

Executive Leader's Full Council Speech

FINAL COPY

21st May 2018 (4,118 words)

Members and officers of the council, it is my privilege to stand before you once more, almost four months after I was elected to the position of Executive Leader.

They say that a week is a long time in politics, and four months is even longer. We've managed to fit in a lot in that brief period. But before I talk about that, I want to take a moment to pay our respects.

Most of you have probably noticed that we've taken the unusual step of hosting this meeting of Full Council on a Monday, instead of the usual Tuesday.

This is to ensure that there is no interference with the tributes and memorials being held across Greater Manchester to commemorate the first anniversary of the bombing of the Manchester Arena tomorrow.

I know that everybody here can clearly remember the revulsion and horror we all felt as the news of the attack filtered through last year.

There is not a single part of our great city, Tameside included, that was left untouched by the atrocity carried out in our midst. There are so many people who lost someone, or who knew friends, neighbours or colleagues who lost someone.

But as well as that, I know that we all remember something else as well. We all remember how, in the face of almost unbearable violence and tragedy, our great city came together as never before.

A clear and unmistakable message was sent. By the men and women who offered whatever they could to people they'd never met before in their lives, by the incredible response by our emergency services, by the I Love MCR vigil and the One Love concert held in the aftermath.

A clear and unmistakable message that, when faced with the spectre of terror and hatred, Manchester will respond with the best values of our city and our country; respect, tolerance, love, unity and community.

It is these values that provide us with the best response, and the best defence, to those who would wish to do us harm. As we remember what happened last year, it falls to us to continue to promote and defend those values even as the immediate trauma fades.

And Tameside will play its full part in that task. Since September last year, Ashton Old Baths has hosted a hub of mental health advice and support for those affected by the attack. Then, now, and in the future, we stand together with the rest of Manchester and its people.

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As I said earlier, a lot has happened in the four months since I was elected Leader, both in terms of things that we have made happen, and things that have happened to us.

The start of March is usually considered to be the beginning of spring, but you would have never guessed it this year, as Tameside and other parts of the country were buffeted by some of the worst storms in recent memory.

But no matter what happens with the weather, there are many council functions that cannot simply be put off. Not when people's lives can literally depend upon their reliable delivery.

It is in conditions such as this when council workers and services are put to the ultimate test. I'm happy to report that, when faced with the full fury of the Beast of the East, they passed with flying colours.

Our Highways and Transport service worked around the clock to keep our main roads and emergency service routes open. Usually, in an average winter we'd expect to do around 55 separate treatments. This year we ended up undertaking over 90 treatments.

All in all, those treatments involved the use of almost 5,000 tonnes of salt on over 22,000 kilometres of road – the equivalent of the distance from here to Singapore and back again. That doesn't include the time spent ploughing roadways and gritting minor routes by hand.

Having seen first-hand how seriously our highways teams take their work, often in the most difficult of conditions, I want to extend my sincere thanks and appreciation to all of them.

But many other parts of the council also stepped up to make sure that vital services continued to operate.

Our Homelessness service worked closely with Greystones, Tameside Housing Advice, the police and other partners to make sure that any rough sleepers had a warm and safe place to ride out the worst of the weather.

Our Bereavement service pulled out all the stops to make sure that, despite the snow, wind and freezing temperatures, not a single funeral had to be cancelled, postponed or delayed.

And our Community Response Service and Integrated Urgent Care teams not only responded to every call out they received, but also went out of their way to make proactive contact with our more elderly and vulnerable residents.

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At the end of March we also had the pleasure of inviting the Mayor of Greater Manchester, Andy Burnham, to Tameside for the first stakeholder event of the Stalybridge Town Centre Challenge.

With representatives from the construction industry, property sector and local businesses and charities also in attendance, together with Stalybridge ward councillors and local MP Jonathan Reynolds, we discussed the unique assets of Stalybridge and how they could best be leveraged to drive sustainable and inclusive regeneration and investment.

The reaction from the public and business communities in Stalybridge so far has been overwhelmingly positive, and I fully expect that this is the first step in turning our shared ambitions into reality.

Thanks must go out in particular to Councillor Adrian Pearce, who has wasted no time in moving things forwards after being appointed as Chair of the Stalybridge Town Centre Challenge partnership group.

The next stage will be to develop the vision agreed at the stakeholder event into a concrete and realistic masterplan. As part of that process, over the next few months we will host walkabouts and other consultation exercises to make sure that the ideas of local people and businesses about the future of Stalybridge are sought out and taken seriously.

