CABINET

Tuesday, 3rd February, 2026
Time of Commencement: 2.00 pm

View the agenda here

Watch the meeting here

Present: Councillor Simon Tagg (Chair)

Councillors:	Sweeney	Skelding
	Heesom	Hutchison

Apologies: Councillor(s) Fear

Officers:	Gordon Mole	Chief Executive
	Simon McEneny	Deputy Chief Executive
	Anthony Harold	Service Director - Legal & Governance / Monitoring Officer
	Craig Jordan	Service Director - Planning
	Nesta Barker	Service Director - Regulatory Services
	Georgina Evans-Stadward	Service Director - Strategy, People and Performance
	Geoff Durham	Civic & Member Support Officer
	Paul Dutton	Senior Media Officer
	Craig Turner	Service Director - Finance / S151 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 13 January, 2026 be agreed as a correct record.

3. WALLEYS QUARRY UPDATE

The Leader introduced a report updating Cabinet on the latest position regarding odours in the Borough associated with Walleys Quarry.

The Leader stated that the site was in a period of vast improvement compared to the same period last year.

The Council's Chief Executive advised that the report recognised that all agencies were now focussed on the steps towards restoration of the site, with the Environment Agency (EA) and their contractors still on site at present. The situation had moved out of 'incident' and into the next phase. However, should any future serious incident occur the 'incident' stage would again be implemented.

Members' attention was drawn to paragraph 2.5 of the report which showed that the levels of hydrogen sulphide had briefly raised in mid-January. The EA and their contractors were aware and had been looking into the cause. The issue had not continued beyond that period and no complaints had been received from the public.

The public were aware that there was activity on site and it had been useful to have the EA and site operations group as part of the next phase of the multi-agency response in existence for quickly getting together and working through such issues.

The Chief Executive asked the Leader to join him in thanking Glynn Luznyj from Staffordshire Fire and Rescue Service for chairing the group for a number of years and was due to become the next Chief Fire Officer.

The Leader also commended Glynn's work in chairing the co-ordinating group had been important and the focus on the very bad periods. The aim now was for the long term restoration capping which would cost money and, as was mentioned at a previous Cabinet meeting, it needed to be funded by the government and a public inquiry was needed.

Councillor Sweeney congratulated Glynn on achieving the post of Chief Fire Officer. Referring to the report, Councillor Sweeney stated that it was good news, with no odours across the Borough. He stated that the question was- who would pay for the restoration.

The Leader stated that this Council stood ready to react to any issues, should there be any deterioration or if any action was necessary in the future. However, the Council's only powers were through the abatement notice / statutory nuisance area and money remained in reserved, should it be required.

There would continue to be engagement with the EA. A meeting would be taking place with them in the near future with all key partners.

Resolved: That the contents of the update report be received and noted.

Watch the debate here

4. **REVENUE AND CAPITAL BUDGETS AND STRATEGIES 2026/27**

The Portfolio Holder for Finance, Town Centres and Growth introduced the report seeking recommendation to Full Council for approval later this month for the 2026/27 General Fund Reserve Budget and the Capital Programme for 2026/27. In addition, recommendation to Full Council for approval was also sough for the Capital Strategy for 2026-36 as well as the Treasury Management Strategy, Investment Strategy and Commercial Strategy for 2026-27.

The funding gap was £1.599m which had been found through the Council's Efficiency Board process and were all feasible and sustainable. This was not helped by the £1m reduction in funding from the government. The proposals had been considered twice by the Finance, Assets and Performance Scrutiny Committee and no amendments had been made.

The budget and strategies would be submitted to Full Council the following Wednesday including a 1.99% Council Tax increase towards services and programmes such as the Civic Growth Fund would still be supported.

The Leader stated that the proposals had been through all of the required processes, starting with the Efficiency Board, there had been the reduction in funding from the Government but the Council had still managed to balance the budget. The Leader referred to the Civic Pride Fund of £250,000 which, over the last few years had been put back into schemes and initiatives which the Council wished to support. Recommendation (vii) sought to freeze car parking charges for 2026/27 for the Council's commitment to support vibrant town centres. Free nipper parking at the bottom end of the town was also being introduced. These were all being done through the Council's Civic Pride Growth Fund along with the freeze to the outside sports charges which would help Newcastle's bid to be a Town of Culture.

