

**STATEMENT OF THE LEADER OF THE COUNCIL TO FULL COUNCIL –
22nd JANUARY 2025**

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 3rd December and 9th January, detailed below is a selection of decisions and other actions of the Leader and Cabinet since the last Leader's Statement.

2. **Walleys Quarry Odour Issue**

The Council has applied to the Planning Inspectorate to be a 'Principal Party' actively supporting the Environment Agency (EA) as it fights Walleys Quarry Ltd's appeal against the Closure Notice issue in November. The Council has compiled extensive evidence, including air quality readings and numerous complaints from residents over the last few years, which will be used to support the EA's case at the appeal inquiry.

There has been a significant spike in foul gas odours and complaints over Christmas and into the new year with all three monitor stations show historically high readings.

The EA in its update of 16th January stated: *"Since the beginning of January 2025, officers have been on site weekly and will continue to carry out regular inspections to ensure that WQL is making progress to complete the series of steps required by the Notice. As we have previously informed you (see 3 January 2025 update), we expect the odour outside the site to reduce as the additional gas infrastructure and capping required by the Notice are completed. The deadlines in the Notice are challenging but reasonable, based on the work which needs to be done. The capping work is due to be completed by 31 January 2025. The significant levels of emissions outside the site have been intensified by the recent period of cold, still weather, which leads to poor dispersion conditions that will magnify the impacts on the community."*

Using the latest monitoring data, UK Health Security Agency (UKHSA) have undertaken an interim risk assessment. They state: *"UKHSA is aware that residents living near Walleys Quarry Landfill have experienced increased odour pollution from the site throughout December, continuing into January."*

The air quality data supplied by the Environment Agency (EA), for our December risk assessment, shows that hydrogen sulphide levels over the Christmas period were substantially above the World Health Organization (WHO) odour annoyance guideline level, with continual periodic high spikes of emissions throughout this time. This is consistent with the increase in local complaints sent to the EA and local authority.

UKHSA felt it was important to carry out an interim risk assessment, due to increasing levels of odour pollution complaints, along with further raw data being received for early January, showing hydrogen sulphide levels periodically exceeding the WHO short-term health guideline value.

The assessment is that while the risk to long-term health is still likely to be small, there is an increased likelihood that some residents could experience short-term health impacts affecting breathing, irritation of the eyes, nose and mouth. These effects should be transient (reduce if exposure declines) however, these higher exposures may exacerbate pre-existing chronic lung conditions.

Anyone with health concerns or symptoms should contact NHS 111 or their local GP.”

Council Officers are continuing to work closely with the EA, UKHSA, County Council, Public Health, civil servants and others via the Strategic Coordinating Group which was set up in 2021 when Walleys became a serious incident. Walleys Quarry is the longest running incident that the Staffordshire Civil Contingencies Unit (CCU) has ever been involved in.

It should be noted that Walleys Quarry Ltd have referred to the capping work currently taking place as ‘temporary’.

There is currently no date set for the Appeal to be heard by the Planning Inspector. I believe it is now imperative that this happens sooner rather than later. I understand that the Secretary of State can ‘call in’ the appeal and expedite it earlier – this now needs to happen.

It is important in the meantime that residents still register complaints to the EA, as the main regulator, by calling 0800 807060, or online at: <https://report-walleys-quarry-smell.service.gov.uk/>

Complaints can also be registered with Newcastle-under-Lyme Borough Council at: <https://www.newcastle-staffs.gov.uk/walleys-quarry/report-problem-concern-walleys-quarry>

3. Borough Local Plan submitted

The new Borough Local Plan was submitted to the Planning Inspectorate before Christmas. This is the culmination of 4 years of work by the Council’s Planning team. It contains around 4,000 pages of documents detailing the draft Local Plan and supporting evidence including all submissions from consultees and the public for and against the proposals.

Councils are required by Government to have a rolling five-year supply of housing land and specifies which parts of the Borough will be earmarked for different types of development, including homes and employment land over the next 15 years.

By submitting the Plan at pace, it is not directly affected by the Government’s proposals to increase housebuilding quotas announced by the Deputy Prime Minister which would see an extra 2,000 homes required across the Borough.

As per the requirement by the Government, officers will be bringing forward the framework for the next Borough Local Plan in due course.

4. Draft Revenue & Capital Budget and Strategies 2025/26

Cabinet is proposing a balanced budget which prioritises essential front-line services again this year despite the backdrop of uncertainty in the economy and the national government’s incompetence.

The budget plans which will come before Full Council in February continue the investment in vital community services such as waste collection, street cleaning, and the operation of the J2

leisure centre and Brampton Museum. The Council is also committed to the regeneration of key areas like Ryecroft, Astley Place and Midway which will bring new homes, shops and businesses into Newcastle town centre. In Kidsgrove, jobs will soon be created at Chatterley Valley West employment site and enhancements to the town centre, the canal route and station are in train.

Despite financial pressures and a cut of 4% in core funding by the new Government, the Council has managed to keep the council tax increase to a minimal 7p per week for most residents, keeping the pledge given by its administration to keep the council tax increase below 2%.

Our approach not only supports the local economy but also fosters a strong sense of community with the roll out of Civic Pride initiatives across the Borough, backed by a new Civic Pride Investment Fund.

5. **Car Parking Strategy 2019-29 Update**

Cabinet endorsed the latest update to the Car Parking Strategy which outlined the progress and future plans covering the period up to 2029. Key updates include the development of the new replacement multi-storey Castle Car Park which will feature electric vehicle charging points and modern amenities and enhance user experience when compared with the outdated Midway. Castle Car Park is due to open by the end of January.

The Strategy aims to meet the current and future needs of town centre visitors, businesses, and residents whilst enabling the development of the Midway.

The parking concessions over the Christmas period were well received and the £1 after 1pm remains in place on surface level car parks around the town centre.

6. **Navigation House Refurbishment Contractor Award**

The Council has taken a bold step to advancing its efforts to end rough sleeping in the Borough with the planned conversion of a building near the town centre into a 'homeless hub.' The facility, to be known as Navigation House, will provide safe, secure emergency accommodation and practical support for rough sleepers including showers, laundry facilities, and connections to various services.

The project, funded via the UK Government's Shared Prosperity Fund, aims to offer immediate help without appointments, reducing the need for emergency intervention. The aim is to help those most vulnerable members of our community in a moment of most need, and change the perception of our town centre.

7. **Update on Decarbonisation of the Council's Operational Buildings and Fleet**

Cabinet received a report detailing a sustained reduction in the Council's carbon emissions. A 35% cut over the last few years brings the total reduction in emissions to nearly 70% since the start of the Council's journey. This significant achievement is part of the Council's broader Sustainable Environment Strategy which aims to reach net zero carbon emissions across its operations by 2030.

Key initiatives contributing to this success include the installation of over 100 solar panels on Council buildings which generate substantial green energy and reduce reliance on grid electricity. Additionally, the Council has transitioned its heavy goods vehicle fleet to Hydrotreated Vegetable Oil (HVO), a low-carbon fuel derived from renewable materials like rapeseed and sunflower oil. These efforts are complemented by ongoing projects to minimise waste, increase recycling and offset residual emissions via tree planting.

The Council's proactive approach has not only made great strides in reducing its carbon emissions to combat climate change, but also sets to bring other efficiencies and reduce costs that will help to create budget savings in the future.

8. **Forward Plan**

The Forward Plan can be found at: -

[Browse plans - Cabinet, 2025 – Newcastle-under-Lyme Borough Council](#)

Councillor Simon Tagg
Leader of the Council