2018 also marks the centenary of some women in Britain being given the vote for the first time. On this year's International Woman's Day, I joined the Civic Mayor, our local MP Angela Rayner, and local councillors and residents at Ashton Market Square to celebrate both the occasion and Tameside's contribution to the woman's suffrage movement. Organised impeccably by Cllr Cartey, it was a unique opportunity to commemorate not just the heroic women of the past, but to look forward to the heroic women of the future.

We also faced an unexpected and tragic situation as a serious fire in Ray Mill led to the demolition of the near-century old building. Thanks to the tremendous work of council staff, emergency services and other partners the building was made safe and disruption kept to a minimum. We are currently working closely with the tenant businesses in the mill, including award-winning dance group TCA Tycoons, to help them get back on their feet and find new premises.

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This is also the first meeting of Full Council that has been held since the local elections.

At the start of this month, the eyes of the borough turned to Dukinfield Town Hall, and to the names and faces of those who will be helping guide Tameside through the next twelve months.

As is usually the case at local elections, it was a moment for both fond farewells and warm welcomes.

My sincerest thanks and best wishes for the future go out to the six councillors who left us this election. Four of whom, Cllrs Kevin Welsh, Frank Travis and Lynn Travis, and Basil Beeley, all of whom have made the decision to retire from public life. Two other councillors, Cllrs Andy Kinsey and Paul Buckley, were unsuccessful in their re-election campaigns.

Combined together, these six former councillors amassed over half a century of service to Tameside. I'm sure I speak for everybody here when I say that we will miss their valuable contributions deeply. I offer all of them the very best of luck for their futures.

I'd also like to extend a warm welcome to those who are taking on the mantle of Tameside councillor for the first time. Dolores Lewis in Ashton Hurst, Vimal Choksi in Ashton Waterloo, Phillip Chadwick in Hyde Werneth, Stephen Homer in Mossley, Sam Gosling in Stalybridge North and Liam Billington in Stalybridge South.

I know that no one can expect to be elected to a council seat unless their desire and determination to do their very best for their communities and residents is apparent to all. I

fully expect that all those elected or re-elected will serve their wards with pride, honesty and integrity, and I look forward to working with them in the months and years ahead.

Thanks are also in order to the people that toiled from early morning to the dead of night to make sure that the whole local election day ran like clockwork.

That includes the many council staff who manned the borough's 98 polling stations and Dukinfield Town Hall where the count was held, the police who ensured that the election could be run in safety and order, and the volunteers who contributed their time and labour to all parts of the election process.

Elections of any kind are an opportunity for renewal and recommitment, and this one is no different. As part of that, I have taken the opportunity to make a number of changes to the portfolios of Executive Members. I would also like to welcome Cllr Fairfoull, who will serve as Deputy Executive Leader, as well as Cllr Ryan to the position of Executive Member for Children and Families, Cllr Feeley as Executive Member for Lifelong Learning, Skills and Employment, and Cllr Bray as Executive Member for Strategic Development and Transport. A number of further changes have also been made at Assistant Executive Member level, which will be published on the council's website and in hard copy in due course. All new Cabinet members will immediately get to work alongside existing members to deliver on our priorities for the year.

I wish to express my heartfelt appreciation to all outgoing Executive Members for their service to Tameside over the years. Combined with these changes to the Cabinet will be a redistribution of power at the local level through the creation of new Neighbourhood Forums. These Forums, which will take over and build on the functions and responsibilities of the former town councils, will allow local councillors and residents to have more of a say in the issues that affect their own communities.

I am confident that these changes, both in Executive positions and in how decisions are made, balance the need to retain experience and continuity with the requirement for renewal and transformation at this critical time.

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Foremost among our many priorities is pushing ahead with my commitment to improve the private rented sector in Tameside. I am pleased to see that, even at this early stage, we have received support for the idea from local organisations representing tenants and landlords alike.

This is an idea whose time has come. Housing, especially in the private rented sector, is at the heart of the economic, social and environmental infrastructure of the borough. Housing is the building block of sustainable communities. Housing is a key factor in making sure that everybody in Tameside can lead a healthy and happy life.

As the private rented sector becomes a bigger share of the housing market, locally and nationally, it is more important than ever that we protect the reputation of good landlords, the welfare of tenants and the ability of the council and police to take swift and meaningful action against the minority of rogues who let the entire sector down

This is a vital issue, and it is important that we get it right. We will consult closely with landlords, tenants, charities, businesses, the police and other stakeholders. We will also take into account learning from other parts of the UK, such as Newham Council in London, and further afield from places like the Republic of Ireland.

