Westminster City Council

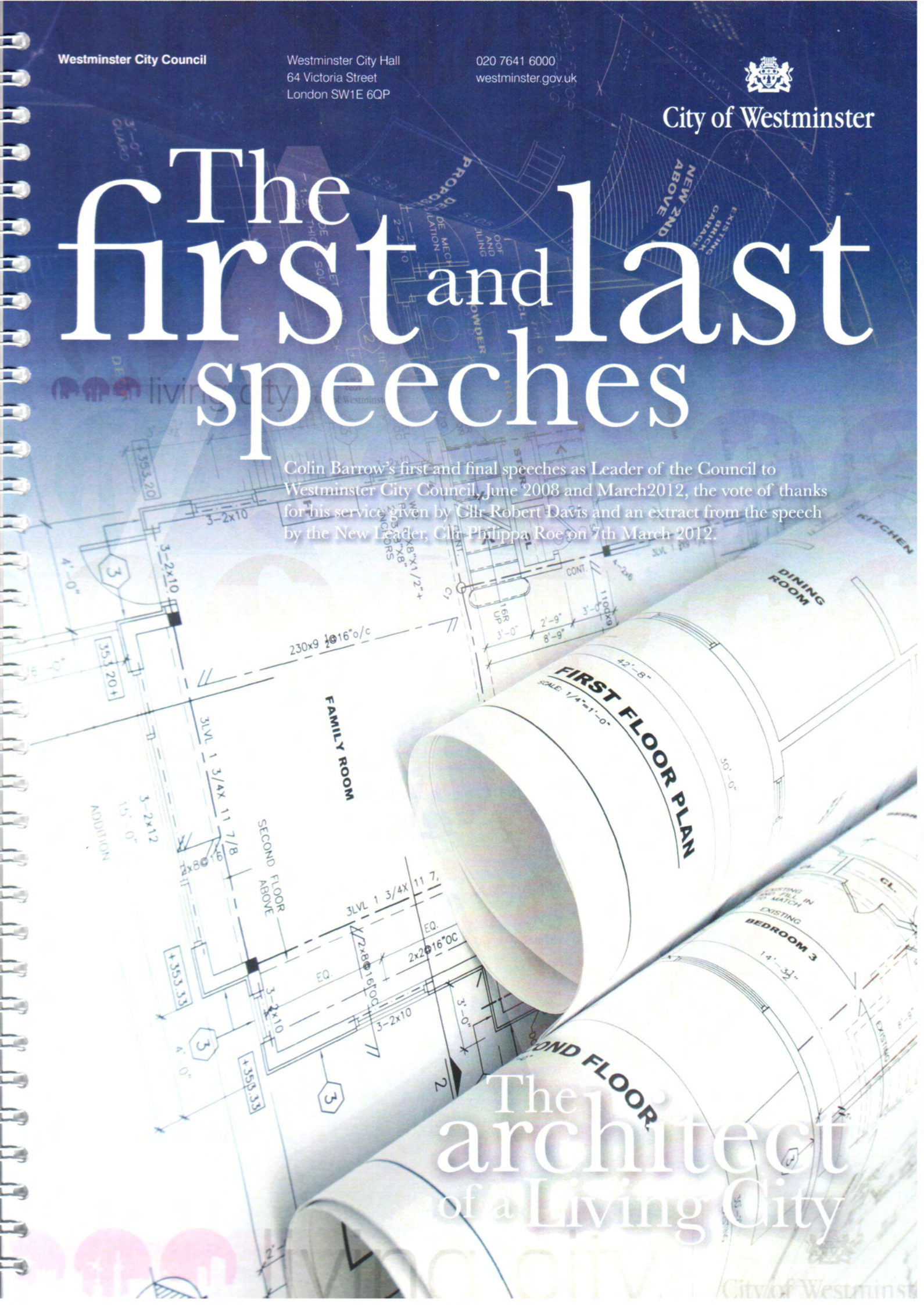
Westminster City Hall
64 Victoria Street
London SW1E 6QP

020 7641 6000
westminster.gov.uk

City of Westminster

The first and last speeches

Colin Barrow's first and final speeches as Leader of the Council to Westminster City Council, June 2008 and March2012, the vote of thanks for his service given by Cllr Robert Davis and an extract from the speech by the New Leader, Cllr Philippa Roe on 7th March 2012.



The architect of a Living City

The first and last speeches

Colin Barrow's first and final speeches as Leader of the Council to Westminster City Council, June 2008 and March 2012, the vote of thanks for his service given by Cllr Robert Davis and an extract from the speech by the New Leader, Cllr Philippa Roe on 7th March 2012

Setting a Westminster Standard of Service

First speech as Leader of the Council by Cllr Colin Barrow, to the Council on Wednesday 18th June 2008.

