

SLOUGH BOROUGH COUNCIL
AUDIT & CORPORATE GOVERNANCE COMMITTEE – TABLED PAPER

COMMENT/QUESTION FROM COUNCILLOR BEDI

The Chair of the Committee agreed that the following statement and question be put in view of the fact Councillor Bedi was unable to attend in person under Rule 30:

Statement from Councillor Bedi:

We are here today to discuss the damning audit report on the Council's terrifying finances and how this will now be rectified. What needs to be discussed and investigated is how this was allowed to happen and why the issues were not identified sooner. This report has clearly shown that our internal processes regarding scrutiny and monitoring have fallen short, and highlights appointed staff did not have the required skills for the roles taken on. What has not been stated is who appointed the staff, and what experience and qualifications were expected from them. I would like to understand who was monitoring and signing off reports that have led us to this meeting as surely the Section 151 Officer and Finance Department could not have been operating in isolation for the last 3 or more years. Now we need to fix this, and we bring in a team with expertise. How will this expertise be paid for and at what cost over the total period it will take?

My concern and that of my residents is how was this allowed to happen and who is ultimately responsible for these huge failings that will undoubtedly impact on the lives of the residents we stand to serve. 2017/18 accounts stated there were problems, the council recognised this and signed them stating they were dealing with these problems, yet here we are. I have been contacted by a resident who is a financial accountant. I read to you her words, 'The audit findings are the worst I have ever seen! If it was talking about a one man band that had grown suddenly over a year or two and tried to do its own accounts without an accountant or bookkeeper, it would be more understandable! She goes on to say she would be happy to come in to the council and help to sort out the reconciliations and processes. This is her key strength and she recognises that a robust project team is needed. This of course will not happen, instead the very residents who will be severely impacted will have no say. I hope as I requested in my meeting with the Chief Executive and the newly appointed Section 151 Officer, residents will at least be given a formal apology for the state we not find ourselves in, I am sure you will agree this is the least that they so rightfully deserve.

My question to the leader of this council and the CEO are when did they become aware there were such huge problems and what action did they take to remedy the situation?. Furthermore is the leader having regular one to ones with the chief executive, since a former chief executive was paid off because a former leader, was allegedly not undertaking formal 121. Is history going to repeat itself again?

This council is responsible for its Town and its residents, this is not a game of Monopoly in which we can choose to buy wherever we land, in whichever town we see fit. This is not a minuscule error which was the response given to me, this is real life with serious implications, due the lack of expertise or actions taken by this Leadership.