

MIKE OLLEY



Councillors Deirdre and Bobby Alden

Like mother, like son – Aldens savage Labour

There have rarely been such closely related and erudite political orators on Birmingham City Council as the Aldens. Meanwhile, as the world judders over the Middle East, our city remains calm. **MIKE OLLEY** reports.

COMETH the hour, cometh the man ... and woman, of course. Forget terrestrial TV and streaming services: the big entertainment spectacle recently has been the viewing of live Birmingham City Council meetings online.

Many speakers have been wonderful. This could not be truer for Cllr Bobby Alden (leader of the Tory group, representing Erdington) and his dear old mum Cllr Deirdre Alden (Con, Edgbaston).

Their performances in the council chamber over recent weeks has been a viewing pleasure. Bobby's grasp and delivery of facts, statistics and damning commentary have struck home and shaken to the core both the controlling Labour group and the ever-changing cadre of senior officers.

Meanwhile Deirdre, always resplendent in her designer chic, with impeccable and most eloquent diction, sarcastically slammed Labour's governance. She even called on cabinet members to resign over their culpability for, and "mediocre" actions to recover, the bankrupt council. Ouch!

But that wasn't all from Deirdre. Only last week, at yet another couple of "special" council meetings, she put her stiletos in again, accusing Labour of 11 years of messing up the council and creating a culture of fear and disrespect, along with bullying senior female officers. I have to say it was a brilliantly constructed speech.

Labour really had no time to reply to Deirdre. That was a shame. I would have liked to hear from the talented Cllr Sam Forsyth (Labour, Quinton), who is always good for a spot of intelligent, stridently spoken communication.

And I would have loved to have listened to Cllr Jayne Francis (Labour, Harborne), who has a different style but is nevertheless so engaging, energetic and empathetic. It was left to council leader Cllr John Cotton (Labour, Glebe Farm & Tile Cross) to handle the devastating attacks from the Aldens, and he did very well indeed. Good luck to him.

I'm still quietly confident that he can wrestle back full control of bankrupt Brum. Perhaps even helped and inspired by Bobby and Deirdre.

Anders and cruel kidnappings by Hamas terrorists in Israel have shocked the world. The Israel Defence Force is now replying with deadly force in Gaza.

Death, blame and tragedy has been a constant for more than 70 years in that area of the world, and I fear there will be so much more for us to witness. It's all very ugly and so desperately sad that humanity can sink so low.

Birmingham and the West Midlands has a very diverse population, something we are rightly proud of. Many of those in the region will support either the Palestinians or Israel. Many others will support neither side. Some will just have a sadness towards any victims. It's a mixed bag. What I am pleased to note is that in Birmingham there has been no strong, offensive public outpouring, and little stringent taking of sides, one way or the other. The UK had many pro-Palestine rallies at the weekend, while Birmingham had few. On balance, the good sense of Brummies has prevailed.

The actions of both Hamas and Israel promote much anger and sadness in our hearts. Yet for the sake of peace, it's best kept in our hearts and off the streets. Long may all us Brummies live together in peace and harmony.

■ It's Black History Month! I'm delighted to say that not only is my best friend black, we have also been married for more than 20 years. And we are still both so madly in love! As a middle aged, middle class, fat and straight bloke, who happens to be white, I am therefore very proud of the positive heritage that Birmingham can contribute to this special month.

And none is more positive than Joseph Sturge, another middle aged, middle class, fat and white bloke. Sturge lived in Edgbaston and had a family business on Broad Street, the Merchant Stores, in the 1830s. Today it's a popular bar. But up at Five Ways is a wonderful monument to Sturge, and his contribution to Black History is significant. Whilst slavery was abolished in North America, the slavers moved over to indentured apprentices – slavery in all but name, and just as brutal.

Sturge campaigned fiercely to end this second wave of repression, and his is a notable contribution that my wife, kids and all of us can be proud of.

■ Gruesome beheadings, random mur-

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