

## **Leader's Full Council Speech – 3<sup>rd</sup> November**

*(2,989 words – 23 minutes)*

Members and officers of the Council, before I get into my speech, I just want to a moment to reflect on some the really positive achievements during this really challenging time by our teams at the council and key partners since the last meeting of Full Council.

In August the CCG were awarded silver status under the Ministry of Defence's Employer Recognition Scheme for supporting the armed forces community. I know the collaboration between the council, CCG and ICFT in this area is exceptional.

The same month the annual Customer Service Excellence results were published with Tameside once again achieving 100% compliance with 18 areas of compliance plus (good practice) up from 15 last year.

September saw Emily Drake – Head of Payments, Systems and Registrars – announced as joint winner of this year's Public Services People Management Association peer of the year programme.

In October the prestigious Municipal Journal awards were handed out with double success for Tameside. Our markets team won the Innovation in Property Asset Management category. And Katie Sherriff (Payments Team Manager) was recognised for the Rising Star award.

Also in October, the Research in Practice Awards highlighted a number of projects and staff from our adults services for their innovate work – Anna Jenkins, Sharron Davies, Trevor Tench, Dave Wilson and Paula Bell.

The annual assessments of CCGs were published in October and I was pleased to see our own CCG led by Dr Ramachandra and Dr Ali retained their outstanding rating. The Healthy Hyde Team won Primary Care Team of the Year at the BMJ Virtual Awards last month for their work giving residents of care homes a bigger say in how their care is managed. By the way, this is the team behind the Hyde drive thru flu vaccination clinic. I see more awards ahead!

Portland Basin was listed in the top 10% of destinations in Trip Advisor's Travellers Choice Award last month. And finally, last week was the Local Government Chronicle (LGC) Awards. The joint work of the council, CCG and ICFT in the Digital Health Centre and Community Response Service was rightly recognised when they won the Driving Efficiency through Technology category.

Tameside, along with the other 9 local authorities in GM, won the Public/Public Partnership work for workforce collaboration. Work being led here in Tameside by our own Tracy Brennan Assistant Director for Human Resources who is also the chair of the GM Heads of Human Resources that co-ordinates the collaboration.

As we cannot recognise this tremendous success in the normal way with a round of applause, I will take the liberty of sharing our joint congratulations with all those involved and thank them for their hard work and dedication, which has been recognised as outstanding.

Before I begin to talk about anything else, I would also like to remind everybody to protect yourself and others around you from the coronavirus. Now more than ever we need to make sure that we are all still doing our part.

We must remember that, as the days get shorter and colder, safeguarding the health of our residents goes further than just protecting them from coronavirus.

Every year flu kills 11,000 people on average in England, and hospitalises tens of thousands more. I urge anybody who is eligible for a free flu jab who has not yet received it to arrange to do so as soon as possible.

I know that many areas in Tameside have put in place ingenious and innovative ways of making sure residents get the vaccinations they need while maintaining social distancing. To give just one example, if you live in Hyde you can book an appointment for a vaccination “drive-thru” that will let you get your jab while never leaving your car.

Remember that when you get your vaccination you are doing more than just protecting yourself from flu. You are also helping to take unnecessary pressure off the NHS as they continue to do incredible work in handling the most serious coronavirus infections.

As you know, for the last two weeks the Greater Manchester city region has been in the harshest possible level of local lockdown at Tier 3 – Very High Risk. I imagine most of us feel the same frustration with how we have been treated, so I will not go into it in too much detail again here. However, I will say two things.

Firstly, forcing the third biggest city in the country into a Tier 3 lockdown while withholding much-needed funds to protect our businesses and low-paid workers, and setting individual councils against each other, is nothing short of a parody of how a country should be run. Let’s not forget Greater Manchester has been under restrictions since July that were equivalent to what is now called Tier 2 – High Risk. That is a long time with substantial impacts on individuals and businesses. It is for that reason we put together a detailed and fully costed submission to the government, which recognised the need to support those people and business suffering hardship to date, as well as when we moved into Tier 3 – Very High Risk. I found it particularly disappointing that when London moved into Tier 2 – High Risk the government were suddenly forthcoming with financial support. Sadly, this is a pattern of behaviour that is all too familiar.

Secondly, let’s not forget that the negotiations broke down over a difference of just £5 million, despite the government spending billions on failed testing programmes and inadequate PPE. Just a couple of weeks ago we heard that Serco expects profits to exceed original expectations this year due to the extension of government contracts to provide the Test and Trace service. A service that is universally considered to be failing with only two thirds on contacts reached. Compare that with examples of locally lead tracing teams who reach over 95% of contacts. All along, we have consistently asked for local control of test and trace. We know our communities and we know how to engage effectively with them.

