

30th January 2018

Dear colleague,

It is with mixed emotions that I am announcing my decision to stand down at the May local elections as ward councillor for Seven Sisters, leader of Haringey Council and as chair of London Councils.

When I became leader in 2008, Haringey was in the midst of the highest profile public service failure in recent memory. A decade later, it is in a very different place and I feel that this is the right point at which to move on to new challenges.

Becoming leader in Haringey at one of the lowest points in its history made me realise what an enormous challenge, and profound privilege, it is to lead a borough like ours. More than anything, the last 10 years has shown me the difference that good political leadership can make. Effective leadership, in politics as in many other areas, starts by facing the future, framing its challenges and building a consensus around them, and creating the partnerships that can meet them. It requires you to define, determine and deliver an inclusive vision, underpinned by a strong working relationship between political leaders and officers. I feel honoured to have worked alongside some of the most talented and dedicated public servants in the country - people whose work often goes unseen but without whom our country would be poorer. It has been a privilege to develop an outstanding team of councillors who have brought great leadership as well as a diversity of skills and experience to leading our borough. I am only sorry that many have been denied the opportunity to stand once again - I hope that they can continue to use their talents in future to shape a better future for those who need them most.

While local government does not enjoy the esteem of its national counterpart, the last ten years have left me in no doubt that it is where change truly happens. I am immensely proud to have served as a local politician. Across London and the country, in councils of different political complexions, the true work is underway to shape the physical, social and economic future of communities, as well as to reform public services, making better places, stronger communities and services which are more responsive to people's needs.

I came into to politics because I believed it to be the best way of improving people's lives. I will leave office more convinced than ever that this is the case. I have always said that local government should not be in the business of managing decline and I believe more strongly than ever that politics should be focused on using all the tools available, as well as creativity and innovation to solve the intractable issues of the day rather than sticking to a rigid ideology.

I have been motivated by a sense of injustice throughout my whole life. Tackling poverty and inequality has always been my priority. Where this is entrenched, it is my view that social and economic change is most successfully delivered alongside physical regeneration - indeed I think the former is impossible without the latter in these cases. That is why I am passionate about both improving education and delivering regeneration.

This is not always a popular or easy path to take but I believe in facing up to difficult decisions rather than retreating to a position that feels safer or more comfortable. For too many years in Haringey, there simply wasn't enough focus on providing better quality, safe and secure housing for residents and more sustainable, better paid jobs that enable people to have options and make choices about their own future. These are not easy things to deliver, and rarely come without controversy. But taking the easy path is to let down those who need us most. Political issues are rarely binary; solutions are not simply good or bad.

Today Haringey is a far more ambitious and confident borough than the one I came into a decade ago. We are no longer a place that thought we could do no better than achieve 65% of schools rated Good or Outstanding by Ofsted because of the deprivation and transitory nature of the population. Instead it is a place almost 100% of our schools are Good or Outstanding. We've gone from being a council that was known for its terrible failures in children's services to an organisation that won the LGC Children's Services of the Year 2017 award. We have led the way with our STEM Commission, exploring how a whole borough approach can equip our young people for the jobs of the future. New educational institutions such as the London Academy of Excellence and ADA - the national digital skills college, have established themselves here to provide the best possible opportunities for Haringey's young people. We have expanded schools; opened new ones; and strived to make sure that our young people have the best possible start in life through building strong relationships with parents, teachers, governors and students. And it has paid off, with Haringey schools' results amongst the fastest improving in the country.

We are making Haringey a place which is open for business and where there are opportunities to train and work in industries that will dominate our future economy. We have gone from being a council that had not built a single house in 30 years, and had no plans for regeneration, to one that since the 2011 riots has attracted £500m public sector investment and a further £3bn from the private sector. The first council housebuilding in a generation is already happening; over 900 people have been helped into employment directly linked to regeneration activity; and we have plans in place for thousands more homes and jobs.

Even in the face of austerity, we are making Haringey a better place; the regeneration of Alexandra Palace and Hornsey Town Hall is underway; we have a record 23 parks with Green Flags; have protected our libraries; and have worked with the Mayor of London to design the capital's first cultural enterprise zone.

And we're making Haringey a fairer place. The Council's directly employed staff - over 40% of whom live in the borough - are all paid the London Living Wage. We have frozen regressive Council Tax for 9 years which has protected low income households from an additional financial burden when they are facing rising living costs across the board.

In recent years I have also had the honour of being Chair of London Councils. To work more closely with the range of hugely talented council leaders in our capital has been an absolute pleasure. and together we have delivered much to be proud of - the business rates devolution deal; coordinated efforts to open our doors to unaccompanied asylum seeking

children, particularly those impacted by the closure of the Calais camps; and made the case for a Brexit that works for London. It has also been fantastic to work with my colleagues at the LGA and to Chair the Resources Board as well as work with other local authorities and councillors through peer support and development programmes.

It has been a privilege to represent Seven Sisters. In particular, I am proud of the strong relationship I have forged with the Charedi community in the ward. I have developed true friendships with many in the community and am grateful for their unwavering support.

It is hard to put into words how difficult it has been to reach this decision. The last ten years have been an absolute privilege and at the moment, it's impossible to imagine what could match being able to help people and change things for the better in the way that everyone in local government does every day. And there is still a lot I want to achieve between now and the election. I am, of course, excited for the next chapter for myself and my family.

There are too many people that I have met and worked with over the years to recognize here, but know that it has been a team effort and I will miss it and you all, very much.

Best wishes

Claire Kober