

## Tories cling to office after massive property bungle

### **“New Administration – Quick wins to demonstrate strong leadership and control”**

Cllr John McGhee, Leader of the Opposition, condemned the Tory Cabinet for the bungled property deal which is being reported to Council on Tuesday.

At least 3 Cabinet or former Cabinet Members are implicated in the bungled deal that will cost Council Tax Payers hundreds of thousands of pounds.

Those Tories who should resign are:

- Cllr Robin Brown who presented the strategy to Cabinet in March 2006 and drew up the plans to hand the running of the Council's £900m property portfolio over to a private company. The strategy appears to have more to do with quick wins than value for money and raising the “NCC profile ... within peer group”.
- Cllr Bill Parker who gave the go ahead – by e-mail – with a lead in period of a little over 2 months which included Christmas – having already piloted changes in contract procedure rules through the council with no reference to scrutiny or the constitution working group – which the Tories abolished. **Clearly Cllr Parker didn't do his homework but he gave the go ahead “I have been kept fully informed .... and can confirm that I am happy for the process to continue.**
- Cllr Jim Harker – this was a key decision for the council. Cllr Harker has a legal duty to publish the Council's Forward Plan. The decision was not properly identified in the council's forward plans. **Further, no budgetary provision was made for the letting of the contract.**

Cllr Harker is the Leader of the Council. He has failed in his duty. His incompetence, first of all in handing this role over to Cllr Parker who already had a wide range of cabinet responsibilities, then in emasculating the Council scrutiny process, then in abolishing the constitution working group which was preceded by a change in the contract procedure rules shows a total disregard for due diligence in dealing with the affairs of the Council.

In the presentation of the revised property strategy to Cabinet – there is a key phrase that sums up the Tories approach to running a Council

### **Quick wins to demonstrate strong leadership and control**

- so to hell with the consequences

let's have a 'quick win' to make us look good.

Cllr McGhee said:-

“It staggers me that all of this debacle took place under a Tory Administration that told the electorate in 2005 that they had ‘experience in running businesses’ – given what has happened perhaps that should have read ‘RUINING businesses’ given the scale of what has happened.”

“I am conscious that in calling for three senior Tories to resign others may be tempted to close ranks. But members of the Cabinet should ask themselves how well informed they have been over this situation. Tory backbenchers need to ask how well served they have been by a leadership that so badly handled a situation that the Council is now in uncharted waters – Councillors themselves are asking whether being bound by legal constraints is stopping them

doing their job on behalf of the people who elected them. The veil of secrecy surrounding this issue has to be lifted but we have to balance this with protecting the council tax payers from even greater losses.”

“I am very disturbed by this report. A report of this nature is almost unprecedented – so much so that I was advised initially that it was not possible for Councillors to table amendments. In other words, it was a take it or leave it report. That, of course is totally unacceptable – Councillors must have the right to accept or reject advice – that is what we are elected to do.”

“This report outlines the staggering incompetence of Cabinet Members – current and previous.”

“It transpires also, that having signed the contract we had 6 members of staff in place to supervise it. Two left and two more were allowed voluntary redundancy. How on earth did Cllrs Brown, Parker and Harker imagine the remaining staff members were going to cope?”

“My concern is that this whole fiasco will be kicked into the long grass until after the election. I am sure that is what some of the Cabinet want to happen. But the public has the right to know that their council tax has been squandered because the Tories wanted a ‘quick win to show good leadership’. What they actually delivered was a bungled deal for which that the tax payer will pay dearly.”

“I am also concerned at the lack of record keeping of the decisions – and the loss of or lack key e-mails, correspondence and records – this is all basic stuff as anyone running a business knows.”

“In the meantime, the Leader of the Council produces a Leader of the Council’s Report that makes no mention of Carillion – it is almost as though this whole fiasco never happened. Regrettably it has happened and it has happened under Cllr Harker’s leadership – he must resign.”

“During the election period, the Chief Executive will consult with the three Party leaders on any major decision’s – this was a major decision that the Tories under Cllr Harker’s leadership have got almost 100% wrong – he should not be allowed the opportunity to make even more mistakes.”

“If the report is accepted, the Council will engage Counsel again, at what cost?”

**“So as a result of the bungling of Cllrs Brown and Parker, and the lack of leadership from Cllr Harker we have a situation where the Council is on the edge of special measures – I wonder what the Audit Commission would make of this**

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