

Leader's Full Council Speech 23rd July 2019

(2,000 words, 15 minutes)

Introduction

Members and officers of the Council,
I stand before you tonight at the third meeting of Full Council in 2019. At the beginning of the year we introduced and discussed the Council's budget for the financial year, and then in May we outlined our priorities to secure the future of our residents and the services that they depend upon.

Since a relatively short amount of time has passed since then, I won't revisit those subjects tonight. Instead, I want to talk about something bigger.

Every organisation, no matter its size or function, requires a strategic vision. A vision that informs its day-to-day decisions, and which clearly spells out our values and objectives. It's not just about what we do; it's about what we want to be.

Tonight I will lay out our vision for Tameside. This vision incorporates two main goals; adopting the principles of a co-operative council, and championing the cause of social mobility and justice within the borough.

Sandra MJ Award / Kathy HFMA Award / Stamford Park Green Flag

Before I discuss that, however, I would like to take the opportunity to pay tribute to our very own Borough Solicitor and Director of Pensions, Sandra Stewart, for receiving the accolade of Corporate Director of the Year at the recent MJ Awards.

This followed the news at the end of last year that Kathy Roe, Director of Finance for the Council and Clinical Commissioning Group, was named Finance Director of the Year at the Healthcare Financial Management Association Awards.

Both women have gone way above and beyond the call of duty in fulfilling their roles, a fact that I'm sure anybody who's worked with either of them can completely agree with.

I have always said that the work that goes on in Tameside, and the officers who carry out that work, are among the best to be found in the whole of the public sector. Now everybody else is getting the chance to see that too. So, once again Sandra and Kathy, congratulations and thank you for everything that you do.

On the topic of awards I was delighted to hear earlier this month that Stamford Park has been awarded a Green Flag, the international award that recognises public spaces that boast the highest possible environmental standards, are beautifully maintained and have good visitor facilities. To quote the two independent judges ... 'the management of this park is excellent ... it is providing a good healthy recreational area for local people.'

Ofsted

I want as well to acknowledge the important news that we have recently received from Ofsted. Following their full re-inspection back in May, they have informed us that our Children's Services have moved from "Inadequate" to "Requires Improvement to be good".

Significantly, Ofsted not only noted a much strengthened whole council commitment to improving the quality and impact of children's services but improvements within our multi-agency safeguarding arrangements and political leadership as well.

Thanks must go to everybody whose hard work and commitment made that improvement possible. There is still some way to go on our journey, but now we go forward with confidence that we're heading in the right direction.

Co-Operative Council

At the end of my address in May I announced that we would be aiming to transform Tameside into a Co-Operative council by the end of this municipal year, if not sooner.

We've taken the first step by agreeing to move forward with our plans at Executive Cabinet. This marks the beginning of our formal application process to the Co-Operative Councils Innovation Network. Over the next few months, we will be talking to all elected members and the wider community about what this means for them and for the borough.

I know that many people will be asking, "What's a Co-Operative Council, and why should it matter to me?"

First and foremost, co-operative councils are defined by their adherence to the principles and values of the wider International Co-Operative Alliance, as represented by

313 co-operative federations in 109 countries. It is less about the transformation of services to co-operatives as it is ensuring we follow these common principles and values, albeit slightly modified for the context of local government, in everything we do.

In broad terms, they commit us to find better ways of working for, and with, the people of Tameside for the benefit of Tameside's communities. It builds upon the consultations and conversations we already have with our residents to create deeper engagement and partnerships, coming together to share innovation and learning to co-produce services that meet the needs of those that depend on them.

Put simply, it is about everybody working together, and everybody receiving the benefits. As the democratically-elected leaders and civil society partners in their local area, councils are in a unique position to drive and support this improvement and change.

We can even point to a number of areas in Tameside where this is happening already. The Tameside Digital Infrastructure Co-Operative offers its members wholesale access to our publically-owned dark fibre infrastructure. This allows them to build and operate cutting-edge broadband and digital connectivity services while ensuring that we retain ownership and guarantee neutrality. Our current partners include the Hospital, College and Jigsaw Homes, and we are in advanced discussions about extending the model out to organisations from the private sector.

The Home Start service brings together a network of charities from Oldham, Stockport and Tameside to offer early intervention for families with at least one child

under five. Volunteers are recruited and trained to go into homes for a few hours a week, supporting parents to give their children the best possible start in life, improving the ability of parents to care for their children, and preventing crisis by ensuring that the health and social needs of parents and their children are met.

