

THE MAYOR OF CROYDON 2016-2017

Ellr Wayne Trakas-Lawlor



Introduction

Firstly, I thank you all for giving me opportunity to serve as Mayor of Croydon. It has been a great experience and a wonderful personal journey for Michael and me.

I decided that I would produce a written report and spare Members a very long and time-consuming speech that you would forget. It seems hard to believe that I am giving my farewell address when it seems like yesterday that I gave my acceptance address to Members. I will try to cover as much ground in this report as I can, but there really isn't enough time or paper to cover everything.

Business Arts and Culture as a theme

As Members know, my theme for the year has been business, arts, and culture. I chose this theme deliberately to celebrate the exiting developments in Croydon:

- Fairfield Halls is undergoing its most significant refurbishment since it was built in 1963;
- The first Croydon Pride celebrations in 20 years and the second largest pride festival in London;
- Street parties and many amazing community festivals across the Borough;
- Street Art in Croydon;
- Box-Park making a significant contribution to Croydon, and much, much more.

I have also held 4 business breakfasts; 4 business drinks receptions and presented a number of awards to the business community, including TONE scaffolding who won my award for business, innovation and excellence in industry in Croydon.

TONE really was a wonderful organisation to work with for our New Year's Day Celebrations. Nothing that we asked of them was too much nor was it any trouble. I look forward to this council strengthening our links to wonderful companies like TONE who do so much to enrich the economic and social value of Croydon.

Highlights/best bits

I have learned so much about my home town and met so many incredible people doing incredible work. There have been many highlights of the year from the tremendous Croydon Pride celebrations to watching people who did not have much confidence, growing in confidence and self-esteem and doing what they thought was impossible.

The most inspiring moments of the year were those engagements where I had the chance to make a difference to people, and to show them that they could achieve anything they want to in life, and not to let anyone or anything stop them. I attended and spoke at many Jack Petchey and First Give engagements where I had the chance to speak to young people directly and celebrate their achievements.

I had the pleasure of visiting the Gingerbread Corner where a wonderful girl aged 10, called Vivien painted the most tremendous portraits of our dogs, Max and Roxy. Michael and I absolutely love them and will treasure them forever. Our thanks go to Sue Dzendera and her team for their inspirational management of the Gingerbread Corner.

I have had the honour of being guest speaker at a number of Rotary dinners and lunches, and I was honoured to have Honourary Member status given to me.

Croydon Pride, the first in twenty years and the biggest ever, was a wonderful and historic occasion in Croydon. I want to place on record my thanks to my friend and colleague, Cllr Mark Watson for all his hard work, his energy, and his passion and for bringing everyone together to make Pride happen. It was

a weekend of family fun, it was a weekend of showing Croydon at our strongest: united, diverse and welcoming to all, regardless of background, culture or ethnicity. That is the Croydon that I know and love.

Croydon Business Awards raised a phenomenal amount of money for my charities and I had the pleasure of making a new friend in the Palace legend John Salako. John sang for us that night and he has a wonderful voice. He and his partner, Michelle, have become good friends with Michael and me.

Tough times

The hardest and most challenging moment was that tragic morning on 9th November 2016 when seven lives were taken and many more changed forever.

Nothing can prepare you for the moment when you meet the family of one of those who died. The deputy mayor and I attended the first three funerals of those who died. It was one of the hardest things that I have ever had to do. I wrote cards of sympathy to all the families of those who lost their lives, but I have to say that support we received from people across London and indeed the country and showed me that we could recover from this appalling and tragic accident. When the council launched the appeal fund, within weeks the amount raised climbed to £90,000 – it made me feel to be a Croydonian.

The terror attack on Westminster left its mark on London and Croydon. We were shell shocked as a Borough – flag lowering to remember those who lost their lives and those whose lives were changed forever. It serves as a reminder of the amazing job that the Metropolitan Police do to keep us safe every day, with fear of their own safety.

The appalling attack on Rekar Ahmed in Shrublands, Shirley shocked the nation and shook us in Croydon, too. We know that what happened does not represent Croydon at all, but the response from the people from Croydon was,

as ever, magnificent. A considerable sum of money was raised to help Rekar continue with his education and rebuild his life.

I was also extremely proud of Members at the April council meeting who gave impassioned speeches condemning the attack. The Chamber spoke as one as we unanimously passed a Motion condemning the attack on Rekar Ahmed. Croydon is at its best when we are united.

Holocaust Memorial Day 2017 will also stand out for me as being very special. We heard from the brave survivors of that ghastly period in history when millions of Jewish people were murdered. Hearing their family stories was deeply moving and brought me to tears. It was an incredibly powerful day.

I have also lowered the flags of various nations to half-mast to remember those who lost their lives sadly high number of terror attacks across the world. We also had what feels that a record number of books of condolence opened up in the town hall to remember those who died in those terror attacks.

Arnhem

This year has also been filled with many memorable visits, but one that stands out for me is the annual trip to Arnhem. As most of us here are aware, Arnhem was occupied during the war, and as such their commemorations of that period are deeply significant. I will never forget standing in the field at Oosterbeek where Croydon service men and women lost their lives. It was an incredibly humbling experience.

What really struck me about the Arnhem visit is how Croydon is standing on the world stage at this important event. We are sat with Ambassadors from all around the world remembering the immense contribution of those brave women and men who left Croydon Airport, never to return home.

