

MJ Awards 2019 Submission – Corporate Director of the Year

We wish to put forward Sandra Stewart, Director of Governance and Pensions at Tameside MBC, for consideration for the award of Corporate Director of the Year in the 2019 MJ Awards.

The last 12-18 months have been a time of great change and significant challenges across the local government sector, and Tameside has been no different. Throughout this period, Sandra has been an essential member of our management team, consistently putting herself at the forefront of delivering necessary change and improvement. Where challenges have emerged, both anticipated and unexpected, she has successfully tackled them with her familiar hands-on and rigorous approach.

As transformation continues across all public sector organisations, Sandra has been instrumental in understanding and managing this process. As Director of the Greater Manchester Pension Fund she has pioneered cutting-edge approaches to driving investment and growth in Tameside, Greater Manchester and the United Kingdom. As Director of Governance of Tameside MBC she has been indispensable to our trailblazing work in integrating the Council and Clinical Commissioning Group. She has also provided stabilising leadership in the Council and CCG's day-to-day operations, most notably in times of significant crisis and challenges.

With assets of £22.7 billion and a membership and employer base of 370,000 and 560 respectively, the Greater Manchester Pension Fund (GMPF) is firmly established as the largest local government pension fund in the UK. Under Sandra's governance, the Fund has consistently delivered a higher return than the comparative benchmark indexes, despite the challenging financial and economic climate.

The GMPF has also been a major player in harnessing the financial firepower and unique long-term outlook of pension funds to drive significant investments in property and infrastructure. Since its establishment, the Greater Manchester Property Venture Fund (GMPVF) has developed more than 1 million square feet of commercial buildings within the Greater Manchester region.

This portfolio includes the former Colgate Palmolive factory in Salford, an industrial park in Rochdale and the BBC site on Oxford Road in Manchester city centre. We are also a partner with the Manchester Airport Group and the Beijing Construction and Engineering Group in the development of the £800 million Airport City project. Working in partnership with local authorities, the Pension Fund also set up Matrix Homes, whose innovative development programme has led to the successful construction of 240 high-quality family homes across five sites in Manchester, with more to come in the future.

This has the double benefit of providing a commercial return that will allow us to continue to meet our obligations to our members, while at the same time supporting the redevelopment and regeneration of our communities.

In addition to overseeing these commercial investments, Sandra's leadership has been invaluable in the process of pension fund pooling, as the GMPF has come together with other pension funds in the region to deliver cost savings and greater efficiencies of

scale. The product of this has been the Northern Pool, a £46 billion asset pool set up by the GMPF, the West Yorkshire Pension Fund and the Merseyside Pension Fund. Even at this early stage, the pool has spearheaded a number of significant investments, most notably a minority shareholding in the Clyde Wind Farm, which currently operates at a 350MW capacity with room for a further 172MW expansion. The Northern Pool has also set itself the ambitious task of financing the construction of at least 10,000 new homes over the next 2 and a half years, building on the success of similar schemes like Matrix Homes and using a wide range of funding approaches.

These ambitious and innovative approaches have fundamentally changed the way that pension funds look at shaping their local environments through infrastructure and development. Neither have they gone unnoticed by our fellow pension professionals, as the GMPF has been recognised by judges at the prestigious Local Authority Pension Fund Investments Awards for the last two years consecutively in the fields of collaboration and infrastructure.

But Sandra's contribution to transformation goes far beyond her excellent work in the world of pensions. She has also made her impact felt in the integration of health and social care, perhaps the single most significant area of innovation and reform in local politics today. The Council and local Clinical Commissioning Group, which covers both Tameside and the neighbouring town of Glossop, now operate a single leadership team, with decisions about health and care commissioning and council services made by a joint committee of councillors and GPs overseeing a budget of £940 million. The complexity of putting in place appropriate governance and successfully merging the ethos and practices of the Council and CCG cannot possibly be overstated. However, Sandra was up to the challenge, and the solutions we put in place are now being emulated in other places as a model for successful integration.

As Director of Governance, Sandra's influence also has been particularly felt in managing the transition to a single corporate service for the Council and the CCG, covering the area of Human Resources, Executive Support, Democratic Service, Legal, and Policy and Communications. Some of the benefits from this have included greater efficiency in the commissioning of services, as well as reduced waste and duplication in the current system of corporate services. One of the key achievements from a public-facing standpoint has been that it allows us to speak to our service users and residents with a single voice. That was seen clearly in our recent Budget Conversation, which closed after a substantial response at the end of last month. The results from this Conversation are currently being assessed, and will be considered as part of our Joint Budget for the next financial year.

