

LEADER'S STATEMENT

I would like to begin, Madam Mayor, by congratulating you on becoming First Citizen of the borough. You must feel very proud to follow in the footsteps of your father, Councillor John Raymond Poel who was Mayor of Romford in 1951.

I know I speak for all of us, when I say that our best wishes go with you for your term of office. I have no doubt that you will represent Havering with great style and do us all proud wherever you travel in the Jubilee and Olympic year.

Madam Mayor, fellow councillors, invited guests, ladies and gentlemen.

In life, change is inevitable. What matters to us is how we react to that change whether we are frightened of it or whether we actually see it as positive and something that needs to happen for us to evolve. Whether it is business, political or personal change, I have always thought it to be necessary and therefore in no way a commentary on the past but a gateway to a possible future.

Two years ago, this Administration embarked on a difficult journey, across shifting sands, towards an uncertain destination.

The economic situation was bleak; the determination of Government was clear and the future for all public services was challenging - to say the least.

I'm very proud of Havering Council's response over the last two years. I think we have shown our mettle.

Faced with an unprecedented scale of challenge, we set a clear course and we've steered along that course ever since. We identified how we would save money - and we've steadily delivered those savings.

And though it's not a race, I do take comfort that our plans are further advanced than some of our contemporaries. In so many ways, Havering leads London in developing innovative solutions to the problems that all councils face.

There are a number of factors that have helped us in this effort.

One of these is determination. We have not shirked the tough decisions and we have stayed the course. That's why we remain on target to achieve our savings.

Another factor is just as important and that is having a clear guiding principle – a statement of intent, around which we base our decisions, and in the light of which we judge our choices.

And that principle is this:

If we are here to serve local people and provide them with a better quality of life, we must be on the side of local people.

It's easy to understand sometimes, why some residents view us as a regulator and enforcer:

- the people who tell them what they can and can't build
- where they can and can't park
- what they can and can't sell
- and what they can and can't do.

Now we have to do these things – if we didn't, the Borough wouldn't work and nobody would thank us for that.

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But they are our *functions*, not our *principles*; they are things we do - but they are not why we're here.

Now more than ever – when times are tough and hard choices are being made - we need to remind local people that we are on their side.

That must be the driving principle of the remaining two years of this Administration. We must *think* it when we take decisions and we must *show* it when we implement those decisions.

We are on the side of residents.

We've shown that by listening to their concerns and focusing on their priorities.

We've shown that by undertaking the Spring Clean survey to give us an unprecedented picture of how clean and tidy Havering is – not based on our own statistics and assessments, but based on the personal feelings of more than 8,000 residents who took part.

It's a credit to our staff, and to Cllr Barry Tebbutt, that around three quarters of our residents think their local streets, parks and shopping arcades are clean and tidy, but the survey shows us where we can make improvements and more importantly, how we can meet the aspirations of local people - by doing the little things that make a big difference.

That's why we've set aside a quarter of a million pounds to fund the clean-up days, the new bins, the new seats and the education campaigns that local people are asking for. We're on their side.

And we're on the side of residents who want a better future for their communities. That's why we've invested in the facilities and spaces that bring communities together and open up new opportunities for local people – from libraries, to sports facilities; from community centres to parks.

It's our determination to be on the side of local communities that has brought the superb MyPlace centre to Harold Hill



and the extraordinary elevated walkway in Rainham.

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It's what secured investment in our town centres from the Mayor of London to help revitalise our high streets and it's what has led us to replace run-down, depressing garage sites with new homes - giving new hope to local people.



And I would commend the work of Councillors Andrew Curtin, Steven Kelly, Robert Benham and Mike Armstrong, among others, in driving these improvements in communities across Havering.

Madam Mayor two weeks ago Havering went to the polls to vote in the London elections. Boris Johnson Mayor of London has been a great friend to Havering therefore I'm extremely pleased that Havering residents voted to keep Roger Evans as our GLA member and Boris Johnson as the Mayor of London

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The summer of 2012 will live long in the memory, and in this most incredible year, we're on the side of local people who want to celebrate together.



We've shown that, by granting permission for nearly 100 street parties across Havering to mark Her Majesty's Diamond Jubilee.

And we're pulling out the stops to deliver three weeks of celebrations across the Borough.

