

# 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: 2015/16** .....

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

**Position held: Liberal Democrat Lead Member for Communities** .....

## A general outline of the special responsibilities you perform

My Communities role changed to that of an opposition Lead Member in May 2015 due to the council moving from no overall control to majority control. I continued to attend the draft agenda meetings with the other parties' Lead Members. At these meetings, we asked questions and challenged officers about the reports for the next committee meeting. The aim was to improve the reports, to make sure that they contained the information members needed to make an informed decision and that they were clear for members of the public to read.

As Lead Member for my group for Communities I:

- Led the discussion on and development of our groups policies on Communities issues
- Liaised with officers where we wanted to put forward alternatives to the ruling party's proposals
- Worked with colleagues on our group's budget proposals, which proposed diverting money that the ruling group were using for a small reduction in the green bin charge to libraries and youth services, which were facing significant cuts.
- Led the group at committee meetings and took the lead at full council meetings when Communities issues were being discussed.
- Kept members of my group informed on Communities issues and liaised with officers on concerns they raised.
- Acted as media spokesperson for the group on Communities issues.
- Acted as a point of contact for residents who wished to get my group's perspective on Community issues
- Represented the group on the Safer Stronger Communities Partnership and was one of our two members on the Waste Forum.
- Attended the Town and Parish Council Forum meetings.
- Represented the council at those events and celebrations related to the Communities committee, such as the Community Awards Ceremony, where all three parties were represented, rather than just the ruling party.

I also attended training, briefings and visits to improve my knowledge of areas related to Communities – for example, touring a number of waste plants at Avonmouth.

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

- Working constructively to come up with alternative proposals where our group felt they were needed. With the ruling group able to outvote any proposals we made, it was obviously harder than in the previous council to achieve these alternatives, but at times we succeeded. For example, residents whose only vehicle is a works van were concerned about proposals to ban them from using the council's Sort It Centres for disposing of personal waste. We heeded those concerns and I successfully proposed an amendment to the ruling group's proposals that asked officers to come up with a scheme to enable them to continue to use the centres.
- Where our alternatives were not accepted, making sure we held the ruling group to account publicly for their decisions. For example:
  - Leading the challenge at the budget meeting to their proposal to spend money on a small reduction in the green bin charge as the same time as they were proposing to cut libraries and youth services
  - Opposing the scrapping of the area forums, which had for many years allowed residents to have input into decisions that affected their communities.
  - Challenging the decision to replace the community grants scheme with a poorly designed scheme where members would have individual pots of money to give out.
- Being the voice of residents and partners like the Town and Parish Councils, raising issues with officers and the ruling group.
- Having input into the Policy Sites and Places Plan as a member of the working group.

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

- Acting as a contact for residents with concerns within the remit of the Communities committee.
- Listening to residents' views and making sure they are taken into account in the decision making process.
- Challenging the decisions of the ruling group, to try to improve policies that affect the local community

## **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 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 challenging the ruling group I aimed to ensure that while the cuts might put the emphasis on delivering value for money, other core values, such as equality of opportunity for all, protecting the environment and engaging with our partners were also taken into account. By contributing to agenda briefings and questioning at committee meetings, I aimed to improve decision making by making sure all the issues were understood and that residents' concerns were taken into account.