

Leader's Speech to Council – 12th June 2013

I would like to begin this evening by formally congratulating Councillor Eric Munday on becoming the Mayor of Havering - something I was unable to do that at the Mayor-making, owing to illness.

I would like to thank Members for their good wishes while I was ill. On a more serious note, I am not sure which made me feel more sick – the Norovirus or watching on the webcam how a former Member with 24 years service was treated by this Council.

Tonight, Mr Mayor, I move the motion to receive my Annual Speech to Council. It is a speech that I was unable to deliver, so I thank all of you who have taken the time and trouble to read it.

Before I give way to debate, I'd like to deliver a summary of the main points.

Mr Mayor, as we enter the last year of this current Administration, we have the chance to reflect on our achievements and set out our approach for the year ahead.

This time last year, we were all looking forward to a summer like no other.

The magical summer of 2012 in Havering was a reminder of what this Borough is all about – tradition; patriotism; community; energy – all of us joining together in celebration.

But of course, last year wasn't just about those heady days of summer.

2012 also brought more challenges to local government. Our budgets continued to fall and the pressures on our services continued to rise.

The years ahead will be no different. We will need to balance an ever-tightening budget with a relentless demand from our residents to do the things they have come to expect: – keep the streets clean, protect the vulnerable and spend their money wisely.

And of course, we politicians will want to go further.

Whatever our background, opinions, politics or ideals, I'm sure we all shared a common motivation, pushing us to get involved in local politics.

We want to make things better for our families, friends and neighbours

We want to make a difference.

And, as we reflect this evening, Mr Mayor, it's a chance to ask ourselves: "Have we made a difference?"

Have we made a difference for local people – by addressing their priorities and meeting their needs?

Have we made a difference to the Council - by squeezing more value from the organisation, without slashing frontline services?

Mr Mayor, I believe we have made a difference.

Over the last decade, this is a borough where:

£78 million pounds has been invested into roads and pavements

Where 5 new primary schools have been opened;

And where nearly 3,000 new affordable homes have been built;

We've made the sort of difference that improves the quality of life for local people.

And we've made that difference because we've taken bold decisions;

We've held to strong principles

And we've had safe hands, when dealing with taxpayer's money.

From the outset, this Administration has taken bold and creative decisions to improve the quality of life in Havering.

We enshrined our approach in our Living Ambition and its five goals.

And we have developed a leaner, smarter council which delivers greater value for money, is more focussed on the needs of its residents and meets its promises.

So our goals for the Environment, Learning, Towns & Communities. Individuals and Value, will remain our guiding principles for the future.

Those Goals have led us to be bold.

We have been bold on libraries – recognising their place at the heart of communities across Havering.

Where other councils looked to rationalise their libraries, reduce hours, or simply shut them down - we were different.

This Administration, with Cllr Curtin in pole position, set about refurbishing and rebuilding libraries across the Borough.

Our library service now sets the standard in London, for the quality of its service; for its engagement with customers and for the high quality environment enjoyed by library visitors.

That's the difference we have made.

We took a bold approach to re-energising our communities.

In Harold Hill and Rainham, we rejected the disjointed tinkering of the past, to develop broad strategic plans that we could properly discuss with local people.

Harold Hill Ambitions is transforming the Hill and the opportunities for its residents.

Just last year, we opened Myplace. A fantastic facility for local people on the Hill which was used for Community Questions last Monday.

It's a striking place to visit, and it's also a centre for the sort of work that transforms young lives and has a positive impact on the area as a whole.

And myplace is one small part of an all-encompassing strategy.

We've improved the environment, we've built new homes, we've developed new facilities and we've worked with the community on projects like the Harold Hill Festival, which has now taken on a life of its own.

Harold Hill Ambitions has been led by Councillor Steven Kelly and has had many achievements. And I'd like to single out one aspect of his project that has grown beyond Harold Hill – and which demonstrates what can be achieved with a bold idea and gritty determination.

We will shortly deliver our 100th home, built on the site of old, run-down, derelict garage sites across Harold Hill and beyond.

