

STATEMENT OF THE LEADER OF THE COUNCIL TO FULL COUNCIL –
21st JANUARY 2026

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 14th October, 4th November, 2nd December 2025 and 13th January 2026, detailed below is a selection of decisions and other actions of the Leader and Cabinet since the last Leader's Statement.

2. Walley's Quarry Landfill Update

Over the early winter period conditions at Walley's Quarry have remained stable, with a very low level of complaints to both the Council and the Environment Agency (EA), all of which are investigated by officers. The EA and its contractors continue to carry out immediate works needed at the site, including to bring the leachate plant back into use and in the meantime tankering leachate off-site for safe disposal. Officers monitored conditions particularly over the Christmas and New Year period, which was the first in many years where residents were able to enjoy an uninterrupted festive break.

Following a meeting of the Health, Wellbeing and Environment Scrutiny Committee in November 2025, at which concerns were raised that the Council had not received a response from Newcastle's Member of Parliament in respect of Government support and action for the future restoration of the site, a further letter was sent from myself and the Chair of the Scrutiny Committee, repeating our call for the Government to play an active role in the safe restoration and remediation of the site; and supporting this Council's call for a Public Inquiry into the site and failures in its regulation by governmental agencies.

Multi-agency meetings have been convened to continue to develop how to secure the effective management, monitoring and restoration of the site over the long term, together with ensuring effective public engagement and communication. I chaired a political co-ordination meeting on 12th December, attended by the Member of Parliament, interim Leader of Staffordshire County Council and the Deputy Police, Fire & Crime Commissioner, at which calls for a public inquiry, public engagement meeting at an appropriate time and support from Government were made again.

3. UK Shared Prosperity Fund

The UK Shared Prosperity Fund continues to pay dividends in strengthening communities, supporting local businesses, and improving skills across the Borough.

Cabinet received a report detailing that through UKSPF investment, nearly 85,000 people have directly benefited from community-focused projects, local heritage initiatives, programmes tackling social isolation and improving the environment. At the same time, the fund has provided non-financial support to 445 local enterprises and reached 993 individuals through business-focused interventions, helping to boost entrepreneurship, drive economic resilience, and widen opportunities for growth.

The borough continues to make full use of the previous UKSPF funding, but it is disappointing that future funding has been cut by the Government.

4. Local Government Reorganisation Update

The Council has sent a firm and united message to Ministers, setting out its position on the government forced local government reorganisation agenda. Following the special full Council meeting last November, I delivered our detailed 200-page submission in which we made clear that plans to dismantle Staffordshire's successful two-tier system and impose unitary councils are unjustified, unwanted and lack public support.

Standing with residents, many of whom have signed the 10,500 strong Save our Borough petition, we are urging Ministers to rethink, we have also taken responsible steps to prepare for any forced change. Should reorganisation go ahead, the council's preferred option is a single unitary authority based on Newcastle-under-Lyme Borough's existing borough boundaries - an approach that would protect local identity, maintain democratic accountability, and minimise disruption for residents and businesses. The Council remains committed to delivering high-quality, cost-effective services at the most local level, and will continue to champion the best interests of our borough throughout this process.

The Council remains fully committed to holding the all-out Borough elections in May 2026 as planned. We have made it clear to Government that there is no justification for delaying or cancelling these elections, and that maintaining the established democratic timetable is essential for accountability, stability, and public confidence in local decision-making.

5. Draft Housing and Homelessness Strategy 2026-30

The Council's Housing and Homelessness Strategy has been refreshed to provide a forward-looking framework to improve housing quality, prevent homelessness, and support some of the most vulnerable members of our community.

The new Strategy responds to significant changes in the national and local landscape, particularly the cost-of-living pressures, and focuses on three clear priorities: strengthening the link between housing and health, creating a vibrant and prosperous housing market with more affordable homes, and continuing early-intervention work to prevent homelessness and rough sleeping.

The Strategy aims to raise housing standards, improve energy efficiency across the Borough, widen affordable housing options, and ensure people in housing need can access appropriate support.

By issuing the draft Strategy for public consultation, Cabinet are inviting residents and partners to help shape a plan that will guide our approach through to 2030 and ensure that the Borough remains a place where everyone has access to a safe, stable and suitable home.

6. Newcastle Town Deal update

Newcastle-under-Lyme's regeneration is accelerating at pace, with council investment building on Town Deal funding to drive major transformations across key sites in the Borough.

Construction at Astley Place is well underway, turning the former York Place into a vibrant new neighbourhood featuring homes, shops and a community music venue, while the former Midway multi-storey car park and Ryecroft site are being redeveloped into high-quality residential accommodation. Work to unlock the former Zanzibar site will deliver new homes and enterprise units and, in Knutton, new housing and the expansion of the Enterprise Centre and a village hall are progressing. Meanwhile, sustainable travel improvements - from new pedestrian and cycle crossings to real-time passenger information and the introduction of the K-bus route have been delivered, with the next phase including the transformation of Newcastle's bus station into a modern, welcoming gateway.

