



## Greater Manchester All Party Parliamentary Group

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**Secretary** Jonathan Reynolds MP  
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### **Non-Verbatim Minutes of 21.05.20 Meeting COVID-19: Taking Stock Greater Manchester's Response and Recovery Rt Hon Andy Burnham, Greater Manchester Mayor**

#### **WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS**

**Navendu Mishra, MP for Stockport**, welcomed everyone to the meeting and noted that he was standing in for Lucy Powell MP as Chair of the APPG.

The Chair set out the context and noted that this is the first meeting of the Covid-19: GM Recovery Series. The series will include other sessions on the "hardest hit" parts of the GM economy including education, employment and skills, transport and hospitality and culture.

#### **IMPACT AND RESPONSE IN GREATER MANCHESTER**

The Chair invited contributions from GM APPG sponsors and attendees on the impact of Covid-19 on their organisations and sectors across Greater Manchester (GM).

**Alex Whinnom, GMCVO Chief Executive**, opened by noting that the voluntary sector had successfully risen to challenges presented by the crisis and helped to provide crucial frontline services for the city-region. He highlighted that Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprise (VCSE) organisations are crucial to local communities and are part of the city-region's fabric, underpinning their resilience and helping to foster inclusive communities.

Whinnom outlined that income sources for charities and social enterprise organisations have been reduced by the crisis, face-to-face income raising is not possible, grant opportunities have been delayed, and reserves across many organisations are low. Against this background and very limited local government funding sources available, GMCVO has written to the Chancellor requesting funding to support the operations of local operations.

Whinnom posed the following question to the APPG: *How can we ensure local charities and social enterprises have the money they need to survive and contribute to Building Back Better?*

**Lee Sugden, Greater Manchester Housing Providers (GMHP) Director**, commented that the pandemic has underlined the housing dynamics of the Greater Manchester, with an estimated one in five residents living in a social housing property. He explained that GMHP's role has been critical in supporting the most vulnerable residents across GM and close working with local authorities has been a key element of housing associations' Covid-19 response.

Sugden argued that the crisis has highlighted inequalities across the conurbation, and identified homelessness and rough sleeping as a priority response area for GMHP, which has involved strong partnership with the Greater Manchester Combined Authority (GMCA).

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In conclusion, Sugden, submitted the following question to the APPG: *We are concerned to see that the positive intervention during the covid pandemic with homeless and rough sleepers is, potentially, going to be lost, given the Government’s support for “everyone in” is said to be being withdrawn. How can GMHP members and the wider housing community support the Mayor to ensure this opportunity to support those most vulnerable is not lost?*

**Adam Jupp**, Manchester Airport Group Corporate Affairs Director, provided context on the impact of the crisis on the aviation sector, as well as its importance to the city-region’s recovery. Jupp noted that demand has fallen by around 99% during the crisis, 70% of MAG staff have been furloughed, and revenues have been significantly reduced.

In respect of recovery, Jupp identified the shape of quarantine policy, the long-term financial health of the aviation sector, and a safe return to international travel as key concerns. Jupp commented that MAG is a critical asset for the city-region’s recovery as a major employer, supply chain supporter, enabler for wider economic growth and hub for international connectivity. The airport provides access to nine of ten top UK export markets and its services have helped support the growth of buoyant GM industries such as life sciences and culture.

Concluding his contribution, called on the APPG to help MAG in making a strong case to Government on the importance of the sector to the economic recovery and levelling up agendas, with a specific focus on securing support for the industry around quarantine policy, international travel, and preserving jobs in the longer term. Jupp also noted that the delivery of key infrastructure, such as HS2, will also help to underpin the sector’s recovery and growth.

**John Martin**, United Utilities External Affairs Manager, informed the APPG that the crisis has required the organisation to rollout new technology at pace to support employees in working from home and ensure that customer enquiries are being managed effectively. Martin identified affordability as a major challenge for the organisation’s customer base – United Utilities affordability break scheme has been extended in response to the crisis to support vulnerable customers. The organisation has created a trust fund to support local communities and organisations through the crisis, and has prioritised the provision of PPE for supply chain workers.

United Utilities has also been engaging with local authorities across the North West on its infrastructure investment programme, with a focus on minimising delays in the planning process that have been caused by Covid-19 where possible.

