

## Joanne Harding: My Role as a Councillor

I was elected in 2011 to represent the ward of Urmston in Trafford. I was adamant, that when considering going for election that I only wanted to serve as a Councillor in the community where I live.

I still feel as strongly about this today.

My years as a Councillor have been a real learning curve. I can say quite honestly that I have grown massively as a person and also as a professional.

I hit the ground running back in 2011 when I led a huge community campaign to try and save services at Trafford General Hospital. I was very clear that I wanted the campaign to be a true community campaign, whilst using my influence at a political level to ensure that the public were truly engaged in decision making. We didn't win the battle on this occasion but we did win the war! I recall commissioners and the decision makers saying that it was one of the best campaigns they had encountered and we really kept their feet to the fire!

It was during this campaign that I truly learned about pragmatism and compromise. I can understand that when Councillors are elected that they feel they can really change things in the area they represent and it can be soul destroying when it doesn't happen. A piece of advice that I share with all new Councillors that I have mentored is to always manage expectations. My starting point when meeting residents and community groups is to ask "what would you like to happen as a result of our meeting?" It is much better to start off with a clear understanding of what may or may not be possible and then try and work out what a decent compromise looks like.

The role of a Councillor takes on many shapes. I have been really impressed with the report that came out of University of Birmingham "The 21<sup>st</sup> Century Councillor". I think it provides an excellent framework for us all to consider how as Councillors we adapt and flex to these roles. I would encourage all elected members on a regular basis to consider how they feel they work in the roles :

- Steward of Place
- Advocate
- Buffer
- Sensemaker
- Catalyst
- Entrepreneur
- Orchestrator

As I have grown in experience and am now in an Executive role, I have considered the impact on me as ward Councillor. I continually remind myself and officers that whilst we are working to change systems as a whole, it is imperative that what lies at the heart of my role, is the relationship I have with the citizens that I serve. If we are genuine at a local democracy level about co-production then we need to speak a language that people can understand.

I know that two of my key strengths are as an "orchestrator" and an "entrepreneur" but that doesn't mean I have all the solutions for what I might be seeking to achieve with others. I now look to others across my political group or community to see who might be able to fulfil the other roles to really bring a project together. As public services are changing, we have to look to more creative solutions to achieve the outcomes we want. It is incumbent upon all of us in a Councillor role to consider what part we play in a system that requires some bold decision making.