From Thursday this week we, and the rest of England, will enter a lockdown period of one month. Tier 3 plus if you will. I think the fact the government has had to take this action is ample evidence that their previous approach didn’t work. Within weeks, the Tiered system of local lockdowns has had to be swept away and replaced with something more comprehensive. Quite frankly, it was never going to work. Why? Because it was an attempt at a localised system, but without proper local engagement, involvement and investment.

Any effective response to coronavirus must be built on solid local foundations, in a spirit of trust and cooperation. That includes, but is not limited to, making decisions on lockdown measures after open discussion instead of top-down diktats, more local funding to handle economic shocks, and taking test and trace infrastructure out of private control and into the hands of our Directors of Public Health.

Local government, local experts and local people must be put in the driver’s seat. And even in these incredibly difficult times, it is this case that I will continue to make.

That being said, our justified anger at the situation we find ourselves in must be matched with clear heads. We cannot blind ourselves to the other challenges that we face now and over the next few months.

A good example of this is oneGM, a new campaign launched a week ago to unite Greater Manchester. oneGM looks beyond the package offered from government by bringing together

money from the public sector, private business and charity donations to provide a package of support for those most in need, particularly over the winter months. Something that will be more important now we have entered a period of lockdown that will have an even greater impact on household incomes for families already on some of the lowest pay. The return of 80% furlough for a month and the doubling of support from 40% to 80% of trading profits for the self-employed is welcome. However, it won't make up for the damage already done sadly. Nor will it be as simple as ending it on 2 December as though the economy will bounce back immediately.

Another example of local action is our response to the issue of children going hungry over the school holidays.

Prior to the onset of Covid-19 successive governments have supported the principle of free school meals for families on low incomes. That is to be welcomed. As was the commitment by the current government to provide free school meals over the summer holidays. They rightly recognised the pressures families are under and the need to do something extra to help.

What has changed? The situation regarding Covid-19 has not. Sadly, the virus is still with us and the impact on families is considerably greater now we have moved into Tier 3 – Very High Risk restrictions. Despite that, the government's policy towards free school meals has changed. Inexplicably, they have refused to provide the same support this half term as they did over the summer. Despite calls from all quarters – including some of their own MPs – that this continued support is vital, the government have refused to provide a national scheme. To me it flies in the face of common sense and basic decency. The campaign led so inspirationally by Marcus Rashford has shown there is overwhelming support in the country for an end to food poverty for children. I hope all members will support the motion later on the agenda asking the government to reverse their decision.

When it became clear last week the government were not going to help, I decided we had to step in. Launched on Tuesday last week the scheme provides a £15 supermarket voucher from either Tesco or Asda for any child attending a Tameside school who is eligible for income based free school meals. All that is required is the completion of a simple online application form, and for those families not online they can call the Early Help Team who will sort out the application for them. If anyone with a child on income based free school meals who has not yet claimed their £15 voucher, they have until 8 November to do so.

The simple fact is that, for too many people in Tameside, Greater Manchester and the country as a whole, hardship and struggle did not begin with coronavirus. They need and deserve more than going back to normal, they need us to build back better.

We have begun this work already. Since our last meeting of Full Council we hit a major milestone in our plans for local regeneration as the Ashton-under-Lyne Interchange opened its doors to the public.

Making it both easier and safer for people to travel around Tameside it will tie together many of our existing investments such as the redevelopment of our further education colleges, Ashton Old Baths and the Tameside Wellness Centre, unlocking greater economic prosperity, increasing employment opportunities and transforming learning and skills in the borough.

Building a world-leading transport infrastructure is also an important step in helping people to leave their cars at home to reduce congestion, improve air quality and protect our shared environment.

Hand-in-hand with this, a number of consultations have been launched to let residents in Tameside and Greater Manchester have their say on what "building back better" means to them.

Yesterday we opened up our annual budget conversation, asking people who live and work in Tameside about their priorities in regards to the services provided by both Tameside Council and Tameside and Glossop Clinical Commissioning Group.

It is unfortunately no exaggeration to say that the financial challenges of this year's budget are the most serious we have ever faced. On top of the reality of a decade of austerity, the coronavirus pandemic has also reduced many of our income sources while increasing the demand for services. It is estimated that a further £60 million in savings will be required next year to balance the books.

The conversation will run until 6<sup>th</sup> January after which point all responses will be analysed and incorporated into the decision-making processes for the new budget, which is due to be agreed in February 2021.

