

## **STATEMENT OF THE LEADER OF THE COUNCIL TO FULL COUNCIL – 23<sup>rd</sup> JULY 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 6<sup>th</sup> May, 3<sup>rd</sup> June and 8<sup>th</sup> July, 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 Issues**

Works continue to be undertaken on site by the Environment Agency's (EA) appointed contractors. Odour complaints received from residents continue to remain low, with at time of writing, five in July. Officers continue to monitor the site and investigate issues raised by residents.

Levels of hydrogen sulphide around the site have continued to be below the World Health Organisation (WHO) odour annoyance guideline value at all three MMFs in the last monitoring period.

In June I chaired a briefing meeting with partners on recent activity at Walleys Quarry and have also undertaken a site visit to see firsthand the works being carried out. Following the announcement by the EA that the MMF hydrogen sulphide monitoring facility at Silverdale Pumping Station is being removed to enable schedule works to take place by Severn Trent, I have sought assurance from EA officers that, if any issues arise, they will bring additional resources back to monitor the site.

New multi-agency groups have been established to move on from the initial incident to restoration tasks for key agencies to help support the ultimate goal of restoration. Council officers are playing their full part in the recovery groups.

The gas odours from Walleys Quarry Landfill remain the longest-running incident in Staffordshire's recent history, and I would like to thank Council officers, the response services

and particularly the Chair of the multi-agency co-ordinating group, the Deputy Chief Fire Officer, for his dedication and commitment over a long period of time.

Regular reporting will continue through the standing Walleys Quarry item on every Cabinet agenda.

### 3. **Fields In Trust**

Cabinet has taken a significant step towards safeguarding green spaces in the Borough by approving applications to the Fields in Trust legal protection programme. This initiative will see 88 much-loved parks and open space legally protected from future development through a Deed of Dedication spaces.

This legal safeguard ensures that the green spaces will remain permanently accessible for public use, supporting recreation, wellbeing, and biodiversity for generations to come. The decision reflects our recognition of the vital role green spaces play in promoting physical and mental health, strengthening community use, and enhancing the local environment.

It reflects the Council's commitment to listening to residents, many of whom have told us how important these areas are to their daily lives. Newcastle Borough is proud to be among the first councils in Staffordshire to pursue this level of protection, and we will continue to champion the value of our many much-loved green spaces.

### 4. **Devolution & Forced Local Government Reorganisation (FLGR) Update**

Following delays in receiving feedback from the Government on the interim plans submitted by councils across Staffordshire, the Council continues to take a firm stance against forced local government reorganisation (FLGR). The Council remains committed to preserving the existing two-tier system but, if reorganisation is imposed, advocates for a Newcastle-under-Lyme Borough Unitary Authority as the preferred option. Crucially, the Council has emphasised that any changes to local governance should be decided by residents through a borough-wide referendum, and it continues to oppose proposals for a whole North Staffordshire Unitary Council.

The Government has now requested detailed proposals for unitary models to be submitted by November 2025, and stated that, under the 'most ambitious timelines', elections to 'shadow' unitary councils may take place in May 2027, with existing councils scrapped and new councils 'going live' on 1 April 2028.

It is deeply regrettable that the delivery of Devolution is facing significant delays due to the Government's preoccupation with FLGR. The Council supports the creation of a Strategic Authority to address region-wide priorities such as transport, infrastructure, skills, and jobs, an approach consistent with the submission made by the Staffordshire Leaders Board in September 2024. It is important to note that a Strategic Authority layer would not be responsible for delivering day-to-day local services to residents.

Any delay represents a missed opportunity. Other areas with Strategic Authorities are already receiving targeted funding for regeneration, which our Borough and the rest of Staffordshire are currently missing out on.

### 5. **Kidsgrove Town Deal Update**

Cabinet has endorsed the next phase of the Kidsgrove Town Deal, which continues to deliver real and lasting benefits for the area. Building on the success of completed projects such as the refurbished Kidsgrove Sports Centre, the preparation of Chatterley Valley for job creation, and community enhancements like the Newchapel Pump Track, an additional £1.9 million has now been allocated to support a new package of initiatives. These include the development of three enterprise units at The Meadows, offering affordable space for small businesses and start-ups, and the creation of a community learning centre at The King's Church of England Academy, which will provide skills training and educational opportunities for residents of all ages. The

programme also includes towpath improvements along the Trent & Mersey Canal, enhancing links between the canal, the town centre, and the Academy, alongside public realm and highway upgrades in key areas such as Meadows Road, Station Road, Market Street, The Avenue, and Heathcote Street. These projects reflect the Town Deal Board's commitment to creating a more vibrant, accessible, and connected town centre for everyone in Kidsgrove.

Following confirmation from Government that no funding will be made available for remediation works on the station car park, the Town Deal Board has asked East Midlands Railway (EMR) to bring forward alternative plans for the refurbishment of the existing station building, which can proceed without the need for remediation. This ensures that there are further improvements to the station environment for local residents and commuters.

## **6. Financial & Performance Review Report – 4<sup>th</sup> Quarter 2024/25**

Cabinet received a report detailing council performance to the end of March 2025. At the end of Quarter 4 the Council had met 65% of its more ambitious targets for 2024-25 and maintained or improved its performance in over half of all measures.

Planning performance remains strong with major and non-major applications processed well ahead of government standards. The Council is making good progress on enforcement activity responding to residents' concerns. Street cleanliness levels remain at a high standard, and this has been bolstered through the new Civic Pride action days to make our borough cleaner, safer and friendlier.

Residual waste collection rates remain low. Membership at Jubilee 2 continues to grow and the health referral programmes are achieving real wellbeing improvements for users. Staff sickness absence continues its year-on-year downward trend through proactive management and a range of employee wellbeing initiatives. Our town centre remains busy with market stall occupancy rates high.

The Council continues to monitor performance and uses this data to stretch targets to ensure continuous improvement to service delivery over the next year.

## **7. Civic Pride update**

Cabinet has endorsed the draft Civic Pride Empowerment Strategy for public consultation, marking an important step in the Council's efforts to strengthen community spirit and pride across the Borough. The strategy builds on the Civic Pride campaign which has focused on clean streets and well-maintained parks and green spaces and asks how people feel about where they live, and how we can work together to build a stronger, more connected community. The draft sets out a series of priorities, including enhancing the appearance of public spaces, celebrating local heritage and culture, and encouraging volunteering and community-led initiatives that bring people together.

A key part of this work is the launch of the Civic Pride Investment Fund, which offers small grants to support local projects that help make our neighbourhoods cleaner, safer, and more welcoming. I encourage community groups and residents to apply - whether it's for a litter-picking scheme, a community garden, or a local event that brings neighbours together. Applications can be submitted online at [Civic Pride Application Form | Data Processing Statement – Newcastle-under-Lyme Borough Council](#)

## **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**