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Immediate Release

No more Blah Blah Blah from GM Mayor Andy Burnham and Tameside Council Leader Brenda Warrington

Pensioners and pension fund members gathered to wake up Andy Burnham outside the GMCA offices at 8am last week. Now, as COP26 ends, campaigners from Fossil Free Greater Manchester are calling on Andy Burnham and Tameside leader Brenda Warrington, chair of the Greater Manchester Pension Fund (GMPF), to stop making excuses and take the pension fund's money out of fossil fuel investments.

"At the start of COP 26, more than 40 countries pledged to phase out coal use, so why is GMPF still funding coal mining?" Joan Bennett, a GMPF pensioner, asked. "Brenda Warrington wastes time defending GMPF's investments in fossil fuels, when she should be explaining how my pension fund will protect our climate and our pensions from highly risky fossil fuel investments."

Maggie Walker, one of the campaigners added, "Andy Burnham had the gall to go to COP26 with the message that world leaders must focus on 'deeds not words'. So why isn't he taking a stand on GMPF, which has £1bn invested in polluting fossil fuels?"

Gale Blackburn, Environmental Officer with Unison, said that "council workers aren't given any say in how their pensions are invested. But more and more are waking up to the fact that their money is fuelling the climate crisis. GMPF must divest from fossil fuels significantly and quickly. Otherwise, there'll be very little chance for us to enjoy our pensions."

"We're not asking for anything unusual," explained campaigner Ali Abbas. "A growing number of pension funds across the world from New York to the Netherlands and Norway are dumping dirty coal, oil and gas stocks, including seven council-run funds here in the UK. Meanwhile, hundreds of MPs have called for their pension fund to divest. 14 of the 18 Labour MPs in Greater Manchester have backed the move, including all 3 MPs for Tameside. So - Andy and Brenda – tell us why you're ignoring the calls to phase out fossil fuels."

ENDS

Contacts for further information and photos of the November 3rd event

[Photos of the November 3rd event at Andy Burnham's offices](#) (credit Brian Stark, Friends of the Earth.)

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Notes to editors

1. GMPF is the UK's biggest local authority pension fund with over 300,000 members, over £22bn in assets with almost £1bn directly invested in fossil fuel companies that engage in coal mining and oil and gas extraction. Its "net zero" by 2050 commitment is too late and out of line with Greater Manchester's 2038 commitment.
2. FFGM (www.fossilfreegm.org.uk) is a coalition of organisations and individuals calling upon the GMPF to:
 1. Make the fund fossil free within the next 2 years.
 2. Immediately move all investments out of the most polluting fossil fuels (coal, tar sands & fracking).
 3. Develop a strategy to invest in local climate solutions in Greater Manchester. See [our most recent briefing](#), which replies to GMPF's defence of its investments.
3. [GMPF's annual report 2020](#) shows that it increased holdings in fossil fuel companies and that they had dropped to 50th on the league tables for pension funds. (*Fossil Free Greater Manchester analysed GMPF's holdings at 31 March, 2020 versus 31 March 2019 and concluded that holdings in the oil and gas giants Shell and BP, went up by 27.3% and 18.6%, respectively and Glencore, a commodity trading and mining company whose operations include coal, increased by 42.3%.*)
4. [Andy Burnham attended COP26](#) and pledged to cut a million tonnes of carbon emissions from the Greater Manchester economy over the next few years.
5. Brenda Warrington, leader of Tameside Council and chair of GMPF, repeatedly opens pension fund meetings with a defence of their investments in fossil fuels. *FFGM has summarised the [chair's opening remarks at the GMPF meeting on 19 March 2021 and our answered each of her arguments.](#)*
6. [More than 40 countries pledged to quit coal](#) at COP26.
7. [Divest Parliament](#). Hundreds of MPs are supporting the call for their pension fund to divest from fossil fuels.