

## Annual Report – Special Responsibilities

(Under the South Gloucestershire Scheme of Members' Allowances, certain councillors who perform significant responsibilities over and above those of other councillors are entitled to receive additional allowances to recognise those extra responsibilities. The Scheme requires councillors in receipt of such allowances to report on their actions. This report is published on the Council's website).

**Report for period: 2019 - 2020** .....

**Name: Councillor Pat Rooney**.....

**Position held: Labour Group Leader** .....

### A general outline of the special responsibilities you perform

As Leader of the Labour Group I am responsible for drawing up the strategic and political policies to challenge the ruling Group on the Council.  
I ensure that all members of the Labour Group fully understand and contribute towards our Group strategies.

#### Communication :

I ensure that my open door policy enables all Group members to engage and communicate their individual concerns and views.

I liaise with all S Glos Labour CLP's, Branches and attend meetings to present reports and inform members on new initiatives and annual budget.

I ensure that a Group Report is produced twice a year to inform Labour colleagues in the three CLP's and Branches.

The Labour Group took a political position to have private Group leader meetings with CEO monthly and also to request private Labour briefings from the Directors and Officers for service areas following the removal of our Political Assistant from Full time hours. The Tory Administration imposed that the Labour group were only able to employ a political assistant for two days per week instead of the full week which is different to the majority of Councils. This was a political and totally unprovoked attack by the Tory Administration. We therefore understood from this political tactic by the Administration that they no longer wished to work collaboratively and so Labour had to respond accordingly as to how we would change our approach. The monthly CEO and Director meetings provide a valued and welcome information platform where we can speak in confidence and air our values and concerns. Since the start of these briefings, we have agreed that the Liberal Democrat group join us with regard to the CAH briefings but not any of the others, I also attend the Strategic Partnership meetings with business, education. Voluntary sector representatives. I cascade information to colleagues to keep them fully informed at all times.

I speak on behalf of the Labour Group at meetings, make press / media statements.

#### Management :

I have duty of care and wellbeing for the Group especially during the COVID 19 pandemic, regularly contacting each Group member to ensure they are coping and ensuring they are dealing with their increased stress levels with regard to the serious and mentally draining

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cases they are currently working on, due to Covid. I also had to train our new Political Assistant and recognise that the post now only being two days per week is reducing their responsibility and work load. I also oversee the role of the nominated Whip for the Group. I hold Appraisal meetings with the Political Assistant which used to be held with the Head of Legal but this is not now the case. I discuss PA 's personal development and objective setting for following year and we now have to focus crucially on tasks that will be manageable for the P A within the hours allocated .

I devise the Shadow Cabinet structure to mirror the ruling Group's Cabinet set –up and also ensure that key Group Leads fully understand their roles and responsibilities.

Events ;

I raise the need for 'Away Days' for the Labour Group and help arrange Facilitators and venue. We held such a meeting in March, the week prior to Lock down, but at least all the new Councillors were able to use the day for their further training and development. I and the Deputy Leader and Political Assistant put together an Agenda for the Day which focused on the Group's service area roles and the strategic ,political messaging we needed to discuss , how we were now having to work as a progressive Opposition challenging the Administration at every opportunity .

Following the Event, Action plans are drawn up from the exercises carried out and following consultation with members, implemented accordingly. Group members are selecting outcomes from the Away Day to bring to Group meetings for discussion and current status of progress.

Of course in March, COVID 19 caused Council to take a different approach, Lockdown meant we could not meet in person and all meetings were on Teams or Skype .All members have managed to combat the IT problems we all encountered at the beginning but we are now all successfully accessing and managing meetings.

Whilst COVID was at its peak, I agreed to attend cross party 3 Leader Covid briefings with CEO and Public Health Directors fully appreciating that during this crisis, Party Politics is put to one side and I committed to agree to attend 3 Leader briefings to enable the CEO and others to brief Group leaders urgently and regularly with expediency and for efficiency .This was welcomed as a positive move from all concerned. This was a temporary situation and would be reviewed at a future date.

## Key Milestones/Achievements during the reporting Period

The agreed Labour Group decision to devise a 'shadow Cabinet structure to enable Lead Labour Group members , nominated by Group to carefully consider the Cabinet 's Forward plan and challenge Cabinet decisions where necessary, has been successful. I and colleagues have regularly challenged the Tories at Cabinet and I have ensured that questions are asked of the Leader and Portfolio holders to hold them to account, to seek clarification were necessary and offer an alternative approach to improve the policy.