On Sunday 3rd June, we will hold the biggest of these celebrations - the Diamond Jubilee Romfest in the Market Place - in front of one of the largest Union Flags anywhere in the country.



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I know you'll be there, Madam Mayor - and colleagues, you are all very welcome to join us.

I can also announce this evening that we are designating two popular open spaces as Queen Elizabeth II Playing fields – which will ensure the spaces are protected and enjoyed by future generations. The playing fields are: Brittons Playing Field in Elm Park and Park Lane Recreation Ground in Romford

Tens of thousands of people will watch the Torch relay pass through the Borough on July 22nd - marking the start of festivities around London 2012. And we're helping to make that celebration happen.

I'm sure everyone here will join me in wishing our Olympians and Paralympians the very best of luck on their home soil this summer.

And we're hoping for another record-breaking turn out at this year's Havering Show and Hornchurch Live events. This really will be an incredible summer of events and entertainment.

I've always had a sneaking suspicion that Councillor Robbie Benham is a bit of a party animal... but he's putting it to very good use this year by taking the lead on our Civic Pride project and working with Councillor Curtin and myself to make sure Havering marks 2012 in style.

The popularity of street parties and the number of people who told us in the Spring Clean survey that they were willing to volunteer to help clean up their neighbourhood - tells us everything we need to know about our residents.

They really take pride in their communities and they want to be involved.

And we are certainly on the side of volunteers and people who want to do their bit to help their neighbours and their neighbourhoods. The voluntary sector in Havering is a vibrant and powerful force for good. We work with them on many projects and we also work directly with communities.

The Community Chest grants pot has given out £100,000 in small grants over the last 12 months. The scheme allocates small injections of cash to grassroots community groups who really make a difference to the quality of life in Havering.

Groups like the Havering Neighbourhood Watch Association; the 3rd Upminster Scouts, Add Up and a number of local sports clubs have benefited from the Community Chest. They are turning small amounts of cash into actions and activities that benefits hundreds if not thousands of local people.

We've also shown, on the Briar Road Estate in Harold Hill, what can be achieved when we work together with residents to improve local areas. The neighbourhood agreements on the Briar underline the goodwill and energy of so many people in that community and we will continue to work with the voluntary sector and harness the energy of communities across the Borough, as we work to make Havering better, together.



This summer also provides us with an opportunity to showcase our Borough to visitors and give enterprise in Havering a chance to shine and an opportunity to grow.

We are on the side of local business.

We've shown that by opening the Visitor Centre – to promote the Borough to newcomers and residents alike and do our best to put Havering on the map.



It's why we're dedicating more effort to inward investment, and it's why we're supporting new and existing businesses and giving them a voice in how the Borough should develop.

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And we've shown it by investing time, money and effort in improving and promoting our town centres as places to shop and enjoy.

Next year, Tesco will open its Rainham distribution centre, bringing upwards of 900 new jobs to the Borough and we're working with the Mayor's office to encourage more firms to set up in Havering.

We want to help national businesses and local entrepreneurs alike to create more jobs. We want to sustain more firms in Havering and I want to give a clear message that this Council is on the side of enterprise.

In Havering, we know more than most about the pressures on social care budgets. We have the highest percentage of older residents in London and – led by Councillor Steven Kelly - we are constantly searching for new ways that we can support and care for the people who most need our help.

We are on the side of the vulnerable.

We've shown that by developing CarePoint – opened by the Secretary of State for Health. Here, we're working hand-in-glove with the voluntary sector to provide the best possible advice to people who need support to live independently and enjoy a better quality of life.



Already the service has helped more than 300 people find the right advice and support for their needs, through its shop on the High Street. Between 10 and 15 new people are contacting the service every day.

With a web launch and much greater publicity planned for this summer, it looks like a major success story for older and vulnerable residents.

Being on the side of our more vulnerable residents means providing more choice around care and that's what we're doing with the roll-out of personalised care budgets and greater autonomy for vulnerable people.

It also means preventing problems before they arise and providing assistance to help people live in their home for longer.

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One of the most common issues faced by older people is isolation and loneliness. Later this year, we'll be launching a scheme to harness the power of volunteers and help older people stay active and engaged, not cut off and lonely.

And we're on the side of vulnerable youngsters too.