Fundraising/charities

I have been blessed to have a fantastic Fundraising Board, chaired by the man who has become affectionately known as the Mayor of Purley, Mr Deva Pannoosami. Deva has given his time, commitment and energy over the years and it was a privilege to present him with a Mayoral Citation to recognise his work.

We have held a number of fundraising events and I thank those Members who have been able to attend.

The biggest and most memorable fundraiser was my Gala Dinner where we raised just over £10,000 for my charities. We had fantastic entertainment from CODA (Croydon Operatic and Dramatic Association) my Consort, Michael and John Salako sang a duo, and we were even treated to a rendition of 'New York, New York', from the Mayor of Bromley, Cllr Ian F. Payne.

15 Mayors from London, Surrey and Kent attended my Gala Dinner with over 180 guests.

My three charities: The British Home, The Stanley Peoples' Initiative and Croydon Commitment are all very grateful for the time, energy and devotion from the people of Croydon and further afield.

A busy year in politics

This has been a most extraordinary year politically as well. We have been through an eventful and at times colourful Referendum campaign, and we have had to deal with the subsequent issues that followed that campaign. Now we are in a General Election mode. But, being the Mayor comes with great responsibility and restraint, and I have to confess that holding back has been very difficult and painful at times – but I did it!

Thank you

I have been very lucky to have had the privilege and the honour of having a first class Deputy Mayor. Toni Letts has dedicated her life to helping others and without her support, love and occasionally some tough love; I could not have fulfilled the role of Mayor of Croydon. Toni, I place on record our sincere and heartfelt thanks to you.

My Chaplain, Fr John Pritchard, has been a wonderful spiritual advisor and has become a good friend to Michael and me as well as the mayoral team.

As past Mayor's in the Chamber will know, the mayoral year is a hectic and thoroughly enjoyable year. I am eternally grateful to my wonderful family for their support, their love, their encouragement and their patience and forbearance. My family really haven't seen much of me or Michael this year,

We also thank our dogs, the first canines of Croydon, Max and Roxy. They will be very relieved to have their daddy's around a bit more than usual.

A big heart felt thank you to Kathy and Jane, my ward colleagues who have pretty much covered for me this year at surgeries and matters of casework. I also wish to thank my constituents in South Norwood who have not really seen much of me this year but have been very understanding and supportive, a huge debt of gratitude.

Thanks to the office team and Lea Goddard: I will miss Denise's screams when I walk into the office – colleagues who pass by must wonder what is going on sometimes – it's just the mayor startling his PA! I must also warmly welcome Nick Evans to Croydon and congratulate him on his first two weeks as chauffeur and assistant mace bearer.

We have made some wonderful friends throughout this amazing journey: here in Croydon and across London.

It would be remiss of me not to mention the laughter and fun had with other members of the 'chain gang' including, Cllr Ian F. Payne, the larger-than-life Mayor of Bromley and his lovely Mayoress, Mrs. Judith Payne, the Mayor of Islington, Cllr Kat Fletcher and her delightful Consort, Rev Mel Toogood, the Mayor of Havering, Cllr Philippa Crowder and her Consort Cllr John Crowder. Cllr Bernadette Lappage in Enfield was a real tower of strength when it came to advice on chairing Full Council. I had real fears that I would not be able to chair the meeting as well as my predecessor, but the Mayor of Enfield was candid in her advice. You have to be tough, you have to be firm and you have to be fair.

I thank our Chief Executive, Jo Negrini for her steady and calming influence. Jo has the amazing ability to keep the waters calm before a big meeting and keep me focussed – not an easy task.

Jo also has the incredible talent of being able to communicate with 'Team Dias': Stephen Rowan (head of democratic services), James Haywood and Victoria Lower (senior member services managers) Jacqueline Harris-Baker, Madam Deputy Mayor and myself in jargon-free language.

Our Deputy Lieutenant, Col Ian McRobbie has been a loyal and trusted servant of Croydon. Thank you for your service and guidance to me personally and to Croydon over the past 22 years. It has been a pleasure working with you and it was a pleasure and my personal honour to award you with Freedom of the London Borough of Croydon.

I warmly and sincerely congratulate to Jacqueline Harris-Baker, our new and dynamic Director of Law. Jacqueline has provided legal clarity to me on a number of matters and it was with a punch to the air and a little dance around the parlour that I greeted the news of her appointment to her current role.

Saving the bet till last, I thank the people of Croydon who gave the confidence to be the best Mayor that I could be and helped me to find my voice at the most challenging of times. I thank you all from the bottom of my heart for making this year so special and for taking me, Michael, Max and Roxy into your hearts.

Croydon is the centre of the universe and it is the people of this great City that have given me the inspiration, motivation and energy to carry out my duties to the best of my ability, even during the darkest moment for our Borough.

I said in my acceptance speech that I wanted people in Croydon to realise their Croydon Dream, just as Croydon helped me to realise my Croydon Dream. Never stop believing in yourselves and all that you can achieve, and never stop fighting for what you believe in. Always remember that we achieve more together than we do alone.



**Cllr Wayne Trakas-Lawlor,
Mayor of Croydon 2016/2017**

**Michael W. Trakas, the Mayor's
Consort**















