

President, Councillor Fletcher, Mr Murphy, distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen. Friends one and all. Shalom. And thank you for the kind invitation to speak this evening. I am very pleased and honoured to join you.

Tonight is a happy but also a somewhat poignant occasion for me because this is my last speaking engagement as Leader of Glasgow City Council. I officially step down this Thursday. At approximately 2.15pm to be precise, when a new leader will be appointed at the full council meeting.

As to my successor - that will be decided by a vote of the administration Labour Group this Wednesday afternoon. I know which of the two nominated candidates I'll be voting for - but I'm not saying.

So tonight I'm in something of a reflective mood about all that has happened in the five plus-years that I have been Leader, and indeed the 16 years that I have been a councillor in Glasgow. It's been a blast; if, at various points, not for the fainthearted.

I'm also excited, and a little nervous in truth, about what the future holds for me. This is a time of change in my career, with all the opportunities and uncertainties that entails. But I am not so self-absorbed as to imagine that my personal career prospects is anything other than of 3 limited interest. Limited, in fact, to me, my partner, my mum and a couple of close pals. Although to be fair I have a number of friends who want the best for me and I know will point me in helpful directions if they can.

Where Glasgow is positioned, on the other hand, is of much wider significance and interest. So tonight, if I may, I would like to touch towards the end of my speech on the city and the Clyde valley region and how we are placed to shape our future. I understand I will be open to questions later, and this will be an opportunity for you to share your perspectives. I'll simply aim to get that conversation going.

But before all that I would like to talk about my experience of working with the Glasgow Jewish Representative Council, and the Jewish community more generally. I think it's fair to characterise my involvement with the Jewish community throughout my time as councillor and Leader as respectful, cordial but intermittent. I'm pleased to say our relations have been more sustained and positive, indeed warm, for much of the last year - albeit following a difficult period from August 2014. I'll talk about that later.

But essentially intermittent over the years. That said, for five years in the early Noughties I lived in a Rabbi's house. Though perhaps I should explain that the Rabbi wasn't there at the time. The first flat I owned was at 125 Hill Street, immediately next door to the Garnethill Synagogue.

You may know that before it was converted into flats the whole building was owned by the Hebrew Congregation at Garnethill and over the years the Rabbi attached to

the synagogue lived there. A number of Jewish boys fleeing Nazi persecution were also housed at that address in the 1930s. I knew of this history and respected it.

I also on more than one occasion visited the synagogue and the Scottish Jewish archive. I visited on Doors Open Days, and I have participated in a number of civic services in local synagogues over the years. I figured that they would be interesting and a bit different, which they were.

In any event, I regard it as a privilege of public life to be able to share in religious and cultural events of significance to Glasgow's increasingly diverse population. And I know enough about the pressures of political life to know that we need all the prayers we can get. When I was Glasgow's education convenor I chaired the organisation called Sense over Sectarianism and was proud of the work done to promote the Anne Frank exhibition in Glasgow schools; and I was pleased to support visits by senior pupils to the Auschwitz death camp. The way they, afterwards, speak of their visit among their school peers is moving and powerful. I've also attended a number of Holocaust memorial events with many of you over the years.

When you list it like that it sounds like quite a lot but we are talking over fifteen years. So respectful, certainly cordial and intermittent I think captures it. Until August 2014. The 'difficult period' in our relations that I alluded to earlier followed my decision to fly the Palestinian flag from Glasgow City Chambers during the last period of intensive military action in Gaza. It was intended as a gesture of humanitarian support for Palestinian civilians and followed a request to our Lord Provost from the mayor of one of Glasgow's twin cities, Bethlehem. Flying the flag for one day was the least of the political demands that were being made of us at that time.

What became very clear to me, however, was the deep sense of anger, hurt and insecurity that this decision created among the Jewish community. I deeply regret that. But good was to come from this low-point. Many of you were at a meeting of the Representative Council that I attended, indeed requested, shortly after the flag incident. It was a difficult, raw discussion. I think diplomats reserve the phrase 'full and frank' to describe such occasions. But it was a good meeting. Because it was open and honest. And we agreed to build from where we were at that time. We resolved to meet regularly, which we have.

We knew that intermittent would no longer do. We agreed that the relationship between the Representative Council and Glasgow City Council needed to be with the political leadership, not only the civic. And this approach has been fruitful. We have worked together for a number of months to help ensure a more effective policing response to anti-Semitic attacks, and we have together opposed those who pursue a policy of economic harassment and boycott as part of a delegitimising of Israel. An agenda I have never supported. I recently was afforded the honour of welcoming the Israeli Ambassador to Glasgow City Chambers. And I thoroughly

enjoyed the warm and convivial atmosphere at the civic reception in the Chambers to mark your centenary.

I was greatly impressed by your charitable commitment that evening to ongoing support for refugees seeking sanctuary in our city. A generous and prescient gesture given recent events across Europe. Ladies and gentlemen, we've come a long way in a relatively short period of time. Throughout this latter period I have developed a particular respect and indeed affection for your President, Mr Paul Morron. He's a class act.

None of this is to say that issues won't arise in future. We know they will. But we have the structures and relationships in place to better deal with them. The inter-faith dialogue you engage in, in particular with the local Muslim community, is also to be encouraged and can only help whenever tensions increase at home or abroad.

Two other brief points from me, President, before I close. Firstly, I am delighted to share this evening with your illustrious former MP, and my former boss, Jim Murphy. I hold Jim in the highest regard. You know how effective and diligent he was as a constituency MP. His ministerial career extended his reputation across the UK and internationally. And he was the best leader of the Scottish Labour Party I have known - unfortunately at a quite impossible time electorally for our party.

And finally, let me close on my favourite subject: Glasgow. Glasgow is Scotland's largest, friendliest and most stylish city. We all know that. And I love it. It is also the principal powerhouse of the Scottish economy and the engineering, bio-science, retail, renewables, cultural, sporting, media and educational capital of Scotland. Oh, and we're famously understated. Our economy is more diverse and therefore resilient than ever. And our international reputation is high, following the delivery of the best ever Commonwealth Games, and our proven ability to host major events, such as the MTV Europe Music Awards and the forthcoming World Gymnastics Championships.

Perhaps the most significant recent development was the signing of the £1.13billion City Deal, in equal partnership with the UK and Scottish Governments and all 8 councils across Clyde Valley, including of course Councillor Fletcher's East Renfrewshire. The Deal will fund 20 major infrastructural projects and create 29,000 new jobs across our city region. Increasingly across the world the metropolitan agenda is gaining profile, economically and politically. And it provides an alternative constitutional worldview to that of an increasingly centralised, nation-building Scotland.

I hope that, wherever I find myself in the future, I can help to advance the city region agenda in order to rebalance and grow our economy, tackle inequality, and devolve power. President, ladies and gentlemen. Enough from me. Thank you for the opportunity to speak this evening. It is characteristically big-hearted and generous of you to invite me.

May the Glasgow Jewish Representative Council, like Mother Glasgow herself, continue to flourish.