Sadly, we're not lucky enough to live in a world where the welfare of children is guaranteed. So we're working in new ways with our partners in the police and health services to identify the families across the Borough where issues of crime, alcohol or drug abuse, domestic violence, or neglect, present a risk to young people.

Under the leadership of Councillor Paul Rochford, we are getting involved with these families earlier, before things get so bad that we have to take the drastic step of breaking families up. Early intervention can help put these families back on track - and give the hope of a brighter future to their children.

And, as we're in Fostering Fortnight, I should say that we're also doing a lot of work to encourage more foster carers to come forward and help children when they need it most. These children at Hildene Primary school dressed in yellow to mark the occasion and remind us all that we have 180 children in care at any one time in foster care – so we need more foster carers to come forward.



So we're on the side of residents, businesses and the vulnerable in Havering.

And I'd like to make a special mention of the quiet people – we're on their side too.

Quiet, decent people - who play by the rules, pay their taxes and try to get on with each other and with their lives - should never be overlooked.

They want to build their lives here - so we are encouraging more jobs to the area and continuing to develop a more rewarding environment in our towns and communities.

They want their children to have every opportunity - so we have built new schools – like this one in Elm Park,



We've worked with partners to bring a brand new Academy to Harold Hill and we're working with headteachers to maintain the excellent reputation of Havering's schools.

Decent people want to live in decent homes and we're working to upgrade our housing stock and provide homes that local people can enjoy.

Under Cllr Lesley Kelly, we'll also be reviewing who gets council housing in our Borough and tightening rules to ensure that the majority of decent tenants don't have their quality of life spoilt by a minority who don't play by the rules.

And that goes for all our residents and all of our communities. Under Cllr Geoff Starns, our community safety team work with the local police to develop innovative new ways to tackle anti-social behaviour – from yellow cards to information-sharing schemes - to make our town centres safer and more welcoming.

If we're truly on the side of local people we need to recognise what local people expect of us and we need to meet those expectations.

They understand that times are tough and that we need to cut our cloth - but they don't want to see their most cherished services slashed.

They pay their taxes - but they don't want to pay too much.

Last year, I spoke of the need to balance aspiration with responsibility and it's a theme that is worth returning to.

By 2014, we will have reduced our running costs by something approaching £40 million in just four years.

That will be a huge and very hard won achievement – and it will take an all-consuming effort over the coming months and years.

At the same time – helped by a Government that has prioritised keeping council taxes low – we have been able to cut or freeze council tax for the last three years.

This is a joint effort of course – and one that we are all engaged in.

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But I'd like to credit Cllr Roger Ramsey and Cllr Mike Armstrong in particular for the tireless work they do. Roger, for keeping a tight rein on our finances and a forensic eye on the budget, and Mike for overseeing a programme of change and transformation that is protecting frontline services for residents, while delivering huge changes in the way this organisation works.

I am always impressed by the innovation we demonstrate. For instance, we are engaged in a number of groundbreaking multi-council projects to deliver more efficient support services and better customer service.

We're introducing new technology that is speeding up the way we work and making our processes more efficient and less costly. These programmes save millions, but they are hugely complicated and impact greatly on the staff in this Council.

Being on the side of local people means accepting that this organisation needs to make changes and sacrifices, so that the people we serve don't lose the services they expect and deserve.

We all owe a debt of gratitude to the Chief Executive, her team and more widely, every member of staff here for biting the bullet and delivering such huge savings.

We all know that we've never been a fat and wealthy borough, so shedding pounds is that much harder. We've had to do the responsible thing – even where that means the loss of jobs – and I wouldn't want our staff to think that we don't recognise what they're going through.

So we're halfway through an Administration that must balance aspiration with responsibility.

As we look forward, we know there are challenges ahead. We have more savings to deliver - up to and almost certainly beyond 2014 – which means taking a tough and responsible stand.

But being on the side of local people is not just about managing cuts, with their interests in mind – it's also about recognising their aspirations and keeping our promises to them.

