

**Report Title:** STATEMENT OF THE LEADER OF THE COUNCIL TO FULL COUNCIL

**Submitted by:** Cllr. Jonathan Gullis

**Portfolios:** All

**Ward(s) affected:** All

<b><u>Purpose of the Report</u></b>	<b><u>Key Decision</u></b>	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
To provide an update to full Council on recent activities of Cabinet and the Forward Plan			
<b><u>Recommendation</u></b>			
<b>That Council:</b>			
1. <b>Receives and notes the statement of the Leader of the Council.</b>			
<b><u>Reasons</u></b>			
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**

- 1.1 The Administration held its first meeting of Cabinet on 23<sup>rd</sup> June 2026. Set out below are a number of decisions arising from Cabinet, together with actions and activities of Cabinet since the meeting of Annual Council.

### 2. **Waste Vehicles – Procurement Saving**

**2.1** One of the first actions of this Administration was to take a close look at budgetary decisions already in train. As part of that work, it was identified that the previous Administration had been preparing to replace the existing refuse collection fleet with new electric vehicles as vehicles came forward for renewal. Those electric bin lorries would have cost £2.19 million more than their conventional equivalents, with a further estimated £4.2 million required for the charging infrastructure needed to power the fleet.

**2.2** This Administration has therefore asked officers to cancel the proposed purchase of electric refuse collection vehicles and to proceed instead with non-electric vehicles that meet the latest emissions standards, are operationally reliable, and represent better value for money for residents. This will deliver a saving of approximately £70,000 per vehicle replaced.

**2.3** This decision forms part of the Administration's wider commitment to removing unnecessary Net Zero policies from the Council and reviewing every area of spending

linked to that agenda. A motion to rescind the Council's previous Climate Emergency declaration is covered later on this agenda. The Administration will continue to identify savings, remove unnecessary and ideological policies, and ensure the Council remains focused on delivering reliable services, clean streets and value for money, while remaining fully within its legal responsibilities and duties.

### **3. Article 4 Direction**

**3.1** The Administration has requested that officers undertake the necessary work to set out the use of an Article 4 Direction to control the spread of Houses in Multiple Occupation across the Borough. This is a key quality of life issue for many residents, particularly in communities where family homes are being converted into shared accommodation without proper local scrutiny.

**3.2** Without an Article 4 Direction, smaller HMOs can be created without the need for planning permission, meaning residents and ward councillors can be left with little or no meaningful say. A borough-wide Article 4 Direction would ensure that future HMO conversions require planning permission and are considered properly on a case-by-case basis, taking into account the impact on parking, waste, noise, amenity, housing mix and the character of local streets.

**3.3** This is about making sure that such accommodation is delivered responsibly, with proper safeguards, proper oversight and proper regard for the communities in which it is located.

**3.4** A report on Article 4 Directions will come to Cabinet in the Autumn. The Administration is committed to making sure vulnerable local residents come first. That includes homeless veterans, women and children fleeing domestic violence, and others who need safe accommodation, proper safeguards and the right wraparound support to help them rebuild their lives.

### **4. Walleys Quarry**

**4.1** Cabinet received an update report on Walleys Quarry, and confirmed this Council's commitment to ensuring that the site is restored so that it can never again present a health threat to the community.

**4.2** Whilst odour complaint levels remain low, with 7 complaints to the Council so far this year, the Council is not complacent and continues to carry out active monitoring and odour assessments. It was noted that the EA has reduced air quality reporting from weekly to fortnightly, but will seek to revert to a more frequent regime should issues arise.

**4.3** Cabinet supported the need to support any criminal proceedings against those who ran Walleys Quarry Ltd., and to seek to press Government for the necessary resources to allow the site to be restored. A cross-party working group will be established to ensure regular political oversight, information-sharing and scrutiny of progress.

### **5. Community Fund**

**5.1** The Administration was pleased to approve the introduction of the Newcastle-under-Lyme Community Fund, providing each of the Council's 44 borough councillors with a dedicated annual ward budget of £2,500 from 2026/27.

**5.2** This initiative recognises that local ward members often have the best understanding of the small projects, voluntary groups and community initiatives that make a real difference to residents' lives. Whether supporting community events, local improvements, grassroots organisations, playgroups, voluntary groups, local landmarks or projects that strengthen neighbourhood pride, this funding will enable councillors to respond directly to local priorities and help deliver visible benefits across every part of the Borough.

**5.3** The Community Fund has been created by reprioritising existing Council resources, so no additional money is being raised from taxpayers to fund it. This is about taking money already within the Council's budget and putting it closer to residents, communities and local priorities.

