

DISTRICT COUNCILLOR JULIA GOOCH

Annual report – Newent & Taynton Ward May 2023 – April 2024

At the Annual General Meeting I was allocated positions on Development Management (Planning), Strategic Overview & Scrutiny Committees. I also participate in the Constitution working group & was appointed as representative for Glos County Council, Health Overview & Scrutiny Committee.

Development Management Committee hears & determines planning applications that are not determined by the Group Manager for Planning and Housing under the council's officer delegation scheme.

I can call a planning application to be heard by the committee so long as I give a planning reason but there is a time limit for doing so.

The constitution does not allow me to participate in questions, debate or voting on applications within my ward, this constitutional rule needs to be changed, as I was elected to represent the public and I cannot do that in the three-minutes I am allocated to speak.

At the October full council meeting members debated and approved the local plan strategy, this is the same strategy delivered by the previous administration although central government reduced the number of homes by nine hundred that FoDDC needs to deliver. The proposed suggestion of a new settlement would not have seen a reduction in the numbers of new dwellings allocated for Newent.

The Local Plan is still being worked through; however, the current administration has been calling daytime meetings that I have been unable to attend, this does not mean I shall not challenge the Local Plan where necessary when it is debated at full council later this year.

Strategic Overview Committee checks on the Cabinets work as a critical friend as well as issues relating to the planning, performance, and management of council services.

Currently, there are two inquiries one concerning the withdrawal of some services from Publica and the other concerns the Development Management improvement plan that was instigated by the previous administration.

The constitution working group reviews and makes recommendations to full council to determine the way business is conducted. I have asked that the rules regarding ward members participation at DMC (planning) & Licencing are reviewed.

The role of the Health Overview & Scrutiny Committee at GCC is to function as a lever to improve the health & services that impact on the health of local people, working in partnership with other agencies. To address issues of health inequalities between different groups in the community.

I learned of the challenges our health providers face and learned there are national shortages of Midwives, Pharmacists and GP's

I was delighted to be invited to a pre-opening tour of the new Quayside Community Diagnostic Centre that will offer more than eight hundred appointments each year across Gloucestershire. The facility offers X-Rays, MRI, CT, ultrasound, Echo (heart) and Dexa (bone density) scanning as well as blood tests without having to go into hospital.

I was astonished to learn when attending a training webinar that as an elected member, I had a responsibility as a corporate parent for looked after children that I had never been made aware of. I immediately contacted the relevant officers at FoDDC although it took many months before a presentation was given on the role, consequently council resolved to implement council tax support for care leavers up to the age of twenty-five subject to meeting the criteria as agreed.

Together with my colleagues in the Progressive Independent Group we challenged the increased car parking fees and put forward budget amendments that included two free hours parking, however the proposal was unsupported by almost all political groups, however I am pleased that our publicity helped to gather momentum and as a direct result the public lobbying caused the administration back track on their proposed extortionate fees.

I have been pleased that residents have been sending questions to the FoDDC, but I am not satisfied with the answers they have been provided with, I will be following up on this at the next full council meeting.

It has been disappointing to learn in the last few weeks that the proposed leisure facility at Five Acres cannot be delivered as was planned, my group has requested a scrutiny inquiry to determine the facts as eleven months ago it was on target to be commenced in March 2024.

Other matters that I have been concerned with are the circumstance regarding GL1 leisure services and the award of cost of over £180k for a lost planning appeal at Glos County Council.

Best wishes

Julia – Progressive Independent Group – Newent & Taynton Ward.