

## **Leader's Budget Speech – 26<sup>th</sup> February**

(2,619 words, ~20.1 minutes)

Members and officers of the Council,

I've heard it said that to truly understand somebody, you need to understand their story. Not just the story about where they've come from. Not just the story about where they are at the moment. But the story about where they're going in the future.

I like to think that this applies to organisations as much as it does to people. If that's true, then you can't understand where we are today without understanding the story of local government.

That story continues to be one of struggle against the grinding and increasing weight of austerity.

Council funding has been cut by over half since 2010. Where once we might have had £1 to spend on services in 2010, in 2019 we have 40p.

I know that every single person in this room knows that figure, but there is another side to the austerity story that is sometimes missed. That is the fact that demand for services over this time has remained the same, or even increased in many cases.

Unless serious action is taken, councils up and down the country risk being crushed between the rock of austerity on one side, and the hard place of demographic pressures and inflation on the other.

Here in Tameside, we estimate that a further £31 million of savings and cuts over the next three years will be required to balance our books in addition to the plans we've already outlined.

I want to make one thing absolutely clear before I go any further; the protection of our most vulnerable residents, and the vital services they rely on, remains our highest priority. The majority of the Budget presented to you tonight is allocated to this singular purpose.

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But we have reached the point where keeping our heads down and getting on with the job is no longer an option. Silence in the age of austerity is not just complicity; it is a betrayal of the very people we have pledged ourselves to protect.

The sound of the alarm bells has even reached as far as Parliament itself, where the influential and cross-party Public Accounts Committee has said that the government is "in denial" about the state of local government finances, and that they need to "get real, listen fully to the concerns of local government and take a hard look at the real impact funding reductions have on local services".

Their words, not mine.

It is a message that I think we can all get behind. We call once again upon the government to call time on austerity and provide fair and sustainable funding.

Not passing the buck down to councils, but taking some responsibility. Not sticking plasters, but a long-term plan.

Not for the bare minimum of statutory services, but for everything that local government provides.

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In these extreme financial conditions, it is more important than ever that we are honest with the public and with our partners about the challenges we face and what it means for them.

I'm happy to share with you tonight a snapshot of the work we've done to make this happen, and how exactly it has fed into the Budget presented to you tonight.

At the end of last year, we went out to the people to Tameside and Glossop to talk to them about the Budget. We wanted to know which services they wanted us to prioritise, and how they thought we could save money or increase our revenue.

From the start of December to the end of January, we received over 500 responses. Council officers organised a number of engagement and drop-in sessions at community services across the borough. This included a particularly enjoyable and informative session which I attended with the Tameside Youth Council at Copley Youth Base. The conversation was also promoted extensively through social media and our existing network of groups and partners.

We've also committed ourselves to working more closely with public sector agencies and voluntary, community, faith and social enterprise groups in Tameside and Glossop by signing up our PACT agreement.

This formally commits us to bringing fellow PACT members into discussions about designing and delivering services, to improve communities to build genuine partnership working, and to combine our skills and resources to secure investment and funding.

The beginning of the month also saw us hold the first Partnership Engagement Network Conference of the year at Hyde Town Hall.

One of the three that will take place in 2019, these events bring together representatives of organisations and the public to discuss how we can build the future of health and social care from the ground up in Tameside and Glossop.

Of course, we cannot forget as well that the PACT agreement and the PEN Conference feed into our wider plans for health and social care integration. We are continuing to work collaboratively and positively with healthcare professionals and clinicians to make sure everybody in Tameside and Glossop has access to the right care, at the right place, at the right time.

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Hand in hand with working closely with our partners and communities, and a theme that emerged as a key one for our residents in the Budget Conversation, is making sure that whatever money we have left goes further than it has in the past.

Over the past year we've seen a number of examples in the Council and our partners where we've put this into practice. Examples that haven't just had an impact in Tameside, but

which have been recognised as breaking new ground regionally and nationally.

Tameside Hospital, our local care homes and the council's Community Response Service teamed up to deliver the Digital Health Centre. Using Skype to put residents in touch with medical professionals from the comfort of our own homes, it has to date prevented over 2,700 ambulance call outs, saving over £1.3 million and improving quality of care at the same time.

Our Shared Lives scheme, which allows residents with mental health issues or physical and learning disabilities to take part in everyday social and domestic activities with volunteer carers, has received almost universal praise about the difference it has made on the lives of everybody involved in it. It's also saved £10,000-£25,000 per year per person over traditional forms of social care, and was named Local Government Communications Campaign of the Year at prestigious UK Public Affairs Awards.

In the very near future we will also celebrate the opening of Tameside One, a key milestone in the Vision Tameside project and our plans for Ashton town centre. Smaller and far cheaper to run than the building it replaced, Tameside One will be a one-stop shop for customer services and will bring thousands of council officers, college students and support staff back into the heart of Ashton.

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I give you my assurances tonight that the Council, our partners and I will continue to find yet more opportunities to

improve service quality while saving money at the same time. But I want you to be under no illusions either, these innovations on their own will not be enough to bridge the funding gap we all face.

It's appropriate at this point, for the benefit of those who may be less familiar with the Budget, to go over where our money comes from, where it goes, and what we can and cannot do to improve our financial position and keep our vital services running.

For the last financial year the total gross expenditure of the Council was approximately £533 million. £336 million of this was covered by income, government grants and various forms of payments from customers and clients. This left £197 million that was funded by business rates and council tax, just over a third of our spending in total.

We are required by law to set a balanced budget. Despite what you might hear from some, there is no way of getting around this simple fact.

