

Speech by Cllr Stephen Alambritis to the Council Meeting of Wednesday 16 September 2020 announcing that he is stepping down as Council Leader at the council meeting of November 2020

Madam Mayor,

Before I get to the business of the next ordinary meeting of this great council I have a personal statement to make

This evening I am announcing that after 10 years as Leader of Merton Council, and 10 plus years as Leader of Merton Labour Group, I will be stepping down at that next ordinary meeting on November 18th

Madam Mayor,

It has been an absolute honour to lead Merton, in what has been an extraordinary ten years of attainment for this best achieving council

When I became Council Leader in 2010 I was determined that we would be a business-like council

Determined to make Merton a great place for families and bridge the gap between the East and West of the borough and ensure we cared for the most vulnerable in our society

Looking back we have done just that in spite of unprecedented cuts to our budget and tough economic circumstances

We have managed to protect statutory services to vulnerable groups like fighting for St Helier Hospital and at the same time deliver positive growth and change across the borough

We have been consistent in our support for the return of a fan owned club leading to a brand new stadium for AFC Wimbledon at Plough Lane with over 800 housing units to boot

We delivered on a state of the art leisure centre in a park setting in Morden

We now have a new award winning library in Colliers Wood and we have opened a new secondary school with a new building for the children in South Wimbledon on the horizon

And what a joy it was to be with Mary Curtin as our Mayor to open to a new centre for adults with learning disabilities at Leyton Road

Madam Mayor

I am pleased to report that all that investment has brought new homes; new jobs; new apprenticeships which we have helped to create as a council, with much more in the way of new office and leisure space

At the same time we have been able to deliver flagship policies with the introduction over 23 expanded primary schools leading to over 4,500 extra places for our primary school children;

We are trailblazers in the country for the progress our children make in our secondary schools and those schools are all rated good and outstanding

And indeed the schools in our borough regularly out-perform the London and national averages, with our children's services also rated good with outstanding features

Madam Mayor

Now onto something I am particularly proud of and that is exempting care leavers in the borough from paying the council tax until the age of 25, protecting our households on low incomes with full 100% council tax support and delivering a zero council tax for 6 years

I was keen to retain our ongoing support for widening the opportunities to enjoy culture and the arts with our work with Wimbledon Theatre and Polka Children's theatre. With regards to the World class Polka Theatre I was pleased to link them with the Greece based Stavros Niarchos Foundation and that Foundation is now a major supporter

Madam Mayor

Our work putting public health and social regeneration at the heart of all that we do as a council by working with our local NHS and CCG has been inspiring

Our voluntary sector is thriving via the MVSC and reflected in the number of compact awards we have achieved from the Cabinet Office

We worked very closely with Merton Chamber of Commerce for our businesses and we were awarded the title of best small business friendly borough by London Councils

I am pleased that residents continue to be positive about the council and return increasing satisfaction levels in successive independent surveys with the way the council runs things, increasing satisfaction with the local area, that the council provides value for money and that the council acts on the concerns of local residents

Madam Mayor

The past decade has also seen us face huge challenges as a Council – from riots to floods to the covid-19 pandemic

These events have scarred individuals and all our communities with Covid-19 having a disproportionate impact on our BAME communities

But Madam Mayor these events have also demonstrated the amazing resilience and support we have been able to offer each other as residents of Merton

Being a best achieving council would not have been possible without the support of all my fellow councillors, an amazing team of officers and Merton Council staff, and friends and partners right across Merton and London

I have always believed that we work best as a partnership, and that together we share responsibility for our successes and give credit where due

Thank you for the part played by every councillor from every party in helping to make Merton such a safe borough; a borough of hope and opportunity

We have also been winning local elections since 2010 and that is because of our commitment to deliver a business-like council and to making the area attractive, safe and free from discrimination for all our residents and this has been the winning formula

We have demonstrated that a courageous focused and disciplined and well-run council informed by our care for the more vulnerable in Merton and our values and aspirational for our all communities and residents is politically attractive

Madam Mayor,

In football language no referee or VAR technology can take away our hat trick of local election wins in 2010, 2014 and 2018

Madam Mayor

As Chair of the South London Partnership it has been an honour to represent our sub regional grouping at London Councils and to work with Mayor's Boris Johnson and Sadiq Khan to make the case for Sutton, Richmond, Croydon, Kingston and of course Merton in our gloriously green part of South London

I am very proud to have been the leader since 2010 and of course I will miss being leader but now is the right time to go

Madam Mayor,

Merton will elect a new leader on November 18th

I am confident the next leader of the Council takes over a borough with much to look forward to and that they will continue to build on our achievements and work with all of you

Between now and November the 18th there is more work to be done to protect our residents from this awful pandemic

I will also use the time to continuing working with you and saying a personal "thank you" to you all here at Merton Council

And Finally Madam Mayor and from a very personal and family perspective this is the right time for me to move on

This last ten years have given me the opportunity to represent Merton both within the borough and to London as a whole

And given me to opportunity to fight for our values and this has been such a huge honour for me , so above all else I would like to thank the people of Merton for giving me this opportunity

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