

# 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 2013 to April 2014.....

**Name**.....CLLR ANDY PERKINS.....

**Position held**....LEADER OF THE LABOUR GROUP.....

## A general outline of the special responsibilities you perform

- To lead the Labour Group of councillors
- To act as spokesperson / representative for the Group on council-wide strategic issues.
- To act as the Group's Lead member on Policy & Resources Committee
- To be the Group's point of contact when working with the Chief Executive.
- To work with other Group Leaders within the Council.
- To work with Group Leaders from other Councils.
- In conjunction with the Group's Deputy Leader, to provide day-to-day management/supervision of the Group Political Assistant and to assist in providing longer-term goal setting.

## Key Milestones/Achievements during the reporting Period

This has been the second full year in which the Council has operated a committee-based system of decision making rather than the previous Leader & Cabinet system. I remain of the view that we were justified in having campaigned for this new system of decision making as it has enabled all political groups to be fully involved in an open and transparent decision-making process rather than one which was largely behind closed doors with the Leader & Cabinet system.

Set against an ever decreasing budget because of cuts imposed by central Government, we are faced with a very challenging environment. Our budget proposals this year, therefore, sought to safeguard valued frontline services. Our proposals through the budget process included defending library services and public toilets against closures. We also proposed to protect free car parking, street marshals, dog wardens, planning enforcers and those tackling domestic violence and anti social behaviour from cuts in provision. We ruled out further cuts to the youth service and we honoured a long-standing council commitment to provide funds for a youth centre in Staple Hill.

The Labour Group also proposed turning street lights back on for an extra hour between midnight and 1am in response to widespread concern from residents about the council's part night lighting programme. All being well, we are informed that this change should take effect by the end of October. Labour councillors also scrapped the £10 charge for disabled Blue Badges introduced by the Conservatives a few years ago. We also

proposed that the council would pay the individual membership fee for residents to join a Credit Union, where they could receive money management advice.

Having been the driving force behind the introduction of the Living Wage in South Gloucestershire, we are now spear-heading a drive to encourage companies with whom the Council contracts to also become Living Wage employers. We also pleased to see that neighbouring authorities are also following South Gloucestershire's lead.

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

My previous reports noted that I felt that the new Labour Group and individual members are much more vocal and active across South Gloucestershire and not afraid to say what we think and stand up for the people of South Gloucestershire. This I believe continues to be the case. If we felt that proposals were wrong for local residents, we have said so and proposed alternative solutions. None of this would have been possible under the old Leader & Cabinet system of decision-making whereby the views of opposition councillors could be, and were frequently, ignored.

I believe that the introduction of the Committee-style of decision making has enabled local communities across South Gloucestershire to see directly all 70 councillors taking decisions in open, transparent meetings. That has to be good for democracy.

Safeguarding valued frontline services from cuts such as library services, public toilets, free car parking, street marshals, dog wardens, planning enforcers, the domestic violence and anti social behaviour services has to be a positive move for our residents, as is being able to turn street lights back on for an extra hour. Scrapping the £10 charge for disabled blue badges reflects our view that people should not be penalised for their disability. And enabling residents to join Credit Unions free of charge to access money-management advice and escape high-interest money lenders is a really positive move.

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

Again I remain of the view that the introduction of the Committee system has meant that all councillors are involved in decision making and the equal access to information for all political parties has meant that real alternatives to proposals have been put forward and agreed. Under the old Leader & Cabinet system, any alternative proposals developed by opposition councillors could simply be ignored without a vote. I believe, therefore, that in enabling all councillors to be involved in decision-making and opening-up access to information has meant that the decisions being made are more likely to represent what the majority of the public would want. The examples of things that the Labour Group successfully proposed through the Budget process shows this to be true. That has to mean we are a more effective council.

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

As with previous year's reports I suggested that the over-riding core objective of the Council is to serve the residents of South Gloucestershire and I remain of that view.

Therefore, whether leading the Group as a whole or representing its views as its 'spokesperson', I have done so in a way which I believe has had a positive effect for our residents.