

CABINET

Thursday, 9th January, 2025
Time of Commencement: 2.00 pm

[View the agenda here](#)

[Watch the meeting here](#)

Present: Councillor Simon Tagg (Chair)

Councillors: Sweeney Fear Hutchison
Heesom Skelding

Officers: Gordon Mole Chief Executive
Simon McEneny Deputy Chief Executive
Sarah Wilkes Service Director - Finance /
S151 Officer
Andrew Bird Service Director - Sustainable
Environment
Geoff Durham Civic & Member Support Officer
Paul Dutton Senior Media Officer

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 3rd December 2024 be agreed as a true and accurate record.

3. WALLEYS QUARRY ODOUR UPDATE

The Leader introduced the report on Walleys Quarry sharing that the operator had appealed the closure notice issued by the Environment Agency.

The Chief Executive presented the report including the latest complaints data and next steps in the context of the appeal process.

Members raised questions and responses were provided as follows.

The Deputy Leader enquired about paragraph 2.2.1 of the report, noting that the odours seemed to have got worse since the closure notice six weeks ago.

The Chief Executive advised that the Environment Agency had set a timetable for the operator with activities to complete within a set timeframe. The Council would continue to monitor activities and encourage residents to report incidents.

Cllr Fear emphasized the importance of optimizing the data and evidence collected by officers along with working closely with the Environment Agency.

Cabinet - 09/01/25

The Leader asked if the Council was keeping monitoring for further breaches of the abatement notice since the one recorded in Spring 2024 and would these be noticed if they would be communicated to the operator as part of the legal action as well as to the public.

The Chief Executive confirmed that it was indeed the case along with making sure that the data was calibrated and correct.

The Leader commented that it would be interesting to hear from officers when the data would be available so that this can be shared with the public and be used against the appeal process.

The Leader also reiterated the need for residents to continue reporting cases.

- Resolved:**
- (i) That the contents of this update report be noted.
 - (ii) That the request for the Council to be a principal party in the appeal process as set out in section 2 of this report, be noted.
 - (iii) That, if participation on the terms set out in recommendation 2 was to be agreed by the Planning Inspectorate, the participation of the Council in that process be endorsed.

[Watch the debate here](#)

4. DRAFT REVENUE AND CAPITAL BUDGET AND STRATEGIES 2025/26

The Deputy Leader introduced the Draft Revenue and Capital Budgets and Strategies 2025/26, highlighting on the fact this was prepared by local people for residents of the borough.

The Leader commented that the budget would be submitted to the Finance, Administration and Performance Scrutiny Committee, then back to Cabinet and finally to Full Council in February. The focus was on the regeneration of the town centre and investment in front line services and leisure.

Cllr Hutchison gave some insights from the Efficiency Board and said savings had been achieved with improved facilities and no redundancies.

Cllr Fear shared his enthusiasm about the budget and the fact the Council had managed to deliver on keeping the Council tax low and maintaining services.

Cllr Skelding also showed support to the budget and report.

Members expressed concerns about the Devolution White Paper, which would be discussed under item 11 as urgent business.

- Resolved:**
- (i) That the progress on the completion of the Revenue (Appendix 1) and Capital Budgets (Appendix 4) be noted.
 - (ii) That the updated Medium Term Financial Strategy 2025/26 to 2029/30 (Appendix 2) be noted.
 - (iii) That the strategy for ensuring a balanced revenue outturn position for 2024/25 be noted.

(iv) That the calculation of the Council Tax base and the Council Tax increase to be proposed for 2025/26 of 1.99% per Band D equivalent property be noted.

(v) That the risk assessment at Appendix 3 and the Section 151 Officer's recommendation on the level of reserves and contingencies provisionally required to be maintained in 2025/26 be noted.

(vi) That the draft Capital Strategy (Appendix 5) for 2025/35 be noted.

(vii) That the draft Treasury Management Strategy (Appendix 6) for 2025/26 be noted.

(viii) That the draft Investment Strategy (Appendix 7) for 2025/26 be noted.

(ix) That the draft Commercial Strategy (Appendix 8) for 2025/26 be noted.

(x) That the Asset Management Strategy (Appendix 9) for 2023/28 be noted.

(xi) That the draft Budget and Council Tax proposals be referred to Finance, Assets and Performance Scrutiny Committee for comment before the final proposals are considered at Cabinet on 4 February 2025.

[Watch the debate here](#)

5. **SCALE OF FEES AND CHARGES 2025/26**

The Deputy Leader introduced the report on the Scale of Fees and Charges for 2025/26, highlighting that the Council had always endeavoured to keep the parking charges as reasonable as possible and that the system in place was to control parking and traffic rather than to generate income.

