

Thank you Madame Mayor – and welcome to also.

I wanted to express the thanks from my group to the outgoing Mayor, councillor Janice Howard and her consorts – and also to councillor Foley – for the work they have both done and their colleagues have done in this elongated Mayoral year.

When I welcomed her last year I mentioned councillor Howard's lightness of touch and cross party approach, and she certainly followed it up this year despite the difficulties caused by the pandemic. There have still be hundreds of activities and events and fantastic fundraising results as well – it's really, really amazing.

We certainly in my group enjoyed seeing councillor Kohler in his cricket gear for the Charity Cricket match. We are also very grateful for the support you gave at the first ever Motspur Park Christmas Fair, organised by the Liberal Democrat councillors for West Barnes, bringing a real community event to an oft forgotten part of the borough.

I particularly wanted to highlight how important the work of one of one of your charities – Merton Faith in Action – was. As we all know I'm sure, they run homelessness drop in on Kingston Road just outside my ward. Now pandemic aside, they offer homeless people food, warm drinks, a shower, a haircut maybe. But as well as the practicalities it's about treating people with respect.

Now during the pandemic there's been a real focus on homelessness and it's one of the issues that we didn't want to get lost in the recovery. And that issue of treating people with respect needs to be at the fore – and this great charity is showing us the way. Thank you very much for all your work.

Thank you Madame Mayor

Councillor Anthony Fairclough, Leader of the Liberal Democrat Group

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