Opportunity, respect and challenge

I thank colleagues for the opportunity I have been given to lead Westminster, and to dedicate this organisation to improving lives in the heart of our capital city.

And I accept the challenge that being Leader of the City Council entails. Westminster is not simply another council.

It aspires, rightly, to be the best of the best, to be a global leader in city management.

It was this ambition that Simon Milton turned into reality. Simon is widely regarded as the best civic leader of his generation, and we have all been very fortunate to be part of his team.

Civic Renewal delivered on a hundred specific commitments. One City is building strong communities supported by excellent council services. Together we have won award after award, one top rating after another, and our advice is sought throughout the public sector

Sir Simon inspired his top team to set the highest standards, and to apply the best ideas. And when a new Conservative administration for London needed talented people, it was to Westminster that Boris looked.

Under Simon we have re-learnt the art of leadership, locally and nationally. It is a precious attribute upon which I intend to build.

A Westminster Standard of service

To begin with the biggest promise of all.

I want Westminster's work to be the standard by which others judge public service.

To me this means constantly asking ourselves three questions.

First, are we treating people well as well as serving them effectively. Is this how you would want to be treated

Secondly are we really embracing innovation? Have we found out who does this best, who knows most about this, and have we tried to do what they do, and then gone further to meet Westminster's requirements?

And thirdly, do you care like I care about the impact of the Council tax on people of low and fixed incomes? Are we spending the money as wisely as the pensioner from whose pocket we have taken it? Good government is not expensive government. Worksmart delivers sustainable savings to invest in the frontline. The past decade has shown beyond doubt that Westminster Council is a better guardian of public money than national government. We really do deliver more for less.

Policy challenges

Lord Mayor,

The new Cabinet that is approved tonight will tomorrow begin its work.

We will continue to implement the One City programme and I intend to quicken the pace of change.

So I have a number of challenges for my Cabinet colleagues.

Our Family Recovery programme aims to steer families away from a culture of crime and dependency and the cash economy, and instead help them into work and education. I want to see this move ahead with speed and purpose.

I intend to begin work on creating a unified public service in Westminster with a one stop service for police, health and local government matters. It is vital that we bring together everything the Government does in our area, so I have today written to the DWP and Job Centre Plus in particular to ask them to join forces with us, and the Westminster partnership, to help these families.

I have asked Brian to lead a project to identify and begin to manage the totality of Government spending in Westminster.

I am determined to raise the standard of our streets and public space. I want the rest of the world to be amazed at the quality of design, cleanliness and safety of our streets, certainly in 2012, and preferably by this time next year.

As you walk around the City you see little bits of debris that are left behind as people, often from the public sector, move on to the next thing. Traffic cones, bits of barriers, waste put out at the wrong time and place. I want it all gone.

I have a personal target of restoring Marble Arch from the mess that it is currently in to become an area of which we can be proud. And the visitors to our City can admire.

I want our CCTV operation to improve public safety but also to respect private behaviour.

I want to harness public spiritedness in Westminster by recruiting a small army of volunteers to support the strong communities we wish to build.

I intend to deliver both a decent housing service today and a fundamental rebuilding programme tomorrow.

Education is the route to opportunity. I was the first member of my family to go to University. I got my education through the willingness of Croydon Education Committee to pay for me to go to one of the best schools in the country, along with a load of posh boys.

Sadly that engine of social mobility was made illegal by the class warriors of the Left.

I am determined to help our head teachers raise the educational attainment of children educated in Westminster and I have asked Sarah to get the best people in the country to tell us how this can be done. We all know that excellent leadership is the key to school success and I want our heads to be at the heart of this process. I would like us to start work on this in September, and report by Christmas.

We are already committed to the Environmental agenda. I have asked Melvyn to develop plans for this council to become Carbon Neutral within five years, and if at all possible before 2012.

I will ask my Cabinet colleagues to work up firm, costed and timetabled proposals to implement these plans. We will publish them in the autumn and then open them up to public scrutiny.

And I want to make our own work as Councillors more effective. I have asked policy officers to present their ideas and options to O and S well before they come to Cabinet for signoff. To emphasise this approach, the O and S committees will from now on be known as Policy and Scrutiny Committees.

I have also asked Melvyn, as Chief Whip to create and lead a cross party task force to review the effectiveness of Council itself. Many of you believe that debates in this chamber are sterile and ritualistic. I want to make this a place where policy can be debated and our leadership held to account.

The Opposition

I hope that these principles will be received by Cllr Dimoldenberg and his colleagues in a spirit of co-operation for the benefit of the city.

