

Councillor Eleanor Stringer, Deputy Leader, Merton Council

Madame Mayor, Welcome. First of all it's wonderful to be addressing you by that title. Well Madame Mayor, I'm glad to have the privilege of moving the vote of thanks for my friend Councillor Mike Brunt. So I request the Council reports in its written record its sincere thanks and appreciation for Councillor Michael Brunt for the dedicated manner in which he has served as a Mayor of the London Borough of Merton in the year 2021 to 2022.

Councillor Brunt was elected to the council in 1990 and served as a councillor for 18 of the last 32 years. He was elected mayor at a virtual meeting in April 2021, taking over duties from Lower Morden Ward Councillor Sally Kenny. He started his official duties on the 9th of May. Councillor Brunt most recently represented Figges Marsh Ward as former leader of Merton Council and former Cabinet Member for the Environment.

Two of his grandparents were born in the borough in the and his parents lived all their lives in the borough. Councillor Brunt was also born in Merton and grew up here. Councillor Brunt developed a passion for healthcare during six years working for the Donald Woods foundation and HIV Charities in South Africa. As he helped lead Merton out of the Covid-19 pandemic, his theme for the year was focused on healthcare and wellbeing. Councillor Brunt selected Christian Care Association as the first of his nominated charities. The association provides emotional support and practical help in their home for struggling families. The second charity is Marie Curie, the UK's leading cancer charity, Marie curie provides frontline nursing, hospice care as well as a free support line for those coping with a terminal diagnosis. Councillor Brunt helped raise more than £58,000 for his chosen charities His highlights include the sleep out for 60 people at AFC Wimbledon in November, could have organised that in the summer, but it had to be in November. And a raffle organised by Councillor Brunt aided £44,000 pounds for local charities. He also organized a charity cricket match for the Mayor's XI against the team from Richmond Cricket Club, which was played on reportedly the oldest pitch in the country. For some reason the formal report neglected to mention the final score and as one of the players, I can't for the life of me think why this was omitted from the formal facts

Councillor Brunt then hosted teas and tours at the All England Lawn Tennis and Croquet Club, the venue for the first Mayor's Ball since 2019. Councillor Brunt presented Freedom of the Borough to Dickie Guy at AFC Wimbledon's ground. As a season ticket holder Councillor Brunt was privileged to watch their side play their first full season back in the borough and he was also delighted welcome the London Broncos to Merton.

Councillor Brunt hosted an afternoon tea at Tooting and Mitcham Hub in recognition of Silver Sunday - a celebration of older people, and combat issues such as social isolation.

Madame Mayor, aside from his charity work, Councillor Brunt led tribute to the fallen servicemen and servicewomen on Armistice Day and Remembrance Sunday and he led citizenship ceremonies throughout the year the year as part of his civic duties.

With a focus on promoting community spirit as Merton recovered from the pandemic, Councillor Brunt championed testing and vaccination and visited more than half the schools in the borough, to highlight how Merton could be a more positive example.

Councillor Brunt's joint chaplains from the Merton Priory Team and the Mayor has been supported throughout by his consort, his mother, Joan Brunt and by the Deputy Mayor, Councillor Edith Macauley MBE.

Madame Mayor. Councillor Brunt's mayoralty will be remembered by the way in which he prioritised health, wellbeing and engaged with young people in Merton schools.

Merton runs through Councillor Brunt to his core and he's extremely passionate about safeguarding the borough's future. Through his charity work and civic duties he encapsulated the borough's strong collective spirit and has been especially impressed by the way the community has come together over the year as Merton recovered from the pandemic. I formally move this motion of thanks to Councillor Michael Brunt.

Councillor Anthony Fairclough – Leader of the Liberal Democrat Group

Thank you Madame Mayor, I'm very pleased to be seconding this motion of thanks to Councillor Brunt and Councillor Macauley. But first, Madame Mayor, I would like to welcome you and congratulate you on your own results. I don't think I've ever heard you speak in the Chamber or in a committee or indeed in person where you haven't mentioned the people Pollards Hill with a certain warmth and I think this is a lesson to us all in why we are here, so thank you.

You spoke meaningfully of your time in South Africa and I think what came through to me about that was the sense of family and community and community impact that has gone on throughout your life and I think you brought some of that into your mayoralty as well.

I also wanted to highlight briefly the role that we don't talk about for the Mayor which is the chairing of our meetings and keeping us in order. You haven't, and I know you remarked, had to stand up. Though Councillor Henry may do if she wants me to shut up. We were working through times that weren't easy and weren't easy to manage or get our heads around. But Councillor Brunt managed that while keeping us calm and staying on task and for that I'm very grateful. I'd like to thank you for your service. Thank you very much.

