

Leader's Speech – 21st May FINAL VERSION

Members and officers of the council,

It gives me great pleasure to stand before you again for the second time as Leader of Tameside Metropolitan Borough Council. A number of people in the room today are representing their wards at Full Council for the first time, including Jack Naylor in Denton South, Shibley Alam in Hyde Werneth, Charlotte Martin in Audenshaw, Jacqueline Owen in Longdendale and Lee Huntbach in Ashton Waterloo. Every one of us will have a vital role in our plans for Tameside's future.

Tonight, I want to use this opportunity to outline what those plans are. While government at a national level continues to flounder, we're getting a grip, getting the job done, and continuing to look forward.

As part of this looking forward, I have undertaken a number of changes to the structure and members of the Executive Cabinet, the details of which will be covered further on the agenda. With a mix of experienced heads and fresh thinking, I am confident that we have the focused and balanced leadership necessary to deliver on our priorities.

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Our focus over the next year will be on two distinct but deeply connected areas, people and place.

We will develop our built environment through encouraging growth and infrastructure, creating jobs and improving services for our residents. We will also work to preserve Tameside's natural environment, raising awareness not just of our greenspaces and areas of beauty, but also how they can help improve our health and quality of life.

As part of this, we launched the first ever Tameside Green Summit. Six months on we are making good on the pledges declared there, such as reducing the energy demand across our corporate estate through better management, retrofitting and switching to a green energy supplier. We've also planted over 4,500 trees in 2019, beating our target by 1,115 with more than half the year still to go. This will ensure that the quality of our greenspace is matched by its quantity when it comes to promoting diversity and environmental impact.

The report last year about micro-plastic pollution in the River Tame has been a wake-up call for us all. Next month, we will roll out Refill Tameside, encouraging residents to swap out their plastic water bottles for reusable alternatives that can be refilled for free at local businesses. Refill Tameside is the first step in our drive to tackle unnecessary plastic waste, but we cannot tackle this scourge unless everybody plays their part. We should all think about the simple and effective changes we could make to our lifestyles and behaviour, such as using plastic straws or other non-plastic alternatives where possible.

Looking beyond the borders of Tameside, the public consultation for the GM Clean Air Plan has now launched and is open until the end of the June. I encourage you all to take part to make sure that the voice of our borough is heard in any final decision.

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Hand-in-hand with our natural environment is our built environment – the town centres, buildings and infrastructure that we depend upon for our livelihoods and quality of life.

As part of that, I'm delighted to announce that even at this early stage, the co-location of services at the new Tameside One has succeeded beyond expectations. To give one example, 6,000 residents have visited the new library within the first week; double that of the old Ashton Central Library. That popularity has been maintained, with visitor numbers consistently averaging over 5,000 a week since. Our public service area is also proving to be very beneficial and popular to those needing advice and support.

Construction is also progressing on our other two major infrastructure projects. The superstructure of the new transport hub in Ashton-under-Lyne is now in place, with work now shifting to the construction of the floors, roofs and walls of a building that, when completed, will encourage the use of public transport across the borough

and connect us to regional economies throughout GM, into Yorkshire and beyond.

The structural work for the Denton Wellness Centre is also well underway, and has been complemented with a £1.5 million grant award by Sport England; a ringing endorsement of their faith in the Centre's potential to deliver health and cultural benefits to the town and the borough as a whole.

But we know there is more to investment than the big showpiece buildings. Through our partnership with the Tameside Digital Infrastructure Cooperative and a £2 million investment, we will put our dark fibre network at the disposal of commercial internet service providers to roll out ultra-fast broadband across all of Tameside.

We are also continuing to invest in other towns through the Stalybridge Town Centre Challenge, and we have made a formal submission on behalf of Stalybridge and Hyde town centres to receive a share of the government's £675 million Future High Streets Fund. I expect to be able to inform you about further progress in the near future.

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A further area of focus this year will be on securing the future of Tameside's people. By this I mean not just the future of our residents, but the future of the services that many of them depend upon.

Nowhere will this be seen more clearly than in the continuation of our work to integrate health and social care, including the opening of five Primary Care Access Service hubs, and the Urgent Treatment Centre at Tameside Hospital. Working alongside existing neighbourhood teams and building on existing good practice, these networks will help guarantee all of our residents access to place-based, high-quality and person-centred care.

Nor we will allow mental health services to suffer from the neglect that they are too often subject to. By 2021, we will double the funding for initiatives to tackle mental health issues in Tameside and Glossop to £5 million. This money will be backed up by our Suicide Prevention Strategy, which will lay out a comprehensive approach to reduce suicide rates in Tameside by at least 10% within a year.

We recognise as well that our elderly residents can and should be empowered to continue to live a full and independent life. With help from £3.1 million from the GM Transformation Fund, we're revolutionising how we provide care at home. We're putting more faith in our care workers, and more money in their pockets, to go above and beyond existing care models and make use of social prescribing and new technology.

Our work on this has already been recognised nationally, as no fewer than 12 health and social care schemes in Tameside and Glossop have been shortlisted in the

prestigious HSJ (Health Service Journal) Value Awards and MJ (Municipal Journal) Awards.

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At the same time as we make sure that our elderly and vulnerable residents can live with care and dignity, we also commit ourselves to guaranteeing that young people in Tameside have the very best start we can give them.

We're currently in the last stages of an Ofsted monitoring visit of our children's services. I want to offer my appreciation of the diligence and professionalism shown by Councillor Oliver Ryan, our Children's Services and the staff supporting them during a busy and stressful fortnight.

While we wait for Ofsted's report, we can nevertheless highlight progress in other areas that support and benefit our young people.

We have continued to invest our care leavers. From council tax support, to apprenticeships and transitional living arrangements, we are giving them a helping hand into a successful and fulfilling adult life. Thanks to the initiative of Councillor Stephen Homer and the generosity of a number of his driving instructor colleagues, we can now offer a number of our care leavers free driving lessons as well.

We've also developed a new and enhanced Early Help offer to families, getting them the support they need to

resolve issues before they escalate. Working closely with the police, schools and other partners, we've put in place a Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub to deliver swift, effective and integrated solutions.

And we have areas of excellent practice we can build on. All five of our children's homes are now been rated "Good" or "Outstanding" by Ofsted, receiving praise for their innovative approaches to care, including creative and inclusive planning, mindfulness coaching and using social media to improve engagement and safeguarding.

I'm really pleased to see the Tameside Youth Council here tonight, as they often are in Full Council meetings. I'd like to congratulate them for their absolutely excellent annual report, a copy of which should be in front of you. I think it offers a real insight into their work.

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Success over the next year will not only transform Tameside, both people and place. It will make us an example for other local authorities in Greater Manchester and England to follow.

Nor are our ambitions limited to the areas I just described. We will continue to support a number of other projects such as improving the Private Rented Sector and bringing empty homes in Tameside back into use. We also want to recommit to working with our communities and partners by seeking accreditation as a Cooperative Council, reinforced

by a comprehensive economic strategy embedded in growth, housing and co-operative principles.

Whether you sit in this chamber as a Labour councillor, a Conservative councillor or a Green councillor, the people of Tameside have put their faith in you. The responsibility now falls upon us to ensure that faith is not betrayed. They expect, and they are right to expect, nothing less than all of the ambition and effort we can give.

Achieving everything set out tonight will be challenging, and I have no doubt that there will be stumbling blocks along the way. But nothing worth doing is easy. Let's commit here and now to make Tameside a fairer place, to make Tameside a richer place, and, most importantly of all, to make Tameside a better place to live and work in.

Thank you.