The council and its partners, along with developer Capital & Centric, are pushing forward confidently, ensuring that this once-in-a-generation regeneration continues to create a thriving community and a more prosperous future for residents, businesses and visitors.

7. Kidsgrove Train Station update

The transformation of Kidsgrove Station is now on track, with a £2.7 million modernisation scheme set to deliver a cleaner, safer and more welcoming gateway for residents, commuters and visitors.

The revised project backed by Cabinet and Kidsgrove Town Deal Board, led by East Midlands Railway and Network Rail, focuses on upgrading the main station building, renovating the Island Building on platform two, and enhancing the wider station environment. Improvements will include refurbished waiting rooms, modern toilet and kitchen facilities, new windows and doors, sustainable features such as solar panels and an air-source heat pump, clearer customer information screens and signage, a new secure cycle store, and a revised car park layout with EV charging and improved accessibility.

These upgrades will not only modernise the station facilities but also strengthen Kidsgrove's role as a connected and accessible town centre, supporting wider regeneration projects across the town.

8. Civic Pride In Our Borough

The Council's Civic Pride programme continues into the new year, with a calendar of Borough-wide events for 2026 building on a successful first year. Civic Pride brings together the Council, Aspire Housing, Staffordshire Police and other partners under the #PrideInNUL banner to create cleaner, safer and more welcoming neighbourhoods. Throughout the year, coordinated activities, from community litter-picks and safety drop-ins to walkabouts, maintenance work and bicycle security marking, will take place across the Borough, starting in Westbury Park and Northwood in January and concluding in Maer and Whitmore in November.

This work reflects the Council's commitment to fostering stronger community cohesion, empowering residents of all ages to get involved, and celebrating the unique character of each local area.

The Council is preparing a first-class bid to become a UK Town of Culture in 2028, showcasing our rich heritage, creativity and longstanding civic pride on a national stage. With award-winning cultural assets like the Brampton Museum, Apedale Heritage Centre and the New Vic Theatre, University and college alongside the legacy of our 850th anniversary celebrations, we are ready to demonstrate why our Borough is uniquely placed to take on this honour.

9. Progress of the Council's Sustainable Environment Strategy

Our commitment to a cleaner, greener Borough continues to gather pace through a series of ambitious environmental initiatives.

Cabinet have endorsed the county-wide Local Nature Recovery Strategy, helping to reverse the decline of wildlife by restoring habitats, improving ecological connectivity and embedding nature recovery across Council policies, building on our long-standing work including 34,000 new trees planted over the past five years. Alongside this, extensive Borough Tree Planting Strategy continues to expand, with a further 3,000 trees being planted across eight new sites this year to boost biodiversity and support carbon capture.

Cabinet have agreed to advancing a three-stage plan to create the new Lyme Countryside Park on the border of Silverdale & Keele, protecting two-thirds of the former golf course as public green space, enhancing access to nature, and supporting our wider habitat, woodland and open-space improvements for years to come.

Through our work with Fields in Trust, more than 80 Council owned parks and green spaces across the borough are now going through the process to gain permanent legal protection, ensuring that cherished community green spaces remain protected for recreation, wellbeing and nature for future generations.

10. Future Delivery of Financial Wellbeing and Debt Advice Service

The Council's Financial Wellbeing and Debt Advice Service remains a vital lifeline for residents facing increasing financial pressures. Nearly 20 per cent of households in our borough living in fuel poverty and many more showing signs of struggling with priority bills, the need for accessible, expert advice to deal with this new cost-of-living crisis has never been greater.

Delivered currently by Citizens Advice North Staffordshire, the service provides invaluable early intervention through online, telephone, and face-to-face support in the borough helping prevent financial crises and reducing the risk of homelessness.

To ensure uninterrupted assistance, Cabinet approved a six-month contract extension during the procurement period, ahead of a new three-year contract worth £70,000 per year. This decision demonstrates the Council's commitment to supporting residents through cost-of-living challenges and ensuring they have access to trusted, locally delivered financial guidance when they need it most.

11. The APSE Award for Best Performance in Streetscene

The Borough Council is proud to have been awarded the APSE Award for Best Performance in Streetscene, recognising its position as a top-performing authority for cost-effectiveness, service standards and environmental quality. This accolade follows rigorous external verification and reflects the ongoing improvements made across the service - from embracing new technologies like Bartec for cleansing operations and GIS mapping to target fly-tipping - to investing in staff through enhanced training, leadership apprenticeships and innovative recruitment campaigns.

The Council have also secured external funding, including £28,000 for chewing gum removal in Newcastle town centre,

The APSE award further demonstrates the Council's commitment to delivering cleaner, safer and well-maintained public spaces for residents and visitors.

12. Forward Plan

The Forward Plan can be found at: -

[Browse plans - Cabinet, 2026 – Newcastle-under-Lyme Borough Council](#)

Councillor Simon Tagg
Leader of the Council