It is my hope that within the next few months we will have taken the first steps in creating a new private rented sector framework in Tameside that is robust, sustainable, and fair.

Closely allied to this will be a drive to bring empty properties, of which our housing service estimates there to be around 800 in the borough, back into productive use. At a time where home ownership seems like an increasingly distant dream for many young people and families, this is a state of affairs that cannot be allowed to continue. Once again, we will be looking closely at best practice, in the UK and elsewhere, to turn these properties into much-needed homes and thriving parts of their local community.

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We have also made significant progress in charting a new course for the Vision Tameside project, following the collapse of Carillion at the beginning of the year. In the middle of March we signed an 8 weeks Early Works Agreement with Robertson Construction Group Ltd, one of the largest independently-owned construction companies in the UK.

Since then, Robertson has restarted work on the Advanced Skills Centre, including bringing subcontractors back onto the site. They have safeguarded jobs and expertise by offering new roles to any former Carillion employee on the site who wants one. They've also pledged that all apprentices contracted to Carillion on the development will be able to complete their training.

The handover has been carried out swiftly enough so that any damage to the partially-built structure from weather or other factors has been minimised. However, due to the inevitable delays the entire process has caused, the completion date of the latest Phase has been pushed back to November of this year at the earliest.

The council has also maintained its commitments to former Carillion staff working in facilities management, school meals and other everyday functions. We are working closely with our partners and the Local Enterprise Partnership to make sure that this remains the case. The men and women in these vital services bear no responsibility for the events that have occurred recently, and their consistent professionalism in the most uncertain of circumstances has been noted and valued.

The situation over the past few months has been far from ideal, but I have every confidence that the consequences from the collapse of Carillion have been mitigated, and that Robertson have the expertise to bring the project to a successful conclusion. As is the way of Tameside, we have adapted and thrived in the face of adversity.

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Our pioneering work on integrating health and social care in Tameside is also continuing, blazing a path that the rest of the UK will soon be following. As we progress further down this path of innovation and reform, it is more important than ever that we take the public, stakeholders and other partners with us.

To make that happen, we recently celebrated the launch of the Partnership Engagement Network. Directly integrated with the Council, Clinical Commissioning Group and Integrated Care Foundation Trust, the Network is set up make sure that any new and developing models of health and social care are subject to the full challenge of scrutiny and consultation. Local bodies and community groups will also be encouraged to proactively feed in their own issues and ideas.

We're also working to make sure that members of the public, health and social care providers, and commissioners can make informed decisions about their own health and service needs. That's why we've launched the Life in Tameside and Glossop website. From the beginning of April, the website has been a depository for health, care and demographic information of every ward in the area. It also includes a comprehensive directory, allowing residents to search for all manner of local services, community support, activities and groups.

Following the end of the consultation process in January, we've also agreed on the best way forward for improving urgent care provision in Tameside and Glossop. The decision means that the Walk-In service will be relocated from Ashton Primary Care Centre to Tameside Hospital. Should a patient attending the Walk-In Centre require more specialist care; they will now be able to receive it without having to travel to another location. This will be supplemented by increasing access to GP care through the establishment of five Neighbourhood Care Hubs.

Another issue that has received more concern over the past few years, for very good reason, is where support for mental health services feeds into the overall framework of integration. One in four people in England will suffer from a mental health issue every year, but funding and access to services remains inadequate in many cases. This is why we'll be putting mental health provision front and centre of our future integration efforts, making sure people get the treatment they need and giving them the tools to manage their own condition on a day by day basis.

The work we've undertaken is proof that no stone is being left unturned in our pursuit of finding the best model of health and social care for the future. From the highest levels of decision making to the way residents access the most routine services, we will never stop looking for ways to make sure all our residents can access the right care, in the right place, at the right time.

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Another significant journey we have undertaken in recent months has been in the improvement of our Children's Services. Last week we received the feedback letter from the fifth monitoring visit from Ofsted, which took place on 18-19th April.

The report recognises that we have accelerated the pace of improvement; progress which they agreed is now leading to improved outcomes for children and families. Ofsted is clear in their faith that we now have an accurate understanding of ourselves, the challenges we face and what we need to do to improve further. The energy and commitment of staff was also recognised, as well as the good quality direct work with children they undertake and the improvements made to general team stability.

The time and effort it has taken to get us to this point should not be underestimated, and I would like to thank both council staff, in Children's Service and elsewhere, along with the member team and the Cabinet lead for the progress made to date.

