

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: 2013-14

Name: Claire Young.....

Position held: Chair of Communities Committee

A general outline of the special responsibilities you perform

Working with the other Communities Lead Members, I guide the work of the committee and provide strategic leadership, support and challenge to the Director of ECS and the relevant senior officers. As well as attending draft agenda meetings, the Lead Members regularly meet officers to discuss future plans, the implementation of decisions taken by the committee and any issues that may arise that require Member input. We also work with the council's partners, such as the police and Circadian Trust.

As Lead Member for my group for Communities I:

- Lead the discussion on and development of group policy on Communities issues
- Lead the group at committee meetings.
- Keep members of my group informed on Communities issues and liase with officers on concerns they raise.
- Work with colleagues on our group's budget proposals.
- Act as media spokesperson for the group on Communities issues.
- Represent the group on the Safer Stronger Communities Partnership and the Equalities Forum Partners Group and am one of our two members on the Waste Forum.
- Attend the Town and Parish Council Forum
- Represent the council at budget roadshows

As Chair of the committee I:

- Chair the Communities committee meetings.
- Chair the Draft Agenda and Lead Member meetings.
- Act as a point of contact for residents and other Members who have concerns about issues in the remit of the Communities Committee.
- Sit on the Policy and Resources committee.
- Am the principal spokesperson of the committee for media interviews.
- Represent the council at events and celebrations related to the Communities committee.

I also attend training to improve my knowledge of areas related to Communities – for

example, "Understanding and Working with the Voluntary and Community Sector".

Key Milestones/Achievements during the reporting Period

2013/14 was a challenging year, as we started to make difficult decisions that had an impact on frontline services, such as waste and grass cutting. This meant that some of the meetings I chaired involved very lengthy and complex debates, during which I did my best to be fair and give everyone a chance to have their input. I was also called upon frequently to defend the decisions the committee made, and my own group's position on those issues, in the local media and in correspondence with residents. I have tried to explain clearly and honestly the reasons why we have made the decisions we have made.

I am pleased that local residents have attended our meetings, so they can have their say and see decision making happening. I have also done my best to make sure that local residents are aware of any chances to have their say before decisions are taken. I continue to work with officers and other Members to make the committee system work as effectively as possible.

Some key milestones/achievements for the committee in 2013/14 were:

- Keeping within the committee's budget despite a number of pressures.
- Approving the new Waste Strategy, which introduced new recycling services as well as making major savings through the introduction of the garden waste collection charge.
- Localising Street Scene services, making significant savings while enabling communities to make decisions over the level of service in their area.
- Commissioning a business case for the extension of both Bradley Stoke and Longwell Green Leisure Centres.
- Reviewing the Community Grants process and delegating the decision making to Area Forums. This means the decisions can be made by councillors who know the area where the grants will be spent, rather than the Communities Committee making decisions on some of them. We also aimed to streamline the service, which is work in progress.
- Closely monitoring the performance of services in the committee's report and receiving reports on issues of particular concern such as the work going on in Priority Neighbourhoods.
- Approving the Local Air Quality Management report.

The need to make savings while providing excellent services for local people is a recurring theme, which involves making difficult decisions. Along with the other Lead Members I have attended a number of workshops looking at how to make the savings.

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.
- Working with officers and the other Lead Members to ensure the Committee makes fully informed decisions in the best interests of 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 are taken into account when we make decisions, I have helped the council be more responsive to residents.
- Through the preparatory work done in Lead Member meetings and individual discussions with officers and through my chairing of the meetings, I have tried to ensure that the committee decision making works effectively.
- 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.
- Decisions taken by the committee have contributed to the savings the Council needs to make to balance its budget.

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

The Communities Committee covers a wide range of services and therefore helps deliver all the Council’s core objectives. Inevitably in the current financial climate, there is a particular emphasis on delivering value for money, but I have tried to ensure we keep in mind the other core values, such as equality of opportunity for all, protecting the environment and engaging with our partners.