Councillor Nick McLean – Leader of the Conservative Group

Madam Mayor may I congratulate Cllr Brunt on a successful year as mayor. And also may I congratulate Cllr Macauley for her strong contribution as Deputy Mayor.

The first Mayor's ball back after the pandemic was a great event, it was especially gratifying to see so many councillors after the disruption of the pandemic.

Cllr Brunt and Cllr Macauley, by your support for the Christian Care Association and Marie Curie your year as our Mayor and Deputy Mayor has raised much needed money for some truly vital causes. The Conservative group thanks you both.

I would also like to pay tribute to the other Mayors from the previous municipal term, which was so tragically disrupted by covid. Former councillors Mary Curtin and Janice Howard and Cllr Sally Kenny gave sterling service to Merton through tough times, we thank them all for their service to the borough.

Thank you.

Councillor Edward Foley – Leader, Merton Park Ward Independent Residents

Thank you Madame Mayor and congratulations to you and your Deputy Mayor as well. On behalf of the Merton Park Independent Residents, I am pleased to contribute to the vote of thanks to the retiring mayor, Councillor Mike Brunt. I've often found it interesting how much you will discover about someone in the year of office than you knew before. I'd been on the Children and Young Peoples Scrutiny Panel with Mike and chatted with him at various functions and events. I knew he had been a teacher, I did not know about his time at British Airways, nor how when he left BA that he took some time out to work in an orphanage in South Africa. Having helped organize a charity cricket match when I was Deputy Mayor, I was pleased to be asked again last year. Having come second to Richmond Cricket Club, the first time I played, I had prepared myself for a similar outcome. It was not to be, we had some different councillors playing this time, and a couple of external players as well. Mike batted early, maintaining he had not played for many years however he put on a very good performance and even managed to score a four a memorable accomplishment especially as mentioned it's the oldest cricket club in the country. I'm also pleased to say we came first that year and I just looked at the score, we were chasing 160 runs over 20 overs and at the end of the 90 we managed to get 162 so came first.

I'd like to pay tribute too, to the Mayor's support for charity during this year in office. His two charities were Christian Care Association in Merton and Marie Curie, a charity which supports people at the end of their lives and their families. Mike had personal experience of the support of Marie Curie with his late father and how much they helped in those final days and nights. Having gone through a similar situation with my wife last year I was not so fortunate as Marie Curie did not have anyone the time to help and by the time they did have somebody, sadly it was too late. I know he is very keen to support and help start a local Marie Curie support team and fundraising in Merton and if any other councillors are interested then please do get in contact with him and let's see what can be done to make this happen.

Throughout he has been supported by his mother Joan, often at his side and in her role as Mayoress. She deserves our thanks too, it was great to see them both together at Buckingham Palace recently. Mike has attended over 70 citizenship ceremonies at Morden Park House and welcomed over 700 new British Citizens to the borough. He has visited 31 schools in Merton, including his own former schools Holy Trinity Primary School and Garth High School which is now the Harris Academy. Another special visit was his mother's school, Wimbledon Park Primary

School which when she first entered that school it was the day of World War II. She visited the school again this year on the day that Russia invaded Ukraine.

Before I finish I would like to give a special thanks to his Deputy Mayor Councillor Edith Macauley. Not only did Edith support Mine at virtually every event throughout the year, but you also raised nearly £3,000 for the Mayor's charities with her sponsored swim. Thank you Edith.

Councillor Howard

Thank you Madame Mayor, as others I'd like to welcome you to your new post and congratulate you on your succession. I am looking forward to your year and I must say it's nice to find myself at your elevated level in the chamber a level from which we may both look down on those currently seated between us. Now I'm going to sing your praises in 12 months' time, I have no doubt, so give me a moment to focus on your predecessor Councillor Michael Brunt. I know that my wife Councillor Janice Howard, would have wanted to thank Mike personally but as you know she's been promoted to a public gallery when she can now hold us all to account, starting no doubt with me.

The Queen, God bless her is represented by the mace before us, but it is our residents, some behind me, that we owe a more immediate fealty. Councillor Brunt, together with Janice, I had the immense pleasure in supporting a good knock at Civic events. I know Janice took immense pride in being able to contribute in any way to the organisation that you and your team put into them. We know that Merton Council offers a fantastic support to the office of Mayor. Support that many others cannot provide. That Councillor Brunt the driving force, with your own energy and enthusiasm for fund raising for your chosen charities Christian Care and Marie Curie gave us many opportunities to support you. The Mayor's XI cricket match in Mitcham where your team was victorious was a great start to the year due of course to a significant innings, your own.

