

Leader's Third Update Report 2018/19

1. Introduction

- 1.1 I'm pleased to present my Third Update Leader's Report, as I look back at what we've achieved in the last few months and look forward to a year of change and opportunity.
- 1.2 As you may be aware, this will be my last Leader's Report before I stand down as Council Leader and Ward Councillor for Heatons North ahead of May's Local Elections. I will look back on my time as Leader of Stockport Council with tremendous pride at what we've achieved over the last three years. I'd like to put on record my thanks to my fellow councillors across all parties for their commitment to getting the very best for Stockport and its residents, along with the dedicated council employees without whom none of this could have been possible.
- 1.3 At a national level, the political landscape continues to be dominated by Brexit. From a Local Government perspective, the deadlock needs to be resolved with clarity as soon as possible in order to assist us to make the long-term plans needed to improve the lives of Stockport residents. In the meantime, we are making preparations for the various scenarios, including a 'no-deal' Brexit, and these are outlined in a recent report to CRMG Scrutiny. Whatever the political arguments, we need to ensure that the Council takes a prudent and responsible position. We've established an advisory group, along with meeting with our public service partners, and will provide further updates as the situation develops over the coming months.
- 1.4 The Provisional Local Government Settlement, delayed due to the postponed December Brexit vote, showed no sign of an end to austerity. The settlement did however provide welcome extra one-off funds for Adult Social Care, Children's Services and roads, which although an indication that the Government is listening, again represent short-term fixes where real solutions are desperately needed. The Government has allowed councils greater flexibility on council taxation to address financial pressures, but this only passes the implementation of national decisions onto Local Authorities. Ahead of the final settlement expected in February, there remains no long-term model for Local Government finance beyond 2020, which can only lead to further uncertainty around key areas such as Business Rates. The Cabinet have publicly backed the 'Breaking Point' campaign for an end to austerity upon Local Government, and we will continue to make the argument.
- 1.5 Despite this, I am pleased to report significant progress at Greater Manchester level, not least the recent publication of the revised Spatial Framework, and toward the delivery of our local priorities. These are outlined in more detail below.
- 1.6 Final proposals for 2019/20 Budget are being considered alongside this report as part of our Medium Term Financial Plan, along with our new Council Plan. These reflect a significant change in emphasis towards a more holistic, long-term approach. I am grateful for the constructive engagement by members across all parties and Scrutiny Committees, alongside feedback from our public consultations in helping to shape these proposals. I would also like to thank officers for their efforts in bringing together the detail behind these in a short timescale.

2 Delivering our priorities

- 2.1 The accompanying Corporate Report updates on key areas of progress in delivering on our priorities and ambitions over the last quarter. There are a number of areas where I'd like to comment further.
- 2.2 Significant progress continues toward building the affordable homes residents need. One of the first things we did back in 2016 was to set up Viaduct Housing Partnership as Stockport's first council-owned local housing construction company. Since then we have already built, or are building, 400 hundred affordable homes at sites across the Borough, with planning granted or pending to extend this figure to almost 1,000 within Viaduct's first three years. In addition, our Town Centre Living Strategy incorporates a range of new building developments. Together these measures mean that the Council is delivering more affordable housing than Stockport has seen for a very long time.
- 2.3 As part of this, Greater Manchester leaders recently gave the go-ahead to consult on creating a Mayoral Development Corporation (MDC) to lead the regeneration of the Town Centre West area. As the first ever MDC in Greater Manchester, this is a major coup for Stockport and will permit a step change in our regeneration plans for the area, providing up to 3,000 homes, helping us overcome barriers to development and to attract inward investment. We need to bring new homes into Stockport for the future, but are doing all we can to protect our borough's green spaces. The MDC will help drive these developments, shaping the future of our town. I'd like to thank Members from all parties for their contributions and support which have helped make this possible. As plans develop, we're keen to ensure that local residents and businesses have their say on the proposals - the consultation can be found at www.gmconsult.org.
- 2.4 We recently issued a statement in relation to the Stockport Local Assistance Scheme (SLAS) to clarify our ongoing commitment to ensuring that support continues for our most vulnerable residents. We have stated our intention to fully retain the SLAS in its current form through to 2019/20, which will allow the Council the time needed to come up with the full and comprehensive reforms needed to ensure services can be retained as far as possible for those that require them, whilst also achieving savings.
- 2.5 Proposals for developing a single commissioning framework with Stockport CCG were recently considered by Scrutiny. A joined-up approach will help ensure that health and social care monies can go as far as possible whilst improving the quality and access to services. We will ensure that democratic accountability and influence continue to be at the heart of these proposals.
- 2.6 At the Council Meeting in November we passed an important motion calling on the government to pause, fix or scrap Universal Credit. The motion highlighted the problems being experienced as part of the UC rollout, and the valuable contributions to the debate made by members illustrated the missed opportunity the recent budget presented to pause and fix the programme with adequate resources. It was a positive outcome that the motion enjoyed cross-chamber support on the night, which we can only hope is reflected by the new Work and Pensions secretary Amber Rudd's move to delay further rollout, and we will keep up the pressure on this issue.

