

## **Leader's Full Council Speech – 8<sup>th</sup> October 2019**

*(1,846 words/14.2 minutes)*

The 1979 Monty Python film “The Life of Brian” has perhaps the most famous joke in British film history. As the characters plot their overthrow of the Roman occupation, one asks “What have the Romans ever done for us?”

After a long discussion, they agree that apart from better sanitation, medicine, education, irrigation, public health, roads, a freshwater system, baths and public order, the Romans haven't done anything for them.

It's a scene that I often think about when people ask about the Council and the services we provide.

Whether it's the everyday functions like roads, bin collections and libraries, or the more specialised services education, social care or infrastructure, Whitehall might run the country, but it's the town hall that has the biggest impact on our daily lives.

It's because of this that we're searching up and down the country for examples of best practice, and joining together with other local authorities to maintain and improve service delivery in the face of a decade of austerity. We cannot take what we're doing in Tameside in isolation without looking at what's happening in the wider world in local government.

Over the past months this has led to two milestones, each of which has the potential to transform Tameside and our communities.

Last week, at their annual conference in Rochdale, the Co-Operation Councils Innovation Network ratified our application to become a Co-Operative Council.

From this moment onwards, Tameside is part of a growing and influential network of local authorities committed to developing a new relationship with our citizens. A network that embodies the values of the weavers and workers of Rochdale who founded the co-operative movement 150 years ago, and which has grown into a global organisation of 313 federations in 109 countries.

We are now formally committed to the principles of the Co-Operation Councils Innovation Network, including championing fairness and equality, making decisions in a transparent way, taking responsibility for our actions and encouraging others to do so as well, working together and supporting each other in achieving a common goal, holding ourselves accountable to our stakeholders, recognising and welcoming different views, and believing in and acting within the principles of democracy and public engagement.

But I feel that it's important to point out that, while our recognition as a Co-Operative Council is partly driven

by what we've pledged to do in the future, there are already a number of examples in Tameside where our commitment to co-operative values and principles can be clearly seen.

Many of these were highlighted at our own Co-Operative Summit, which we held in Dukinfield Town Hall last Wednesday. Council officers were on hand to discuss the Tameside Digital Infrastructure Cooperative, which brings together the public and private sector to create and share new digital infrastructure, and how we're encouraging integration, understanding and mutual support between the local community and the armed services community through the Tameside Armed Services Covenant.

It is my hope that we will use the connections and relationships we build up as a Co-Operative Council to draw learning from others, but I also believe that we have much we can teach others about what we're doing in Tameside as well.

At the beginning of the month we also threw our support behind the Local Government Association's "Councils Can" campaign, joining together to call for a new relationship between local authorities and Westminster.

In the short term, that means putting an end to austerity by giving us the long-term and sustainable

funding we need. Funding in Tameside has been cut in half since 2010, and we predict even more to come even if the latest Spending Review is put into practice.

But those numbers, as grim as they are and what they represent for services reduced or lost entirely, do not fully illustrate the true cost of austerity. It's also measured in the loss of ambition for our country. Our towns and cities are capable of so much more, and we deserve to be given the faith and funding from the powers-that-be to make it happen.

To make that happen we need to start thinking bigger. British councils are the most powerless form of sub-national government in the developed world. The second part of the "Councils Can" campaign makes the case for devolution in England that, at the very least, matches the powers given to the Scottish government.

This would give us the freedom we need to turbo-charge devolution here in Greater Manchester, allowing us to build new homes, secure our children's future, improve the health and employment opportunities of our residents, and create places where people want to live. It would also give communities across the country with no existing devolution agreement the power to finally be able to make their own decisions

We were given a preview of what this expansion of devolution could mean in practical terms yesterday, when I chaired a special meeting of the Greater Manchester Combined Authority where the Leaders of our city region gave the go-ahead for a consultation on bringing our bus services back into public control.

The successful creation of a London-style bus network in Greater Manchester will mean more regular bus services, with more affordable fares, at a better cost for local taxpayers. This is an idea whose time has come, and it's an idea that could make a real difference to every man, woman and child in our city region. The bus consultation is due to go live on 14<sup>th</sup> October, and I would encourage you all to make your voices heard.