**Paul Bircham**, Regulation and Communications Director Electricity North West (ENW), advised that maintaining the safety of staff and customers, and protecting network resilience have been the chief priorities for ENW. Responding to immediate power network incidents has taken primacy over other works during the crisis to make sure that disruption is minimised for customers and residents.

Bircham noted that ENW has prioritised engaging with and supporting the most vulnerable customers across its geography, and led on ensuring that the Manchester Nightingale hospital had a resilient electricity supply.

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Moving forward, ENW is focussed on preparing its Business Plan for the next regulatory period running from 2023 – 2028. ENW is engaging with the GMCA and individual GM Councils as part of this process to understand their low carbon aspirations, which will inform the organisations infrastructure planning. ENW’s planning will be adapted to support ambitions for a green recovery.

**Tom Davies**, *Investment Manager Amey*, outlined the organisation’s work in supporting Transport for Greater Manchester (TfGM) on upgrading the city-region’s electric vehicle charging network. During the crisis, Amey has been focussed on ensuring that the electric vehicle charging network has remained available to key workers providing frontline services, as well as updating its customer journey and communications for the project. On public projects outside of Greater Manchester, Amey has worked with Government on ensuring that its supply chain has continued to be paid on time during the pandemic.

Concluding the sponsors contribution session, it was agreed that:

- the prepared sponsor briefing notes would be shared with Parliamentarians following the meeting;
- GM APPG to submit follow up letter to Chancellor on voluntary sector impact and required support.

## RESPONSE AND DISCUSSION

**Jeff Smith**, *MP for Manchester Withington*, commented that it was critical for Parliamentarians to develop a sector-by-sector understanding of Covid-19’s impact, which will help shape their response and scrutiny of Government decisions. Smith highlighted the aviation, hospitality and entertainment sectors as some of the hardest hit by the crisis, and ones which are likely to take a longer period of time to emerge from recovery.

**Chris Fletcher**, *Greater Manchester Chamber of Commerce Policy, Campaigns and Communications Director*, confirmed that aviation and hospitality are two of the hardest hit sectors by the crisis. The Chamber has begun engaging with GMCA Business and Economy Lead, Cllr Elise Wilson, on the newly created night-time economy task force to start planning for the long term recovery of this sector.

Fletcher raised growing concern across the property and construction sector on the pipeline of confirmed work in the medium to long-term, with decision making and investment stalled by the crisis. On engineering and manufacturing, Fletcher highlighted social distancing and safe working practices as key challenges. Looking ahead, Fletcher outlined the Chamber’s concern on the potential for a deep recession if demand does not recover, which could mean significant cross-sector impact and widespread redundancies.

**Lee Sugden** identified an opportunity for GM’s housing and construction sector and political leaders to work collaboratively on securing an affordable housing boost for the city-region. He noted that this work could require increased Government and Treasury support to achieve.

**Jason Prince**, *GMCA Head of Public Affairs*, updated the group on the GMCA’s response to the crisis. A strategic group has been in operation from the beginning of the crisis to co-ordinate the city-region’s response and a number recovery groups focussing on specific themes have been created. The GMCA is focussed on how the

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city-region can continue to manage the Covid-19 impact, safely release from lockdown, and Build Back Better in the longer term.

Prince confirmed that decarbonisation, investment in green infrastructure and creation of green jobs are GMCA strategic objectives. He noted that it was encouraging to see organisations such as ENW putting the green agenda at the forefront of their corporate strategic priorities

**Tony Lloyd, MP for Rochdale**, commented that it would be helpful for GM Parliamentarians to collectively advocate for a city-region wide housing strategy. Lloyd noted that MPs should receive industry input to ensure that there is alignment and consensus on housing priorities.

Lloyd also commented that it was important to have a co-ordinated voice of northern MPs and political leaders that seeks commitment, clear timescales and sequencing on HS2 and Northern Powerhouse Rail from Government.

**Alan Ferns, Manchester University Associate Vice-President for External Relations & Reputation**, updated the group on the work of universities in leading on Covid-19 research and testing, and the provision of doctors and nurses to help provide frontline health and care services.

Ferns highlighted the financial implications of student recruitment for the next academic year as a key concern for universities, which will become clearer in September / October. He noted that the impact is anticipated to be particularly acute for universities that have a high level of international student recruitment, which helps to subsidise the research activities of these institutions. Against this background, Ferns confirmed that there is an ask of Government to support universities and their research bases. The four GM Vice Chancellors have been meeting on a weekly basis to help co-ordinate their response and there is ongoing engagement with Mayor Andy Burnham and the city-region's MPs to keep them of abreast of key issues affecting the sector.

