

## Appendix A

### Questions for the Chairman

What percentage of the role of the Chairman of SSSC should be spent on the preparation and attending such meetings as DX in order to be fully prepared for the FC meetings?

**In the ideal world you would try and achieve 100%, Chairman's other duties permitting. However, much of what comes to DX only appears on FC under the Standing Item of Executive Decisions and therefore you may have to discriminate between those and major items that would stand alone at FC. It is certainly my policy as Chairman to scrutinise all DX Agendas as I receive them, and attend as many DX meetings as my other duties will allow in order to be fully briefed and prepared, not only for FC but also to be knowledgeable on issues I may be asked questions on whilst out and about on duty and therefore be able to respond appropriately, albeit in a "non political" manner.**

In light of the 2008 White Paper, 'Communities in Control' how do you think the role of Chairman of Council could participate in developing public debate, interest and involvement at FC to enhance the role of the frontline councillor?

**My understanding is that there are three main ingredients to community empowerment under this White Paper, although some of the Paper will require legislation to be enabled in the Government's draft 2008/2009 legislative programme. The components of empowerment are described as follows:**

**Active Citizens.**

**Strengthened Communities.**

**Partnership with Public Bodies.**

**I would suggest to you that, in South Somerset, much of this is already happening, an example of which is the Planning for Real Exercise that took place in Yeovil's West Ward (my Ward) under the auspices of the Area South Officers and Members and other agencies ("Public Bodies"), such as the Police, Yeovil Churches (Gateway and St James's) and Schools (Westfield). This directly involved "Active Citizens" and "Strengthened Communities" by getting the community directly involved (public debate and planning workshops in situ) in that Project. The legacy of the project is a safer and cleaner Westfield Estate with the emergence of a Community Association that, as I compose this response, is about to carry out a Bulb Planting programme in partnership with SSSC Street Scene Team. West Ward Front Line Councillors were actively involved in that project from beginning to end! The success of that project was reported back to Area South and a similar activity has just been completed in the Milford Area of Yeovil, with a launch taking place on Saturday 8 November. Front Line District and Town Councillors were present at that event! It is suggested that, more often than not, this sort of activity would normally manifest itself at Area level. However, significant issues raised by Front Line Councillors that emanate from Area level would work their way up through to FC in the traditional manner. Notwithstanding this, the role of the Chairman, on issues such as this, is still remains to make themselves available to all Councillors (I have always had an open door policy) to give them my advice (an opinion) as how to get involved in such projects or promote other issues from Area level.**

In light of the 2008 White Paper, 'Communities in Control' how do you think the Chairman of Council could develop public debate, interest and involvement at FC meetings to actively encourage public participation?

**Much of the Agenda for FC is dictated by the Constitution and is very much driven by that and the timetable for getting subjects items through FC in order to meet legislative dictates. At the moment "Public Debate" is catered for under Public Question Time, a facility that some District and Borough Councils still deny their citizens. However, another opportunity for citizens to raise issues could be through their local Front Line Councillor, who could raise a matter as a motion under standing item 12 or a question under standing item 13. It is a matter of debate whether further public involvement should be at FC or Area Meetings but "local" issues tend to best dealt with at Area level. This does, however, depend on how respective Area Committees carry out their business. There is also a standing item, certainly on Area South for Items for Future Agendas! Again, significant issues that emanate from Area level would work their way up through to FC in the traditional manner. One also has to consider that FC must not become overlong and become a marathon for members to endure. I repeat that I have always had an "open door" policy to "all" Councillors to offer them my opinion as to how they might make use of standing agenda items at any level of committee.**

In one sentence how would you describe the role of the Chairman of Council?

**In addition to presiding over Full Council Meetings, the role of the Chairman is to be the champion of the Council in establishing and maintaining tangible links with and providing non political support to as many people, local businesses and voluntary organisations as possible in the community.**

Area Chairs and Portfolio Holders have expressed a keen interest in being able to represent the council at local events in their areas. How do you feel this would fit in to help the role of the Chairman with the civic workload?

**Firstly, I do not have a problem with the workload that I incur as Chairman. It is what I expected to be required to do in order to have the best opportunities to promote the Council and have first hand communication with as many members of the community throughout the district as possible. It is important that members try to understand that people want something tangible to identify the Council to them and that comes in the form of the Chairman, complete with Badge of Office and my experience is that is what people expect and want to see. It gives them an immediate and identifiable point of contact and provides endless goodwill in terms of Council Tax payers feeling they are getting value for money from the Council if the Chairman attends their events. This instantly raises the profile of their event, which they have worked hard to organise and put on, and they feel someone of authority is recognising their efforts and contribution.**

**This is why I took the opportunity; during the rural play areas programme to visit as many of those events as I could. The attendance of the Chairman at local events also provides Council Tax payers with an enhanced photo opportunity, which may then lead to a better chance of being published in the local press, thereby further increasing and highlighting the profile of their event or organisation. If events coincide, or the workload gets too much, the Deputy Chairman is always requested to assist!**

**None of this is intended to preclude Area Chairman (ACs) and Portfolio Holders (PHs) attending events that the Chairman may be at, although one should**

remember that the Chairman is there usually because they have been “invited” to be there. I have attended numerous events when both ACs and PHs have also been in attendance. Photo calls are often set up by Public Relations that way! The successful publication of photo opportunities from events attended by the Chairman also raises the profile of both the Chairman and Council in the local press. One should also remember that the Chairman’s role is “not” a political one and that is often what many of our hosts prefer.