

“The best job in the World!” Who has it?

When we first interviewed **Waseem Zaffar** J.P., MBE in 2011, just after he had been elected as full time Labour Councillor for Lozells and East Handsworth, he stated proudly that indeed it is he who has this privileged job, as we were welcomed warmly at his local office. It is obvious that this young man (31) loves his work and is enthusiastic and totally committed to it.

Parents

They came to Birmingham from Pakistan in the early 1970s. Waseem was born in Leonard Road, where he still lives. He was educated at Heathfield Road Primary and at Holte and Joseph Chamberlain Secondary schools. He then went on to study Logistics at Aston University. Prior to his election his career has been devoted to community work in particular to youth related projects. He became politically involved at the incredibly young age of 8, joined the Labour Party aged 15 and in 2001 was very active in Khalid Mahmood MP's successful Campaign; he sees the MP as a valued mentor. He considers it an honour to have



been elected to Birmingham City Council in May 2011 to serve this area.

He is passionate about cricket and still manages to find time to play. He cites Imran Khan as a great role model. As a teenager he offered Jesse Gerald the Manager of Holte Leisure Centre; now Constituency Community Partnership Manager, his services as coach for their cricket team! He is, also an ardent fan of our local football club Aston Villa and goes regularly.

He has a great desire to motivate and enable the young people in the area to get involved in local politics in order to have their say. He cites local community 'super stars' Ahmed Bostan and Matthew Tye as young people making a big difference. He is grateful that he had and is still having, a good political education and he is keen to pass this on to other young people. As a young Councillor, he considers that he has a serious role in communicating with the youth effectively, through the social media. He invites us all to follow him on Twitter

@WaseemZAFFAR

During our interview we asked him about local issues and concerns. These include loss of a Neighbourhood Manager, (Yvonne Wager), lack of Environmental Wardens, rubbish littering our streets, the boarded-up waste land from the demolished flats, library facilities and care of the elderly. He considers Yvonne Wager's leaving as a great loss and hopes that there will be another role for her in the community at a later date. He acknowledges that in the recent Council cuts the hardest hit have been the elderly and the disabled. He promises to represent this group as effectively as he does the youth of the area and he will visit them in their homes, if required, to offer support and advice. He acknowledges the vital role that the local library played in his own young life and is determined that Soho Road library will remain open and maintain its present facilities.

We also asked him about his future political plans. He showed concern and responded positively and realistically to these questions both in general and specific terms. Councillor Zaffar is concerned that there is not enough re-cycling in the area and a lack of appreciation of the value of trees; there are frequent requests from residents to cut them down.

He spoke earnestly about involving local residents in how this money is spent in the future and in how services are to be run. He drew our attention to the first Peoples' conference (July 2010) where all the community groups met including Villa Business Centre, Handsworth Recreation Group and Birmingham Adult Community Education group. He stressed the importance of building a capacity of local people of all ages, from diverse ethnic groups and religions coming together with a common agenda, sharing skills and good practice. He proposed to facilitate this through Neighbourhood Forums and invited every resident to attend and have a say. He also looked forward to a change of leadership in Birmingham City Council in May 2012!

Indeed this proved to be a turning point for his political ambitions as the new leader of the Council appointed him as Chair of Birmingham City Council's Scrutiny Committee for Social Cohesion & Community Safety. This has enabled him to write to the likes of Bob Jones, (West Midlands Police Crime Commissioner) Cllr Sir Albert Bore, (Leader, Birmingham City Council) and Chris Sims (Chief Constable, West Midlands Police). Earlier this year as 'Dear Bob, Albert and Chris,' from his new city centre office in the Council House You will now see him appearing regularly on TV being interviewed on such topics as Terrorism, "Time for some clear thinking on

Mental Health and Criminal Justice System", in his Birmingham Post column, and more recently a TB awareness campaign in our own ward.



So his new role has taken him to the far reaches of our city as his committee prepares reports for the Cabinet members on such areas as Re-Offending, Homelessness, and most recently, Stop and Search. Earlier this year he presented the findings of 'Birmingham: Where the World Meets' to a full City Council meeting. "The report highlighted the strength of our great city in attracting people from all over the world to come and live here because of our friendly warm nature but most importantly because we allow all cultures and faiths to feel welcome and integrated whilst respecting their beliefs, faiths, morals and cultures."

He has also written to Dame Christine Braddock CBE, Principal of Birmingham Metropolitan College raising his concerns and the concerns of his constituents regarding the college's performance and the policy that has now been adopted by the College. Saidul Haque Saeed, Chairman, Lozells Neighbourhood Forum & Organiser, Citizens UK Birmingham describes Waseem in these terms;

'His dedication to involvement and empowerment of local people is always a key starting point of any contribution from him. Nevertheless, he is a 'man of action' and does not shy away from leading on tasks himself. A very good motivator and strategic thinker, Waseem is not your ordinary active citizen, but an accomplished young Community Leader having led on various city wide campaigns and drivers for change.'

He is currently leading an Enquiry into Mental Health Working In Partnership with Criminal Justice Agencies. We were impressed with this committed young man who promises to continue to work hard in this 'best job in the world' to serve us in this community and provide strategic leadership during these tough times. He offers us a clear invitation to get involved and use our people power to make a difference

Let us do it!

by Nora Warnaby