

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: 2018-2019

Name: Pat Rooney

Position held: Labour Group Leader

A general outline of the special responsibilities you perform

As Leader of the Labour Group I am responsible for drawing up the strategic and political policies to challenge the ruling Group on the Council.
I ensure that all members of the Labour Group fully understand and contribute towards our Group strategies.

Communication:

I ensure that my open door policy enables all Group members to engage and communicate their individual concerns and views.
I liaise with all S Glos Labour CLP's, Branches and attend meetings to present reports and inform members on new initiatives and annual budget.
I ensure that a Group Report is produced twice a year to inform Labour colleagues in CLP's and Branches.
I attend 3 Leader meetings which provide information to minority parties and also Strategic Partnership meetings with business, education, voluntary sector representatives .
I cascade information to colleagues to keep them fully informed at all times.
I speak on behalf of the Labour Group at meetings, make press / media statements.

Management :

I have duty of care and wellbeing for the Group and also manage the Group's Political Assistant. I also oversee the role of the nominated Whip for the Group.
I attend the Appraisal meetings for the Political Assistant with the Head of Legal for the PA's personal development and objective setting for following year .
I devise the Shadow Cabinet structure to mirror the ruling Group's Cabinet set –up and also ensure that key Group Leads fully understand their roles and responsibilities.

Events;

I raise the need for 'Away Days' for the Labour Group and help arrange Facilitators and venue.
I along with the Political Assistant and Facilitator devise an Agenda for the event to ensure it provides the greatest benefit for all Group members.
Following the Event, Action plans are drawn up by me from the work carried out and following consultation with members, implemented accordingly.

Key Milestones/Achievements during the reporting Period

Following the review of Ward Boundaries which was at the request of the ruling Group the Commission published their report and we were pleased that many of the proposals we put forward in a full, comprehensive submission, were accepted and adopted by the Commission and I have worked with the Constituencies to explain and present the new Ward structure. The result being that Labour Branches have had to change and sitting Councillors will have to report to more than one Branch and CLP once the changes are implemented internally in July. This then resulted in the local elections May 2019 on the new ward boundaries being the focus of work from Sept 2018. I had to ensure new Councillor candidates were introduced to the new wards and invited them to all Group meetings to support their potential election. I organised Budget presentations for the Group and candidates so that they were fully briefed prior to elections.

I initiated the work to draft our Manifesto following consultation with Branches CLP s and held working groups to devise new strategies for our local manifesto. I arranged training sessions for candidates to give them a flavour as to the 'Role and Life as a Councillor'. New candidates were unaware of Cabinet structures and I held briefings to advise as to how we address the Cabinet system which had been running for a year and had changed the way in which the Labour Group carries out its roles and responsibilities on the Council. The agreed Labour Group decision to devise a 'shadow Cabinet structure to enable Lead Labour Group members, nominated by Group to carefully consider the Cabinet's Forward plan and challenge Cabinet decisions where necessary, has been successful. I and colleagues have regularly challenged the Tories at Cabinet and I have ensured that questions are asked of the Leader and Portfolio holders to hold them to account, to seek clarification where necessary and offer an alternative approach to improve the policy.

I ensure that Group members are fully informed and information is shared amongst the Group and I report back from all meetings I attend as Leader of the Group.

The Budget Scrutiny Task and Finish Group which I raised with the Leader as good governance practice, has not been allowed to robustly challenge the ruling group's budget setting process in a timely or detailed way compared with other local authorities and I continue to challenge the ruling group to address this urgently and raise my concerns at every opportunity. The Scrutiny Task and Finish topics raised by Labour have been completed such as the Labour initiative for Priority Neighbourhoods and recommendations are awaiting Cabinet decision. The Labour Group Co Chair the Scrutiny committee with the Lib Dems. This has worked well and a different approach which was at my suggestion so that we have an 'in-road' into the Council agenda.

I arrange Leadership Team meetings with Deputy Leader and Political Assistant twice a month to ensure we are all fully informed and keep up to date with decisions made by the ruling group.

I ask the political assistant to arrange monthly Group meetings to maintain a flow of information and discuss policy.

Since The Labour Group successfully campaigned to keep the Civic Centre in Kingswood there has been the creation of a Hub which has resulted in the Library moving into the Civic Centre and a public café on the ground floor which will be adjacent to the One Stop Shop.

The public were against closure and we lead the campaign as local Councillors but also as a budget item and I lead the campaign to secure the Civic Centre as Council accommodation and our only Council Chamber.
The building is now being partially leased and training facility for the Council plus Council Chamber maintained.

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

I ensure that I am visible within the Community and speak on their behalf.
As I sit on high profile strategic committees, it benefits the Community as I am able to raise issues, concerns and also publicise the work carried out by Labour Colleagues with business representatives and educationalists.
I work alongside the Voluntary sector and due to my involvement with local initiatives, it benefits the community due to my position on the Council.
I endeavour to be fully informed on a wide range of issues that I have access to and if the new administration maintain the PAG 's which was the Council's information channel for minority parties , I will ensure that Labour's voice is heard making constructive contribution towards Council policy.
As the Labour Group Leader I have presented amendments to the ruling Group's budget which have been to benefit our residents.
I have spoken on every opportunity open to me, to make sure that the 5 Priority Neighbourhood areas maintain their targeted resource and that we keep them high on the Council agenda.
I provide local residents with as much information with regard to local initiatives via local leaflets, reports and press statements.

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

I ensure that the Labour Group fully contribute to the Budget procedure and challenge the ruling Group's proposals where we believe we have better and will benefit residents. I challenge the ruling Group whenever their decisions are questionable or can be seen to be detrimental to particular areas of S Glos.

I contribute at all meetings I attend, speaking on behalf of the Group and ensuring that Council has a robust and visible opposition party but that I do not stop or prevent Council efficiency without valid cause or valid reason,

I hold the ruling Group to account.

I engage with Senior management and lower tiers of Officers in a constructive and effective way.

I attend the West of England Combined Authority meetings when necessary but believe that the WECA Scrutiny committee is the place where business takes place and as the Labour Group in South Gloucestershire does not have a seat on this body as Bristol has the larger Group, I ensure that I meet with Bristol colleagues to feed our views forward so that we do have a voice .I am especially interested in pushing the Skills and employment programme to improve Labour areas in South Gloucestershire. I continually challenge the way in which this will deliver to local wards where skills, employment and educational attainment are in urgent need of attention and funding.

I have challenged the new Metro Mayor on how we will have claim for sufficient funding for our priority neighbourhood areas over and above the claims of the other authorities.

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

I have ensured through robust challenges that the Council/s core objectives and overall mission statement:
'Equality of opportunity for all '
Is carried out
Ensuring that high quality of inclusive services and facilities are provided and wherever this appears to be failing, highlight and challenge.
Working with diverse groups and recognising their distinct requirements and challenge where necessary.
Supporting good employment practices and policies.
Challenge any discrimination or harassment
I have suggested a joint cross party statement to strengthen this Councils commitment to fighting against all forms of discrimination and hate by drafting a statement for agreement form the Administration and Lib Dem parties. I am still awaiting this to be signed by the ruling group.