Cllr Hutchison commented on the improvements introduced in relation to bereavement services and environmental health.

Resolved: That the fees and charges proposed to apply from 1st April, 2025, as set out in Appendix 1, be approved.

[Watch the debate here](#)

6. **NAVIGATION HOUSE REFURBISHMENT CONTRACTOR AWARD**

The Portfolio Holder for Community Safety and Wellbeing introduced the report on the procurement of a contractor for the refurbishment of the Navigation House as a homeless hub and accommodation. The Portfolio Holder outlined what Navigation House would provide and also the benefits to the wider community.

The Leader commented on the aspiration to eliminate homelessness by 2025. That had been a commitment by the previous Government but no such commitment had come from the present Government.

The Deputy Leader referred Members to paragraph 8.4 of the report which outlined the various funding streams. He fully supported this, stating that it was a really strong initiative.

The Leader stated that this Council, over many years, had a proud record of homelessness and getting people off the streets.

Resolved: (i) That the Deputy Chief Executive, in consultation with the relevant Portfolio Holder be authorised to sign any such agreements as may be necessary to complete the refurbishment of Navigation House for its use as a Homeless Hub and accommodation.

(ii) That an amendment to the Housing Assistance Policy to include discretionary applications for creating 'accessible' supported housing provision for disabled people in housing need, be authorised.

(iii) That the allocation of funding as set out in the report, be authorised.

[Watch the debate here](#)

7. UPDATE ON DECARBONISATION OF THE COUNCIL'S OPERATIONAL BUILDINGS AND FLEET

The Leader stated that this item also included the annual report on the Council's climate change aspirations.

The Portfolio Holder for Sustainable Environment introduced the report, updating Cabinet on the progress in decarbonising the Council's operational buildings and fleet.

There was currently an application with the National Lottery for infrastructure upgrades at Brampton Museum.

The Commercial Delivery Sustainable Working Group had led the installation of solar panels on offices at Bradwell Crematorium, Kidsgrove Town Hall and Keele Cemetery and would have a £20,000 per annum saving ongoing, in the electricity costs.

The Planning Sustainable Environment Working Group had embedded bio-diversity net gain into the new Local Plan and Housing Development Sites. Section 106 Agreements would ensure bio-diversity net gain on appropriate sites or locally, within the Borough.

The Leader stated that this was a great progression on the Borough's plans to get to net zero by 2030. It was also helping the Council with efficiency savings.

The Deputy Leader stated that a 68% reduction was an impressive achievement. The incremental approach was working well.

Resolved: (a) That the progress achieved from 2009/10 in decarbonising the Councils operational buildings and fleet by 68.37% and 35% during the past twelve months, be noted.

- (ii) That the progress made be referred to the Health, Wellbeing and Environment Scrutiny Committee for scrutiny and comments.
- (iii) That the key activities being undertaken by individual service areas, currently and planned for 2025/26, be noted.

[Watch the debate here](#)

8. **MEMORIAL HEADSTONE POLICY**

The Portfolio Holder for Sustainable Environment introduced a report regarding a review of the Council's memorialisation rules and Regulations and seeking approval for changes in memorial sizes and the Terms and Conditions for Memorial Masons.

The size restrictions would mean that there would be uniformity, rather than having a higher headstone next to a standard sized one. Memorial stonemasons had confirmed that the majority of people purchasing headstones (90%) were happy with the Council's current size restrictions. They had also advised that an increase in the restrictions to 40 inches would accommodate approximately 99% of requests.

The Leader invited three public speakers to come forward.

Dr Siobhan Spencer stated that there were many people who would welcome less restrictive rules. She wondered if it was the safety aspect that was the reason for the changes and asked if there was a reason not to increase the height to the neighbouring stones in Stoke on Trent which was five feet.

Lisa Maughan stated that larger memorials would allow for more personalised designs and increasing the height restrictions would ensure that the cemeteries were all inclusive of all local community values.

Mary Maughan stated that the headstones completed a persons life and should be a fitting memorial to them.

The Portfolio Holder stated that the Council had considered the changes to the memorial headstone size and those stated were considered to be best for Newcastle sites and communities. The proposed increase to 40" would allow for more shaped headstones and additional words for inscriptions.

Resolved: That the changes in memorial sizes, as detailed in the report, alongside the Terms and Conditions – be approved.

[Watch the debate here](#)

9. **FORWARD PLAN**

The Leader went through the Forward Plan

Resolved: That the Forward Plan be received and noted.

