

COMMENTS OF COUNCILLOR SEÁN WOODWARD ON INVESTIGATOR'S REPORT

I was brought up in Fareham and have spent my entire working life in healthcare including 25 years in the pharmaceutical industry and the last 13 years running my own healthcare company, LBhealthcare, in Fareham. I have been happily married [REDACTED] for 23 years and our son, [REDACTED] is studying for a master's degree in chemical engineering.

I have been a Councillor for over 34 years on Fareham Borough Council (Leader for the last 21 years) and am in my 16th year as a Member of Hampshire County Council having been Executive Member for Economy, Transport and Environment and, latterly, Recreation and Heritage.

Why am I telling you this? Because while some of you are colleagues and know something of my political life, I do value my family's private life and never share it publicly. Look at my personal Facebook page and you will find nothing other than a picture of our horses which is a passion I share with our son.

BACKGROUND

14. I asked for my decision day to be changed in April 2019. The Leader of the Council was unchanged at that time; there had not "been a change of Leader" so this part of the allegation is completely without foundation. Having consulted my diary, on 23rd May 2019 I was invited to present certificates at a Royal Naval gliding course at Solent Airport in Fareham which clashed with the originally proposed decision day timing which would have been the reason I asked for it to be moved. In fact, having also checked my Facebook page the posting of 23rd May is on it and is attached (SW1). I arranged for the date to be changed due to another engagement. I had no further need to be in Winchester that day as the morning's Culture and Communities Select Committee which I always attend was also cancelled which can be easily verified. I was invited by [REDACTED], Chief Instructor for the Royal Navy on 2nd April 2019 (invitation attached - SW2). A couple of weeks later I contacted Nicola Horsey to ask for the decision day to be moved due to the diary clash. I was aware that there were 17 grants falling to be determined. I agreed a date of 7th May 2019 which was suggested not by me but by the democratic services officer in her email to me of 17th April 2019 (contained in SG13). I did not have "extensive contact" with officers about any particular grant, the contact I had was about all 17 grants falling to be determined.

It was the grants officer who stated in her resume of grants in early April that the decision on the Rockets grant and two others should be made in April not any alleged influence by me. Spreadsheet attached as SW3

15. I was contacted by [REDACTED] to ask whether the grant could be made instead to Solent Stars. I said to her that I doubted that would be possible and a fresh application would likely be required but I would ask the question. Wishing to be helpful I did speak to Nicola Horsey and asked her. She suggested that [REDACTED]

should write to her which I understand she did. I did not contact the officers “in support” of this request. I simply asked for advice.

PC COLLIER

23. I have never had a conversation with PC Collier about grants or any other matter, so this is complete fabrication, and no evidence has been supplied in support.
24. A new Cabinet was not being appointed at 10am on that day or even that week. There was not a new Leader of the Council, so this statement too is complete fabrication. In fact, the incoming Leader made it clear that he would be keeping the same Cabinet members and that was common knowledge. I have to assume that this concocted and very inaccurate story came from a political opponent who was a member of the Conservative Party and had openly criticised my leadership, had visited PC Collier (which our local Conservative Association has evidence of in the statement by Chairman [REDACTED] at SW12), and was expelled from the Party a couple of weeks before the complaint was made [REDACTED]. [REDACTED] The change of date for the decision day was I understand advised to the Rockets by the council grants officer.
25. By invitation I attended a training event with my son at the end of 2018. I occasionally attended training. The only shows I attended where the Rockets were present were when I was invited by the organisers – nothing to do with the Rockets. The only one I attended out of the Fareham area was Abingdon Air Show which I was invited to by the organiser to assist with planning for an upcoming air show in Fareham. I also presented prizes at an awards evening at the end of 2018 to which I was invited by PC Morris.
27. Not relevant but I was passing [REDACTED] property to attend a meeting with the Harbourmaster at the end of the same road. And I live 3 miles away and my mother lives around the corner.
28. This is complete fabrication as evidenced by [REDACTED] statement (SW11).
29. Complete fabrication except I was indeed on the telephone to [REDACTED] [REDACTED] when I witnessed PC Collier’s assault on [REDACTED] which was on the highway outside his home, not hers. [REDACTED] instructed me to immediately call 999 as any member of the public would.
30. [REDACTED]
32. As the investigator has already stated I did not approve any grant applications therefore PC Collier’s statements are a complete fabrication without foundation

and no evidence is supplied to support this. I readily agree I give all possible help and support to all community grant applicants, which I see as part of my role.

33. There was no such conversation, so this again is a complete fabrication without foundation and no evidence has supplied to support this. And as for saying they “no longer needed the ramps” – half the ramps were supplied and delivered, and I was invited to a training session to see them. The problem was I understand that they were not paid for.

PC MORRIS

38. Not true. The ramps were not free. If they were the grant would not have been approved.
40. This is all hearsay. As well as untrue. Fareham Borough Council did not increase the grant from £5,000 to £15,000. The application was for £15,000 as can be evidenced in the original application.
41. Complete fabrication. [REDACTED] has supplied the evidence for the investigator of [REDACTED], pictures of the injuries she received from [REDACTED] and expressed her willingness to be interviewed by the investigator which for some reason he did not take up.
42. By PC Morris’s own statement the information about when the grant would be discussed came from the council, not me.
43. Having just stated that he was advised by the council about the grant PC Morris contradicts himself and says he had all the information from [REDACTED].
44. Untrue. A council would never insure a councillor to drive a car. To suggest otherwise is ludicrous. Again, no evidence is supplied.

