pledge had been kept.

Councillor Hutchison welcomed the MTFS and stated that Streetscene and recycling continued to be protected. Solar panels had been installed at Bradwell Crematorium Chapel and also at Keele Cemetery offices and Kidsgrove Town Hall which would bring in savings. The Council was now looking at collecting trade waste in the town centre and Fixed Penalty Notices would be issued for fly tipping with a zero tolerance. In total, within the Sustainable Environment Portfolio, savings would be between £150,000 to £200,000.

Councillor Heesom was pleased that there would be no reduction in the services at the Vulnerability Hub which was an essential service provided by the Council.

Councillor Skelding referred to the J2 leisure centre where footfall was always buoyant and there were plans to work towards carbon net zero at the site which would help future budgets. The Museum was also working well with many people continuing to visit. Both of the sites were self funding and it helped to have a strong strategic Capital Strategy.

The Leader stated that the Museum was going from strength to strength being enhanced from outside funding on the back of the 850 celebration events. In addition, membership at J2 continued to increase following the reduction during the Covid outbreak. The Borough now had two vibrant sports centres – Newcastle and Kidsgrove.

Councillor Fear, referring in particular to the low increase in Council Tax, stated that the MTFS showed that this Council kept its promises. The Council had not cut services but had improved them.

The Leader stated that not much had been mentioned regarding the One Council programme – which had made significant savings, but that was the next item on this agenda.

Referring to recommendation three, the Leader stated that this was important as the Walleys Quarry reserve which Council transferred more money to at the last meeting may still need to be tapped into as legal proceedings progressed.

The next stage for the revised MTFS would be to present it to the Finance, Assets and Performance Scrutiny Committee in January.

- Resolved:**
- (i) That the first draft savings proposals as set out in Appendix A and Appendix B to the report, be noted.
 - (ii) That the revised Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) funding gap (Appendix C), be noted.
 - (iii) That any surplus funds identified when setting the budget to be transferred to Reserves in order to achieve future financial resilience, be approved.
 - (iv) That the commencement date of the Budget Consultation period as mid-November to mid-December 2024, be noted.

- (v) That the first draft savings proposals be referred to the Finance, Assets and Performance Scrutiny Committee for their views (Appendix A and Appendix B).
- (vi) That the refreshed Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) (Appendix D) be referred to the Finance, Assets and Performance Scrutiny Committee for their views.
- (vii) That the Mid-Year Capital Estimates for 2024/25, be approved.
- (viii) That the proposed setting of Council Tax at 1.99 per cent for 2025/2026, be noted.

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5. ONE COUNCIL REVIEW AND NEXT STEPS

The Leader introduced a report providing a review of the One Council Programme and the next steps. The programme had arisen from how the Council had changed its operations during the Covid pandemic, working in different ways. The One Council Programme was then set up to make savings across the Council without affecting, but improving front line services.

In its present form, the One Council Programme would come to an end this year and through the life of the programme £1.17m in overall savings had been made each year. This had been achieved by looking at the processes of the Council including a revamped website with all services available on it. New technology had also helped out on the streets with streetscene, the dog wardens and town wardens all working together.

One Council would continue in other forms under three work streams – One Green Council, Digital One Council and Commercial One Council.

Councillor Sweeney stated that the One Council Programme had been the finest achievement of this administration where an initial spend of £1.2m had created savings of £1.17m each year.

Councillor Hutchison stated that Streetscene were first to review their processes. These included fly tipping removal and investigations, graffiti removal and litter bin emptying. Referring to the litter bin emptying, Councillor Hutchison stated that route planning/emptying had saved approximately 499 hours; £1,500 in fuel costs and approximately 3.14 tonnes of carbon. The One Council Programme allowed the Council to know where each litter bin was located digitally and when it required emptying.

- Resolved:**
- (i) That this report and the successes evidenced, be acknowledged.
 - (ii) That the lessons learned and the need to continuously

improve as the One Council programme closes, be acknowledged.