I ensure that Group members are fully informed and information is shared amongst the Group and I report back From all meetings I attend as Leader of the Group.

The Budget Scrutiny Task and Finish Group which I raised with the Leader as good governance practice, has not been allowed to robustly challenge the ruling group's budget setting process in a timely or detailed way compared with other local authorities and I continue to challenge the ruling group to address this urgently and raise my concerns at every opportunity . The Scrutiny Task and Finish topics raised by Labour

have been completed such as the Labour initiative for Priority Neighbourhoods and recommendations to Cabinet for their decision. The Labour Group Co Chair the Scrutiny committee with the Lib Dems. This has worked well and a different approach which was at my suggestion so that we have an 'in-road' into the Council agenda.

I arrange Leadership Team meetings with Deputy Leader and Political Assistant twice a month to ensure we are all fully informed and keep up to date with decisions made by the ruling group .Labour consistently called for a Scrutiny Commission designated Officer to be employed by the Council as we have evidenced the need for legal and research advice and information to support the Commission.

I ask the political assistant to arrange monthly Group meetings to maintain a flow of information and discuss policy.

I also sit on the Outbreak Management Engagement Board to demonstrate the need for Councillors to be fully engaged and lead on communications with regard to our residents and community.

**What “added value” to the local community have you been able to achieve through your special responsibilities?**

I ensure that I am visible within the Community and speak on their behalf.  
As I sit on high profile strategic committees, it benefits the Community as I am able to raise issues, concerns and also publicise the work carried out by Labour Colleagues with business representatives and educationalists.  
I work alongside the Voluntary sector and due to my involvement with local initiatives, it benefits the community due to my position on the Council.  
I endeavour to be fully informed on a wide range of issues that I have access to and if the new administration maintain the PAG 's which was the Council's information channel for minority parties , I will ensure that Labour's voice is heard making constructive contribution towards Council policy .  
As the Labour Group Leader. I have presented amendments to the ruling Group's budget which have been to benefit our residents.  
I have spoken on every opportunity open to me, to make sure that the 5 Priority Neighbourhood areas maintain their targeted resource and that we keep them high on the Council agenda.  
I provide local residents with as much information with regard to local initiatives via local leaflets, reports and press statements.  
I have been an active member of the Covid Kingswood Community Groups set up by one of my team and we have found that the increase in vulnerable and financially deprived residents has tripled.

**How have your special responsibilities enabled the Council to be more effective?**

I ensure that the Labour Group fully contribute to the Budget procedure and challenge the ruling Group's proposals where we believe we have better and will benefit residents.  
I challenge the ruling Group whenever their decisions are questionable or can be seen to be detrimental to particular areas of S Glos.  
I contribute at all meetings I attend , speaking on behalf of the Group and ensuring that Council has a robust and visible opposition party but that I do not stop or prevent Council efficiency without valid cause or valid reason ,  
I hold the ruling Group to account.  
I engage with Senior management and lower tiers of Officers in a constructive and effective way.

I attend the West of England Combined Authority meetings when necessary but believe that the WECA Scrutiny committee is the place where business takes place and as the Labour Group in South Gloucestershire does not have a seat on this body as Bristol has the larger Group, I ensure that I meet with Bristol colleagues to feed our views forward so that we do have a voice .I am especially interested in pushing the Skills and employment programme to improve Labour areas in South Gloucestershire. I continually challenge the way in which this will deliver to local wards where skills, employment and educational attainment are in urgent need of attention and funding.  
I have challenged the new Metro Mayor on how we will have claim for sufficient funding for our priority neighbourhood areas over and above the claims of the other authorities.  
We are preparing for the Metro Mayor and PCC elections taking place May 2021.

**In what ways has the exercise of your special responsibilities supported the core objectives of the Council?**

I have ensured through robust challenges that the Council/s core objectives and overall mission statement :  
'Equality of opportunity for all '  
Is carried out  
Ensuring that high quality of inclusive services and facilities are provided and wherever this appears to be failing, highlight and challenge.  
Working with diverse groups and recognising their distinct requirements and challenge where necessary.  
Supporting good employment practices and policies.  
Challenge any discrimination or harassment.  
I have suggested a joint cross party statement to strengthen this Councils commitment to fighting against all forms of discrimination and hate by drafting a statement for agreement form the Administration and Lib Dem parties. I am still awaiting this to be signed by the ruling group which STILL has not been signed!