COUNTY COUNCILLOR ANNUAL REPORT

NAME: SARA JONES
WARD: LLANOVER
ELECTORATE: 1808
REPORTING YEAR: CURRENT YEAR OF ADMINISTRATION 2015/16

1. APPOINTMENT TO OUTSIDE BODIES

I am an active member of both Llanover and Llanarth Fawr Community Councils. Whilst I am not an elected member of these community councils I attend as many meetings as possible given how important it is to engage with those that are working hard within our communities, this is an invaluable forum in providing feedback and highlighting issues to me in my role as local County Councillor.

I am the Welsh Government appointed Diversity Champion and I have worked hard to raise the profile of the work of County Councillors with the aim of improving diversity within local government. I regularly speak at events and workshops to raise awareness of this issue. In March 2016 I was awarded a ‘Women in Public Life’ award at the Chwarae Teg ‘Womenspire’ awards for the work that I do.

In addition, I have worked closely with Disability Wales on the direct payments co-operatives scheme and brought forward a motion to council on behalf of the Monmouthshire Direct Payments Co-operative, who were then successful in gaining funding for their project.

2. COMMITTEES

I am a member of the following committees:

- Economy and Development
- Strong Communities
- Democratic Services
- Bryn y Cwm Area Committee

I am the chair of the Economy and Development Select Committee, a role that I am hugely passionate about. Over the past year we have scrutinised a number of key areas including (and not limited to) broadband, Monmouthshire business and enterprise, planning issues including the Community Infrastructure Levy, tourism, events and car parking. I have led a consultation engaging with businesses across Monmouthshire asking for their feedback on what support they receive and how we can further support them to develop the County’s economy and ability to attract business.
I have worked closely with the other select committee chairs, particularly in relation to our scrutiny by the Wales Audit Office.

3. CONSTITUENCY MATTERS

There have been a number of wide ranging issues that have been brought to my attention over the last 12 months.

I hold monthly ward surgeries with Councillor Penny Jones (Raglan) alternating between our wards. These surgeries have been hugely helpful to providing a direct link with residents and ensuring we have a forum whereby people can meet with us to discuss issues they may have.

Cllr Penny Jones and I have issued a newsletter to residents updating them on our work, and we intend on issuing another newsletter during the summer of 2016.

In terms of some of the main issues that have been raised with me by residents:

Planning – I have had a number of enquiries relating to planning issues, which I have dealt with by liaising with the Planning department and within the committee itself. The issue of the solar park at Llanvapley has been one that I am continuing to work closely with residents and the community council on, I am determined that we should see adequate and appropriate community benefit to the affected communities given the scale of this development.

Flooding – Following a very wet winter there have been numerous enquiries throughout the ward in relation to flood prevention. One area that we are continuing to focus on is in Llanfair Kilgeddin, a funding bid has been submitted to Welsh Government for a Project Appraisal Plan and we are currently assessing options for the village with officers.

Speeding/Road Safety – We secured a 50mph speed limit for the B4598 and R64 roads following a long campaign by local residents. There have been many emails, meetings and calls on this issue and whilst the speed limit is now in place there remains concerns regarding enforcement. I am also working with Llanarth Fawr Community Council and residents on the issue of speeding in Llanarth and through the Pitt.

Highways – There have been numerous highways issues, particularly in relation to potholes and drain clearing to ensure clear highways. Llanover village and its surrounding roads requires attention from both a highways and flooding perspective and I’ll be working with officers to prioritise this.

A40 Noise Pollution – I have set up a petition calling for the Welsh Government to provide funding (as set out in their noise management action plan) for resurfacing of this road, one of only three trunk roads in Wales to have the concrete surface it has.
Broadband – In addition to the work I have undertaken in our economy and development committee I have liaised with numerous residents and businesses on the issue of poor broadband infrastructure and worked with BT as part of their Superfast Cymru scheme to get updates on their works programme.

4. TRAINING AND DEVELOPMENT

I have attended a number of training and development events. One of the key areas of training over the last 12 months has been on the Future Generations and Well Being Bill. I look forward to jointly chairing the meetings of the Public Service Board which has been established to examine the performance of our local public bodies against the measures of this Bill.

5. ADDITIONAL COMMENTS

Members of Llanover community council have led on a bid for Rural Development Fund money to support a village hall broadband scheme which would make our halls Wi-Fi enabled and provide training hubs for the local community. I fully support this bid and am working with members and officers as part of the process for funding.

I believe many parts of our rural ward could benefit from rural development funding and I would encourage any community groups to get in touch if they feel there might be an opportunity to access these funds to support community initiatives in our ward.

I am a long standing supporter of Gwent YFC and facilitated their debating competition at County Hall, which was a fantastic event – Gwent YFC play a huge role in my local ward and in other rural areas in providing a forum for young people to socialise as well as learning valuable life skills.

In the final 12 months before the next election in May 2017 I am keen to work closely to identify areas of concern for residents and ensure that these are taken forward where there is a council responsibility to do so, or raise awareness if it’s an issue under the remit of Welsh Government.