**Lord Stunell** highlighted the need for a large scale retrofit programme of existing housing to raise their energy efficiency standards. Stunell confirmed that cross-party efforts are ongoing to seek the rapid extension of this programme, which is likely to require Government incentives and regulatory changes. He highlighted that a retrofitting programme would not only help in achieving decarbonisation ambitions but – given that it will be a labour intensive process – create a new pipeline of jobs for the economy.

In conclusion, Lord Stunell identified this as a significant opportunity for large metropolitan areas in particular, and encouraged GM Parliamentary colleagues to support a cross-party letter submission to Government on this issue in due course.

**Charlotte Morris, University of Salford Public Affairs Manager**, echoed Alan Ferns' concern on the anticipated financial impact of a reduced international student intake. Morris also highlighted that Salford is concerned about the potential for city-region students and students from disadvantaged groups to choose not to take up their university courses due to the uncertainty created by the crisis. She highlighted polling that found 20% of students are considering deferring their studies until the next academic year, which will significantly reduce the university's income.

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Morris noted that Salford is seeking to drive forward the Build Back Better campaign from a university perspective, with a focus on improving education and skills opportunities, aligning with business and sectoral needs, collaboration with Further Education providers, innovating its business support services, and introducing flexible working for employees to help improve work/life balance and contribute to reducing congestion and public transport pressure.

Concluding her contribution, Morris encouraged GM Parliamentarians to support the city-region's universities in seeking medium to long-term support from Government to help mitigate the economic volatility of the crisis, as well as additional support for students experiencing financial hardship due to the collapse in part-time work.

**Paul Bircham** responded to Lord Stunell's contribution on retrofitting housing, agreeing that this programme of activity had the potential to unlock significant job creation benefits for the city-region and North West more widely. Bircham confirmed that ENW has been engaging with Government around this issue and the organisation is mindful of the need to reduce energy usage as well as decarbonise in order to meet Net Zero targets.

As part of ENW's decarbonisation work, the organisation is investing in improving the energy efficiency of home devices by changing the way it operates the network and is also seeking backing for a wider programme to support the most vulnerable households increase energy efficiency across its geography. Alongside this, Bircham noted that the organisation is considering the viability of providing finance towards improving the energy efficiency of homes by changing the fabric of buildings.

It was agreed that ENW will follow up Lord Stunell to further discuss the retrofitting of housing and next steps.

#### **UPDATE FROM GMCA BUSINESS AND ECONOMY LEAD, CLLR ELISE WILSON**

**Cllr Wilson** confirmed that the GMCA is focussed on developing its recovery and Build Back Better strategy, which will require strong cross-sector working to shape and deliver it. A key priority for the GMCA is to rebuild business confidence to reopen, restart operations and safely return staff to work.

Cllr Wilson explained that the ambition and aims of the GM Industrial Strategy will help steer the city-region's recovery, with clean growth, health and digital innovation being specific areas of focus.

Cllr Wilson concluded that she planned to engage closely with the APPG moving forward.

It was agreed that ENW and Cllr Wilson would separately pick up engagement on how the organisation can align with and support the city-region's clean growth ambitions.

**Gill Morris**, *DevoConnect Chief Executive*, outlined that the GM APPG will seek to build a consensus on the key priorities for the city-region's recovery and will provide a united voice and platform to take key asks to Government and decision makers.

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## UPDATE FROM MAYOR ANDY BURNHAM

**Mayor Burnham** updated the meeting on key challenges for the GMCA. The Mayor highlighted securing sufficient support for the city-region's public transport as a main area of focus, particularly in respect of boosting the capacity of Metrolink. He argued that the case for bus reform has been strengthened by the crisis and, alongside this, the city-region must bring forward an integrated and coherent public transport vision that marries with the clean air agenda.

The Mayor confirmed that city-region leaders have agreed to proceed with the procurement of a new bike hire scheme, which will help enhance active travel opportunities in GM. The GMCA is also considering utilising powers to increase cycling and walking capacity. He confirmed that the consultations on clean air and minimum taxi standards will be held simultaneously, and that discussions are ongoing with the operator of last resort around the potential for rail devolution. The Mayor commented that it is hoped these developments will enable the city-region to accelerate plans for an integrated public transport system.