Labour politicians are part of the fabric of some of our communities, as many of us saw yesterday, and I hope that they will play a challenging, and constructive role in civic life.

They have a right - though not a duty - to disagree with us, and question us, but not to doubt our good faith or to lower opinion of this or any other civic institution. I ask of them tonight that they recognise their duty to create the mutual trust and respect so that we can work together when it is in the interests of local people – winning resources, improving effectiveness and securing the future of local families. In the past this has sometimes happened. But in the future I want us to do more of that. At least for as long as there is a Labour Government!

Citizenship

I am a firm believer in personal responsibility. I believe that every citizen has a role to play each day in building our neighbourhoods as places to live, work and enjoy life, together.

This City is made up of people of many, many different backgrounds. We all have many aspirations in common. If we don't do something about multiculturalism, we will, as Trevor Phillips has warned, sleepwalk into a segregated society.

As I was growing up, Britain treated easily recognisable migrants, at best as guests in our country, to be tolerated and patronised. Modern multiculturalism divides us all up into boxes,

boxes that are increasingly out of touch with the fact that we are all formed and shaped by many religious and cultural influences.

If we are to build a strong city community we need to work together, to build together. We must regard and treat every citizen as exactly that, a responsible member of a single society. We build or fail together. We may be white, black or brown, we may be gay or straight, old or young. We may be Muslim, Christian or Jew. But we are all people, equal under the law.

So under my leadership we will call a halt to practices that emphasise difference but instead create a culture that places a ladder of opportunity in front of everyone.

Martin Luther King spoke in 1963 of his dream that '….that my four little children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the colour of their skin but by the content of their character'

John F Kennedy in the same year said. Let us not be blind to our differences – but let us also direct our attention to our common interests and the means by which those differences can be resolved.

In the past 40 years much has been achieved. Now our children and grandchildren do not see colour or religion as a differentiator, and that is a tribute to the work of many campaigners. Many battles have been won. So has the war.

Now we are free to dedicate ourselves to getting everyone to work together to create the Westminster we want and deserve, where our citizens admire and appreciate public service, and we can ask in return that they respect the freedom, safety and security of us all.

This is our mission

A call to action to shape the greatest city on the planet.

It is my challenge to you and our work begins tomorrow.

Lord Mayor, I thank you.

The standard bearer in local government

Speech in tribute to outgoing Leader of the Council by Cllr Robert Davis, Deputy Leader of the Council, 7th March 2012

It is my immense pleasure – as Deputy Leader, as a colleague, and as a friend - to be asked to pay tribute to the outgoing Leader of Westminster City Council, the 10th Leader since Westminster was created in its present form 47 years ago.

The last four years have been some of the most challenging in the history of local government.

Starting with the financial crisis, and book ended by the introduction of the Localism Act, we have been required more than ever before to find radical solutions to a multitude of challenges.

And innovation is where Westminster, particularly under Councillor Barrow's leadership, has led the way.

No where is Westminster's drive to find new solutions to improve the lives and opportunities for its communities better demonstrated than in the ground-breaking Family Recovery programme.

Over 150 of our most troubled families have benefitted from the approach, delivering savings for the public purse, and creating a model which central government has followed as it seeks to turn around the lives of 120,000 families across England.

Colin's commitment to young people continues when we look at the work to improve education in Westminster.

In the past decade, our city has stopped accepting the perceived wisdom that a transient population and areas of particular deprivation must prevent young people from getting the right start in their lives.

And since the establishment of the education commission, the number of pupils achieving 5 A star to C grades has risen under Colin's stewardship from 46% in 2007 to 63.6% in 2011.

This approach has been underscored by the creation of educational facilities worthy of Westminster's name, as more Academies have opened their doors along with one of the first free schools in the country – with many more expected to follow.

There a very few finer legacies that a politician can have, than creating an environment in which future generations can learn, grown and develop.

Yet the older people have also remained a priority for the city under Colin's stewardship.

Building upon the successful Social Care Commission, the City now has a vision for personalised budgets, empowering residents to procure the services that meet their needs, ending the one size fits all orthodoxy that had prevailed for too long.

Perhaps the most innovative solution, which has been pioneered in recent times has been the development of the Tri-Borough programme.

At a time when many authorities were looking at how they could slash front line spending, with our partners we led the way, finding over £33m of savings across three boroughs; almost exclusively from the back office, just through working more closely together.

Once again this has created a blueprint which many authorities are now following.

Coming from a business sector, I know how important harnessing the strength of the business community has been to Colin.

That Westminster now has the most Business Improvement Districts of any authority in the country is a reflection of both his commitment to business, and a seizing of the unique opportunities presented by our international city.