A second organisation with which we engage with the public on health and social care integration, and in which Sandra's input was also vital, is the Partnership Engagement Network (PEN). By allowing stakeholders and representatives to come together to share best practice, build relationships and make their voice heard, the PEN has provided a unique avenue for the inclusive development of local services in Tameside and Glossop. It has received the highest rating in the NHS Engagement Improvement and Assessment (IAF) framework in 2018, and as part of our 2019 assessment we will be delivering webinars to NHS England on the PEN's impact and influence locally.

While Sandra's work with the Pension Fund and on health and social care integration cannot be understated, we would both agree that it is in times of crisis and challenge where she truly rises to the occasion. As you may already be aware, at the end of 2017 the then-Executive Leader of the Council, Kieran Quinn, passed away suddenly on Christmas Day. Sandra's calm direction was essential in making arrangements for Kieran's funeral and ensuring that the day-to-day operations of the council, CCG and Pension Fund remained uninterrupted. Despite the most difficult of circumstances, she also played a leading role in managing the smooth and effective transition to a new political leadership.

Less than a month after that, Carillion went into liquidation.

Like many local authorities, Tameside had a number of contracts linked to Carillion. This included everyday activities such as School Meals, and Events and Facilities Management, as well as major projects such as the construction of the new Tameside One administrative headquarters and a 6 storey, 180,000 square foot mixed-use commercial building on First Street in Manchester on behalf of the GMPF. Unlike many local authorities we weathered the storm. All major projects, including Tameside One and the First Street development, were saved and the bulk of the former Carillion employees, who showed exceptional professionalism throughout, were transferred over to new contracts with their terms and conditions and trade union recognition honoured. A great deal of the credit for this has to go to Sandra, who skilfully and assertively defended the council's position against outside parties who sought to take advantage of the unfortunate situation. Her role in developing the Local Enterprise Partnership from the Better School Fund as a vehicle for investment in asset development was also influential in ensuring that, as much as possible, it was business as usual in the face of potentially massive disruption.

Around this time, we also faced what we would describe as one of the most unusual situations any local authority has ever had to deal with. Following the death of the infamous Moors Murderer Ian Brady in prison, Sandra fought tooth and nail through the courts to make sure that his dying wish to have his ashes scattered on Saddleworth Moor, within the boundaries of Tameside Council, was not honoured. Instead, she took personal responsibility of ensuring that his remains were disposed of expediently at sea, in a manner that was respectful to the relatives of Brady's victims and consistent with the public interest.

These are just some of the highlights of Sandra's long and storied career as a Corporate Director in Tameside Council, but she would be the first person to say that she shouldn't be judged primarily by her highlights, but by what she does in the day job to keep the wheels of Tameside turning. Some examples of this work, often written off as mundane and routine, but which is nonetheless absolutely essential, includes the successful running of no less than five elections, including by-elections, over the last two years. What Sandra also appreciates more than most is the importance of upskilling and developing the talents of the council's employees, especially those who may have the potential to become the next generation of local government leaders.

In the short term, this means laying the foundations for a happy and engaged workforce in here and now. To that end, Sandra successfully grasped the nettle by settling in an effective way the matter of equal pay, an issue that has proven a running

sore for a number of other councils, and undertaking a full review of terms and conditions with new contracts issued to all staff. There are many ways to measure the impact that this has had on the morale and productivity of our employees so far, but let's use one that Sandra prefers. We now have the lowest sickness absence rates of any metropolitan borough in the North West.

In the longer term, Sandra championed and shaped our new People Plan and Induction processes. The policies have empowered workers in the Council and the CCG to create their own ideas for innovation and transformation, driving integration and partnership working in public sector organisations in Tameside and Glossop from the bottom-up. They have also formalised much of the succession planning within the Council and CCG, as current managers and aspiring leaders are now identified and put through specialised training to develop their skills. To date, nearly 450 management-level officers have entered our STRIVE program, and nearly 150 future managers have been through our Aspiring Leaders scheme.

In Tameside we often refer to the "Tameside Way", a shared belief in driving forward collective and effective change and improvement, rooted in a single-minded focus in securing better outcomes for our communities, while at the same time looking outwards to learn best practice from others and to share our own experiences and insights.

Sandra Stewart is an embodiment of the Tameside Way. In her Corporate Director role, she has blended together cool-headed professionalism and knowledge with an intense passion for Tameside. Every single part of council's work that has felt her influence, and every single resident in Tameside has benefitted from projects that she either instigated or played a vital role in bringing to fruition. We believe that she would be a strong candidate for the award of Corporate Director of the Year in the 2019 MJ Awards.

Yours faithfully,

Councillor Brenda Warrington
Executive Leader of Tameside Council
Chair of Greater Manchester Pension Fund

Steven Pleasant
Chief Executive of Tameside Council
Accountable Officer for NHS Tameside and Glossop Clinical Commissioning Group