The Leader stated that on social media there had been comments asking why the car parks were not free. This would result in residents in and around the town centre to park there twenty four hours a day which would, in turn take up spaces for shoppers. Furthermore, the Council had to pay business rates on its car parks which totalled £167,000 per year to keep them open, excluding maintenance on them. The Leader stated that if the Council wished to support its town centres with reducing parking charges and offering more free parking, the business rates needed to be reduced or waived completely. The Leader proposed that he would write to the local MP and ask him to take up the cause for that and that recommendation (vii) below be amended accordingly.

Councillor Sweeney echoed the Leader's comments regarding free parking in the town centre. The freeze to the outside sports charges was a good idea and such sports should be encouraged – especially amongst the younger generation.

Cabinet Members echoed the previous comments.

The Leader stated that the Civic Pride Fund (formerly the Borough Growth Fund) could be used to help the economic situation in the town. It was also used for projects such as tree planting and improvements to car parks. The Leader stated that at Full Council next week he would outline how the Fund would be allocated for the benefit of the Borough.

Resolved: (i) That the Revenue and Capital Budgets as detailed in this report and in the report to Cabinet dated 13 January 2026, be recommended to Full Council for approval.

(ii) That the updated Medium Term Financial Strategy 2026/27 to 2030/31 (Appendix 2) be recommended to Full Council for approval.

(iii) That the strategy for ensuring a balanced revenue outturn position for 2025/26, be approved.

(iv) That the calculation of the Council Tax base and a proposed Council Tax increase for 2026/27 of 1.99% per Band D equivalent property, be recommended to Full Council for approval.

(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 2026/27, be recommended to Full Council for approval.

(vi) That the Civic Growth Fund priorities for 2026/27, be approved.

(vii) That an extension of the freeze, already announced to £1 after 1pm car parking, be recommended to all hourly car parking charges in support of the motion agreed by Full Council on 21 January 2026 to support the Borough's Town Centres, High Streets and Villages. And, that the creation of free 'nipper' parking at the South High Street be noted. It was further resolved to write to the Chancellor and local Member of Parliament to seek the removal of business rates for town centre car parks.

(viii) That a freeze in fees relating to tennis, bowls, football and rugby fees and charges for 2026/27, be recommended.

(ix) That the Capital Strategy (Appendix 5) for 2026/36, be recommended to Full Council for approval.

(x) That the Treasury Management Strategy (Appendix 6) for 2026/27, be recommended to Full Council for approval.

(xi) That the Investment Strategy (Appendix 7) for 2026/27, be recommended to Full Council for approval.

(xii) That the Commercial Strategy (Appendix 8) for 2026/27, be recommended to Full Council for approval.

(xiii) That the Local Council Tax Reduction Scheme (Appendix 9) for 2026/27, be recommended to Full Council for approval.

Watch the debate here

5. FINANCIAL AND PERFORMANCE REVIEW REPORT - THIRD QUARTER 2025/26

The Portfolio Holder for Finance, Town Centres and Growth stated that the budget was £3000 underspent at the present time and it was projected to be £4000 underspent at the end of the current financial year.

The Portfolio Holder stated that it had been previously commented that there was not enough information in these reports and therefore a lot more information had now been added.

The Leader invited portfolio holders to comment on performance indicators.

<u>Priority 1 – One Council delivering for Local People</u>

The Leader stated that the average number of days lost to sickness rose during December, most likely due to a widespread virus that had emerged on the run up to Christmas.

Councillor Sweeney pointed out the time taken to process Housing Benefit, percentage of Council Tax collected and percentage of National Non-Domestic Rates collected were all on or above target.

The Leader referred to digital online transactions which was below target. The Council now had 'citizens access' for transactions which meant that there were fewer clicks to get to the required pages on the website. This indicator would be looked at when they were next refreshed.

Priority 2 – A Successful and Sustainable Growing Borough

The Leader stated that planning enforcement performance had improved – reaching 88% in the last quarter. Appeals relating to major applications was off target but a low number of major applications had been received.