Community centres are where co-operative values and principles can be seen the most clearly. There are a number of these centres in Tameside, providing volunteer-led, thriving and fully inclusive spaces for our residents and communities. The Grafton Centre in Hyde runs a wide range of health and wellbeing, social and learning activities for 480 local residents of all ages. The Together Centre at Loxley House offers a community space for residents who may otherwise be vulnerable to loneliness and isolation, working in partnership with other local organisations to put on activities such as The Shed, art groups and Sing Together.

We are also in talks about the possibility of extending “The Bread and Butter Thing”, a Hattersley-based project that brings together the public, private and community sectors to tackle food waste and food poverty, out to the whole of Tameside. I know this is something that Janet Cooper has been heavily involved in, and would be more than happy to give you the details if you want to know more.

Over the rest of the summer we will take these examples of good practice and expand them out into a comprehensive and ambitious bid for Co-Operative council status. It is our hope that we will be able to

submit this to the Co-operative Councils' Innovation Network at the first appropriate opportunity.

Social Justice and Mobility

The second strand of our vision for Tameside is social justice and mobility. I would go even further and say that this reaches far beyond the borders of the borough; it is one of the gravest crises we face as a country.

The evidence of this crisis is staring us in the face. On the one hand, more young people than ever feel that in terms of housing, in terms of stable jobs, in terms of being able to have their own children, they will be worse off than their parents. On the other hand, two of our three most recent Prime Ministers went to the same school, the same university and the same dinner club.

But the slow death of social mobility isn't just confined to the top and bottom of society, it cuts across every possible demographic, including class, disability, ethnicity, age and gender.

Those from better off backgrounds are now almost 80% more likely to be in a professional job than their working class peers. Just 21% of people with disabilities from working class backgrounds enter the highest occupations. The proportion of 25-34 year olds who own their own house has plummeted from 55% to 35% in twenty years.

Despite what some might tell you, none of this is “just the way the world works”. It has been the inevitable result of conscious and politically-motivated choices.

The most obvious and damaging of which has been, of course, the imposition of austerity since 2010.

It would be impossible to describe the damage done by austerity to every part of our economy and society, so for the moment I'll focus just on education. Funding for children's centres such as Sure Centre has been cut by 62%, and school funding, despite ever-increasing number of young people entering education, has faced cuts of 8% with sixth forms and local authority support being hit disproportionately hard.

But even that pales in comparison to the decimation of adult and further education. Despite the fact that we've been told that acquiring new skills and qualifications is more essential than ever to getting by in the modern workplace, the number of Level 2 England and Maths courses has declined by 45%, and the number of adults achieving those qualifications has also gone down to 60%.

While action is undoubtedly required at a national level, there are things we can do to reverse the decline of social mobility in Tameside.

One of the cornerstones of social mobility is jobs; high quality and high paying jobs. Making sure our residents get those kinds of jobs starts with education. Through the continued improvement of our children's services, projects such as Tameside Loves Reading and the cutting-edge facilities built as part of Vision Tameside we are making sure that learning in all its forms is within

reach of every young person in Tameside, no matter what their ages or life circumstances.

We're hard at work at revolutionising our public transport infrastructure, not just to improve our air quality, but to connect our residents up with job opportunities in Tameside and beyond. The construction of our new Transport Interchange in Ashton is proceeding on schedule, and we've thrown our weight behind a number of Greater Manchester-wide projects, such as taking more control of our bus network, through the GM Transport Strategy 2040.

All these plans, and more, have been enshrined in the Joint Corporate Plan for the borough as agreed at the end of June, making sure that the priorities of "Starting Well" and "Living Well" receive the attention they deserve in at every level and in every project we undertake.

Conclusion

In the very near future, we need to have a serious discussion about whether what we've seen in Britain since 2010 is where we really want to be as a country. The ravaging of our public sector by austerity, the fact that so much of our lives are determined by the luck of our birth, the chaos and cruelty that have become routine in the highest levels of our politics.

But hand-in-hand with that discussion, there needs to be action as well. Action that can be taken right here in

Tameside to show that there is another, better way. Our commitment to co-operative principles and social mobility will allow us to forge our own path for Tameside's future and our resident's future.

That pledge, to give people and partners in Tameside a real opportunity to get on in life and get involved in our priority-setting, has already been established through measures like the Tameside PACT and our Corporate Plan.

Becoming a Cooperative Council and improving social mobility are the natural next step to build on these strong foundations, empowering our residents to realise their full potential, and to play their part in making decisions, in delivering services and in supporting our communities.

These are ideas whose time has come, and it now falls to all of us to make them a reality.

Thank you.