- 2.7 A cross-party motion on addressing 'period poverty' was also passed in that meeting. This noted significant efforts already being undertaken by the Council to address this issue and calls for further government action. I am pleased that all the parties in the Chamber were able to work constructively together on this issue.
- 2.8 November saw the commemoration of the hundredth anniversary of the Armistice which brought the First World War to an end. There were an impressive range of events locally, and our programme of restoration of war memorials will ensure these remain fitting tributes to the fallen for another hundred years.

3 Greater Manchester Developments

- 3.1 I am committed to updating members and residents on the activities and developments across the Greater Manchester Combined Authority. You can see the items that are due to be discussed in the GMCA Register of Key Decisions, the latest version of which was published on 20 December¹.
- 3.2 This past month saw the launch of comprehensive GMCA plans, outlined in a speech by Andy Burnham on January 7th, with proposals on the GM Spatial Framework and GM Transport delivery plan, along with long term plans for inclusive and sustainable growth. Within my Green Portfolio, the next couple of months will see further plans on Air Quality and, as part of the Green Summit, further plans and policies on achieving carbon neutrality.
- 3.3 The radical rewrite of the GM Spatial Framework has meant the proposed take on green belt sites has been more than halved, and development prioritised around brownfield sites, town centre redevelopment and other sustainable locations. The plan sets out how Greater Manchester should develop up until 2037. It identifies the amount of new development that will come forward across the 10 districts, in terms of housing, offices, and industry and warehousing, and the main areas in which this will be focused.
- 3.4 It also supports the delivery of key infrastructure, such as transport and utilities, how important environmental assets across the city region will be protected and identifies sites for employment and housing outside of the existing urban area, defining a new green belt boundary for Greater Manchester. The city-region has also made clear its opposition to fracking. This comes alongside ambitions to build a minimum of 50,000 additional affordable homes, 30,000 of which will be social housing.
- 3.5 We've come a long way since the original GMSF proposals, with green belt development in Stockport reduced from 12,100 to 3,700 new homes, 5,000 of Stockport's identified need being delivered by other boroughs and the MDC development set to deliver up to 3,000 new homes on brownfield sites at Stockport West. Exciting plans on transport will also ensure that Stockport becomes better connected, with long term plans to bring Metrolink to Stockport.

¹ <https://www.greatermanchester-ca.gov.uk/media/1677/register-of-decisions-20-december-2018.pdf>

- 3.6 We have made a firm commitment to the people of Stockport that we will – as far as possible – build the homes we need on previously developed land. This Brownfield First approach is central to our ambitions and we have shown we have changed from the first draft of the GMSF plan in light of feedback from our local communities. However, it is important to note that nothing has been decided yet. There is currently a period of open consultation and I'd like to encourage all residents to participate and have their say on this plan to help shape a Stockport fit for the future. It is vitally important we listen to local views on how we can improve the environment and provide new opportunities to live and work in Stockport. Details of how to respond can be found at <https://www.greatermanchester-ca.gov.uk/GMSF>. Following this consultation, responses will be reviewed and any revisions made, with a second phase of consultation in autumn 2019 ahead of a final plan ready to implement in late 2020.
- 3.7 Police funding at GM level is an increasing concern. Despite the one-off government funding recently awarded to support contributions to GMP pensions, it is proposed that the Policing Precept is increased by 13.8% for 2019/20, placing further burden on local taxpayers. This will raise an extra £18m, most of which will be used to recruit 320 additional officers across GMP to address a series of priority areas, addressing public concerns. Whilst this is welcome, it should be placed in the context of GMP having lost around 2,000 officers since 2010 and increasing numbers of incidents. A long term funding solution for policing and crime is desperately needed to address these changing trends and increasing threats.

4 Concluding Remarks

- 4.1 The last 12 months have seen Stockport Council make significant progress in tackling a number of major challenges. New affordable homes are being built; our Town Centre and local economy is being transformed; we are making major investments to improve our schools and our roads; integrated health and social care is helping people access the services they need locally; and our Stockport Local Fund is contributing to strong, resilient local communities.
- 4.2 These have been well-documented over the year in my Leader's Reports and Portfolio Reports from my Cabinet colleagues. I'd like to thank all our residents, community groups, schools, businesses and partners for helping us make this happen.
- 4.3 These are certainly exciting times for Stockport, building on the success of major developments including Redrock and Stockport Exchange. We are ambitious for Stockport, and aim to further strengthen our local economy, creating opportunities for local people with new developments such as Town Centre West, Stockport Interchange and the Produce Hall.
- 4.4 This all comes as the Council continues to face the most challenging financial circumstances, requiring increasingly difficult choices. However, we remain committed to delivering the best for Stockport, focusing on the interests and needs of our most vulnerable residents, and ensuring council services are fit for the future.

Alex Ganotis,
Leader of the Council and Cabinet Member for Policy, Finance & Devolution