



# Leader's Breakfast speech

Delivered on Thursday 2nd March 2017 by Cllr Nickie Aiken

At Full Council on Wednesday 1st March, I set out our City for All programme for the year ahead.

City for All may seem familiar, as it is now entering its third year. Indeed, we will have the same unwavering commitment to value for money. We will have the same relentless focus on clean streets and efficient, high quality services and we will always look after the most vulnerable in our city.

But this year we are entering a new era of challenge and change.

The council is half way through delivering one hundred and thirty million pounds of savings. We face a growing and aging population that requires, and deserves, a step change in social care services and Westminster must be confident and prepared for a post-Brexit world.

In my first year as Leader, some things will be different. We will go further and we will move faster.

I'm challenging our pioneering council to get things done quicker, to think bigger, to be more innovative and to work in different ways to meet our challenges head on. A big part of that will be to work better with our partners.

Building more affordable housing can't be done in isolation. Tackling poor air quality can't be done in isolation and tackling the future of social care can't be done in isolation.

So we will be getting out and listening to our people and partners to see how we can work better to tackle common challenges together. I often get my best ideas from talking to local businesses, market traders, our outstanding clergy, the fantastic Westminster staff and my local friends, community and resident groups.

I am not afraid to work across the political divide, if it means delivering for this City. That is why I have already been to see the Mayor of London and have had very constructive meetings with him and a number of his deputies.

I'd like to introduce you to our City for All 2017/18 programme. We are a progressive and pioneering council and, in my first year, as Leader we will be ambitious.

I will focus on three priorities. First, I want Westminster to set the standard for civic leadership and responsibility. Second, we need to spread opportunity and fairness across the city. Finally, we need to safeguard our reputation as a world class city.

Let me begin with civic leadership. As I said, getting out and about in our neighbourhoods is absolutely fundamental for my leadership. I will lead a city-wide engagement campaign called MyWestminster that will reach out to everyone, young and old, to make sure everyone has a say in the decisions we make.

We will talk and listen to people about the changes in our city and our services, not run tick box consultation exercises.

We will build on the success of our public Open Forums by launching two new Forums this year. Firstly, a Young Westminster Open Forum and, along with Cllr Davis, I will also launch a Business Open Forum where we will listen to businesses and their employees.

A year ago I announced the cross party Community Cohesion Commission. I can assure you we have left no stone unturned in identifying both the drivers and barriers to making our community more united. We will now consider the findings, make our recommendations and launch our action plan.

But, in the meantime I am proud to say that we are planning to hold a My Westminster Day. I am championing this great idea from Hamza, our former youth MP. This will be a day where people from different backgrounds come together and celebrate our diversity and what unites us.

This year we will also open the Sir Simon Milton Westminster UTC. This ground breaking partnership with Network Rail, Land Securities and BT will train the engineers of the future, meeting this Government's industrial strategic aspirations right here in the heart of London.

My second priority will be to spread opportunity and fairness across the City.

I am very proud that 25% of the housing stock in Westminster is social and long may that remain. But we cannot continue where only 1.5% of new housing stock is built as intermediate. We need to create more intermediate housing for those on middle incomes. Through our housing strategy we will seek to put that right. Only then will we continue to have the mixed community which has been the hallmark of Westminster neighbourhoods for decades.

Therefore, I intend to deliver on our Housing Strategy's commitment to flip the current 60:40 social to intermediate housing ratio. We will commit to building nearly two thousand more affordable homes in the next five years.

I want no-one to be in any doubt that Westminster is open for business.

That is why I have asked Councillor Astaire to oversee a City Plan Task Force to ensure officers expedite the delivery of our City Plan by 2018. This will include a root and branch review of our planning policies to ensure they are fit for purpose and delivering the right conditions for growth whilst ensuring the benefits of prosperity are spread evenly. In other words, growth in the Westminster way.

Developers want transparency, certainty and speed, and the city wants more homes. We intend to review and refresh our policies to move towards a tariff based system for affordable housing, lobbying where appropriate for legislative change to enable us to move away from negotiation on viability and focus on transparency and deliverability.