As colleagues may be aware, I have a passing interest in the built environment, so I would like to briefly touch on some of Colin's work to renew the fabric of our city.

The so-called Magnificent Seven was one of the first announcements, emphasising our commitment renewing our city in time for the Olympics.

Driving these through required commitment and tenacity in the field of public service; a bit like the original Magnificent Seven.

And of course it took a lot of persuasion for me to play the handsome, dashing, king of cool, Steve MacQueen to our Leader's Yul Brynner!

Nonetheless, under your watch, Marble Arch has been restored to its former glory, Piccadilly has returned to two way running for the first time in a generation, and of course was opened by Her Majesty just last week.

We also have a new shared space along Exhibition Road and the first major diagonal crossings at Oxford Circus.

And we will shortly complete the final major project, the creation of a sparkling new home, a home worthy of our world-famous entertainment industry, in Leicester Square.

At the same time, to the benefit of our residents and local communities, the Neat Streets programme has now removed unnecessary clutter, delivered essential repairs and spruced up every one of the streets in our city.

I would like to conclude by noting the Leader's achievements in managing our finances.

Despite the turbulent economic times, we have stayed true to our principles of helping our households by freezing Council Tax for every year since 2008, retaining our position as the second lowest council tax area in the country.

In the first throes of the recession, Westminster was proud to help businesses of every size, and thousands of residents, into work or training through Westminster Works and City Recovery.

The challenge has of course persisted, and this past year more than £60 million of savings have been found from our budget.

But Colin's focus has been unrelenting in, wherever possible, achieving value for money and preserving the front line services that matter to everyone who lives, works or visits our city.

And a legacy of innovation will remain, as we find new ways of delivering services through mutual pathfinders, social impact bonds and our community budgets pilot over the coming months.

There have of course been insurmountable obstacles along the way; but despite the challenging national picture, under Colin's stewardship Westminster has weathered the economic storm and has retained its position as the standard bearer in local government.

So on behalf of Westminster City Council, I would ask that our formal thanks for Colin's stewardship is transcribed and presented to him in the traditional manner.

I also have a small token on behalf of the Council to present to Colin, outlining some of the achievements that I have referred to, and many more successes over the past four years.

On behalf of the City Council, our residents, businesses and every community in our city, we thank him for his service over the past four years as Leader of the greater Council in the land.

To live in interesting times

Final speech to Council by Cllr Colin Barrow, 7th March 2012

Thank you Robert and Guthrie for your kind words I have experienced undeserved praise, and undeserved abuse, and I can say that praise is better.

Lord Mayor I have never owned a boat, but they say that the best two days of boat ownership are the day you buy it and the day you sell it.

To be elected by your peers to lead them is a great privilege. To help, for a while, to shape and develop this City, the capital of the capital is an extraordinary and fascinating experience. And to hand over the reins to such a worthy successor is a pleasure as well.

Westminster, as the ancient Chinese curse has it, is certain to live in interesting times. But because of that, the Council will always attract the best people. I thank them all – all the officers so ably led by Mike More and all of you elected members, for all your support over the last ten years.

I wish Philippa and her team the very best of luck and very much hope that she will enjoy the role as much as I have.

Leadership in challenging times

Extract from the inaugural speech by the new Leader of the Council, Cllr Phillipa Roe, 7th March 2012

I would like to say a few words about my immediate predecessor, Colin Barrow

Colin led the council through what will be seen as the most challenging economic times in the last 60 years. He sustained services and made necessary savings, which would be achievement enough for many.

But he will also have a lasting legacy in the physical improvements that we see in the city today

The innovative Oxford St Crossing

The renewal of Marble Arch

The improvements around Piccadilly recognised by Her Majesty only last week – the first act of her Jubilee year which speaks volumes in itself

But if Colin oversaw improvements in the physical infrastructure he did the same for the city's social infrastructure.

Under the Living City Banner he led a record improvement in levels of school attainment, in the number of adults able to benefit from personalisation and in housing, he gave me the opportunity to build the first new council housing in a generation and to lay the foundations of a renewal strategy for our most deprived areas.

And recognising that difficult times called for different approaches, Colin led new ways of operating that pushed the boundaries across the public sector

Family Recovery – now adopted by government and rolled out across the country, can be attributed to Colin's foresight and perseverance.

And Tri-borough shared service - now bringing tangible improvements to services across the city, from wider access to libraries to the extension of Family Recovery across Westminster.

And throughout his time he was true to his belief in the benefits of low taxation on those on low and medium incomes with a freeze in council tax in each year of his administration

Colin, this is a record to be proud of and on behalf of the council I thank you for everything that you have done for this city.