

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: 2019-20

Name: Claire Young.....

Position held: Leader of the Liberal Democrat Group

A general outline of the special responsibilities you perform

The final two months of this council year were of course dominated by the pandemic. This brought additional responsibilities as a group leader including:

- Attending a weekly virtual meeting with the other group leaders, the Chief Executive and the Director of Public Health (DPH) to discuss Covid-related issues and the impact on our communities.
- Ahead of these meetings, collating and submitting written questions from group members and then briefing them on the answers.
- Attending LGA Lib Dem Group meetings with other opposition leaders from across the country, initially weekly. These gave me a chance to share information and learn from good practice elsewhere, which informed the questions and points I raised with the Chief Exec and DPH.
- Ensuring that my group members had the briefings and training they needed to work in the new way and support their communities.
- Arranging virtual meetings for the whole group and our Shadow Cabinet and assisting group members with technical questions related to the move to online working.
- Supporting group members with Covid-related casework.
- Asking all the questions on behalf of my group at the first virtual Cabinet meeting.
- Managing our Political Assistant remotely.

Nearly half our group were newly elected in May 2019, so this year I also spent time arranging mentors for every new councillor, holding one-to-one meetings with members and arranging a group training day, although at the last minute this had to be postponed until the new council year and held virtually.

Throughout the year, I had the usual special responsibilities of an opposition group leader:

- Providing strategic direction to the group, working with all group members to develop new policies, prepare motions and questions for Council meetings and respond to policies emerging from the Administration.
- Keeping an overview of all council functions and briefing my colleagues on the strategic issues coming to Cabinet, Council and West of England meetings. I

meet regularly with our Shadow Cabinet to discuss issues arising in their portfolios. I provide advice and support to all group members as needed, including with issues in their wards, and share information I receive with them.

- Leading on the council budget for our group. This involves working with our Shadow Cabinet Members and meeting council officers to prepare our alternative budget proposals and presenting them at the budget Council meeting.
- Working with our relevant Shadow Cabinet Members and the wider group to prepare responses to consultations, including on major strategic plans.
- Responding to written questions to me as group leader ahead of Council meetings and providing a verbal response to follow-up questions at the meetings themselves when required.
- Speaking on behalf of the group in the media.
- Meeting regularly with the Chief Executive and other senior officers and with the other group leaders as necessary.
- Attending the meetings of the Local Strategic Partnership, which brings together major partners in the area, such as health, police, fire service, business, education and the voluntary sector.
- Attending Employment and Appointments Sub Committee meetings, where we agree the recruitment process for senior officers, and sitting on interview panels for some senior appointments.
- Attending Joint Consultative meetings with the Trade Unions.
- Attending other committee meetings as an ex-officio member, particularly where there are sensitive issues.
- Meeting Liberal Democrat colleagues across the West of England and beyond, to share ideas and work together on regional and national issues. Also reporting back to and liaising with my local party colleagues.
- Providing oversight and day-to-day management to the group Political Assistant, in their role supporting the group to be an effective opposition. We were without one for a number of months, during which I had to do many of the tasks they would normally have done. The role was cut to 2.5 days a week before the appointment of our new Political Assistant. This reduced support to the group and meant that more time had to be spent managing the priorities, as not all the usual tasks could be done in that time.

Key Milestones/Achievements during the reporting Period

- Proposed a motion to declare a Climate Emergency in South Gloucestershire and commit the council to cutting the area's carbon emissions to net zero by 2030. By working with the other groups ahead of the council meeting we were able to secure cross-party backing. This ambitious target will shape everything the council does over the next decade and ensure that our area makes its contribution to the biggest challenge facing our world. Following the declaration I joined the standing Task and Finish group to ensure words are followed up with actions.
- Represented our group at the Public Hearings in Bath on the deeply flawed West of England Joint Spatial Plan, giving evidence to the Inspectors as to why we felt the plan was unsound. The Inspectors agreed and in February we voted to withdraw from the JSP process.

- Worked with colleagues who put forward motions on SATS testing in schools, reducing vehicle idling outside schools, the process for referring planning applications for site visits by the relevant planning committee, and protecting the rights of EU citizens.
- Successfully proposed amendments to the budget to ensure climate change was taken into account when disposing of council land or property and that all surplus council land and property be reviewed, with a focus on delivering Affordable Housing to meet local need. Also got agreement that any of the VE day money not allocated to celebrations should be spent on working with men and LGBT victims of domestic abuse.
- Proposed a Task and Finish group to look at the process for preparing and reviewing Education, Health and Care Plans for children with Special Educational Needs.
- Ensured that local people's concerns regarding the pandemic were heard and acted upon.

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

As Leader of the largest opposition party on the council I aim to improve the decisions that affect the local community by scrutinising and challenging the Administration. This has been particularly important during the pandemic, when it was vital that those making decisions understood the impact on local residents and what other actions might be needed.

Two key achievements this council year will have far-reaching positive impacts on the community. The declaration of a Climate Emergency and the work that follows from that will shape all the decisions the council makes. It will change how we get around, how we power our homes and keep warm in winter, how we deal with our rubbish and many other aspects of our lives.

The withdrawal from the flawed West of England Joint Spatial Plan makes possible the development of a better plan to shape our area in the coming decades. If this opportunity is now taken, our communities will be more sustainable and successful than if the JSP had not been challenged.

Throughout the year, I have taken up concerns on behalf of residents across South Gloucestershire. I have done this directly with officers and members of the Administration, through the questions my group asks at Cabinet, Council and Scrutiny meetings, and through our group responses to consultations. We have sought to change council policy for the benefit of local residents through motions and through the policy development work of Task and Finish groups.

As always, we have pushed for residents and other stakeholders such as the Town and Parish Councils to be as involved in the decision making as possible and have worked with campaigners on important issues such as support for children with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities. We have kept local people informed through traditional and social media.

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

An effective council needs a strong opposition to challenge and scrutinise the decisions of the Administration. I have led my group to provide that, as previously outlined, at council and West of England level. Where appropriate, I have also been prepared to work constructively with members from other groups to achieve the best outcomes, such as with the Climate Emergency motion.

My group has contributed to developing council policy, through motions and through initiating and contributing to Task and Finish Groups.

Through constructive input at the regular meetings with the Chief Executive and senior officers, at meetings such as those of the Local Strategic Partnership and when interviewing applicants for senior officer roles, I have contributed to the effectiveness of the council.

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

Through my strategic oversight of issues and leadership I have ensured my group has supported the core objectives of the council. For example:

- Successfully proposing the declaration of a Climate Emergency clearly supported, “Protecting the environment for future generations”.
- My work on challenging the Joint Spatial Plan supported the council’s Place Priorities – “To have well designed, sustainable development which meets housing and economic needs, promotes health and which integrates with and benefits existing communities.”
- By sponsoring a Scrutiny Task & Finish Group on the process for preparing and reviewing EHCPs and continuing working with campaigners on Special Educational Needs and Disabilities issues, I supported the council’s priorities: “To have all young people well educated and skilled, and prepared for the future,” and, “Reducing the attainment gap in schools.”
- By supporting my group members, I supported the council’s priority, “To have strong leaders across the council and our communities.”