

Appendix B - Mayoral speech
17th May 2023
Council Chamber

Good evening may I welcome The Deputy Lieutenant, honorary Aldermen and Alderwomen of Merton, the Assembly member for Merton, Councillors, officers and of course friends, family and guests.

Goodness me, as I look out before me from this bench, I am delighted to see you all and trust you are well and in fine spirits this evening, despite battling the profusion of roadworks!

Thank you for being here on this special night in the Civic Year. The annual council is a night we look forward to, as it signals the beginning of the newly elected Mayors term of office. As we say thank you to the outgoing Mayor and her Deputy, and look ahead to what's coming next!! A re-dedication of our civic lives and responsibilities.

I take this opportunity to place on record our thanks to Cllr Henry and Cllr Akygina for their commitment, dedication and service to the residents and communities in this Borough. You will be a hard act to follow.

Thanks also must be made to my political family in the chamber, both elected councillors and branch party members, for trusting me to inhabit this new role and to be a shining example. Cllr Garrod, colleagues, what were you thinking!!!

Mere words will never be sufficient to thank my two Ward colleagues Cllr Kaweesa and Cllr Butcher. We were elected as a team just over a year ago (to my surprise) and we have bonded for the common good of our Ward of Cricket Green. I am extremely fortunate to work with two very bright, energetic, imaginative and caring young men.

Mitcham is my forever home. I came here 5 years ago, a refugee of my sad, beleaguered, but much-loved Croydon. Father David sitting to my right interviewed me, in his role as trustee of the charity that provides Almshouse cottages, and (I hope he does not regret that decision) made me a beneficiary of the magnificent cottages built by the Mitcham benefactress Mary Tate almost 200 years ago.

In Mitcham, I discovered a community of people that is generous, kind, and very forgiving!!! During the pandemic, without the kindness of good neighbours and food parcels from the Dons, the lockdown would have been much harder to endure. It is my privilege to not only live in Mitcham but to be able to serve the very people that have welcomed me, supported me and come to my rescue.

You will have heard in the speech's, stories of some of my endeavours and achievements. 62 years I have plodded this planet and cannot possibly list the multitude of phenomenal people I have met and worked with, nor what seemed at the time most unlikely jobs I have done. I am the mistress of reinvention I am told. And to some, becoming Mayor is yet another in the ever-increasing list of reinventions.

I would argue that what appears to some to be re-invention, I call discovery. With each season that passes, my imagination is re-ignited with ideas and possibilities. I am fundamentally a storyteller. Whether as an actor on stage or film, a jazz singer that improvises at Ronnie Scott's, writing plays, a funeral celebrant that speaks to the lives of those that have left us, to a politician that addresses the chamber.

My life's path provides wisdom and knowledge that enables me to be many things, but fundamentally my core is to speak to people and somehow make a change in them that matters. Perhaps even inspire them to take a leap of faith, to follow their gut instincts, and to remember that perfection is not required, only diligence and a willing heart.

**“All the world's a stage,
And all the men and women merely players;
They have their exits and their entrances;
And one man in his time plays many parts” says the great Bard**

In truth, we are in the midst of a political theatre or arena if you will. All of us driven by civic duty, and the desire to make change, to enhance lives, and to provide solutions. Though we may not all share the same philosophies, we are all led by a common goal, to make a difference. Alas, we do and will disagree on ideology, and that's ok!! Good debate is necessary.

I am reminded whenever I question my sanity and decisions to undertake a role or new path that Aristotle said:

"At the intersection where your gifts, talents, and abilities meet a human need; therein you will discover your purpose"

I have found a purpose in this Chamber, and will use all my gifts, talents and abilities.

As your new Mayor, I have nominated two charities for which I will be raising funds. Firstly the Merton Music Foundation. As a child, I was privileged to be able to have free music tuition in violin and recorder and was fortunate that my parents could afford piano and flute lessons. Today's young people are not so lucky, especially in the deprived areas of our borough. MMF's vision is a borough where music resonates along the corridors of every school and echoes throughout the community. A place of aspiration where every child can find their first notes, make progress and flourish as a young musician. I am delighted that we have the Chief Executive of MMF Elisabeth Wigley with us today.

My other charity has a special significance in my life and many of those in the Chamber. The National Hospital for Neurology & Neurosurgery and the UCL Queen Square Institute of Neurology – together known as Queen Square. This is one of the world's leading centres for the diagnosis, treatment and care of patients with

neurological and neuromuscular conditions. These include stroke, multiple sclerosis, brain cancer, epilepsy, Parkinson's disease, and dementia. I am truly grateful that Dr Paul Mulholland is here this evening, who I am sure will be happy to speak to you at the reception afterwards.

A very dear and wise friend told me once, she has a personal mantra, and I will embarrass her this evening by not only quoting her but, thanking her for her encouragement as I entered into the life of a councillor. We stand on the shoulder of giants, and this woman is surely one of those, Dr Margaret Casely-Hayford, in your words.

**“I can, I will, just watch me”
“I can, I will, just watch me”**

Tonight, I pledge my complete commitment and dedication to a year of spreading peace, fun, love and joy.

A year of embracing every corner of this borough

A year of inspiring activities and events

A year of leadership, balance, and calm during the stormy nights of Full Council

A year of celebrating our heritage, culture and arts

A year of ambition for my beloved Mitcham

A year of just showing up and sharing the love

There will be stories to tell, and dreams to be shared

Children and young people to nurture and encourage

Volunteers to thank

Achievements to be celebrated

Honouring, and remembering

Touching lives

Drinking tea

Eating cakes and leading parades

Cutting ribbons

Waving flags

Applauding success and true grit

Being gracious and showing gratitude

Above all this

Gratitude

I am grateful to you all this evening for your time, your patience, and your love

I end with these thoughts:

“Though she be but little ,she is fierce”

I can, I will, just watch me

I can, I will, just watch me

Thank you.

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