

Save Our Island: Is it now time to establish an oversight committee for Havant Borough Council?

AS WE REPORTED last month, Havant Borough Council was in disarray.

The result has been a total restructure of the leadership. We now have a new Leader and Cabinet in control. The new Leader is not considered to side with any of the warring factions, and all of the Cabinet Leads are new appointments.

This represents good news for Island residents as the new Cabinet Lead for Planning, Hayling Seafront Strategy and Coastal Management is Clare Satchwell – who has stood out as a long-term champion for the interests of Hayling. It's interesting to note that only a few months ago Clare was manoeuvred off the Development Management Committee.

The bad news is that all of the members of the disruptive factions are still on the Council, so the new Leadership is not going to find life easy.

The major area the new management must address is the lack of sound Governance across the whole spectrum of the HBC accountabilities.

Again, as we have been arguing for years now, there is no process in our 'single party' Council to ensure actions and decisions are made in a fair, intelligent and professional manner in support of the needs of the Community.

The previous Scrutiny Board had no teeth, and was only advisory, as seen last year when the Board's concerns regarding the Hayling Island Transport Assessment were overridden, and it was signed off with numerous outstanding issues.

In the absence of any meaningful Political Opposition, it is essential that an Oversight Committee is established to audit any of the proposals and decisions made by Council members, with the Committee having the power to investigate and require changes where appropriate. The new Overview and Scrutiny Committee may have increased powers to cover these essential requirements, but there are no published Committee responsibilities and objectives to which we can refer.

This is a golden opportunity to avoid the example of East Hants Council's Governance failure, and prevent sliding down the slippery slope back to the chaos of the recent past.

If the Leadership grasp this nettle, community support will be much easier to gain, and HBC will become less contentious with an open and transparent approach, avoiding the need for misleading spin doctoring which seems to be the public face at present.

This month, the Government Inspectorate will undertake their examination of the HBC Local Plan. They have prepared a long list of questions to be answered on the 12th of July. There are over 45 questions which specifically relate to Hayling Island which are remarkably similar to the questions raised by the Representatives of the Residents on the Hayling Island Infrastructure Advisory Group over the past three years, and only now is HBC forced to answer all of the questions honestly and fully. (You can see the Inspectors' Schedule of Matters and Issues for the Examination – Stage 1 Hearings document on www.saveourisland.org.uk)

We will update you on the results of the Hearing next month.