

First Chinese Mayor for Redbridge Borough



Councillor Thomas Chan became Redbridge's 45th and Britain's first Chinese Mayor, in May 2009.

Cllr Chan was brought up in Hong Kong and has lived in Britain for over 32 years. He is a business consultant and has a particular interest in equality in the workplace. He served Redbridge as a Councillor for four years in the 1990s representing Bridge Ward and then, from 2006, Wanstead Ward.

He said, 'There have been Chinese Mayors in Europe and Canada but I am proud to be the first Chinese Mayor in Britain. There are just under 3,000 people of Chinese background in Redbridge and I hope this means something special to them too.'

But my job as Mayor of Redbridge is to represent everyone in the Borough, whatever their background. The Mayor is described as 'first citizen' but in my view that should really be 'first servant'—I'm here to serve.'

The Mayor's role is to represent the Council and Borough at formal occasions. The Mayor is also in charge of council proceedings and has the job of making sure that Council rules are upheld.

Cllr Chan has nominated two charities to support during his year as Mayor. They are the local branch of Alzheimer's Society and Redbridge Business Education Partnership, which organises work experience placements for young people. 'These organisations are both doing very important work. Work experience helps young people on the path to work and taking responsibility for their lives, and this is particularly important during the recession. The Alzheimer's Society makes sure older people, and sadly some not so old, who are afflicted with this terrible condition can live with dignity.'

Speaking at the Mayor's reception, Tim Poon, Chairman of the Confederation of Chinese Business in the UK, said, 'Traditionally we say never get involved in politics, let alone become a politician. I think that's wrong and so I am very pleased that Thomas has stood up to be counted.'

On two issues of community cohesion, faith issues and anti-terrorism, which recently have gained much prominence, the Mayor feels that instead of focussing more on faith issues the government has given more attention to anti-terrorism oriented policies. Based on his experience of community politics he feels that still much needs to be done to solve the conflicts between the communities at local levels and for these efforts young people should be more involved though in reality they are not even on the margins of government policies, and in fact they should be engaged with much more and mainstreamed and the solutions for various issues which are sought for through their involvement will be long lasting. The Mayor also supports more integration of different communities at various levels instead of continuing with their separate worlds.