This was followed by a dinner and of the year of course topped off by a ball at the All England Club. As a point of interest Janice and I did do quite well at some of the raffles. Councillor Brunt, you visited all schools in Merton and gave so many children in insight to the role of a civic mayor and the london borough and amongst those children i am sure there will be future councillors now in the making. I'm sure that your mayoral year will be so well remembered for all you have done for the community of Merton and it is heartening to know that you remain among us. You're a good councillor and above all a genuinely good man. Thank you.

Councillor Michael Brunt, speaking in response to the Vote of Thanks

Madame Mayor, Deputy Lieutenant, fellow councillors, ladies and gentlemen in the gallery. Thank you for all the kind words that have been said about me so far. I'm

not sure that I recognise them all completely, but I really appreciate that and it's coming from across the chamber. It means a lot to me. The last year has been amazing it's been a huge privilege to be Mayor of a London Borough,. Although I predate Merton by 10 years I owe everything to Merton and its where I grew up. I was born and educated in the borough, it's where I'm from, it's what shaped me. I used to play in the parks go to the cinemas, I even remember the Rialto, in Raynes Park and some of the cinemas in Wimbledon. I'm not sure when some of the names of parks changed, but I remember Trinity Gardens being Trinity Gardens, not South Park Gardens, but times change and names change. Tonight is my last chance to have a captive audience and no time limit. I remember when I was first elected to the council the lights you'll get used to over here it's green for four minutes and it goes to amber for the fourth, and it goes red at five I used to admire the people speaking at five minutes. I soon came to realise that the ones to admire were the ones that managed to finish before the amber light came on. You've got me know, so I'm going to carry on.

It's time to say thank you and to mention some highlights. Thank you to those who were councillors last year for putting your trust in me and thank you to all of those who've supported me throughout the year either directly or indirectly. Thank you for those who attended fundraising events or donated prizes or cash, sponsored the Deputy Mayor's swim which has been mentioned raised at least £3000, for my Movember fundraising and for the big sleepout which did raise money for the Dons Local Action Group and for Faith in Action as well as Tooting Community Venture.

Thank you for all of those who've given moral support to me. As I said at the thank you event on Saturday, there's always a risk of leaving someone out where you start naming people but again I'll take that risk and apologise in advance if I inadvertently leave you out. I'll start with thanking my mum for agreeing to be Mayoress, at 93 years old I think she's done remarkably well. Thank you mum. To Terry, who can't be here, for encouraging me and always giving me sound advice and ensuring I keep my feet on the ground despite what can happen to Mayors. To Edith for being my deputy, Edith has been a constant support throughout the year and supported every fundraising event as well as her £3000 for the sponsored swim. I don't think that I could have done it without your support, so thank you very much for that. You have been so dedicated and been good at giving me quiet advice in the background, putting me right before I've gone wrong, so thank you. I know that Carmel can't be here but I know he's been a support to you, even though he's not been able to attend many things because he's in his first year at university and university students have other things to do. Thank you to my joint chaplains this year. IT's been really good to have you being part of this whole journey with me. Thank you to the Deputy Lieutenant for your support and your wisdom and I look forward to our lasting friendship. Thank you to Mayor's Office, to Sandra, Carl, Steve, Mick and of course Sharon. Sandra has been a wise adviser and incredible support. And I learnt early on, as you'll learn Madame Mayor, that you lose your name for the year. I did say to Sandra early on, in the first week I think, when it's just us, please call me Mike or Michael and she said yes Mr Mayor. That's the way it works. Carl Steve and Mick, as I mentioned before for your patience with my back seat driving, sometimes we

would get to a junction and I would say shouldn't we go that way? But no, they always knew better than either I or the sat nav. To Sharon for keeping the Mayor's parlour so spick and span and for your invariably shiny and smiling personality. For the rest of the team who do so much behind the scenes at many events, Diane, Amy, Andrew and others. To Jane and your team, you do incredible work for those in need in Merton and the effects are lasting. To Sharifa and all those in Marie Curie Care. Through the support we received I got to know what you do and how valuable that is. Thank you to the All England Tennis Club for all your hospitality and your generosity, they always make a strong contribution to the Mayor's charities. But especially for making mum feel so welcome and so welcome and special in the royal box. That was a really special. If you ask her afterwards she will say that that's the highlight of the year. To the team at Wimbledon Theatre also contributed, particularly during the pantomime, where Shane Ritchie, who is my other best friend, kept announcing at the end of every performance that the staff would be collecting for the charities with buckets. £11,5000 was raised there. To the team at the registry office who've been encouraging and made me feel so welcome all the time, as we mentioned over 70 ceremonies, and that's been a great privilege to do that. To all those involved in rolling out the vaccine in Merton. I've been able to visit and have vaccines publicly several times i went to thank them this afternoon and they said, do you want your second booster now while you're here? And that's why I'm wearing this, I have the second booster up until next year.

