

Cllr Stephen Alambritis, Leader of Merton Council, London Borough of Merton, Moves the Citation and Vote of Thanks at the Annual Council Meeting on 16 September 2020 in Honour of Councillor Janice Howard, Mayor of Merton 2019-2020

In her inaugural speech as Mayor, Councillor Howard praised the commitment of Merton residents to helping vulnerable members of the community and looked forward to working alongside them. She could not have imagined, back in May 2019, that her spell in office would coincide with an extraordinary period, which would test the resilience of that community.

The coronavirus pandemic saw the suspension of physical council meetings in March 2020. As a result, Councillor Howard presided over the first Full Council meeting conducted via Zoom. She also held the borough's first virtual auction, raising £6,000 for her charities.

Lockdown meant the annual mayor making meeting could not take place and Councillor Howard continued in at the helm for an additional four months, making her the borough's longest continuously serving Mayor.

It was a period which saw residents demonstrate genuine community spirit; whether volunteering to help people who were shielding or organising street-based collections for Wimbledon Foodbank. Touched by the generosity she encountered each day,

Councillor Howard's pride in the borough increased - as did her certainty that she wouldn't wish to live anywhere else.

This generosity helped Councillor Howard in perhaps her proudest achievement; raising more than £99,000 for her charities - an impressive sum given the year's major fundraising event, the Mayor's ball, could not take place.

In my welcoming speech cllrs may recall how I described the lengths to which Janice went to catch my attention to make her case to be our First Citizen. My wife got quiet worried "who is that woman" she would say!!! But I knew all along Janice would be approved by the Labour Group and she has made us all proud in the way she has carried out the role.

Councillor Howard's chosen charities were both causes close to her heart. Faith in Action does an amazing job supporting homeless people in the borough with hot meals, clothing, internet access and the chance to have a shower and do laundry. The Macmillan Cancer Support project at St George's Hospital provides information and support for Merton residents receiving treatment at the hospital; this includes access to a support worker to ensure no one undergoes chemotherapy or radiotherapy alone.

Before COVID-19, Councillor Howard led wide-ranging events, which brought communities together. Highlights include a cricket match on Mitcham Green, which pitted a cross-party team of councillors against the local side, raising money through the sale of refreshments.

The Mayor represented Merton at London's annual New Year's Day parade. She championed the borough's entry, in which two giant puppet aliens enjoyed a London day out, complete with taxis and Beefeaters plus a specially-produced song. The leader and cllr Draper were literally waiting on the crowds with offers of a cheap Prosecco!!

Students from Wimbledon College of Art created the puppets and children from St Mary's Catholic Primary School took part, winning £5,000 for the Mayor's charities.

As Merton's first citizen, Councillor Howard had the immense privilege of welcoming Her Royal Highness The Queen to the borough during a visit to Haig Housing Trust's to open their supported housing for veterans in Morden and to inspect a section of the development named after the late Cllr Maxi Martin.

There was the honour of being hosted in the royal box on the first day of the 2019 Wimbledon Championships hosted by the All England Lawn tennis and Croquet Club. In March 2020 it was the turn of Councillor Howard to host a tour of the AELTC followed by afternoon tea. Councillor Howard also welcomed the Brazilian Ambassador to Wimbledon Park in August 2020 to see Brazilian nationals compete in a beach volleyball contest.

In 2019 Mitcham saw its first augmented reality festival, as part of the borough's Film Merton initiative - Councillor Howard was thrilled to get involved and subsequently to have the chance to broadcast live on Radio Mitcham.

During her inauguration, Councillor Howard said she felt greatly honoured and immensely proud to serve as the Mayor, pledging to meet as many people as possible across Merton. Despite the challenges presented by coronavirus, she has certainly fulfilled this promise, supporting the borough's vital volunteers and genuinely working to bring people together.

As Mayor, Councillor Howard has been supported in her work by Deputy Mayor, Councillor Edward Foley and her consorts; her husband Andrew and children Benedict and Isabella as well as her team, Sandra Folkes and attendant Carl Brown

So we come together tonight to RESOLVE UNANIMOUSLY: that the council places on record its sincere thanks and appreciation to Councillor Janice Howard, for the dedicated manner in which she has served as Mayor of the London Borough of Merton for the year 2019-2020.