However we know there remains significant work to do to ensure that every child and family receives the right support at the right time in Tameside. Our focus will now turn to the next monitoring visit around looked after children, as well as further improvement in Children's Services generally. We remain unwavering in our commitment to build upon the good progress we've made so far.

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However, as exciting as these bold and innovative projects are, we must never lose sight of the day-to-day issues that matter most to our residents.

Every plan we have for Tameside feeds into a single higher purpose in the end; making a borough a place where people, regardless of whether they already live here or have come in from elsewhere, can build a life, a career and pride in their communities. The importance of a clean and well-maintained public realm to making this possible cannot be overstated.

In the Budget in February, we committed funding to a comprehensive plan of urban renewal and environmental improvement. That included £600,000 to repair and upgrade the facilities in 35 children's play areas, £20 million over the next four years to maintain our 750 kilometres of road, £5 million on the final stages of the rollout of LED street lighting, and £5 million on attracting jobs and further investment into the borough. We're also in the advanced stages of securing a £3 million investment from the GMCA Skills Capital programme, with the intent of furthering our goal to make Tameside the centre for high-quality vocational skills education by building a new Construction Skills Centre with Tameside College.

We're also leading the way in making sure that veterans in Tameside can continue to live active and healthy lives after their service to their country ends. Together with the Tameside Armed Services Covenant, GreaterSport and the Ministry of Defence we have been awarded funding of £319,500 for a pilot project to create and deliver a program of physical activity sessions. These sessions, open to and tailored for all armed forces veterans in Greater Manchester, will increase levels of physical and mental wellbeing, reduce social isolation, and help them reintegrate back into civilian life.

I also want to take this opportunity to tell all of our residents that we have listened to your concerns about anti-social behaviour and fly-tipping, and that we share those concerns.

Our environment health and neighbourhood teams are among the council's busiest services. Day after day they are out in Tameside clearing fly-tipping and identifying perpetrators. In the first two months of this year alone, they issued 113 fixed penalty notices, launched 276 fly-tipping investigations and looked into 132 reports of abandoned vehicles. That's almost 9 separate enforcement actions a day, every day.

Where necessary, they will also co-operate with organisations with similar responsibilities for protection and enforcement – most notably in recent months with the Environment Agency in regards to the illegal waste dumping on Gartside Farm in Droylsden. Clearance of the site, which has been causing significant issues for local residents, began on the 10th May after a

concentrated effort by Angela Rayner MP, the police and local councillors to pressure the government for intervention, to carry out the necessary investigations and to keep residents informed during the entire long and difficult process.

But, as the old saying goes, prevention is always better than cure. While we will never hesitate to take enforcement action if necessary, we are also happy to provide advice and support for residents to look after their own streets. This can range from one-to-one discussions about how to properly manage waste, to helping people or groups to organise their own community clean-ups. One such clean-up last month in Ashton's Holy Trinity district saw 20 bin bags worth of rubbish and litter being removed from the area.

Our Youth Service is also working closely with the police and business owners to reduce young people taking part in anti-social behaviour in our town centres, such as that which we've seen in Hyde in recent months. Rather than moving them on, which in most cases simply transfers the problem to another area, the youth service teams engage and challenge their behaviour, building relationships that will encourage them to think about the consequences of their actions and make better choices.

It may seem counter-intuitive to some, but we know from experience that this is an approach that produces results. The pilot scheme in Droylsden reduced anti-social behaviour by half within two years, winning the praise of both residents and businesses in the process. One of those youth service teams that secured this turnaround is now working in Hyde as we speak. I have every confidence that, with the right level of support, they will be able to repeat their success.

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At the Budget session of Full Council, my first as Executive Leader of the Council, I laid out our priorities for Tameside; on housing, on Vision Tameside, on health, and on safeguarding our public realm.

As the local elections recede from view behind us, now is the time to renew and recommit to those priorities, putting in the effort and making happen what needs to happen to not just transform our present, but secure our future as well.

And in doing so, we must never forget the basic truth, that Tameside's most important asset is not measured in money or property, it is measured in individuals and the communities that they build together.

It is those communities which makes Tameside a place which people are proud to live in, work in and call home.

It is those communities which celebrate together during good times, and sustain each other during times of turmoil.

It is those communities which we must invest in and put our faith in.

If, by the end of 2018, people can look back and say, "Tameside is a better place now than it was last year", we will be well on our way to delivering on our ambitions and unlocking the potential that we all know is within the borough.

We should be under no illusion that we are on but the first step of that long journey, but we have started as we mean to go on. Let's keep on going forward together.