To Hannah Doody and Louise Round, your advice and support, particularly during the hybrid meetings and helping me to get through those. Fellow counsellors, for never making me have to stand up. I appreciate that, you've always conducted the meetings, with a bit of chastising and good humour so I do thank you for that. Merton/Morden Guild, for being a constant support, working behind the scenes on things like Silver Sunday and the cricket match. To Janice, Sally Oonagh, Ed, Linda, as former mayors and members of the committee on the fundraising you've been invaluable. You've given me steadfast support and advised me on the role of Mayor and it's been great to know that as you've gone before me, that you can advise. So thank you to those that I've mentioned and to all former Mayors who still sit on the Council because I know i know that you have that experience.

I'll briefly mention some highlights of the year and I've already mentioned the tennis so I won't go into that. Edith and I went to the schools and that was very special and particularly last week, one of the highlights a three-year-old girl in the nursery came up to me because I always used to go into the schools in robes. Madame Mayor you can do that in the future. But this three year old girl came to me and said, where's your dressing up box? And I said, I haven't got it with me, and she took me by the hand and took me to the dressing up corner in the nursery and that was a precious moment and I realised just how confident our young people are in this borough, and we have a fantastic education system and I think we should encourage all councillors in their wards to get to know the schools, particularly the primary schools, be in there and get to know them.

The Silver Sunday was a highlight, and that's already been mentioned as well. The rising stars football team, Pollards Hill, was a fantastic event - one of the first public

events I went to after we came out of Covid. And that is a team that has been brought together by the PCSO in that area and these are young men who would not necessarily be doing good things but they were all on track and they support each other and they're going on to support each other and making lives in football but also in other areas as well. A big highlight was standing in the semi-circle giving Dickie Guy his freedom of the borough and also having him here in the Council Chamber. And showing I really have been a supporter since 1977 by giving him the first programme I ever bought which he was on and that was in January 1977.

Tooting Mitcham for Teenagers, those not in education, not in training, seeing how things work there is incredible, these are young people who would not necessarily achieve because they're not in school for educational training for all sorts of reasons. But I met some youngsters who are going on to apprenticeships and degree and going to university, phenomenal work.

The celebration of music with Merton Music Foundation Christmas concert was amazing and then following on from that 1001 nights at King's College School but it included children from local primaries and most of the secondary schools. I don't think it was a dry eye in the house when the boy sang supercalifragilisticexpialidocious.

The Garden Party was a special one as well, I think that was mum's second highlight of the year and we discovered the advantage of having a wheelchair because the wheelchair users were lined up in a line next to the palace and the royal party shook hands with all of them. So mum met the future king and also Princess Anne who is one of her heroes. I'll stop there because I could take up the whole evening, but I'll say in conclusion that being Mayor has been a humbling experience. I felt that I've learned a lot during the year and I'll be ever thankful for that. I learned a lot about myself as well. Merton is a wonderful, vibrant, diverse borough, that is full of talent, hope and respect I hope that all 57 of us live up to the expectations of the residents we are here to serve. And there is just one small anecdote. In the 98 elections at the count, I had a Liberal Democrat in a rosette come up to me at the count, and said you won't remember me, but I've just voted for you, I voted two liberal and you. You may remember, because I was 9 years old, I came to see you in your first surgery - he didn't know it was my first surgery, but it was my first surgery - because there was broken glass on the tennis courts. I reported that to the director that was cleared and he remembered that. I think we should all remember that we're here partly because our party but also here because of the respect we show our residents and the dedication to each other. A number of children at schools ask what it's like to be mayor and whether I'll miss it when it ends. My answer has always been, that it's such a special experience that it needs to be shared. I often say to them that it's a bit like being Dr Who – the robes are the TARDIS but the person wearing it changes each year. And I'll finish off by saying there's an expression that I'd learnt during my time in South Africa, which was "things happen when the time is full", and I think the time is full, so thank you.

