

Leader's Budget Speech – 25th February 2020

(2,704 words, 20.8 minutes)

Members and officers of the Council,

Before I begin, I'd like to take the opportunity to welcome you all back here to Guardsman Tony Downes House. Due to the General Election in December, it's been a longer wait than usual between sessions of Full Council.

It goes without saying that the election did not go the way I would have liked it to. But Tameside set its face against the national trend and returned three Labour MPs.

My congratulations go out to Angela Rayner, Andrew Gwynne and Jonathan Reynolds. Their re-election is a testament to their hard work and their commitment to their constituents. I have no doubt that they will continue to be impeccable representatives for the people of Tameside.

While the General Election in December was the biggest exercise in democracy in 2019, we mustn't forget that it was no less than the third election to be held that year following the European and local elections in May.

Most of the people in this room are under no illusions about exactly how much organisation, expertise and sheer hard work is required to make sure that any election runs smoothly. When they were put under pressure, our election staff operated with professionalism and diligence to ensure that all three polls took place efficiently and without incident.

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There is no doubt in my mind that 2019 will be looked back upon as a year of transformation for Tameside. A year where many of the seeds of investment and development we've planted began to bear fruit.

At the final meeting of the year, it's customary to run through some of the highlights of the previous twelve months. However, due to the cancellation of Full Council in December, I'd like to take the chance to do so now instead.

The desire to make music, to act and to express ourselves is one of the things that make us human. It's therefore appropriate that 2019 also saw a number of cultural events come to Tameside, showcasing the borough to a regional and, in some cases, a national audience.

That included not just one, but two, Lantern Parades. First came with postponed Christmas Lantern Parade in Denton in February, followed by the Tameside Northern Lights Winter Carnival in December. With the support of thousands of our residents of all ages and internationally respected artists Global Grooves, the streets of Tameside came alive with light, music and community spirit for two amazing evenings.

Thanks to the efforts of Councillor Ryan and others, Tameside held its first ever Pride Day at Cheetham Park in the summer. Preparations are already underway for a sequel this year, and I think I speak for everyone when I say that I'm really excited to see what they put together.

We also teamed up with the Royal Exchange Theatre over the summer to bring The Den, a 120 seater pop-up theatre space, to Stalybridge Civic Hall. Over a two week period, residents took on the roles of ushers, box office staff, technicians and audience to co-create a cultural event created by, and created for, the people of Tameside.

One of the highlights for me was a production of the Exchange Theatre's new play "There Is a Light That Never Goes Out", which used a 19th century story to highlight modern day poverty and abuses such as zero-hours contracts.

Last, but by no means least, the country's most prestigious cycling competition, the Tour of Britain, came to Manchester. For one day, the eyes of every cyclist were on Tameside as some of the most decorated riders in the world made their way through Hyde, over Werneth Low, and onto Hattersley, Mottram, Stalybridge and Millbrook.

It was a golden opportunity to showcase our borough to the world, and our residents rose to the occasion by creating an incredible spectacle through lining the route with hanging baskets, planters, painted bicycles and bunting. We also held a Bicycle Festival on Armentieres Square the following day, harnessing the enthusiasm of the Tour weekend to encourage people to choose two wheels over four.

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As entertaining and important as these cultural events were, we also never forgot last year that our core purpose as a local authority is to deliver and improve the vital services that our residents depend on.

Nowhere has this been more apparent than the work that has been done on our Children's Services. Following a full re-inspection back in May, we were informed by Ofsted that we have improved from "Inadequate" in 2016 to "Requires Improvement to be Good" three years later.

The Ofsted report shows that inspectors noted the effectiveness of our multi-agency safeguarding hub, strengthening the voice of the child, and enhancing our recruitment and retention efforts for social workers.

And that journey will continue in 2020. Following Ofsted's recommendations a detailed sustainability plan was passed at Executive Cabinet in November. These seven proposals will deliver action in a number of areas, including Early Help, Family Support, Looked After Children's Placements and Fostering. These will both improve outcomes for children and families, and guarantee the financial sustainability of these vital services for the future.

