

## Councillor Raj Sharma Mayoral Farewell Speech

This has been a most unusual Mayoral year for myself. I started my engagements the following day and then a large mayoral engagement in the Council chamber the following week. That was the last social event in the civic hall before the builders moved in. Being a Mayor for the second time in three years meant I was more at ease from the start and carried out with my functions and duties with some flair I think.

Each and every function was a memorable one but meeting and greeting Prince Charles and Camilla, the Duchess of Cornwall on separate occasions was very special for me. Throughout the year I engaged with a variety of people from different communities, clearly indicating the richness and diversity within Crawley. I was well received by all of the communities and all my functions were well attended by a core section of the Crawley residents.

After the busy schedule of Christmas I especially enjoyed attending the 100<sup>th</sup> birthday of a local resident and reading a message from her Majesty the Queen to her and her family of five generations, who were gathered together at the Apple Tree pub. It was a treat even for myself and it was so fulfilling and rewarding to see the happiness on their faces admiring the grand matriarch of their family. When we look to friends we look not only in Crawley but in Surrey, Sussex and in London and I was the guest of the Indian High Commissioner and the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community

All of our meetings were in the Charis Centre which meant I fully missed not having a Mayor's Parlour and not being able to share the lovely food my dear wife has provided previously. She is one of three people without whom my Mayoral year engagements would not have been possible. The other two being Bob Donaldson, our Chauffeur and Hayley Thorne, Mayor's PA.

Just as we're planning some wonderful fundraising, food and culture events, we were hit by the Coronavirus pandemic and all engagements ceased. The Mayoral year was extended to 14 months but the functional year was reduced to 9 months. I am very disappointed for both of my well-deserving charities, namely the Manor Green Community College in Ifield and the Posh Club in Broadfield for not being able to raise the additional money that those charities' events would have been able to do.

This is the first Full Council meeting since 26<sup>th</sup> February although some of the other meetings have been virtual meetings. The pandemic has shown that as a human race how vulnerable we are. I was also saddened to lose 2 serving members and past Mayors, although not to Covid19. They will all be missed.

Even now, during lockdown, the sad ugly face of racism has emerged with the murder of George Floyd. We are re-living the memories of the 60s and 70s. Black Lives Matter. In fact all lives matters. There is a fair representation of the BAME community in both sides of the chamber where we all know that racism is deep rooted and entwined into every area of society. We remove one layer and find there are several underneath. We owe it to our children and future generations to introduce them on the history of the Empire and the Commonwealth as a subject. These need to be taught at every level of schooling for the indigenous community to understand why the BAME community are in Britain.

I ventured out applauding the wonderful work of our NHS visiting some Care Homes and Crawley Hospital it was resoundingly apparent that the BAME staff were there on the front line. It is known fact that the death rate amongst them was un-proportionately high. We collectively need to look at our social-economic system and structure and see the inequalities

that exist within it. We all need this time together under the Crawley Campaign against Racism slogan 'One Race, Human Race'.

On a positive note, there is no doubt our Crawley Borough Council staff have been working very hard during these difficult times. They have adjusted and coped during difficult circumstances and provided first class service to all the residents of Crawley. They deserve all the applause we can provide and I for one, applaud the staff of Crawley Borough Council for doing a wonderful job.

Finally I want to thank all the residents of Crawley, my colleagues, my family for supporting me during the rather unusual year. For me as always there is only one Crawley, a unified Crawley. God bless Crawley and keep its residents safe. Thank you.