That money covers every service that we provide. As you might expect however, certain services require more funding than others.

Services for adult social care and children's services, at £83 million and £78 million a year respectively, are our two largest areas of spending. Operations and Greenspace, which covers many universal services such as parks and bin collections, comes close behind at £76 million a year.

The quarter of a million bins we collect every week, the 33,000 visits to our customer services and 179,000 calls we

resolve a year, the 1,000 family events we hold across every one of our towns, and the 3,000 elderly or vulnerable residents we help to live with safety and dignity in their own homes.

All of this, and much more, must be paid and accounted for in the Budget that we've brought forward tonight.

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It is in order to protect and maintain these services in the faces of cuts and uncertainty that our Budget calls for an increase in council tax of 3.99%. This also includes an increase in the precept for adult social care, and amounts to £37.58 a year, or 72p a week, for a Band A property in Tameside.

We expect this will provide an additional £3.5 million a year of funding for the services and support our residents expect and depend upon.

As many of you know, the council tax bill also includes levies to help fund services that go beyond our borders to cover the whole of Greater Manchester, such as the Police, the Fire and Rescue Service and the Combined Authority.

We do not have control over these in Tameside, but we understand that they will also be increased this year by a combined total of 43p a week for a Band A property.

This is not a decision that any of us have taken lightly, but there are certain facts that we cannot hide from. We must set a balanced budget; we must protect our services; and in the absence of a sustainable plan for funding from

Whitehall we must do both of those things using our own resources.

Even taking this rise into account, Tameside remains a low-tax borough. The amount a resident in Tameside can expect to pay in council tax is the fourth lowest out of the ten Greater Manchester local authorities, as well as below the regional and national average.

We know as well from a survey of local authorities conducted by the Local Government Chronicle that 97% of those who replied said that, facing the same financial pressures that we face, they have made a similar decision to increase council tax.

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We know as well, quite rightly, that our residents will expect some kind of return on the additional money they are being asked to pay. That's why I pledge that every penny will be used to sustain and improve services within Tameside.

Wherever possible, we will invest in services with a focus on the five priorities outlined in our Corporate Plan - Starting Well, Living Well, Ageing Well, Great Place and Vibrant Economy.

For our children, we will ensure that they grow up in supportive and resilient families. When they grow up, we will give them the resources they need to fulfil their potential. When they grow old, we will provide them with the support to remain independent and in control of their own lives.

We'll build upon successes like the Maternity Voices Partnership, which has provided early intervention and support for 1,105 Tameside children, and the Employment Fund, which has helped nearly 368 young people, many of whom were care leavers or far from the jobs market into paid employment and apprenticeships.

We'll continue working with our partners to encourage residents to make the right choices for themselves, like the 31 people with learning difficulties who found work through our Adult and Continuing Education services, or the people who have turned their lifestyles around with help from Active Tameside and our £20 million investment in our leisure estate. If any of our residents find themselves in a crisis we'll offer a helping hand out, through projects like the expanded GM Bed Every Night campaign, which will offer rough sleepers a roof over their heads not just in winter weather but in every weather.

We'll make quality of life a priority at every stage of life through schemes like Denton Diabetes Diverters, which has prevented half of its referrals from developing Type-2 Diabetes, or the Home First service, which has helped elderly or vulnerable residents stay at home for medical and care treatments wherever possible. Just as we look after the health of our residents, we'll look after the health of our town centres as well. Further plans for the Stalybridge Town Centre Challenge are being drawn up following our extensive consultation and engagement work last year. We're also laying the groundwork for development and investment in Hyde town centre through a bid to the government's Future High Streets Fund.

And where we consider it necessary, we will go even further. The Budget authorises the release of £9 million in reserve funding to drive further improvement in our Children's Services, allowing us to reduce cost pressures in the long-term and focus on making the quality improvements that we all want to see.

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Despite all this, we must remember that this Budget is just the beginning, not the end, of our plans. We anticipate that further action will be required to protect Tameside's financial security over the months and years ahead.

The road ahead of us remains uncertain, not least due to the continued paralysis in Westminster around Brexit. With barely over a month to go before our scheduled departure from the European Union, we are no closer to knowing what form it will take, if it even happens at all.

But that is no excuse for inaction. It falls upon us as local authorities to get on with the things we can control, while preparing as best we can for the impact of any decisions made elsewhere.

None of us should be under any illusions about the scale of that task. But over the past twelve months the story of Tameside has been one of resilience. We managed the collapse of Carillion, we endured the flames on Saddleworth Moor, and we will meet this challenge with the same spirit and resolve with which we met those.

Over the next few months we will also be launching a number of significant plans and investment in Tameside for

housing, developing our local economy and moving forward with our digital strategy. I expect to be able to update you with more details on these at the next meeting of Full Council in May.

I also intend for us to continue to be as heavily involved as possible in the work of the Greater Manchester Combined Authority, particularly around the future of the Spatial Framework and our Clean Air policies. We will make sure that Tameside's voice is always heard as we move forward on making Greater Manchester one of the best places in the world to live, work and grow old in.

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Now more than ever, we need to defend and promote the indispensable role that local government plays in our country.

This is the message we must send out; to Tameside, to Greater Manchester and to the government. The services local authorities provide help keep people alive, they help to make people's lives worth living, they are precious beyond measure and they absolutely cannot be taken for granted.

Until the government heeds that call, we must use every resource and asset at our disposal to continue delivering what our residents need and expect from us.

This is a Budget that will help us do just that. I therefore commend it to the Council.