As the 31<sup>st</sup> October deadline for Britain's exit from the European Union draws closer, it is becoming clear that we are standing on the precipice of a fundamental and transformational shift as a country. We back further devolution and the "Councils Can" campaign because, when the winds of change come, I want places like Tameside to be able to make sure that change is for the better, for all of us.

At the same time, we must remember that while there's nothing wrong with having transformative and comprehensive ambitions, they must sit side-by-side with continuing to deliver the vital day-to-day services that our residents depend upon.

Over the past few months we have made a special effort to showcase some of the great work happening in Tameside. The dedication and skill of our council officers, partners and volunteers is something that I witness every day, and it's time that the rest of the country got a chance to witness it as well.

The successes have come thick and fast. At the end of September the Greater Manchester Pension Fund – the largest local government pension scheme in the country – won an award at the prestigious LAPF Investment Awards for their achievements in making sure that the fund's members and stakeholders are kept fully informed and engaged.

Our customer service team built upon their record of success in their annual Customer Service Excellence assessment by not only maintaining their ten areas of compliance-plus from last year, but adding an additional five areas where they were judged to have gone above and beyond the standards required.

The Council and the CCG were also shortlisted in the Health Service Journal awards in recognition of their success in improving the standard of health care offered to our armed forces veterans, and encouraging over 50% of our GPs practices to sign up to the Armed Forces Covenant.

Last, but by no means least, our new joint service centre and vocational education hub, Tameside One, competed last Thursday with the likes of The Pavilion in Spinningfields and the Alliance Manchester Business School to be crowned the GM Chamber's Building of the Year.

While ultimately Tameside One was not selected to receive the award, the fact that it was the only building outside Manchester city centre to be shortlisted should be considered a testament to the strength of the bid, and validation of our approach on focusing on customer service and improving social value.

As well as seeking national recognition for our work, we're on the hunt for opportunities to access new sources of funding and investment to improve our town centres and the lives of our residents.

This had led to us receiving an award of £100,000 from the British Property Federation to develop a master plan for the regeneration of Hyde town centre, and Stalybridge winning a share of the Department for Culture, Media and Sport's £95 million Historic High Street fund.

We're also continuing our close partnership with Sport England to use over £760,000 of grant funding to increase the levels of physical activity of our residents, with a particular focus on young people, the

unemployed and those at risk of developing long-term health conditions.

Now that the summer has drawn to a close, I want to finish off by looking back at what I think were some of the highlights of the season for our borough and our communities.

In the middle of last month we welcomed the Tour of Britain, the country's most prestigious cycling race, to Tameside. As the competing riders worked their way through the borough, beginning at Werneth Low and leaving through Mossley, they saw first-hand the incredible decorations and buntings designed and put up by our residents, community groups and businesses.

Thanks to their effort and creativity we were able to present Tameside in the best possible light in front of a national audience.

In August our young people took the first step in the rest of their lives as they received their A-Level and GCSE results. I'm delighted to announce that they excelled themselves and did Tameside proud once again.

63% of the borough's high school pupils achieved a standard pass of Grade 4 and above in both English and Maths GCSEs – up from 62% last year – while 40% achieved a strong pass of Grade 5 and above.

Our three A-Level providers; Ashton Sixth Form College, Audenshaw School and Clarendon Sixth Form, also continued their strong record of success.

I have no doubt that many of those students will fly the flag for Tameside as they go onwards to prestigious universities and jobs across the country, and maybe even further afield.

In my address to Full Council in July, I said that the time had come for us to take action in Tameside to show that there is another, better way than the cruelty and chaos that has entered our politics in recent years.

I believe that, by becoming a Co-Operative council and supporting a new vision for local government funding and powers, we are starting to make good on that pledge to do things differently.

Let's not be in any doubt about the task that is still ahead of us, but I believe that our achievements over this summer have shown that if we put our faith in our communities, if we put our faith in our council officers, and if we put our faith in our residents, we will secure a co-operative Tameside, a prosperous Tameside and a better Tameside for us all.

Let's keep up the good work. Thank you.