

BLAENAU GWENT COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL
COUNCILLORS ANNUAL REPORT

Councillor: Steve Thomas

Party: Labour

Ward: Tredegar Central & West & Ward

Section 1 – Roles and Responsibilities

I was appointed Leader of the Council in December 2015, before I was Deputy Leader of the Council/ Executive Business Manager. As Leader my role incorporates the Local Service Board (recently renamed Public Service Board), Well Being of Future Generations, Reforming Local Government, Culture, City Deal, Customs and Practices of Council, Policy & Performance (Strategy) and Regulatory Engagement, Transforming Blaenau Gwent Programme, Collaboration, Remuneration Panel and Member Development. I provide political direction with regard to the Executive and Council Work Programme and Agenda.

I have also been nominated as one of the Members who undertake Members Personal Development Reviews and I am the lead Member at CMT Performance Appraisals.

Section 2: Constituency Activity

I represent Tredegar Central and West Ward which comprises of Ashvale, Gwent Way, Town Centre, Bedwellty Pits, Cefn Golau and Church Street areas. I have arranged for constituents to visit me at my office to discuss issues with my Ward Colleagues and relevant officers. I have also made arrangements for site meetings where required. I am in regular contact with Tai Calon on many housing issues as reported by constituents and in some instances the wider Community.

I endeavour to resolve all matters brought forward by constituents and during the past year I have written many letters and emails to resolve matters brought to me by my constituents. I will pursue concerns raised on their behalf with officers, external organisations and seek meetings to ensure the matter is addressed as quickly as possible. I have attended and arranged meetings with the local Police and the Community Safety Team to assist in addressing anti social behaviour raised by concerned residents. I follow up all complaints received to ensure they are resolved in a timely manner.

As part of the Countrywide Campaign to Clean for the Queen's 90th Birthday I arranged litter picking sessions with my colleagues in Tredegar with Keep Wales Tidy. I have regular contact with Keep Wales Tidy to work together to clear particular areas in Tredegar and worked with my ward colleagues to arrange further litter picking sessions in the Ward and neighbouring wards. These were all undertaken with the assistance of local residents who expressed an interest to join in the clean-up.

Section 3: Executive and Scrutiny Activities

I lead the work of the Executive and participate in the Executive's collective decision making, responding to Scrutiny as appropriate. Members and Officers frequently request meetings to discuss strategic/Council matters. During the last year I attended approx. 582 meetings which include statutory meetings of full Council and Executive where my attendance was 99%, attending 29 out of 30 meetings. Other meetings include Executive/Corporate Management Team, City Deal, WLGA Council and Co-ordinating meetings, Council Programme Board, Public Service Board and Town & Community Councils. I have met with Ministers to discuss Local Government, Finance, Education and wider political/council matters. I also attend meetings with leaders from all local authorities in Wales to discuss localised and wider issues faced by all authorities, where good practices are learned and discussed.

I have meetings with elected Members, Trades Unions and external organisations. As Chair of the Public Service Board I work closely with our partners, therefore I am fully engaged with issues that involve our wider community including the Wellbeing and Future Act. I Chair the Council's Programme Board which was established to deliver savings across the Council as part of the Transformation Programme and I am invited to attend meetings with the Corporate Management Team to discuss budgetary matters.

Section 3: Executive and Scrutiny Activities (Cont/d)...

As Leader, I have continued the work that I had as Deputy Leader which was the main political interface with Regulators, such as the WAO, Estyn, SSWI and Welsh Government Representatives. I hold regular meetings with the Lead Corporate Director and Corporate Directors in relation to Transformation Programme, Corporate Assessment, Annual Improvement Report and other issues which arise. I also meet with officers within the Corporate Management Team and Wider Corporate Management team to have regular updates on progress within education, governance and financial matters on key issues.

I have regular dialogue with members of Scrutiny in order to discuss issues in relation to Portfolio and other matters of concern. I also attend Scrutiny Committees when appropriate relevant to my role, if invited by the Scrutiny Chair.

Prior to the Internal Challenge Sessions and External Reviews I arrange meetings with key Elected Members and officers to discuss the key themes being studied.

Section 4: Training and Development

I arrange sessions for Members and Officers ahead of any Internal or external challenge reviews and also ensure that feedback is received and monitored during the process.

As part of Member Development the Authority now undertakes Personal Development Reviews for Members which provides an opportunity for Members to discuss their strengths/weaknesses and identify any relevant training needed to undertake their roles within the Council and their respective wards. These findings will be fed into the training programme which will be available for all Members with some elements of training around core topics being mandatory. The Member Development Training Programme is continually reviewed and monitored to ensure we are undertaking the relevant training to Members requirements. I have offered to mentor Members who wish to be part of the mentoring process.

As Leader I have initiated development sessions with external providers for the Executive which will aid them in the vastly changing Local Government environment in light of the new and far reaching legislation which will have a major impact on local authorities and how they operation in the public sector.

Section 5: Initiatives, Special Activities and Issues

The Council continue to face financial difficulties with regard to the year on year budget reductions, I monitor budgetary matters very closely via the Cost Pressure Sub Group these sessions along with the work around the Transforming Blaenau Gwent Programme has seen the Council move from a serious deficit position to a more favourable one. Although due to the ongoing reductions in budgets continued monitoring is important.

As part of the my role in the Transforming Blaenau Gwent Programme I strive to drive forward improvements which will lead to better service delivery and produce a new modern performance driven local authority that really delivers for people of Blaenau Gwent. The Programme Board oversees the work being taken forward and findings are reported on a monthly basis. The work achieved has been recognised by external regulators in the Annual Improvement Report.