

Chairman's Inaugural speech at Annual Meeting of LFEPA, 26 June 2008.

Councillor Brian Coleman AM, FRSA.

I would like to welcome you all to this Annual meeting of the London Fire and Emergency Planning Authority.

A particularly warm welcome to those members who are new to the Authority, my Assembly colleagues Councillor Tony Arbour who brings his considerable local government and MPA experience, and Councillor Caroline Pidgeon, Liberal Democrat List member, and also Councillor Colin Aherne from the London Borough of Hammersmith and Fulham. Also it is a pleasure to welcome the two appointments by the Mayor of London, Alderman Simon Walsh, who will strengthen this Authority's links with the City Corporation as well as bringing his considerable experience as Chairman of the City Police Committee and, in the field of Licensing, Mr David Cartwright, who after a distinguished career, retiring as Assistant Chief Officer of London Fire Brigade, is now a 'poacher turned gamekeeper'.

Can I place on record the Authority's deep gratitude to the retiring Chair, Ms Val Shawcross CBE, AM for her unstinting, tireless and exemplary service as the first Chair of LFEPA and I am delighted that she is continuing to serve on the Authority where her experience and wise council will continue to be available to members and officers. I would also like to thank former members Mr Peter Hulme Cross and Mr Geoff Pope, both of whom lost their Assembly seats, and Ms Rebecca Sparks who has ceased to be a Mayoral Appointment.

I regret to report to members the death of Sir Peter Derby who has died at the age of 83. After war time service in the Royal Navy, Sir Peter joined the National Fire Service in 1946 and later transferred across to the City of Birmingham Fire and Ambulance Service. In 1963 he became Deputy Chief Officer of Suffolk and Ipswich and then Chief of Nottinghamshire and then in 1967 Chief of Lancashire. On the creation of the Greater Manchester Brigade in 1974 Sir Peter became its first Chief Officer and was appointed Chief Fire Officer of London in 1977, serving until being appointed Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Fire Services in 1980.

He commanded the London Fire Brigade during a difficult period which included the first national fire strike in Brigade history.

On a happier note I am sure members will wish to congratulate Assistant Commissioner Max Hood who was awarded the Queen's Fire Service Medal in Her Majesty's recent Birthday Honours List. Members will be aware that Mr Hood, who I am glad to see with us this afternoon, has recently completed a successful secondment to the DCLG. We welcome him back full time to this Authority.

I am delighted to welcome a number of former members of the Authority and indeed its predecessor body the LFCDA. I notice in the gallery Councillor and Mrs Tandy, Councillor Whelan, Geoffrey Brewer, Councillor Frances Blois and former Councillor Anne Gallop. It is good to see you with us this afternoon and we welcome your continued interest in the fire and safety agenda for this city.

I am also delighted to welcome the recently retired Lord Lieutenant of Greater London, Lord Imbert, and Lady Imbert. We are here to recognise the support and encouragement he has given to the Fire Authority and Brigade during his distinguished tenure of that office. I would like to pause briefly to thank you on behalf of this Authority, particularly to thank you on behalf of members, officers and all those staff whose 30th anniversary award ceremonies you have attended over the years. You were diligent in your attendance at Brigade functions and we are deeply grateful for the arrangements you made for the opening of this building by Her Majesty the Queen earlier in the year. We wish you a long, successful and happy retirement.

May 1st was a significant day in the life of London and today is an important day in the relatively short life of this Authority. The election of Boris Johnson as Mayor of London marks a sea change in the politics and government of this city and I am delighted, proud and honoured to accept the Mayor's invitation to be the first Conservative Chairman (not Chair) of LFEPA. I was even more delighted (and not a little surprised) when the confirmation committee of the London Assembly voted unanimously to endorse that nomination. In my duties I will continue to be supported by my mother who will act as Chairman's Lady. As Chairman of this Authority I will of course have dual loyalty first and foremost to this Authority however I am firmly an appointment of this Mayor and look forward to LFEPA making its contribution to the exciting and important agenda of the new City Hall administration. The Mayor of London's agenda is very much one of transparency and openness and that is how I intend this Authority to run.

On day one of Boris Johnson's Mayoralty he made plain his commitment to the London Fire Brigade when he visited our LIFE project at Dagenham fire station and there we demonstrated that when it comes to engaging with the key mayoral policy of tackling issues among young people LFEPA is ahead of the game. Indeed this was reinforced yesterday when the Commissioner and I both spoke at the first National Fire Brigade Youth Engagement Seminar.

I recall that at the very first meeting of LFEPA in summer 2000 Ms Shawcross in her opening speech stressed the need to refocus the work of the London Fire Brigade on community fire safety issues and of course she was quite right but the events of 9/11 and 7 July 2005 forced us to readjust that focus onto resilience and terrorism issues where LFEPA has led the way, and the national pay strike of 2003 was a catalyst for the much needed modernisation.

Much has been achieved in eight years and I pay tribute to all members and officers who have performed a vital role. There are now just four members who have served for the complete period, myself, Ms Shawcross and Councillors Ali and Heaster and we are now all on our third Commissioner. I know that in Ron Dobson this Authority has a Commissioner second to none in his profession who enjoys the full confidence of all members and indeed of our new Mayor and who has a team behind him well able to lead us in the challenging times ahead. I look forward to continuing a positive relationship with the Commissioner and his management team and indeed with our entire workforce. In particular ensuring close dialogue with our Trades Unions including the Fire Brigades Union.

There are several significant challenges ahead in the immediate future. The current Authority drawing heavily as it does on reserves is not sustainable and difficult decisions need to be taken that do not include the reduction of front line services. This Authority needs to agree a sensible and reasonable policy on shifts and beds and the plethora of property issues, including the proposed PFI, needs significant work. I will ask the Authority within the next few weeks to instigate a full review of all our training needs and facilities.

I look forward to all parties playing their full role in the administration of this Authority. However I will not allow any work to be derailed by party political nit picking or by anyone trying to pursue some wider anti Mayoral agenda not relevant to this Authority. Knowing as I do the calibre of members appointed to this Authority I know it is only the safety of Londoners that will drive the decisions of members.

As we enter this important new phase in the life of the London Fire and Emergency Planning Authority I know I am up to the challenge and I invite all members and officers to work together to the common agenda.