

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: May 2017 - May 2018.....

Name: Claire Young.....

Position held: Co-Chair of Scrutiny Commission

A general outline of the special responsibilities you perform

The role of Co-Chair of the Scrutiny Commission involves:

- Leading and guiding the work of the Commission, helping it to develop and review its work programme and shaping the agenda for meetings
- Attending Task and Finish group meetings in an ex-officio capacity, so that you have an overview of all the work being carried out on behalf of the Scrutiny Commission and making sure it is on track.
- Ensuring that all the work of the Commission is conducted in a constructive and positive manner
- Being consulted on urgent decisions
- Chairing alternate meetings with my Co-Chair

As this was the first year of the new Scrutiny Commission, I also spent a great deal of time working with my Co-Chair, officers and other Members to set it up. Having a single, 15 member Commission with the ability to set up Task and Finish groups for in-depth scrutiny and policy development was very different to the scrutiny arrangements in the pre-2012 Cabinet system, where we had different Select Committees scrutinising the work of each Executive Member.

Setting up the Commission included:

- Attending training and learning from best practice elsewhere
- Developing protocols for how the meetings would operate, agreeing a template agenda and helping to shape the constructive and positive approach required
- Developing protocols and forms for initiating Task and Finish Group reviews
- Taking a lead within my group on proposing our first Task and Finish Group topics

Throughout the year, we kept the operation of the Scrutiny Commission under review, learning from what went well and what didn't and working with officers and members to make changes. Probably the most significant example was that we identified shortcomings in the Scrutiny Commission's ability to scrutinise the Council's budget. I proposed and chaired a Task and Finish Group to put in place a protocol for future years with the aim of ensuring proper scrutiny. We also sought to learn from best practice elsewhere by

attending the South West Overview and Scrutiny Network.

We agreed that it was important for the Co-Chairs to have an overview of all the Task and Finish Group work, so that we could be aware of any difficulties arising and work with officers to ensure they were getting the support they needed.

Key Milestones/Achievements during the reporting Period

- Took a lead role in setting up the new Scrutiny Commission, which was different to any previous arrangements on South Gloucestershire Council.
- When difficulties arose in scrutinising the administration's budget, I proposed we use a reserve meeting to scrutinise it between the Cabinet and Council meetings. At that meeting the Commission questioned the then Leader and Deputy Leader of Council in great depth about their budget proposals.
- I also proposed and chaired a Task and Finish Group to agree a protocol to enable earlier and more effective budget scrutiny in future years. This became the first review group to report back to the Scrutiny Commission.
- Proposed or jointly proposed the following Task and Finish Group topics:
 - Progress towards achieving the Education Commission aim of "Improved Attainment and Progress for All" (with the aim of improving standards in our schools)
 - Yate-area future transport needs
 - Scrutiny procedure for budget setting in future years
 - The responsiveness of social services to time critical situations
- Also attended the meetings of the other five Task and Finish Groups set up during the year:
 - Best practice for dealing with recognised areas of multiple deprivation and review Priority Neighbourhood effectiveness
 - Gypsy & Traveller Policy
 - Housing Provision Company
 - Temporary homes for our homeless singles and family
- By attending the Task and Finish Group meetings I was able to keep an overview of their progress and raise concerns with officers. We successfully made the case for more officer support for the Task and Finish Group meetings. We also introduced a Red Amber Green (RAG) rating for all the topics underway as part of the agenda papers for each Scrutiny Commission meeting, so the Commission could see where further action might be needed.

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

Decisions made by the ruling group affect the local community. In my role as Co-Chair I have worked to make sure that those are subject to effective and appropriate scrutiny. I have also been able to take up community concerns, such as transport issues in the Yate area and the responsiveness of social services, through the Task and Finish groups, and through my role as Co-Chair have helped those groups get the support they need to do their work.

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

- By being a voice for local people’s concerns and trying to ensure they were taken into account when decisions were taken, I have helped the council be more responsive to residents.
- Through scrutinising and challenging the ruling group’s proposals and suggesting alternatives, I have tried to improve the decisions made.
- By monitoring the performance of services in the Committee’s remit and asking challenging questions where appropriate, I have helped the Council improve its services.

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

By working to make sure there is effective and appropriate pre- and post-decision scrutiny of the ruling group’s decisions I have tried to ensure that all the core values, including equality of opportunity for all, protecting the environment and engaging with our partners, have been taken into account when decisions were made.

My ex-officio role on all the Task and Finish Groups has given me an overview of any issues that are arising. I have then been able to take action, such as discussing the clerical support for the groups with senior officers, to ensure they have the support they need to work effectively. In this way I have contributed to policy development.