



Eight out of Ten GM Councils have asked the Pension Fund to Divest from fossil fuel companies – and been ignored

GM Councils want GMPF to divest

8 of the 10 Greater Manchester councils have asked GMPF to divest from fossil fuel companies – either by passing a council resolution and / or signing a joint letter to GMPF in 2021. Their requests have been totally ignored.

Council	Resolution	Signed joint letter 2021
Bolton	√	
Bury		√
Manchester	√	√
Oldham	√	
Rochdale		√
Salford		√
Stockport	√	√
Tameside		
Trafford		
Wigan		√

The overwhelming majority of GM councils have called on the pension fund to divest and to align with the GM councils' net zero targets, yet it still holds £1.6bn of assets in fossil fuel companies. (Latest figures March 2022.)

How can this be, when GMPF is controlled by the 10 councils in Greater Manchester and all the councils have a representative on the Fund's Management Panel?

The explanation is that Tameside Council manages the pension fund and therefore 11 of the 20 GM Council representatives on the Management Panel are Tameside councillors. Tameside Council controls the Panel's decisions and refuses to change.

GMPF stifles debate about its fossil fuel investments

The ten GM councils pay £m in employers' contributions to GMPF every year. (£441m in 2021.*) Yet the Fund does all it can to stifle open debate. It:

- Regularly ignores correspondence on this matter from GM councils.
- Refuses to attend GM council meetings to explain its position.
- Claims that GM councils have no powers of scrutiny over GMPF.
- Takes most Management Panel reports in private, thereby preventing GM council representatives from discussing these with their own council officers.
- Refuses to give panel members the opportunity to vote against proposals.

It's time for the Greater Manchester Councils to make a stand together!

Why are the Greater Manchester councils allowing Tameside Council to ignore their wishes? It's time for the Councils to stand together and exert control over their pension fund.

* For the most recent published figures of GM council employers' contributions, see GMPF's [2021 Annual Report](#) p100.

What have GM Councils been saying about GMPF's fossil fuel investments?

Four GM Councils have passed resolutions

Bolton Council passed a resolution in March 2019 calling on GMPF to:

1. Immediately freeze any new investment in fossil fuel companies, including those engaged in fracking operations and exploration;
2. Divest investments from any company that is involved in the exploration for or production of coal and unconventional oil or gas (fracking) within 2 years, and from all fossil fuel companies within 5 years;
3. Work with the Greater Manchester Combined Authority to develop and fund a sustainable low carbon investment programme for Greater Manchester.

In 2022, the council's Corporate and External Issues Scrutiny Committee requested that a GMPF representative attend the committee and report on progress. GMPF refused, claiming that GM councils do not have the power to scrutinise the fund.

Manchester City Council declared [a Climate Emergency](#) on 10 July 2019, saying that it would, *through our role on GMPF, encourage divestment in fossil fuels as early as possible.*

The council's representative on the GMPF Management Panel wrote three letters to the Chair of the Pension Fund on this issue, but the Fund never replied.

Stockport Council passed a motion in October 2021 - "Making a Climate Action now step-change", where it called on GMPF to:

- use the power it has, including its influence as one of the UK's largest pension funds, to take more of a leadership role to tackle climate change and to accelerate its ambition from being carbon neutral by 2050 to achieving this by 2038, in line with the ambition expressed by all ten local authorities across Greater Manchester.

The council passed a second resolution on 17 November 2022 which regretted that:

- GMPF has so far refused to apply a similar approach to fossil fuel and other climate harming investments;

And noted that:

- Despite over a year passing ... and after follow up by our own ... officers, no response has been received from GMPF to our call to seek to be carbon neutral by 2038.
- *(Because so many all GMPF Management and Advisory Panel reports)* are taken in private despite there being no clear reason for this, panel members are unable to share any reports with their own council's senior officers to seek guidance or to confer about the contents.

- Recent attempts by Stockport’s member to register a vote against an agenda item were refused by the chair of the meeting as she was deemed a non-voting member.

Oldham Council asked GMPF managers to come and explain why they were opposed to divestment in 2021, but GMPF replied saying that they had “decided not to accept such invitations for now.”

The council subsequently passed an amendment to an earlier resolution about GMPF on 15 March 2023 calling on GMPF as:

- – the largest in the local government pension scheme, with over 375,000 members – to divest from fossil fuels by 2030, in line with the borough’s zero-carbon target, and in the meantime to provide an annual report on exactly how it is using its investment to pressure companies to go green.

Six GM Councils wrote a joint letter to the Fund on 3 March 2021

The Climate Change leads of Six GM councils (Bury, Manchester, Rochdale, Salford, Stockport and Wigan) wrote to the Fund on 3 March. The letter (*not available in the public domain but [covered in this article](#)*) urged GMPF to bring its 2050 carbon neutrality target in line with Greater Manchester’s target of 2038.

It also reminded the Fund that several UK local authority pension funds have already committed to fully divesting from fossil fuels, along with high profile councils such as New York. Their joint press release went further and called on GMPF to ‘move decisively away from its current investment in fossil fuels.’

The only response from the then leader of Tameside Council, Councillor Brenda Warrington, was a statement to the Manchester Evening News saying that the letter from the six councils ‘looks to me like election time virtue signalling.’

Just two GM councils have never called for divestment

Only two GM councils have neither passed a resolution on divestment, nor signed the joint 2021 letter. They are **Trafford Council** and, of course, **Tameside Council**.