At the Greater Manchester level, there are also a number of discussions ongoing that will help to revolutionise our transport infrastructure, grow our economy and protect our shared environment for future generations.

The GM Clean Air Consultation will lay the foundation for taking the fight to the silent killer of air pollution, which is estimated to contribute to the deaths of 1,200 people every year in our city region. Until the 3<sup>rd</sup> December we are asking for views on the creation of a Greater Manchester-wide Clean Air Zone, carefully and specifically targeted at the roads in the city region with the highest levels of air pollution.

Vans, buses, coaches, taxis, private hire vehicles, minibuses and heavy goods vehicles that do not meet certain emissions standards will have to pay a daily charge to drive in the Zone. Private cars, motorbikes and mopeds are not included. To support the transition to this Clean Air Zone, we are offering a package of funding to assist businesses to upgrade their affected vehicles before the new measures come into effect. This will also include additional investment in electric vehicle infrastructure and a Hardship Fund for those who may be particularly disadvantaged by the changes.

Close on its heels follows the GM Consultation on Minimum Licensing Standards for taxis and private hire vehicles. Every year, millions of trips are made in these kinds of vehicles, the majority of which take place with no problems whatsoever. However, after listening closely to members of the trade, public and regulators we believe that we can do more.

This includes addressing concerns about "out of town" private vehicles operating outside the area in which they are licensed, inconsistent standards across each local authority area, and older licensed vehicles contributing to air pollution. Vehicles will be required to abide by minimum standards of safety and accessibility for disabled people, as well as adopting a Greater Manchester-wide colour (black for taxis/Hackney cabs and white for private hire vehicles) and livery of a common design with the individual council logo incorporated. In the longer term, our goal is nothing less than making our entire licensed vehicle sector emission-free by the end of the decade.

Just over a week ago, Greater Manchester leaders published the final draft of the city-region's wide-ranging Plan for Homes, Jobs and the Environment – the Spatial Framework. The plan – endorsed at a meeting of the GMCA on Friday last week – will build the right homes in the right places so everyone can live in environmentally sustainable villages, towns and cities connected by a fully integrated, high-capacity transport system. The plan will now be reviewed by all ten districts and if approved will go out for an eight-week public consultation, beginning Tuesday 1 December.

We have a statutory duty from the government to deliver on a housing need target. That applies with or without the Spatial Framework. What is so important about the Spatial Framework is control. By having a plan like this we have control over development and investment. We want development in Tameside to be Tameside led not developer led. We want to prioritise brownfield over greenbelt. We want quality homes over profit driven high-density units. We want to balance public transport and walking and cycling with road infrastructure. We want inclusive growth for everyone. The Spatial Framework enables all these.

Transport for Greater Manchester's Five-Year Transport Delivery Plan has been developed alongside the Spatial Framework to ensure all the new housing and commercial sites are supported by appropriate transport connections, especially accessible public transport. At the core of the plan is sustainability. Green transport like walking and cycling play an important role, and have wide reaching benefits for the environment, physical health and mental wellbeing. You only need look around you to see more people than ever are walking and cycling. So we are targeting investment in facilities and infrastructure to keep that trend going upwards.

The Spatial Framework is so much more than just a planning document. It is a key plank of our 'build back better' strategy. Meeting our city-region's housing need by building high quality affordable homes, connecting areas with environmentally sustainable transport links, as well as becoming carbon neutral by 2038 the plan is the bedrock of our ambition for inclusive growth for all.

Tameside is an exciting place to invest with a track record of successful development.

Just last week a major global property consultancy identify the top five areas in the UK prime for major development, and one of them was Tameside. In addition, three of our major investment projects of recent times have been shortlisted for awards in the North West Regional Construction Awards – Tameside One, Tameside Wellness Centre and Ashton Interchange.

Make no mistake. This is a critical time for not just Tameside, not even just Greater Manchester, but for Britain as a whole. Not only do we face unprecedented crisis in public health and finances, the government's actions also mean that we face an unprecedented crisis in leadership of our country.

Against this it is our duty in local government to step into the vacuum wherever we have the power to do so, earning our residents' trust and building solutions that work for our borough. In areas where we cannot take matters into our own hands, we must never hesitate to speak out if we believe that more needs to be done.

We will never apologise for being a strong voice for Tameside and our residents.

In that spirit, I ask you all to make a promise. A promise that we will continue to stand together in the days ahead. A promise that we will stand together to protect lives, secure livelihoods and to build a better tomorrow.

Thank you.