The Mayor responded to Lord Stunell's points on the retrofitting of housing, noting that it is vital for the city-region to open up job opportunities in new industries. He argued that this agenda was particularly important within the context of anticipated wide spread job losses when the Government's furlough scheme closes.

Against this background, the Mayor encouraged the GM APPG to collaborate and bring forward a united ask of Government to increase the flexibility of the furlough scheme and use it as a bridge to jobs in new industries emerging across the city-region. The Mayor suggested that the furlough scheme could be reformed to help establish new public-private industries, such as retrofitting, which would provide job new opportunities for those that have been made redundant through the crisis. He compared this idea to the Future Jobs Fund that was introduced by Government in 2009 to help long-term unemployed people get back into work.

The Mayor also outlined ambitions to submit a proposal to Government that enables GM to roll out a social rent housebuilding programme, which could incorporate a low carbon and modular homes focus.

The Mayor argued that the crisis has provided a timely moment to address decarbonisation, public transport integration, the housing crisis and create new industries. The Mayor commented that these areas underpin the Build Back Better campaign.

The Mayor also noted that the crisis has highlighted the city-region's strong ability to innovate public services. He cited GM's development of a hospital style alert system for the city-region's care homes as a leading example, which has given leaders more oversight over the social care system that other city-regions have not benefited from. In addition, the crisis has helped to drive agreement on an integrated health and care record for all GM residents, and the night-time economy has been supported through the new United We Stream Service.

The Mayor confirmed that he has highlighted the health and social care innovations made by the city-region during that crisis to Government, and proposed that GM could be used as a pilot for establishing a fully integrated National Health and Care System.

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Mayor Andy Burnham commented on his ambition to link the GM Good Employment Charter to all public procurement across the city-region to help ensure that key and frontline workers receive fair pay and working conditions.

In response to the Mayor's comments on the retrofitting of housing and increasing the flexibility of the furlough scheme, **Lord Stunell** advocated for the skills and training policy to be aligned with this. The Mayor agreed that the policy and approach for these ideas needs to be shaped and invited Lord Stunell to engage in this process. He also expressed interest in understanding the potential for GMHP to help lead in delivering a retrofit programme for social housing.

**Jeff Smith MP** asked the Mayor on the estimated timescale for implementing a GM Clean Air Zone. The Mayor confirmed that an Autumn consultation is planned, with the view to implementing a Clean Air Zone in 2022. As part of this, the GMCA has put forward Government asks for clean van, bus and taxi funds. The Mayor identified an opportunity for the GM APPG to support the GMCA in Government advocacy for additional support and an accelerated timetable to deliver its clean air plans. He agreed to circulate information to DevoConnect as the secretariat on the GMCA's new asks of Government around the clean air agenda to move this activity forward.

**Cath Green, GMHP**, confirmed that GMHP will be open to working with the Mayor and GMCA on the potential for supporting a retrofit programme for social housing. Elaborating on this point, Green also commented in support of delivering a Future Jobs Fund type scheme that can help people back into work and find opportunities in new industries.

Green also commented on the effectiveness of housing providers' response in housing homeless people during the crisis. She confirmed that GMHP will be working closely with the GMCA on how housing providers can best meet the housing needs of homeless people across the conurbation.

In response, the Mayor confirmed that phase three of the GMCA's Bed Every Night funding will be allocated in July, and also called on APPG colleagues to help support the city-region's advocacy for additional support from Government to tackle homelessness.

**Paul Bircham** updated the Mayor on ENW's Business Plan consultation and noted that the organisation is well positioned to support the GMCA in delivering its Build Back Better vision and clean growth plans. Bircham noted that a key challenge for the green recovery will be to encourage behaviour change and asked for the Mayor's views on this.

The Mayor identified the upgrading of digital and broadband infrastructure to support and encourage home working as one solution for decarbonising and achieving behaviour change. He said that the GMCA will be engaging with city-region businesses to ensure that a maximum of 25% of employees travel into the office during the first of lockdown easing to help reduce pressure on public transport and maintain clean air benefits. The Mayor also confirmed that TfGM is exploring the scope for introducing a city-region wide cycle-to-work scheme. Additional opportunities will also be identified through the GMCA's clean air proposals.

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## Conclusions and Next Steps

The Chair thanked everyone for attending and confirmed that the GM APPG to submit follow up letter to Chancellor on voluntary sector impact and required support.

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