

Report to Full Council

30 September 2026



Statement of the Leader of the Council

Lead Member: Cllr. Jonathan Gullis, Leader of the Council

Key Decision: Yes

Ward(s): All

Appendices: None

Report Summary

The Leader's Statement provides an update to Members on a selection of activities and decisions of Cabinet since the last ordinary meeting of Full Council, together with the Forward Plan.

Recommendations

That Council:

1. Receives and comments upon the statement of the Leader of the Council.

1. Walleys Quarry

1.1 Walleys Quarry remains an important issue for the Council and, in particular, for residents in the communities surrounding the site who experienced significant odour problems over a number of years. Although circumstances have improved considerably since waste operations ceased and Walleys Quarry Ltd entered voluntary liquidation in February 2025, the Council continues to monitor developments and work with partner organisations.

1.2 Recent monitoring has shown a sustained improvement in conditions. The number of complaints remains at a very low level compared with previous years. At Cabinet in August, Members were advised that only one complaint had been received

during July and that the Environment Agency and its contractors continued to undertake works intended to prevent serious pollution.

- 1.3 The Environment Agency continues to exercise its discretionary powers under the Environmental Permitting Regulations. Work undertaken has included improvements to temporary capping and site containment, leachate management, including off-site disposal, and improved management of surface water within the void area.
- 1.4 The Borough Council continues its own monitoring and assessment work. Residents should continue to report any incidents of odour to the relevant authorities so that an accurate evidential record is maintained.
- 1.5 A cross-party working group has also been established to provide continued political oversight, information-sharing and scrutiny. Cabinet was advised that representation would include Newcastle-under-Lyme Borough Council, Staffordshire County Council, the Environment Agency and the Member of Parliament, with the ability to involve other organisations where appropriate.
- 1.6 The significant reduction in odour and complaints is welcome, but the Council's interest in Walleys Quarry does not end with the improvement in the immediate position. Attention must also remain on the long-term management and future of the site, the effectiveness of work undertaken there, and ensuring that residents receive clear information as circumstances develop.

2. Housing and Homelessness Strategy 2026–2030

- 2.1 Cabinet considered the Council's Housing and Homelessness Strategy 2026–2030 in August. The previous Housing Strategy had been adopted in 2021 and the Homelessness Strategy in 2020. These have now been reviewed and brought together within a single strategic framework.
- 2.2 The Strategy is structured around three interconnected priorities: Housing and Health; Housing and Prosperity; and Homelessness and Rough Sleeping. These encompass housing standards and energy efficiency, meeting identified housing needs, affordable housing, regeneration and early intervention to prevent homelessness.
- 2.3 Following the change in political leadership in May, the Strategy was reviewed. The Council's report identified four areas to which the new administration wished to give greater prominence:
 - Article 4 Directive to provide greater local control over Houses in Multiple Occupation;
 - improvements in energy efficiency, reducing fuel poverty and lowering household energy costs rather than focusing solely on decarbonisation objectives;
 - supporting the provision of housing which meets the needs of local communities; and
 - strengthening the focus on supported housing provision within the Borough.

- 2.4 The Strategy recognises that housing policy is not simply about the overall number of properties available. Housing quality, affordability, the mix of accommodation available to local residents, the impact of housing patterns on existing communities and the provision available to people who require additional support are also important considerations.
- 2.5 The Strategy also maintains a strong focus on homelessness prevention and rough sleeping. Preventing homelessness at the earliest possible stage, working effectively with partner organisations and ensuring appropriate support is available to people facing housing difficulties remain central objectives through to 2030.
- 2.6 Work is also progressing separately towards a borough-wide Article 4 Direction relating to HMOs. Taken together, these measures are intended to strengthen the Council's ability to respond to the particular housing pressures experienced by different neighbourhoods while maintaining support for vulnerable residents.

3. Parking and Traffic Regulation Order Amendments

- 3.1 Cabinet approved consultation in August on amendments to the Council's off-street Traffic Regulation Order covering three locations: Lyme Park Countryside Park at Keele, Meadows Road in Kidsgrove and Heathcote Street in Kidsgrove. The Traffic Regulation Order establishes the operating rules for Council-owned car parks and provides the legal basis for those arrangements to be enforced.
- 3.2 At Lyme Park Countryside Park, the proposal is for free parking subject to a maximum two-hour stay and no return within six hours, with separate arrangements available for angling permit holders. The purpose is to maintain turnover of spaces so that people visiting the countryside park can find somewhere to park.
- 3.3 At Meadows Road in Kidsgrove, the redevelopment includes three small enterprise units alongside a realigned car park providing up to 16 spaces. The intention is that these spaces should support customers of local businesses and people using facilities including Kidsgrove Library and the Jobcentre rather than predominantly providing all-day commuter parking.
- 3.4 The proposed arrangement at Meadows Road is therefore for the first two hours to remain free, with a charge applying for longer stays. The proposed Order provides for a charge of £3 for stays of up to 24 hours, with a reduced £1.50 arrangement for Sundays, Bank Holidays and event parking.
- 3.5 At Heathcote Street and King Street, the proposed arrangements are designed to retain free parking while encouraging greater turnover of the spaces closest to shops. They provide 30 minutes' free parking on King Street, up to two hours free in the lower Heathcote Street bays, and free long stay parking in the upper bays.
- 3.6 This means that free parking remains an important part of the Kidsgrove town-centre parking offer, but with different areas serving different needs: very short-stay parking immediately alongside shops, short-stay parking for people visiting the town centre and long-stay provision for people who work there.
- 3.7 It is also important to distinguish the Traffic Regulation Order from the separate Asset Management consultation concerning the possible future use or disposal of Council-owned land. At the Finance, Assets and Performance Scrutiny Committee,