Having thrown down the gauntlet to developers to provide more affordable homes, we must recognise that our city is not purely residential but is also a thriving economic hub. If we want more, we must be prepared to allow more.

And this brings me onto my third priority, safeguarding our reputation as a world class City.

Already other cities look to us for good practice in city management. But we need to be one step ahead, and work with businesses to secure opportunity for future generations.

That is why I asked Cllr Davis to lead a brand new portfolio, knitting together our work with the business community, along with promoting adult education, skills and apprenticeships.

Cllr Davis will also lead our hugely significant programme of place-making projects. In particular, I am grateful for his leadership of our forthcoming work with residents, businesses and partners to bring forward plans to make Oxford Street the world class destination we all want it to remain.

I am sorry to say that Westminster suffers from the worst air pollution in the country and it is the leading concern among our residents. Three hundred and seventy million miles are driven in Westminster each year with road transport contributing to over half of the most deadly emissions. Tackling air quality is a national issue but action is required at every level. That's why Cllr David Harvey and I will be launching our #DontBeldle campaign, encouraging people to make just a little change and stop engine idling which can make a huge difference.

Westminster is second-to-none in its cultural and entertainment vibrancy. But for this to truly flourish, we must protect our residents from the worst effects of a 24 hour economy. Our new Licensing Charter will be piloted in Leicester Square and Piccadilly to help the industry take more responsibility and operate to higher standards that will, in turn, benefit not blight our local neighbourhoods.

Many of you in this room have challenged me to do more to tackle rough sleeping. We have listened to BIDs, residents, the clergy, and voluntary sector groups and will shortly launch our new rough sleeping strategy. This will do more than ever to prevent rough sleeping where we can, support people to rebuild their lives and protect our neighbourhoods from the negative

impacts it can bring. We have already been successful in lobbying the Home Office to make Spice, which is a rising and devastating problem among rough sleepers, a Class B drug.

The pace of technological change means our social and working habits are evolving faster than ever before. Innovation can be good but we need to ensure there are no unintended consequences so that change benefits our economy and our residents. We will launch a Gig and Shared Economies Charter to help this growing and important sector, such as short-term lets and some food delivery companies, to take responsibility for the way they operate and the sometimes negative impact it can have on our city. I have asked Cllr Glanz to lead this important area of work.

Let me be very clear – Westminster City Council has absolutely no desire to prevent householders legitimately short letting their homes when on holiday. But when short term letting becomes a commercial operation we have a problem.

We have seen at first hand the genuine and serious fallout for our residents from irresponsible short-lets, more noise, more fly-tipping and more anti-social behaviour. So we will work with the industry to find a voluntary method of enforcement. But my message to them is clear – if you cannot enforce the ninety day limit then we will not rest until we have the means to do so. Ninety days means ninety days.

As we seek to deliver our priorities, we also need to be a smarter council with a constructive approach. A council that thinks like a resident or a business and not a bureaucrat. A council that has one front door where all our services come together seamlessly for our customers.

So this year we are having a bonfire of the silos – this council works better when it works together. People don't care which department sorts out their problem just as long as it gets sorted. I will set a new standard for service delivery – the City For All Standard – every service will be tested against our priorities, delivered through the lens of our customers and challenged to go further and faster.

Last night we announced a modest increase in our Council Tax maintaining the lowest Band D Council tax in the UK.

This year we will be spending eight hundred and fifty million pounds on valued local services. My commitment is that we will spend every penny wisely, prudently and efficiently. That means planning ahead.

I will work closely with central Government to ensure we retain sufficient revenues from business rates so that those that contribute can actually see the benefits in the locality.

I firmly believe that business rates should not be an unfair property tax.

I will end by asking can it be right that someone in a ten million pound or more property pays the same council tax as someone in a three hundred thousand pound property? I don't think so.

So I will lead a campaign to lobby the DCLG to re-cast the council tax system, so we have the flexibility to establish extra council tax bands where those who can afford it will be asked to pay just a little bit more. Indeed, a number of residents have already asked us why this is not possible.

I hope you will support my City for All programme for the year ahead. A programme that supports a financially-stable city, where prosperity is harnessed to support strong neighbourhoods, where everyone plays their part and has a stake in the city.

Only then will we have a genuine City for All.