Everybody who has joined us on this improvement process, not only in Children's Services but in the other council services and partners that have supported them, knows just how much toil and effort it has taken to get to this point. Thanks to their hard work, we can be confident that we are now moving in the right direction.

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. The amount of commendations and awards we've received are too numerous to mention all of them here, but I want to give a shout out to just a few.

In the summer we held the first ever CRISTAL awards – working in partnership with Derbyshire County Council to Celebrate Remarkable and Inspirational Stars, Teams and Leaders in our care homes. Many of the nominations we received came directly from care home residents and their families, which just demonstrates what a difference staff are making on a daily basis to enrich the lives and improve the quality of care for our residents.

This great work has been matched by the step up in quality we've seen in Tameside's care homes as a whole this year, the majority of which are now rated "Good" or "Outstanding" by the Care Quality Commission. This means that more of our elderly or vulnerable residents than ever are able to live in dignity and comfort.

Since we recently celebrated National Apprenticeship week, I also want to highlight one of the 175 apprentices whose career began at or progressed through Tameside Council. Sarah Brooksbank, a modern apprentice in our Carer's Service, walked away from the GM Health and Care Champions Awards with Apprentice of the Year. Over the past year she's made an invaluable contribution of a number of projects, including designing a carers' pack to go out from GP surgeries, relaunching the Signpost carer's newsletter and acting as a meet and greeter for the public during the opening of Tameside One.

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Of course, one of our top priorities in the mid- to long-term is investing in our town centres and built environment to make Tameside a better place to live, work and do business in.

Tameside One has brought world-class customer service and learning facilities, along with thousands of staff and students, into the heart of Ashton-under-Lyne. The Denton Wellness Centre, the jewel in the crown of our £20 million transformation of our leisure services, is due to open next month, and construction is nearly complete on the Ashton transport interchange, which will provide a state-of-the-art hub for public transport for travel within Tameside and beyond.

We've received approval in principle from the Mayor's Challenge Fund to spend £14 million on 11 schemes in a number of our towns to make walking and cycling in the borough an easier and safer option. From Ashton to Denton, Audenshaw to Droylsden, Stalybridge to Hyde, we're making sure that wherever you live in

Tameside you'll be able to feel secure in leaving the car at home. We are currently consulting on these schemes on the council's Big Conversation website, and I would encourage you all to go online and let us know your views.

While these high-visibility projects and investments will no doubt steal the headlines, I want to shine a light on some smaller things we've done that I expect will make a big difference going forward.

I'm talking about initiatives such as the rollout across Tameside of the Refill Scheme and the Litter Hub Networks; working with businesses and residents to give them the tools to make healthier choices and show their pride in their local area. We're also working towards improving energy efficiency in council assets through renovating our buildings and replacing obsolete vehicles with less polluting alternatives.

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In 2020, and with help from the Budget that has been presented to you tonight, we will build on those strong foundations. If last year was a year of transformation, this year will be a year of delivery.

But we can do only that from the solid footing of a sustainable and viable financial context, and ten years of austerity is not something that goes away overnight. Over the last six years we have had to save £160 million to set a legally-required balanced budget. While we are presenting a balanced budget tonight for 2020-21, we project that even more cost savings will have to be found to continue setting a legal budget in future years.

This is a challenge that can only be faced head-on, and can only be overcome by joining forces with our residents and partners.

In the months leading up to tonight we launched our second joint Budget Conversation, giving members of the public the chance to give us their views on how they would like Tameside Council and Tameside and Glossop Clinical Commissioning Group to spend and save money.

I am confident that the Budget I am presenting to you tonight balances all the priorities that we have identified.

It is a Budget with delivery at its heart, carefully targeting the money we have for the maximum possible impact for residents and services. It is a Budget with sustainability at its heart, putting us in the firmest footing possible for the next financial year. It is a Budget with our residents at its heart, since their feedback has been directly incorporated into its creation.

In order to make good on our promises to invest in services and infrastructure this Budget calls for an increase in council tax for the next financial of 3.99%, which also includes an increase in the precept for adult social care. For a Band A property, which comprises the majority of our housing stock, this translates into an increase of £39.09 per year or 75p per week.