Members were advised that the separate consultation concerning Heathcote Street had generated 32 objections, while the consultation regarding land to the rear of Kidsgrove Town Hall had generated 23 objections.

- 3.8 Those representations will need to be considered as part of the relevant Asset Management decision-making process and should not be confused with the Traffic Regulation Order governing parking arrangements.

4. Local Government Reorganisation

- 4.1 Since the previous meeting of Full Council, there has been a significant development regarding Local Government Reorganisation. On 7 September, the Government announced that the process was being halted while the legality of the proposals was reviewed.
- 4.2 This followed Newcastle-under-Lyme Borough Council obtaining independent specialist King's Counsel advice and submitting a pre-action protocol letter to the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government. The Council sought clarification on precisely what information had been considered when the previous Secretary of State reached the decision announced on 16 July regarding the future local government structure for Staffordshire.
- 4.3 The Government's July announcement had indicated its intention, subject to Parliamentary approval, to replace the current structure with two unitary councils from April 2028, with Newcastle-under-Lyme forming part of a proposed North Staffordshire authority alongside Stoke-on-Trent and Staffordshire Moorlands.
- 4.4 The Council's stated position remains opposition to the abolition of Newcastle-under-Lyme Borough Council and its inclusion within that proposed North Staffordshire authority. The Government's pause and review does not, at this stage, amount to the permanent withdrawal of those proposals.
- 4.5 The Council will therefore continue to seek clarity over the future process and the legal, financial and governance issues involved. There also needs to be certainty concerning the implications for local services, assets, liabilities, taxpayers and democratic representation.
- 4.6 In the meantime, the Council must continue to operate and take the decisions necessary to provide services and manage its finances responsibly. Our Asset Management Strategy specifically recognises the need to consider both short- and long-term asset management during the review and to protect locally important assets whatever the eventual structure of local government.

5. Tackling Illegal Trading and Protecting Our High Streets

- 5.1 The Council has continued to work with Staffordshire County Council Trading Standards to tackle businesses involved in the sale of illegal tobacco and vape products.
- 5.2 In July, the Council secured a three-month closure order against Simba's Shop on High Street, Newcastle-under-Lyme. Magistrates were told that illegal tobacco and vapes had been found at the premises and that tobacco had been sold to under-age test purchasers.

5.3 Later that month, a further three-month closure order was secured against Cobra Vape Shop. A warrant executed at the premises resulted in the seizure of 71 illegal vapes with an estimated retail value of £923. The closure period was the maximum available under the powers being used and represented the second such town-centre closure within approximately one month.

5.4 This work protects consumers and supports businesses which trade lawfully. The Council will continue to work with Trading Standards and other enforcement agencies where there is evidence of unlawful activity and use the powers available where the evidential and legal tests are met.

6. Recycling and Waste Re-Routing

6.1 Cabinet has approved changes to collection days affecting approximately 22,000 households in the southern part of the Borough, with the revised rounds due to commence during the week beginning 5 October 2026. The frequency and overall nature of the collection service are not being reduced; for those households affected, the principal change will be the day on which collections take place.

6.2 The current routes were established when the twin-stream recycling service was introduced in 2020. At that point the Borough had approximately 53,000 households. During the six years since then, around 4,000 additional properties have been added, representing growth of approximately 7.5 per cent.

6.3 At the same time, participation in recycling has increased. Recycling performance rose by approximately 20 per cent in the first year of the current service, while the number of vehicles used for recycling and food-waste collections reduced from 17 to 14. These efficiencies allowed the service to absorb growth for a period, but spare operational capacity has progressively reduced.

6.4 The re-routing exercise is intended to rebalance collections across the working week. Under the present southern arrangements, collections finish on Fridays in the Loggerheads area, furthest from the depot and disposal points. This makes it more difficult to recover from disruption at the end of the week. The revised arrangement moves those more distant rounds earlier in the week and redistributes other collections accordingly.

