

Minute 75 – Public Question Time

Questions from Mark Wooding:

1. Could it be clarified if there is a Cabinet at the moment? If there isn't a Cabinet, what are the implications for the recent decision on 3 rivers?

Answer:

At the time the question was asked, the Cabinet was not quorate.

There are no implications for the recent decision on 3Rivers as the Cabinet was quorate at the time the decision was taken.

Questions from Paul Elstone:

Question 1

Public Document Pack Scrutiny Committee – 13 February 2023 35 I understand that a senior and very well-informed member of this Council has requested the Devon Audit Partnership have its fraud team look into the 3 Rivers business dealings with the Council. Public money should not be loaned to any Company under fraud investigation. Given that all loans to 3 Rivers are public money, will this Scrutiny Committee ensure that 3 the Rivers Business Plan approvals are rescinded. Also place on hold all future 3 Rivers expenditures, other than for safety or environmental reasons. This until the results of any fraud investigation are published?

Answer:

Devon Audit Partnership (DAP) have been approached to review the handling of 3RDL finances by MDDC to eliminate any wrong doing by Officers and/or Members of the Council. Any such review will be considered and shaped as necessary before being formally commissioned.

Question 2

At the Cabinet meeting of the 31st January 2023 I asked about the reported problems with 3 Rivers Accounts and the lack of an Auditors Report. In a written response I was told that; "In assessing the company's business plan(s), the Cabinet has considered comments/feedback from the Audit Committee, Scrutiny and Full Council and its professional officers". It is hard to believe that the Cabinet did properly consider the advice being given, since the feedback from Council and Committees was "We do not support these Business Plans". Will Scrutiny Committee please take the advice of Full Council and Audit Committee and send this 27/1/2023 Business Plan straight back to Cabinet with a recommendation that MDDC does not proceed. This until the 3 Rivers Fully Audited Accounts have been published and a further risk assessment has been undertaken by Audit Committee?

Answer:

The recommendations of Scrutiny Committee are included within these minutes.

Question 3

At the same Cabinet meeting I asked; Why was the potential loss of 1.6 million pounds on St Georges Court, known to the Cabinet, kept secret from the MDDC Electorate? The written answer given: This information is restricted due to commercially sensitive nature. This is why the Public have a complete lack of trust in MDDC Executive Officers and Cabinet Members on anything to do with 3 Rivers. Especially so as it seems a senior and very well-informed Member of this Council has said that the Public “do not know the Machiavellian things that have gone on from a finance point of view”. Machiavellian characteristics are marked by cunning, duplicity or bad faith. An example is that 3 Rivers paid four hundred and twenty thousand pounds (£420,000) for low grade land at Bampton but gave the MDDC Planning Committee a viability statement stating the professional land valuation was only two hundred and thirteen thousand pounds (£213,000). Scrutiny Committee – 13 February 2023 36 Will this Scrutiny Committee fulfil their obligation to the people of Mid Devon and remedy this serious situation. This by taking whatever steps are necessary to stop this Business from going any further into decline?

Answer:

The recommendations of Scrutiny Committee are included within these minutes.

Questions from Steve Keable

- a) Did the Cabinet work properly or constitutionally on the 31 January 2023?

Answer

Yes

- b) If so, why?

Answer

The correct procedure was followed, the five days' notice was given, cabinet was quorate, the voting procedure was followed and decision made which was minuted correctly.

- c) If not, why not?

Answer

N/A

- d) Context of my question is the outcome of Council meeting on 18th January where Members were concerned about putting more good money into a questionable enterprise when also considering the cost of living demands of axing services to maintain a balanced budget

Answer

N/A