Priority 3: Healthy, Active and Safe Communities

Cllr Hutchison reported that there had been a slight dip in the percentage of recycling materials collected. The amount of garden waste had fallen due to a very dry summer. However, dry recycling had gone up by 1.5% and food waste by 7%.

Household collections for food waste and residual waste were above target and successful collections was 99.98%.

All targets relating to Streetscene were at 100%.

The Leader, on behalf of the Cabinet passed thanks to the staff that had worked through the recent bad weather and the catch up that had been required.

Councillor Skelding that there was continued growth in people accessing the Museum with 52,129 visitors. School bookings were on the increase which had led to taking on more temporary staff.

Customer satisfaction at J2 had hit an above target mark of 79.25%. There were currently extensive repairs and maintenance going on but disruption was at a minimum to members. There was also a follow up project, through Salex funding, to replace the gas boilers with air sourced heat pumps and back-up boilers to help to future proof the site against rising energy costs.

Councillor Heesom referred to the Anti-Social Behaviour (ASB) cases stating that the Council continued to work with partners to reduce ASB and ensure that complaints were dealt with effectively and open cases were reducing.

The Vulnerability Hub continued to have a high number of complex cases and it was encouraging to see the number of referrals made.

Referring to the Disabled Facilities Grants, Councillor Heesom state that they were being dealt with in a timely fashion with 19 out of 26 grants dealt with within 120 days.

Priority 4: Town Centres for All

The Leader commented on the car park usage, town centre footfall and occupancy of market stalls stating that they were all encouraging figures.

Councillor Sweeney stated that the markets were going well and in the summer months the new television screen would be an asset to the town centre

The Leader stated that overall, the indicators gave a good picture with 82% of them being on target.

Resolved: That the contents of the attached report and appendices be noted and that the Council's service and financial performance for this period continue to be monitored and challenged.

Watch the debate here

6. LOCAL GOVERNMENT REORGANISATION AND DEVOLUTION UPDATE

The Leader introduced a report advising Cabinet of recent developments in respect of the Government's planned agenda for local government reorganisation (LGR) and English devolution.

This Council's proposals for a Newcastle Unitary were submitted in November, 2025 and a public consultation would be commencing imminently. Five proposals had been put forward by Staffordshire Councils.

The report also sought to set up a cross-party Cabinet Panel which would be chaired by the Leader which would aid Cabinet in the future to formulate its response and to monitor this Council's work towards dealing with the LGR. It would also give opportunity to scrutinise MP's on which proposal they supported. It was also important to look at the latest Government policies and initiatives on this.

A further £800,000 had been set aside, on top of £200,000 previously put aside to fund the process. However, it was felt that the two-tier system should continue as it had worked well for many years.

It should be known by this Summer whether the Government wish to proceed with LGR, what the Unitary boundaries would be or if it would be delayed.

It was confirmed that elections would go ahead in May this year, as planned.

Councillor Sweeney agreed that cancelling the elections would be wrong. Regarding LGR, Councillor Sweeney stated that he would be interested in the MP's view on it.

Councillor Hutchison agreed with all of the comments made.

The Leader advised that the link to the consultation would be advertised on the Council's website and encouraged all residents to take part.

Resolved: (i) That the forthcoming statutory consultation on proposals for local government reorganisation (LGR) in Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent, be noted;

(ii) That a cross-party LGR Cabinet Panel be established, chaired by the Leader of the Council.

(iii) That the work being undertaken to support a devolution offer for Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent be noted and endorsed;

(iv) That it be noted that the Ministry for Housing, Communities & Local Government has acknowledged receipt of the Council's intention to hold elections in May 2026 and has confirmed this will proceed.

Watch the debate here

7. **FORWARD PLAN**

The Leader presented the Forward Plan

Resolved: That the Forward Plan be received and noted.

Watch the debate here

8. **URGENT BUSINESS**

There was no Urgent Business.

9. **DISCLOSURE OF EXEMPT INFORMATION**

There was no confidential business

Councillor Simon Tagg
Chair

Meeting concluded at 2.41 pm