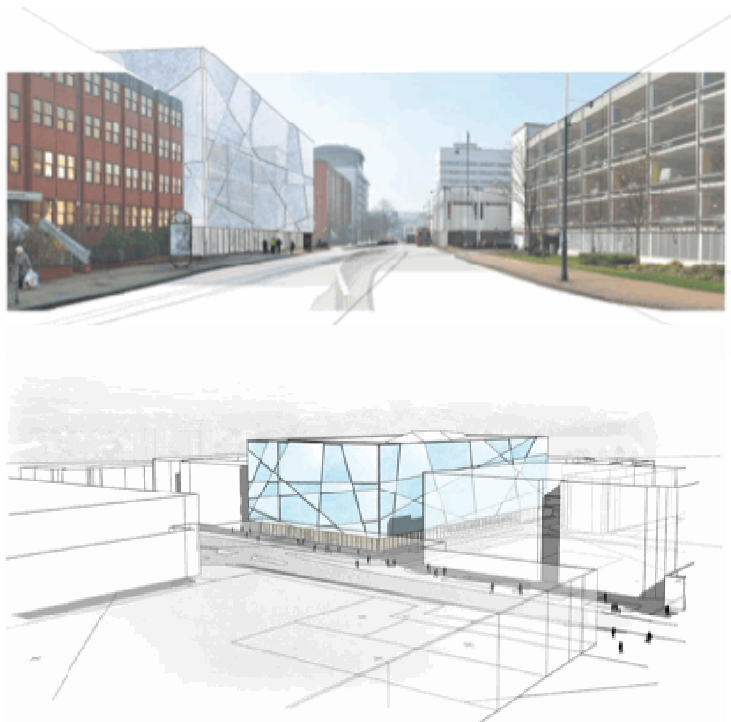
We promised to maintain weekly rubbish collections and we have.

We promised not to close libraries and they're all still open

And we promised to keep council tax stable and we've done that too.

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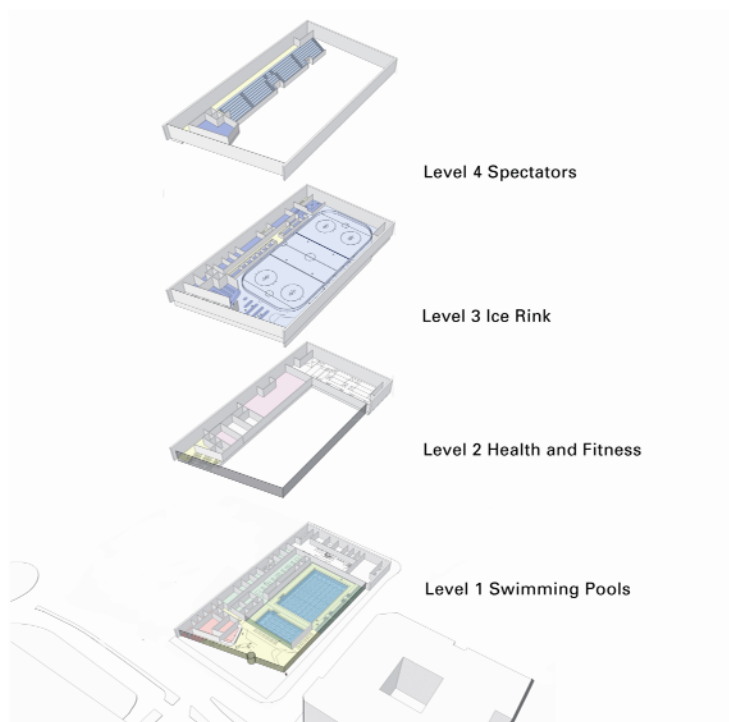
We also promised to deliver a brand new, state-of-the-art leisure centre in the heart of Romford.



Over recent weeks, I've read a number of comments in the press and heard mutterings from various quarters saying that this was one aspiration we would never achieve.

So it gives me great pleasure, Madam Mayor, to announce that today we have exchanged contracts to deliver that leisure centre in Romford.

The centre will have a competition ice rink, a competition swimming pool, a gym, fitness suite and a café.



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The proposals that we will take forward for planning permission will see this landmark centre take shape on Mercury Gardens, while our partners, William Morrisons, develop a food store on the site of the current ice rink.

Best of all, the land-swap deal that we have negotiated with Morrisons means that this centre will be affordable – with minimal draw on Council funds.

It's a great result for local people and a great deal for taxpayers.

In fact, you might say it's the perfect balance between responsibility and aspiration.

There remain difficult times ahead, Madam Mayor, and tough choices to make.

But I hope my comments tonight show that our principles remain clear and unshaken:

We are on the side of local people and we will continue to work tirelessly in their interests.

Thank you.