

# Godstone Parish Council

(incorporating the Villages of Godstone, South Godstone and Blindley Heath)

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18 November 2019

Dear Councillor T Elias

## **OPEN LETTER TO COUNCILLOR TONY ELIAS, LEADER OF TANDRIDGE DISTRICT COUNCIL**

We, the Godstone Parish Council, wish to express our extreme concern over the information published by Tandridge District Council in respect to the predicted budget overspend of £1.1 million. This overspend represents 10% of the total council budget and to suggest that Tandridge District Council has effectively lost such a large sum of money through 'teething problems' resulting from the implementation of the 'Customer First' programme is preposterous and can hardly be described as 'teething problems'. To have reached this point in the financial year and suddenly discover such a huge shortfall is demonstrable of a complete lack of senior management control.

Whilst the timing of the resignation of the Chief Executive, Louise Round, is interesting, the comments you have made both in the press and on the Tandridge District Council website are, frankly, incredible. "Louise has been an outstanding chief executive and we are very sorry to see her go". Louise Round was the Chief Executive Officer - The Chief Executive Officer is the most senior corporate, executive, or administrative officer in charge of managing an organisation. Under her leadership the Council found itself with a £1.1 million overspend in its finances. This can't have happened overnight and it is entirely the responsibility of a Chief Executive Officer to know exactly what is happening within the organisation at all times. Your statement cannot, therefore, be true.

The Strategic Director of Place, Piers Mason, who was the architect of the 'Customer First' programme has not been in his office for several weeks and, as such, has been unavailable to answer any questions relating to this matter. Any formal enquiries to senior employees of the council or of elected Councillors are met with comments along the lines of "I am restricted on what I can tell you for legal reasons which I cannot disclose." Can I remind you that this is public money that the Council appears to have lost and it is public services that the Council is proposing to cut as a result of it. To hide behind "legal reasons" is unacceptable and appears nothing more than an attempt to obfuscate matters further.

Godstone Parish Council consists of the elected representatives of more than 6000 parishioners who are asking what is going on at Tandridge District Council, where the money has gone, why nobody seemed to know about it and what is being done to mitigate the impact on public services. Somebody, somewhere, knew about this. Somebody, somewhere, knew this was happening. Somebody, somewhere, is responsible for this.

We, Godstone Parish Council, insist that Tandridge District Council stop hiding the truth and using 'legal reasons' as some form of shield to avoid answering to the public for this incompetence and mismanagement and issue a clear and truthful statement explaining how this situation has occurred, who is responsible and what steps have been taken in relation to their actions and what is being done to reassure the public that this situation will never, ever, occur again in the future. As Leader of the Council you have a responsibility to issue such a statement as a matter of urgency.

Signed on behalf of Godstone Parish Council

Jim Gardner  
Chairman