

Simon Howell
Monks Corner Cottage
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Great Sampford
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2 September 2012

Cllr Alan Dean
49 Recreation Ground
Stansted CM24 8BD

Dear Alan,

Thank you for your email letter dated 19 August 2012.

I am afraid I cannot agree with many of the points you raise in your letter.

Firstly, I believe you have misunderstood what was said at the meeting of the Performance & Committee on 16 August. Secondly, and perhaps more importantly, you have a misunderstanding of the respective roles, responsibilities and authority of an individual Committee Member, compared to that of the Committee. As I have sought to make clear on a number of occasions, and again at our last meeting, discussion of individual benefits cases are not within the remit of the Committee and an individual Committee Member does not have a mandate to go off and investigate such matters on behalf of the Committee.

In your letter you make a number of allegations about the operations of the Council and its officers. I am not aware of any evidence to support your statements and your letter is silent on how these matters are linked to my chairmanship of the Performance & Audit Committee.

You make a number of incorrect statements, not least that *'one Conservative member did resign from the committee last year because you suppressed debate on benefits' performance*. I recall you were not present at the only meeting that this member attended. However, the minutes of the meeting held on 23 June 2011 fully and accurately report the issues discussed. My recollection is that the Councillor in question expressed an opinion on benefits processing accuracy, which the rest of the Committee did not accept. At no point did I suppress any discussion of the subject.

You suggest you do not wish to make a formal complaint and would prefer to pursue an *'informal mechanism'*, but that you have circulated copies of your letter to all Committee members and other attendees. It would be interesting to know if the views you express are shared by other members of the Committee, or are your opinions alone. For the record, Officers have sought the opinions of the External Auditor on the contents of your letter and they have stated they *'don't have any concerns about the issues Cllr. Dean has raised or the operation of the Performance & Audit Committee'*.

Nevertheless, in the interests of transparency and good governance, I feel the issues you raise are sufficiently serious to warrant being put on the record. Accordingly, as it is already not a private correspondence, I propose that your letter and my reply should be included in the papers for the

next meeting of the Committee; when, if you wish, this matter can be properly debated and recorded.

You state you are unsure whether you wish to continue as a member of the Performance & Audit Committee. As it is apparently my chairmanship of the Committee that is causing you most concern, perhaps I should not express an opinion on this. However, on a personal level, I feel you often bring appropriate and proportionate challenge to the work of the Committee and generally I find your contributions 'good value'. I would be disappointed if you felt this matter warranted your resignation. However, this is a matter only you can decide upon.

Yours sincerely,

Simon Howell
Chairman, Performance & Audit Committee