**5.4** Cabinet looks forward to seeing the positive impact this funding will have in the Borough's communities over the coming months, with proper oversight, transparency and clear eligibility criteria to ensure the money is used responsibly and for the benefit of local residents.

## **6. Local Government Reorganisation**

**6.1** The Administration remains opposed to Local Government Reorganisation and is unhappy it is being imposed on councils at a time when it should not be the priority for local government. As Leader, I have written to the Minister for Local Government and Homelessness, the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, and most recently the likely next Prime Minister, Andy Burnham, to state clearly that forced Local Government Reorganisation should not proceed.

**6.2** The Council's position remains that forced reorganisation risks consuming significant officer time, public money and political attention at precisely the moment when local authorities should be focused on frontline services, financial discipline, community safety, housing, planning and the visible priorities residents expect us to deliver.

**6.3** Ministers continue to indicate that an announcement on Local Government Reorganisation in Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent will take place before Parliament's summer recess. This Administration will continue to make the case that Newcastle-under-Lyme Borough Council should not be abolished and that residents should not lose meaningful local accountability.

**6.4** The Administration supports the rapid introduction of a Strategic Mayoral Authority for Staffordshire and Shropshire. That would allow our area to benefit from stronger regional leadership, greater devolution, and a clearer voice on transport, infrastructure, investment and economic growth, without abolishing historic borough and district councils that understand their communities.

## **7. Withdrawal from the Local Government Association**

**7.1** The Administration has confirmed that Newcastle-under-Lyme Borough Council will withdraw from the Local Government Association. This decision is rooted in value for money, local accountability and the need to ensure that taxpayers' money is focused on the priorities of residents in this Borough.

**7.2** The withdrawal will save local taxpayers an estimated minimum of £17,200 a year in membership fees and associated expenses. Between 2022/23 and 2025/26, membership

fees, together with the time and cost of attending conferences and meetings, amounted to £65,700. This Administration's view is clear: that money is better spent here in Newcastle-under-Lyme.

**7.3** Leaving the LGA does not reduce the Council's accountability in any way. This Council remains fully accountable to residents through elected borough councillors, Full Council, Cabinet, scrutiny committees, audit and governance arrangements, statutory reporting requirements, external audit, the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman, transparency rules, public questions, petitions, Freedom of Information legislation and, ultimately, the ballot box.

**7.4** Nor does withdrawal from the LGA mean withdrawal from partnership working. The Council will continue to work constructively with Staffordshire County Council, Stoke-on-Trent City Council, neighbouring district and borough councils, Staffordshire Police, Staffordshire Fire and Rescue Service, health partners, businesses, voluntary organisations and community groups.

**7.5** Officers will also continue to access appropriate professional advice, benchmarking information, sector intelligence and best practice through other routes where that is necessary and proportionate. However, this Administration does not believe that continued membership of the LGA represents sufficient value for money for residents.

**7.6** This is part of a wider approach to Council spending. Every subscription, every membership, every outside body and every line of expenditure must be capable of being justified to the people who pay for it. Where the benefit is not clear, the money should stay in the Borough and be redirected towards local priorities.

## **8. Local Plan**

**8.1** Cabinet considered a report on commencing a new Local Plan under the Government's new housing targets, which would require the Borough to find space for more than 2,000 additional homes over the Local Plan period. Cabinet carefully considered the options within the report and determined that the Administration could not support commencing work on a new Local Plan at this time, given the damaging consequences it could have for the Borough's communities, green spaces and local infrastructure.

**8.2** The Administration does not believe it is reasonable, fair or sustainable for Newcastle-under-Lyme to be asked to absorb more than 2,000 additional homes while housing targets have been reduced elsewhere. The Administration believes the Borough should not be treated as an easy target for extra development simply because Government policy has changed. Residents rightly expect this Council to stand up for our towns, villages, green spaces and infrastructure, and that is exactly what this Administration intends to do.

**8.3** This position must also be seen in the context of Local Government Reorganisation. The Government is expecting this Council to begin work on a new Local Plan for 2030 to 2045 while, at the same time, the future existence of Newcastle-under-Lyme Borough Council is unresolved. That would risk thousands of hours of officer time and significant public money being spent on a planning document that may never be completed or adopted.

**8.4** The Administration has therefore made clear to Government that it should not force Newcastle-under-Lyme taxpayers to fund a new Local Plan process while the future of the Borough remains uncertain, and while the effect of national housing policy would be to place even greater pressure on local communities that have already taken their fair share of development.

## **9. Forward Plan**

**9.1** A copy of the Forward Plan can be found here: [Forward plan - Cabinet Forward Plan - 1 July to 31 October, 2026 – Newcastle-under-Lyme Borough Council](#)

Cllr. Jonathan Gullis  
Leader of the Council