

CLlr Richard Jones Mayors Speech 2022/23



What a momentous occasion today is for Sandwell having just elected its first openly gay Mayor. I am extremely proud and honoured to become the Mayor of Sandwell along with my consort, my partner, Cllr Richard McVittie. It is especially poignant that this is happening 50 years after the first Pride protest.

For the majority of people my sexuality doesn't matter – I am pleased to say in Sandwell we have a diverse society mostly accepting of all minorities. Like many LGBT+ people when I was younger I used to hide being gay but now I am out and proud. I hope that by being open and my authentic self I will help those struggling to accept themselves in Sandwell, to be their true self. I also believe that it is necessary to have permanent visibility of LGBT+ people and other minorities so that we are permanently accepted. I would also like to thank those councillors and minority community group members who have come before me - spearheading inclusivity, equality and diversity.

I am sure you would like to know a little bit more about me. I was born at Sandwell General Hospital in 1980. At 42 years old I also think I am Sandwell's youngest Mayor. I am from Wednesbury and attended Mesty Croft Primary School and then went to Wood Green High School and Sixth Form. I have a degree in Drama and Performance from Wolverhampton University and a Degree in Paramedic Science from Coventry University.

Professionally I have always been community focused and working with and helping the community. I now work as a frontline NHS Paramedic for West Midlands Ambulance Service. I have worked in education as a Senior Learning Mentor at Wood Green High School. I have worked as a youth worker locally and developed activities for young people especially around the developments of the arts I would like to recognise and thank my NHS colleagues who have worked so hard and sacrificed so much for the public especially during the pandemic.



I was elected in 2019 to serve in the ward of Old Warley and along with my partner, Councillor Richard McVittie who was elected in Newton, we became the first openly LGBT+ couple to be elected together within Sandwell Council. I would like to thank my consort for being supportive. Without him I would have not been able to do what I do mainly through the strength we find together. We have been together for over 16 years.



My consort, Cllr Richard McVittie, originally comes from Coventry. Educated at Howes Primary and Finham Park Senior School. He has worked for over 15 years in local government and currently works full time in Public Health for another local Council. In the past he was a competitive Pole Vaulter and has a passion for sport.

In my spare time I volunteer for St John ambulance as a unit president in Sandwell. I also volunteer for various community groups working with elderly people reducing isolation and loneliness. I have become part of a local LGBT+ community group and help develop community activities for LGBT+ people in Sandwell. I am proud to be part of the organising committee to set up Sandwell's first Pride event happening this June. I regularly support and make donations to food banks and other charities. I am sure you will remember that last year for World AIDS Day I shaved my hair off in the council chamber to raise awareness and fundraise for the Sandwell Mayor Charity and Terrance Higgins Trust. In the past I have enjoyed playing Water Polo for both Wednesbury Water Polo and Warley Wasp Water Polo teams. I volunteered as a Water Polo Official which saw me officiating at International events including London 2012. I like acting and have been in many productions from musicals to TV adverts.



As you know, for the past year I have been Deputy Mayor. I would like to thank Mushtaq Hussain for his dedication to Sandwell over the past year. I know it has been a difficult year for you to keep the momentum especially with COVID restrictions and medical procedures. I wish you all the luck in your retirement. I am also really looking forward to working with my Deputy Mayor, Cllr Jackie Taylor. She has become the first female Black

Deputy Mayor in Sandwell. Another positive step forward for inclusivity, diversity and equality in Sandwell.

I would now like to introduce my charities for this year. This year I want to support 3 Charities - St John Ambulance, LGBT+ in Sandwell Community Group, and New Beginnings Baby Bundles. I would like to support the essential work that St John Ambulance does especially within Sandwell. Run by volunteers LGBT+ in Sandwell Community Group has recently formed to help support LGBT+ people in Sandwell by organising activities and events to help to relieve isolation. Finally New Beginnings Baby Bundles provide essential baby items to disadvantaged new mothers in Sandwell helping to provide a good start in life to those most at need.



Finally I want to thank everyone who has attended today. I appreciate the support of each and everyone of you but especially my supportive friends and family – a special thank you to my mum and dad for their support and encouragement over the years and to my in laws for being a great extended family.

I am really looking forward to the next year. Over the next few month we have some great opportunities to celebrate the people of Sandwell. I am looking forward to attending the Queens Jubilee street parties and celebrations and being a part of the Commonwealth Baton Relay and games but mostly seeing and meeting the great people and communities of Sandwell. It will truly be an honour. Thank you.

For further information please contact Richard_jones@sandwell.gov.uk or call 07971 528910