That's a remarkable achievement. It's given homes and hope to hundreds of people; it's brightened neighbourhoods and it's been extremely cost-efficient.

It's not surprising that the Garage Project is on the shortlist for this year's prestigious MJ awards.

At the opposite end of the Borough, Councillor Mike Armstrong's Rainham Compass Project is no less impressive.

Together with a range of partners and funding bodies, we have drawn up a vision for Rainham that is preserving its heritage and re-creating the historic look of the village;

Opening up access to the riverside and the marshes to make Rainham an attractive destination for visitors;

Encouraging business growth – like the hundreds of jobs arriving with the Tesco distribution centre

And improving facilities for local people – like the refurbished school and health centre. I met the Duke of York last Wednesday and we spoke about the vision for Rainham including the UTC at CEME and the BID centre.

That's the difference we have made, Mr Mayor – and there's lots more to come.

I can only scratch the surface of what we've achieved through Harold Hill Ambitions and Rainham Compass. Or through the other eight projects that this Administration set in motion in 2010.

So over the coming months, each Cabinet Member will provide a report back to Cabinet on difference made by their projects.

The people of this Borough are proud of their parks and here too we have been bold.

Ten years ago, this Borough had no parks that were judged worthy of a coveted green flag. Since then we have won and retained eight of them. We have some of the best parks around and some fantastic staff to keep them that way.

We have been bold in providing support and services for older people.

We are having a real and lasting effect on the health and wellbeing of our older residents - whether through measures to support dementia sufferers or through the introduction of a groundbreaking banking protocol to protect our elderly from fraudsters.

I would like to thank the Deputy Leader of the Council, Councillor Steven Kelly and his team for all that they have done to support and protect the most vulnerable in our community.

But we want to do more than that.

We want our older residents to be social, healthy, supported and involved.

That's why we've launched the *Active Living* programme. From free swimming to the Havering Circle, *Active Living* is all about promoting a better quality of life for older people in Havering.

I would also say that the integration of Public Health into the council opens up a huge new opportunity for us.

Not only can we change the way we care for people who require our support, but we can also improve the health of all Havering residents – whether known to us or not.

We can work more closely with the health service to improve the way we tackle serious diseases like cancer and longer-term health conditions that limit the life chances of young and old alike.

So we will continue to be bold on health and social care, Mr Mayor. And we will continue to take further bold decisions in other areas.

We have done the deal with Morrisons to develop a brand new leisure centre in Romford that will provide a swimming pool in the heart of the town and protect ice skating in Romford for future generations.

Work is underway on another new library – this time in Rainham. And Harold Hill Library will follow soon. Two more new libraries, Mr Mayor - as other Boroughs lock the doors on theirs.

There will be a new sports park at Broxhill - as part of Harold Hill Ambitions, but of interest across the Borough. This will be

something special to encourage young and old alike to play more sport.

We will begin a new drive to bring businesses to Havering, as well as provide support and nurture for our home-grown entrepreneurs.

Bold ideas make a difference, Mr Mayor – as do strong principles.

Last year, I spoke about the need to be on the side of local people.

Mr Mayor, that is one of the strong principles that have helped us make a difference.

Over the last few years we have gone out of our way to understand the priorities of local people.

In 2011, thousands of people responded to the first Your Council, Your Say survey, telling us clearly what their priorities were. And we have responded.

They told us that they wanted more money invested in pavements and roads, so we have continued to do so, with at least a further £5 million to be spent over the next year.

Our residents also told us that they wanted the Borough to be clean and tidy. In response, we launched the Spring Clean survey, seeking detailed information about every street, park and town centre across Havering.

We've since installed 100 new bins across the Borough, put up additional lighting where it was needed, put in new benches and trees, carried out dog fouling campaigns, community clean-ups and anti-litter drives.

Keeping Havering clean and tidy makes a big difference – with Councillor Barry Tebbutt leading the charge.

Residents told us they want Havering to be as safe as possible and we have continued to work very closely with the police.

