

# 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: 2018-19** .....

**Name: Claire Young**.....

**Position held: Leader of the Liberal Democrat Group** .....

## A general outline of the special responsibilities you perform

I provide 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.

I keep an overview of all council functions and brief 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.

I lead 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.

I work with our relevant Shadow Cabinet Members and the wider group to prepare responses to consultations, including on major strategic plans.

I respond to written questions to me as group leader ahead of Council meetings and provide a verbal response to follow-up questions at the meetings themselves. I speak on behalf of the group in the media.

I regularly meet with the other group leaders and the Chief Executive, and other senior officers as appropriate. These meetings enable me to receive information, provide input on behalf of my group and express views on how issues can best be addressed.

I am a member 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. I attend and contribute to the meetings.

I am a member of the Employment and Appointments Sub Committee, where we agree the recruitment process for senior officers, and frequently sit on interview panels for senior appointments. I attend Joint Consultative meetings with the Trade Unions. I am an ex-officio member of other committees, attending where there are particularly sensitive

issues.

I meet Liberal Democrat colleagues across the West of England and beyond, to share ideas and work together on regional and national issues. I also report back to and liaise with my local party colleagues.

I provide oversight and day-to-day management to the group Political Assistant, in their role supporting the group to be an effective opposition.

## **Key Milestones/Achievements during the reporting Period**

- Successfully proposed a motion to eliminate the use of disposable cups at council offices, as part of reducing single-use plastics.
- Worked with colleagues who put forward motions on NHS funding, schools funding, management companies on new developments, condemning the extension of badger culling, lobbying for free to use cashpoints and against the extension to permitted development rights to allow exploratory drilling for shale gas.
- Proposed an amendment to the Capital Budget to use council land to provide affordable homes and use the proceeds to repair our neglected residential roads.
- Worked with colleagues to prepare our group response to the consultation on the additional evidence for the Joint Spatial Plan requested by the Planning Inspectors and prepared to represent our group at the Public Hearings.
- Chaired a Scrutiny Task and Finish Group that improved the scrutiny process for the Council's budget.
- Successfully worked with school and SEND funding campaigners to challenge the Administration's proposals on addressing the High Needs funding deficit.

## **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 have played a key role in scrutinising and challenging the Administration, to improve the decisions made that affect the local community.

I have taken up concerns on behalf of residents across South Gloucestershire. In particular, working with colleagues and local people I have challenged the proposals in the Joint Spatial Plan and the Administration’s approach to reducing the High Needs Funding deficit. My group has changed council policy through motions and the policy development work of Task and Finish groups that we have initiated. We have held the Administration to account through questions at Cabinet and Council meetings, through Scrutiny and by responding to consultations.

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. We have kept local people informed through traditional and social media and have worked with campaigners on important issues like school funding. At all times I aim to be a champion for South Gloucestershire and its residents.

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

The effectiveness of a council is improved by having a strong opposition that challenges and scrutinises the decisions of the Administration and the performance of the council. I have led my group to provide that strong opposition.

My group has contributed to policy development, through motions and initiating Task and Finish Groups, and has held the Administration to account at all times. We have also done that at a sub-regional level at WECA and the West of England Joint Committee.

Through constructive input at the regular meetings with the other group leaders and the Chief Executive, 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.

I have directed our political assistant to prioritise supporting our councillors in their work for local residents and helping our group to act as an effective and constructive opposition on the Council. I believe that, by using our political assistant in this way, we have helped to provide value-for-money for local residents.

## **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, one of the core values for the council is “Protecting the environment for future generations”, which we have done through questions and motions such as those on disposable cups and fracking. At all

times I strive for local communities to be better involved in decision making.

My work on holding the administration to account over their JSP proposals, pointing out weaknesses and suggesting reasoned alternatives fits with 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."

As an opposition group leader, I have consistently challenged the administration over the resourcing of local schools and, in particular, on the crisis in Special Educational Needs Funding. This emphasis on education fits with the council's priority: "To have all young people well educated and skilled, and prepared for the future." Additionally, I co-sponsored and participated in the Scrutiny Task & Finish Group on improving transition between primary and secondary schooling, which fits with the council's priority of "reducing the attainment gap in schools, associated with lower incomes."

Together with my group, I have repeatedly challenged the administration, the Government, and local health bosses to provide the health and care facilities and services that our area needs. This fits with the council's priority: "To advocate for the best possible health and social care services to our residents."