6.5 Without intervention, the Cabinet report identifies an increased risk of missed or disrupted collections, additional overtime costs and reduced resilience in responding to vehicle breakdowns, adverse weather and staff absence.

6.6 A communications programme has therefore been put in place with the straightforward message of "same service, new day". Residents affected by the changes are being encouraged to check their collection dates, with communication through direct contact, the Council website, social media, telephone messaging and other channels.

6.7 The Council also intends to introduce an additional recycling collection vehicle and crew from 2027 to provide greater capacity for future growth. The vehicle is already included within the fleet replacement capital programme at an estimated cost of £330,000, with the additional crew estimated to have an annual revenue cost of £160,000.

7. Lyme Valley Parkway – Pump Track Investment

- 7.1 Cabinet has approved the use of £135,000 of developer contributions to replace the existing BMX facility at Lyme Valley Parkway with a modern all-weather pump track.
- 7.2 The proposed facility is intended for cyclists, skateboarders, scooter riders and rollerbladers across different ages and levels of experience. The intention is to provide a facility which can be enjoyed by beginners while offering sufficient features and variety for more experienced users.
- 7.3 Engagement with residents will help inform the final design before delivery of the scheme. The project will complement the pump-track facilities being provided elsewhere in the Borough and forms part of the Council's wider programme of investment in parks and recreational facilities.
- 7.4 The investment will provide an additional outdoor facility encouraging physical activity and giving children, young people and families another reason to use one of the Borough's principal parks.

8. Civic Pride, Our Flags and St George's Day

- 8.1 On 25 July, the Council held a civic event in Queens Gardens centred on the raising of the Union Flag and the Cross of St George. Stafford Brigades Youth Band performed and the event was attended by the Mayor alongside representatives of the Armed Forces and veterans' community.
- 8.2 This was led by Deputy Leader Cllr Graham Shaw and will form part of a wider effort to bring additional events into Newcastle town centre.

9. Loved & Loyal Pet Crematorium

- 9.1 Planning permission has been granted for the Council's new Loved & Loyal Pet Crematorium within the grounds of Bradwell Crematorium and work is now moving forward on the dedicated facility.
- 9.2 The service will provide guaranteed individual cremations for pets ranging from small birds and rabbits to larger dogs. Specialist equipment will be completely separate from the main crematorium facilities.
- 9.3 A private farewell room will also allow owners to spend time with their pet before cremation. The service will operate on an appointment basis from a detached single-storey building accessed from the main car park.
- 9.4 The facility is expected to open by the end of 2026, subject to the remaining regulatory requirements. Its construction is not expected to interfere with the normal operation of Bradwell Crematorium.
- 9.5 The project provides an additional local service for residents while also adding a new service to the Council's commercial portfolio.

10. Newcastle-under-Lyme Community Fund

- 10.1 The Newcastle-under-Lyme Community Fund is now operating following Cabinet approval in June. The scheme provides each of the Borough's 44 councillors with a

maximum allocation of £2,500 per year, creating a total annual fund of £110,000 for local projects and priorities identified within wards.

10.2 The Fund has been created by reprioritising existing Council resources rather than through an additional cost to taxpayers. The £110,000 consists of £22,000 previously allocated through the Civic Pride Investment Fund and £88,000 transferred from an existing contribution to the Civic Growth Fund.

10.3 As at 21 September, councillors across the Borough have allocated/approved £18,814 from the Newcastle-under-Lyme Community Fund to local projects, groups and community initiatives.

10.4 Examples of support provided through the Fund include:

- Enabling a Christmas tree and festive light switch on event in both Wolstanton and Bradwell;
- The purchase of a Community Speed Watch Camera for a community group in May Bank;
- Support involving free activities for the community at Audley Community Library, free activities for deprived children at St Giles church and weekly free sports sessions for young people at Holditch Miners Football Club;
- The installation of handrailed steps at Clough Hall Bowling Club to improve accessibility;
- Liaison with members of the Kidsgrove Youth Club to provide sports and gaming equipment to support the safe and welcoming space for teenagers in Kidsgrove.

10.5 The scheme has deliberately been designed to allow different communities to identify different priorities. Funding can support one-off projects, events and activities, with examples including equipment for community groups and nurseries, activities for older residents, improvements to local landmarks, community events and contributions towards practical neighbourhood infrastructure.

10.6 Individual allocations are published by the Council so residents can see how Members are using their funding. This provides transparency while placing a modest amount of spending power closer to local communities.

10.7 As further applications are approved during the remainder of the financial year, the intention is that the full £110,000 fund supports tangible projects and activities across Newcastle-under-Lyme Borough.

11. Forward Plan

11.1 A copy of the Forward Plan can be found here: [Forward Plan. Cabinet Forward Plan. 1 September to 31 December, 2026](#)

Cllr. Jonathan Gullis
Leader of the Council