

MAYOR ROBERT BRIA

Remarks at the Special Council Meeting - 19 November 2014

I would like to congratulate you all on your election to Council for the 2014-18 Term.

To those elected members who have just joined Council I extend a special welcome to you, your family and friends who are here to witness your swearing-in.

I hope that you enjoy the next four years and find it a rewarding and fulfilling experience.

No doubt, all of you are excited about being part of Council and the decision-making process, but I am sure that along with this excitement is a strong sense of responsibility to the community you have been elected to serve.

As Mayor, I make no distinction between Councillors attending their first meeting to those attending their 50th meeting or even those attending their 150th meeting.

You all have a contribution to make to improve the welfare of the people of the City of Norwood Payneham & St Peters whom we have the honour to serve.

To new Councillors, I look forward to your energy and new ideas.

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City of
Norwood
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To Councillors who have been re-elected, I look to you to continue providing the stability that has been the hallmark of this Council.

Regardless of our experience, the community has same expectation of us all; that we exercise our role as Elected Members in representing this city to a high standard, in our words and in our actions.

In this sense, I do not consider being re-elected mayor unopposed as a 'free pass.'

I am very much aware of the need to improve my own performance and set the example for others.

As an observer rather than a participant during the recent election campaign, I am mindful of the wide range of issues – big or small, local or city-wide - that confronted all candidates.

Tonight, I do not intend to analyse or indeed, mention any of these issues or place them in some sort order of importance.

I only note that the immediate period following any council election is a time of high expectation within the community that with the campaign over, promises will be delivered and issues will be addressed.

But history tells us that while expectation often feeds off itself, it is reality that bites.

As individuals we need is to recognise that differences of opinion and philosophy will influence the debates and the decisions made in this chamber.

That is the nature of politics, particularly at the grass-roots level of local government.

As a council we need to accept that difference is strength not a weakness.

But the starting point of our deliberations should always be our common ground; we all value our rich history and want to see our unique heritage preserved.

It is this unique heritage that is at the core of our identity.

And it is this respect for our identity which brings us here.

If recent experience is any guide there is no limit to what this Council and the community can achieve together as partners for progress.

Our task over the next four years is clear: not to re-live the past, but help shape the future and turn projects which are outstanding into outstanding projects.

The implementation of the Payneham Oval Playground, Wetland at Felixstow Reserve, new clubrooms at Cooper's Stadium and Parade Master Plan beckons.

But success in these ventures will *only* come if we continue to choose decision over delay and drift.

Success will *only* come if we continue to choose unity over division.

We must reject language that separates our city and its people into 'winners' and 'losers' or 'us' and 'them' or 'Norwood' and 'Payneham' and 'St Peters' as if they are still separate entities.

The lessons of the past tell us that giving region precedence ahead of reason has never improved the tone of a debate, the standard of a service, the aesthetic of a piece of art, the quality of a project or indeed, the sense of community spirit at an event.

The City of Norwood Payneham & St Peters is the sum of all parts, and not as our critics would have people believe, different parts for some.

It is nearly two decades since three communities decided their future was as one, and with that decision the expectation of better infrastructure, better amenity and a better quality of life.

I believe this expectation has not only been met, but in many cases, exceeded.

The proof of this is in our streets, in our parks and our playgrounds.

It is in our libraries and our community facilities.

The proof is in our budget, where in recent years Council has turned potentially crippling deficits into surpluses while consistently maintaining our average residential rate as one of the lowest among the seven Eastern Regional Alliance Councils.

But we should not be satisfied. There is still more to do.

Fellow elected members, our City and the Local Government sector more generally is about to enter a very challenging period.

Changes to the level of involvement in the planning process and the likely end of State-Government funded rate concessions for Pensioners and Seniors Card Holders starting in 2015-16 have the potential to redefine the role of councils in South Australia.

Add to this, a review of the *Local Government Act 1999* and the outcomes of the *Councils of the Future Report* all point to a very different environment for Local Government.

The challenge, therefore, is for this Council and other councils to support key areas of reform, in particular where greater accountability and transparency will earn the confidence of the communities we serve.

For too long, Local Government has been the reformed rather than the reformer.

For too long the sector has waited for changes from above rather than take the initiative to make change where it is needed.

I look forward to working with you to meet this challenge and ensure that whatever changes occur, improving the wellbeing of our community remains at the centre of everything we do.

The next four years also presents us with a number of exciting opportunities.

I believe the City of Norwood Payneham & St Peters is better placed now than ever before to build on its reputation as a leader in the Local Government sector in a number of areas.

We should not lose sight of the important role we can and should play in the prosperity of our State, not only as an individual council, or as part of the Eastern Regional Alliance, or indeed as part of the wider Local Government family, but as partners with the State and Commonwealth Governments to cut red tape, help create jobs, support economic development and invest in infrastructure to give our community hope and confidence for the future.

We should do this not for their political benefit, but for our own benefit and that of our children and grandchildren.

In closing, I wish you all the best for this term and hope that whatever personal interests we have we remember that it is the people's interest we are here to serve.

To quote former British Prime Minister Tony Blair, “politics isn't about politics, in the sense of meetings, and resolutions, speeches, even parties sometimes. It starts with people. It's about friendship and art and culture and sport. It's actually about being a fully paid up member of the human race...”ⁱ

Fellow Elected Members, the election is over and as victorious candidates we have renewed our membership of the human race.

It's now time to start our work for the people.

ⁱ Tony Blair, *Valedictory Address to the Labour Party Conference*, delivered 26 September 2006, Manchester, United Kingdom. <http://www.americanrhetoric.com/speeches/tblairfarewell.htm>