- (iii) That service level change and delivery of improvement moves into business as usual as teams use the skills they have learned through this process to challenge themselves and others to continue to make positive change, be noted.
- (iv) That the significant efforts of Council teams involved in the transformation, be celebrated and endorsed.
- (v) That it be agreed that Agile becomes the espoused project methodology across NULBC, along with knowledge of the tools used to deliver the One Council Programme – Refresher training be offered to Business Managers to ensure the required adoption.
- (vi) That it be approved that the Benefits Tracker continues to be used to capture opportunities organisation wide to ensure their delivery and inclusion into succession programmes and Efficiency Boards.
- (vii) That the Programme governance, approach and dashboard model is emulated in the One Council Green, Digital and Commercial follow-on Programmes, be agreed.
- (viii) That the report be referred to the Finance, Assets and Performance Scrutiny Committee.

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6. **PROCUREMENT OF CORPORATE CRM AND CASE MANAGEMENT SYSTEM**

The Leader introduced a report seeking approval to procure a corporate CRM and Case Management System alongside a suitable partner to support the Council to deliver the programme.

A confidential report was attached that went into more detail about the partner and funding.

The Leader stated that he welcomed this as a means of continuing to improve Customer Services in the Council and to make savings which would hopefully be reflected in next year's budget setting process.

Resolved: (i) That the Chief Executive in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for One Council, People and Partnerships be authorised to enter into a contract by direct award to procure a suitable, modern CRM system.

- (ii) That the Chief Executive in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for One Council, People and Partnerships, be authorised to enter into a contract by direct award with a suitably qualified CRM partner to design, deliver and support the CRM programme.
- (iii) That the implementation of a single CRM and case management solution across all Council services, be approved.

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7. **CAR PARKING STRATEGY 2019-29 UPDATE**

The Portfolio Holder for Finance, Town Centres and Growth introduced a report giving an update on the Council's Car Parking Strategy which set out the Council's plans and ambitions for its owned car parks, in particular the new Castle Car Park.

The Portfolio Holder stated that the Strategy should have been reviewed next in 2029 but, with the development of the new Castle Car Park and the closing of the Midway, it was being reviewed this year.

The Strategy highlighted free parking on 5 event days throughout the year, in conjunction with the BID; dates for this years' free parking on the run up to Christmas were noted as 21st and 22nd December, 28th and 29th December and 4th and 5th January.

The Leader welcomed this stating that service level car parks would be just as important as the new Castle Car Park.

The new car park was due to open early in the new year and was a signature development on the edge of town. It was a secure and well lit car park.

- Resolved:**
- (i) That the updates to the Council's Car Parking Strategy 2019-29, be approved.
 - (ii) That consultation on a Traffic Regulation Order amendment be commenced and the Deputy Chief Executive in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Finance, Town Centres and Growth be authorised to make any necessary recommendations and adopt the Traffic Regulation Order.
 - (iii) That the Christmas Period Free Parking times, as set out in the report, be noted and endorsed.
 - (iv) That it be approved that the Portfolio Member for Finance, Town Centres and Growth has flexibility in setting the Castle Car Park parking charges once open, as noted in the report.

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8. **FORWARD PLAN**

The Leader went through the Forward Plan.

Resolved: That the Forward Plan be received and noted.

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9. **URGENT BUSINESS**

There was no Urgent Business.

10. **DISCLOSURE OF EXEMPT INFORMATION**

Resolved:- That the public be excluded from the meeting during consideration if the following matter because it is likely that there will be disclosure of exempt information as defined in paragraphs contained within Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act, 1972.

11. **PROCUREMENT OF CORPORATE CRM AND CASE MANAGEMENT SYSTEM-
CONFIDENTIAL APPENDIX**

Consideration was given to the confidential appendix.

Resolved: That the confidential appendix be received and noted.

**Councillor Simon Tagg
Chair**

Meeting concluded at 2.38 pm