

**STATEMENT OF THE LEADER OF THE COUNCIL TO FULL COUNCIL –  
24<sup>th</sup> SEPTEMBER 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 Meeting**

Cabinet met on 2<sup>nd</sup> September, detailed below is a selection of decisions and other actions of the Leader and Cabinet since the last Leader's Statement.

2. **Walleys Quarry Landfill Odour Issues**

In August, four odour complaints were received by the Council. So far in September there has been one complaint, indicating that the works carried out on site are reducing the odours and emissions. These measures being implemented by the Environment Agency (EA) will continue over coming months and be monitored as we enter the Autumn/Winter period.

Following the resolution of last Full Council, the then Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs was asked to provide a timetable for a public inquiry into the actions of the EA through the Walleys Quarry process and for confirmation that he would provide a guarantee that all costs of remediation would be met by UK Government. At time of writing, no response has been received from Ministers, and I have written to the new Secretary of State to seek an urgent response and her commitment to moving forward with restoration of the site.

The Member of Parliament for Newcastle-under-Lyme was asked for specific assistance in getting the relevant Government departments and agencies to engage with the multi-agency co-ordinating group; to call for Government to play an active role in the safe restoration of the site; and to join calls for a public inquiry into the site and its regulation. There has to date been no response.

The Chief Executive at the EA was asked to commit real and lasting financial support for the restoration of the site; that continuous monitoring would continue to be in place; and for a public meeting to be held. EA officers have advised that the monitoring equipment around Walleys Quarry (MMFs) will be retained in situ for the foreseeable future. Commitment to a public meeting and a meeting of the Liaison Committee is still being sought.

Multi-agency officer meetings will commence this month on how to secure the effective management, monitoring and restoration of the site over the long term, together with ensuring effective public engagement and communication.

The Council will continue to press for a solution which sees permanent capping and restoration of the site and will challenge vigorously any options to reopen the site as an operational waste facility.

3. **Medium Term Financial Strategy 2026-27 to 2030-31**

The Council continues to take a prudent and forward-looking approach to its financial planning, as set out in the Medium Term Financial Strategy driven by our long-standing Efficiency Board process. Despite ongoing uncertainty around the Government's financial settlement, a budget will be prepared responsibly to ensure the Borough remains resilient and well-positioned to deliver core services and strategic priorities while keeping Council Tax low.

The MTFS outlines a clear framework for managing resources, addressing inflationary pressures, and investing in regeneration, environmental sustainability, and community safety and wellbeing. We are committed to maintaining a balanced budget while protecting frontline services, and we will continue to engage with Government to secure the funding our residents deserve. As always, our budget-setting process will be transparent, evidence-led, and focused on delivering value for money across the council's services.

4. **Kidsgrove Town Deal Update and Contract Awards**

The Kidsgrove Town Deal continues to progress, with the Town Deal Board endorsing key projects including: New enterprise units on The Meadows with public realm improvements, a new Community Learning Hub at the King's CE Academy and improved canal access, these initiatives will breathe further new life into the town. We've already seen the positive impact of completed projects like the refurbishment and reopening of the sports centre, the well-used pump track at Newchapel and job opportunities at Chatterley Valley West. The Council remains committed to ensuring every pound of the £16.9 million Town Deal funding delivers real value for the Kidsgrove area.

Following necessary revisions due to the lack of government funding for remediation of ground conditions, the railway station refurbishment is proceeding with a focus on modernising the existing building and enhancing accessibility. This revised scheme ensures that Town Deal funding is retained and directed towards meaningful local improvements. The Town Deal remains a vital catalyst for regeneration in Kidsgrove, and I welcome the continued collaboration with partners to realise its full potential.

5. **Newcastle-under-Lyme Borough Local Plan 2020-40**

Cabinet received an update about progress with the Local Plan. Officers have been working with the Planning Inspectorate to move the process forward. Following the public hearings held in May and June, the Inspector has confirmed that the Borough Council has met its legal obligations and has proposed a realistic timetable for development. The Inspector has accepted the case for limited release of land from the Green Belt under exceptional circumstances to support job creation and housing needs.

Officers have now supplied further detail to support the Inspector's final decisions. Importantly, the Inspector has also acknowledged our commitment to protecting key areas such as Lyme Park and maintaining appropriate car parking provision in the town centre. This is a complex and rigorous process, but one that is essential to securing long-term certainty for our residents, businesses and communities while protecting green space across Newcastle-under-Lyme. Given the Government's demand for 2,000 extra houses this will be more difficult to achieve in future Local Plans. We remain focused on delivering a sound and sustainable Local Plan that reflects local priorities and supports future sustainable growth.

6. **Forced Local Government Reorganisation (FLGR) Update**

The Borough Council continues to stand firm against Stoke-on-Trent City Council's deeply controversial proposal to merge our Borough with Stoke-on-Trent into a 'North Staffordshire Unitary'. This reckless plan threatens to erase 852 years of local history, identity, and independence. I've made our position crystal clear in our dealings with Stoke, other Councils and the government and will continue to fight for the interests of our residents.

Stoke-on-Trent's financial instability is well known, having required a £42.2 million government bailout earlier in the year. Merger would risk Newcastle Borough residents being forced to absorb Stoke's debt and dysfunction, undermining the sound financial management we've worked hard to maintain.

Unfortunately, Members of Parliament who represent the Borough voted recently for the very legislation that enables forced council mergers. This was followed quickly by chaos in the government with the Deputy Prime Minister, Angela Rayner, the architect of this merger policy, forced to resign over breaches of the ministerial code and subsequently in the reshuffle the whole ministerial team working on FLGR was sacked. I believe this gives the government the perfect opportunity to think again about this unpopular policy.

Residents across Newcastle Borough have given a resounding thumbs down to FLGR with over 8,500 people signing a petition. I'm proud to be leading the fight to Save Our Borough on behalf of the Council. We demand honesty, transparency, and respect for our community - not backroom deals and forced mergers. Our Borough residents deserve better.

7. **Financial and Performance Review Report – First Quarter 2025-26**

Cabinet received a report detailing first Quarter performance. 78% of measures achieved their targets with 11 showing an improvement on the same period last year.

A review of targets for 2025/26 ensures performance metrics remain in line with the Council Plan, and the rightfully high expectations of residents.

Officer sickness absence is at its lowest rate for four years, reflecting the efficiency of the Council's wellbeing initiatives and proactive support for staff welfare. Residual waste collections continue to be low with a high percentage of successful collections noted. A very slight dip in the percentage of materials collected for composting and recycling is explained by the dry summer leading to less garden waste.

The majority of projects continue to progress as expected with a number reaching completion in the quarter; we continue to see strong engagement in our Civic Pride Campaign and both Town Deal programmes continue towards delivery.

8. **Forward Plan**

The Forward Plan can be found at: -

[Browse plans - Cabinet, 2025 | Modern.gov | Connexus](#)

**Councillor Simon Tagg**  
**Leader of the Council**