Cllr Geoff Starns leads on Community Safety and we have achieved a great deal in recent years by launching schemes to improve public safety and reduce crime. These range from taxi marshalling to the Yellow card scheme for troublemakers who might otherwise spoil an evening out in our town centres.

In our parks, we have developed our Parks Protection Service into a much valued uniformed presence that both deters anti-social behaviour and helps keep our parks welcoming and clean.

Though we are one of London's safest Boroughs, this Administration will continue to work with our police colleagues to make it safer still.

Our residents tell us they value our schools. Under the watchful eye of Cllr Paul Rochford, school results in Havering have gone from strength to strength.

In the key measure of five or more GCSEs including maths and English, Havering is comfortably outstripping the national average.

We are embracing new models of education, with the bulk of our secondary schools joining the brand new – and very successful - Drapers Academy as academy schools. We also welcomed the Queen to open the Academy and we recently had confirmation, Mr Mayor, that a proposed new Free School in Romford has taken another major step forward.

Many councils say they listen, when actually they just react to the loudest complaints. We have a proud principle of encouraging everyone to have a say, so that we can do the right thing by our residents.

Another key principle that we have stood by in recent years, is to provide more and better local homes for local people.

Cllr Lesley Kelly has overseen a major overhaul of our housing system to prioritise local people in genuine housing need.

We have now enshrined the principle that only Havering residents of at least two years standing should be able to apply for Havering council homes.

And those homes are getting better. We are confident of completing the Decent Homes programme by 2015 – a year earlier than planned.

We're also looking to reward those people who give back to their community. Volunteers will now be prioritised for housing, alongside those other selfless servants of our Borough and indeed our country – our servicemen and women.

This Council is proud to support our armed forces. Every year, we mark Armed Forces Day with a well-attended and popular parade.

Last year, we awarded the Royal Anglians the freedom of the Borough and watched with pride as they marched through Romford. And we are developing plans to mark next year's 100th anniversary of the start of the First World War.

And those parades and events hint at another principle – that we're not just here to clean the streets and provide social care. We can also enrich lives and instil civic pride.

Our events, from the Havering Show to the Christmas lights switch on, are always attended by thousands of people.

First because they're very good – thanks to the effort of Cllr Robbie Benham. And second, because they're free.

For many people who are struggling in difficult times, these events provide a free day out for their families.

They cheer people up.

They make a difference.

We've also made a difference – perhaps the greatest difference of all, by having safe hands, when it comes to the Council's budget.

We accept the need for councils to look to their budgets and share the burden of deficit-reduction with the rest of the public sector.

But that doesn't make it easy.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank Councillor Roger Ramsey for his peerless leadership on financial matters; for ensuring the financial health of this organisation and for protecting the pockets of our residents.

The last time council tax went up in Havering was five years ago. In the last three years alone we have put around £200 back into the pocket of an average council tax payer by freezing and cutting council tax.

It's not been easy. It has meant new thinking on how we can save money, without slashing frontline services or raiding taxpayers' pockets.

It's that principle that has governed our transformation programme, led by Councillor Mike Armstrong. It's led us to new partnerships with other councils and with other organisations.

It led us to introduce sector-leading technology to cut the cost of bureaucracy and allow us to prioritise the frontline services that matter most to residents.

I would like to recognise here, the incredible work of our staff, led by our Chief Executive.

On behalf of all members, I'd like to thank them for their continuing efforts.

Alongside the savings and the freeze to council tax, we have also frozen councillors expenses for six years.

We've used our assets to fund major capital investment in our borough – from road repairs to new libraries – without relying on taxpayers' money.

We've frozen car park charges.

And this Administration has cut the cost of on-street parking – to boost the high street and reduce still further the cost of living for local people.

That's a real statement of intent. We will not take the quick and easy path to close budget gaps. We will continue to find new and innovative ways to save taxpayers money.

In the year to come we will announce more partnerships and more innovation.

We will continue to have safe hands and we will continue to demonstrate to our residents that they can trust us with their money.

And we will remain a Council that is committed, in all that we do, to making a difference for the people we serve.

Thank you.