

## **Strategic theme motion 2**

This Council remains very concerned at the serious nature of the whistleblowing allegations, which were circulated to all Members on 14 November 2013 and which relate to management of the council's finances, and in particular the hiring practices and use of long term consultants to fill vacant posts at rates significantly above the salaries associated with the posts.

Whilst welcoming the independent review into this matter being conducted by external auditors, this Council is extremely disappointed that these important investigations have still not been concluded some two and a half months later – particularly considering the initial commitment made in November 2013 to investigate the matters raised as quickly as possible – and that the promised report has yet to be presented to Members. This means that the matter can not now be considered by Full Council on 5 February 2014 as part of its discussions on financial management.

This Council further regrets that Councillor David Williams had to wait until 28 January 2014 to receive any response from the Cabinet Member for Finance to the Urgent Question that was submitted under Section 4 (A) Para 12.4 (b) of the Council's Constitution at the last Full Council meeting on 20 November 2013 regarding this administration's expenditure on consultants and agency staff and the procedures in place to ensure it is properly audited. The refusal by the Cabinet Member to answer an Urgent Question within the allotted timescales is in clear contravention of Section 4 (A) Para 12.7 of the Council's Constitution as well as of his own words and commitment when he stated on 20 November last year that his "intention is to reply in full later in the week, in line with the deadline for non-priority questions".

This Council believes that residents and council taxpayers in Merton rightly expect the local authority to:

- a) be a responsible guardian of the money which it manages on their behalf; and
- b) operate in a fully open and transparent manner;

and therefore reiterates its clear regret both at not being able to consider the outcome of these whistleblowing investigations at its meeting on 5 February 2014 and at the unacceptable delay in providing a response to an Urgent Question on this matter.

Councillor Diane Neil Mills

Councillor Suzanne Grocott

Councillor Samantha George

Councillor Oonagh Moulton

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