This will provide an extra £3.7 million to turbo-charge our plans for Tameside's future. This is not a decision that we have taken lightly, and we have also made the decision that our residents should not be expected to shoulder this burden alone.

That is why, after close scrutiny to ensure that it does not negatively affect our financial stability going forward, this Budget also authorises the release of £12.4 million from our reserves.

Since we cannot, and will not, use reserves to support day-to-day spending, this unlocked funding will be used on a number of "invest to save" and "invest to grow" projects in key areas; including Children's Services, Adult Social Care, Economic Development, and Operations and Neighbourhoods.

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As I'm sure most of you are aware, Tameside Council has officially been welcomed into the Cooperative Council Innovation Network. We are now a proud member of a growing and influential network of local authorities committed to developing a new relationship with our citizens, and transforming the way that public services are delivered.

Those aren't just PR buzzwords. We mean it. More than anything else in 2020, it will be the Cooperative approach that will define how we look and move forward.

I believe that this will most clearly be seen in our plans for investment and growth. I've mentioned our major projects like Tameside One, the Denton Wellness Centre and the Ashton transport interchanges, but these are but individual elements in our wider ambitions to encourage inclusive growth in the borough.

These ambitions will build on a single foundational truth; that economic improvement that does not produce opportunities and benefits for all is no improvement at all. We will identify and invest in sectors with the strongest potential for return, give our residents the skills they need to take control of their own lives, and ensure that our town centres play a key role as vibrant community spaces and drivers of growth.

It is my intention that these ambitions for inclusive growth also focus on housing, with particular emphasis on identifying future need, tackling homelessness, and guaranteeing the quality of our Private Rented Sector.

The ideas embodied by this and our Cooperative approach have already been turned into practical action. After a year of preparation and consultation, the Stalybridge Town Centre Challenge is coming to fruition. The formal plan of action was agreed at Executive Cabinet two weeks ago, and in the next few months we will be seeking further investment and support for a number of resident-led proposals with the potential to transform the town as we know it.

We are also using the £100,000 of funding we were awarded from the British Property Federation's Future Challenge to develop a master plan for Hyde – the first

step in the creation of a sustainable, accessible service-rich town centre that stands up to anything else you'd find in a similar-sized town in the UK.

Over the last few years we have also been successful in encouraging the growth of high-technology, high-productivity businesses in Tameside through the renovation of Ashton Old Baths, and nurturing the development of skills in advanced technology and engineering with Vision Tameside. By bringing together these achievements with our new cooperative approach and ambitions for inclusive growth, we are creating a Tameside built to thrive in the 2020s and beyond.

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In Tameside, we have always been proud of where we have come from. From our canals to our cotton mills, the history of who we are is all around us. It is a history of resilience and struggle, but it is also a history of innovation and reinvention.

When the likes of Hugh Mason and Annie Kenney, two giants of Tameside's industrial past, looked at the world around them, they no doubt saw poverty, deprivation and challenge. But they also knew that things could, and would, be different.

No matter what the cynics might say, if we work together, if we work hard and if we work purposefully, we can turn the impossible into the inevitable.

2019 will be remembered as a year of transformation for Tameside. Now let's go further and make 2020 a year for delivering for Tameside. I'm looking forward to working with all of you to make it happen.

I want to be able to stand up and say that, when Tameside needed us most, we stood up and rose to the challenge.

That we faced over a decade of austerity, and we overcame it.

That we saw the path of the future, and we set ourselves upon it.

That we built our vision with our residents, and we worked together to realise it.

The Budget presented to you tonight will give us the certainty and stability we need to fulfil all of those ambitions. In every way, it is a Budget of delivery and of investing to grow.

It takes strong but sustainable action to close the savings gap imposed upon us. It takes the fight to the climate emergency. It not just protects, but improves, our most vital services. And it lays the foundations to truly secure a bright future for Tameside.

I therefore have no hesitation in commending it to the Council.

Thank you.