[Watch the debate here](#)

10. URGENT BUSINESS - DEVOLUTION AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT REORGANISATION : WHITE PAPER

This item had been brought as a matter of urgent business due to the timescales.

The Leader introduced a report, seeking the views and agreement of Cabinet in setting out the position of the Council following the release of the English Devolution White Paper in December, 2024.

The Staffordshire Leaders' Board had been working together on a Devolution Deal as sought by the previous Government who had asked for local authorities to come forward with proposals for their areas, to allow the devolution of powers and finances. The new Government had put out a request for expressions of interest and in September, 2024, the Leaders' Board - including this Council put forward an expression of interest for a Deal based on skills as outlined at paragraph 1.5 of the Cabinet report. In addition, it was stated that a Mayor was not wanted and that the Board wanted to keep the existing boundaries of local government.

Just before Christmas it was announced that this would also include local government reorganisation and that councils should be of a minimum of 500,000 people and councils had been asked to submit proposals.

The Leader stated that this Borough had a long proud history and this Council had fought off reorganisation attempts before. Looking at the Government figures of 500,000, a North Staffordshire came to the fore again which would be a merger with Stoke City Council and possibly Staffordshire Moorlands District Council.

This Council did have a bid in for a Devolution Deal and the Leader stated that he would be pushing that that be reaffirmed.

The Leader proposed an additional recommendation - to submit a paper to Full Council later this month.

The Portfolio Holder for Strategic Planning stated that these were proposals that nobody had voted on and had no mandate. In addition, it had not been in the Labour Party's manifesto or been debated upon anywhere. It was not devolution but drawing power upwards and therefore a centralisation programme. Representation per council in those areas would almost half and nothing would be 'local' anymore.

The Deputy Leader stated that this had been presented at the Local Government Association and it had not gone down very well. The Deputy Leader questioned how removing a layer of democracy would make things more democratic.

The Portfolio Holder for Sustainable Environment stated that Newcastle's history traced back to 1173 and had been celebrated in 2023 with the 850th Anniversary of the granting of a Royal Charter.

The Portfolio Holder for Community Safety and Wellbeing stated that she was proud to be a resident of this Borough and there had been great opposition to the proposal from everyone that she had spoken with.

The Portfolio Holder for Leisure, Culture and Heritage stated that Newcastle currently had 44 Councillors and that number could potentially drop to 12. This would be a large drop in representation for residents. Services such as the Borough Museum and J2 were valuable to the Borough and they could be lost with reorganisation.

The Leader stated that there was no evidence that a reorganisation would save money. No resource implications had been put forward by the Government, no costs or timescales or what would happen with investments currently taking place such as those here in Newcastle.

This Council had already saved large amounts of money through working with its partners. The Leader stated that this Council vowed to fight the Government's plans to scrap this Borough and wished to see services delivered locally for its communities.

The Leader asked Cabinet members to join him in going across to the office of the local MP and deliver a copy of the 'Lost Charter - 850 Years of the Borough'.

- Resolved:**
- (i) That the contents and implications of the English Devolution White Paper be noted.
 - (ii) That Cabinet pledges to stand up for the historic independence of the Borough.
 - (iii) That Cabinet continue to work through the Staffordshire Leaders Board to develop and deliver devolution as set out in the Board's submission to Government in September 2024.
 - (iv) That the petitioning of residents in relation to the preservation of the Borough be supported.
 - (v) That Newcastle-Under-Lyme's Members of Parliament be called upon to support the Borough's preservation, and that they engage with Government Ministers in stating the case for the Borough.
 - (vi) That the Leader & Chief Executive write to the Deputy Prime Minister and relevant Ministers stating the Council's position.
 - (vii) That a report from the Leader of the Council be submitted to Full Council on 22 January, 2025, setting out the details of the Government's Devolution and Local Government Reorganisation White Paper and how this Council can stand up for the independence of its Borough.

[Watch the debate here](#)

11. **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.

12. **SCHEDULE OF FEES AND CHARGES 2025/26 - CONFIDENTIAL APPENDIX**

Consideration was given to the confidential appendix.

Cabinet - 09/01/25

Resolved: That the confidential appendix be received and noted.

13. **NAVIGATION HOUSE REFURBISHMENT CONTRACTOR AWARD -
CONFIDENTIAL REPORT**

Consideration was given to the confidential report.

Resolved: That the recommendation, contained within the confidential report be agreed

**Councillor Simon Tagg
Chair**

Meeting concluded at 3.19 pm