FELICITY ROE

51. The grant system was changed from a reliance on ongoing revenue funding given to a limited number of organisations to generally capital grants at my request. This was to increase the amount of funding available for capital grants for organisations looking to improve buildings or purchase equipment. I became Executive Member in May 2018 and within 2 weeks started discussions with officers on the changes which were finalised in June 2018. I met the Leader of the Council, Councillor Roy Perry as well as the Director immediately after taking office to discuss my proposals and wrote to him in detail about them in June 2018 to seek his support. (His statement [SW4] and my email [SW5] attached). I then spent months visiting all of the organisations that would be affected by these changes to revenue funding before I made decisions on them as part of the budget-setting process in January 2019. As

well as a briefing to the Culture and Communities Select Committee letters were also sent to Councillors in September 2018 (attached SW6) to advise them of the new system that I was proposing. This was not something which suddenly happened in January 2019. I also exchanged emails with many other groups about the launch of the new scheme of which just two are attached (SW7 and SW8)

I first met the Rockets in August 2018 so any suggestion of creating a new grant scheme to accommodate a possible grant application seven months later from an organisation I had never met is absurd as well as untrue. In August 2018 the Rockets requested my help in finding them a training ground. The £15,000 grant request was not submitted until March 2019. I exchanged emails with officers following complaints from the applicants that the new online application system had failed.

Mrs Roe is correct to say the new system was not formally approved until January 2019. Her inference that this was all done in that month when the process of development of the new system was finalised in June 2018 is inaccurate but perhaps unsurprising as she did not become the Director until December 2018 and therefore had no involvement in the evolution of the new system, so would not be aware of any of the foregoing facts.

52. I regularly forewarn officers about grants that I am aware will be submitted as I am very pro-active in signposting potential applicants to the grant scheme. Also, in assisting them on occasion with any queries on the paperwork and visiting them which I see as part of my role. I have assisted organisations in achieving sizeable grant support over the last two years including one to a Hampshire museum for £100,000 agreed by the Leader of the Council after we both visited the site. Also, I was involved in a grant, again agreed by the Leader, to help purchase a countryside site for the Hampshire and Isle of Wight Wildlife Trust. My message here is that I have absolute community focus and work with many organisations to help them achieve their aspirations with support from the County Council and other bodies all in support of the Recreation and Heritage aims of my portfolio. I see my role in this as bringing organisations and support together and many organisations have directly benefited from capital grants without which their dreams would never be realised including village halls, churches, community centres, bowling clubs, etc throughout Hampshire.
53. My preferred approach to grants was already in place – it was the subject of the decisions I had made and was formulated in June 2018.
54. The online grant application process was troublesome, and I did indeed receive and pass on complaints about it hence the email exchanges.
55. As can be seen from the emails they all related to the difficulties in submitting the grant application online. I did not support the application in any of them. There were 4 emails from me in response to the 4 from the grants officer all included in SG13. I did, unsurprisingly, ask when the application would be ready for decision. None of the emails related to the application, they all related to the failed online

application process which I highlighted so the council could rectify it and prevent further complaints and frustration from this and other groups.

57. Felicity Roe and I share a passion for horses, so I did mention to her that I was pursuing a long-held ambition in taking my HGV tests to enable me to get a larger lorry for transporting horses. I really do question how that private conversation is in any way relevant to a complaint about the handling of a grant application. I believe I mentioned it twice in conversations by way of small talk before or after one of our regular briefing meetings.
58. I do recall in April 2019 finding a proposed decision date clashed with another engagement as I was invited to present certificates at a Royal Naval gliding course at Solent Airport in Fareham which would have been the reason I asked for it to be moved. In fact, having also checked my Facebook page the posting of 23rd May 2019 is on it and is attached at SW1. I arranged for the date to be changed due to another engagement. I had no further need to be in Winchester that day as the morning's Culture and Communities Select Committee which I always attend was also cancelled. I was invited by [REDACTED] Chief Instructor for the Royal Navy, on 2nd April 2019 (invitation attached at SW2). Some days later after my annual leave I contacted Nicola Horsey to ask for the decision day to be moved. I was aware that there were 17 grants falling to be determined and I was keen to make the decisions as soon as possible.

It was the grants officer who stated in her resume of grants in early April that the decision on the Rockets grant and two others should be made in April and simply noted in May. Spreadsheet attached at SW3.

59. I was offered 7th May in the afternoon by the democratic services officer. It was not my suggestion but due to having four diarised meetings in Fareham in the afternoon I asked if it could be in the morning prior to a 10am meeting. It was set for 9am.
60. The new Leader was appointed by the Council on the morning of 17th May NOT the afternoon of 7th May. On 17th May the new Leader would announce his Executive Members. The date of 7th May therefore had no significance whatever and Mrs Roe is mistaken in her statement. The incoming Leader had made it clear well before his election that he would be retaining the existing Cabinet members as did the unsuccessful leadership candidates. There was never the slightest chance of a change in cabinet members.
61. I did not ask Cllr Heron to make the decision. That was a matter for the Leader as I had declared an interest in February (spreadsheet submitted on 2nd February 2020 attached as SW9) and decided not to take the decision. The Leader deputed Cllr Heron to take the decision.
62. I was NOT in the room as my decision day was over and I had left the room. In fact, Cllr Heron advised me at a subsequent meeting that we had together at 10am that he had made the decision. He would not have done that if I had been at his side

throughout. There were probably six other people in the meeting who would be aware that I left the room, not least the committee clerk. None were interviewed.

63. As stated, the decision to move the meeting was because I was unavailable for the initial date. If Mrs Roe or any of her officers had any concerns whatsoever through the process, she could have contacted me. She did not. Also, there were sixteen other grant applications on the same agenda, not just the Rockets one. The emails related to the online application process failings, not the merits or otherwise of the application. As per Mrs Roe's email of 17th April 2019 she clearly had in mind (albeit mistakenly) that the decision to move the decision day was in relation to the Rockets grant application. She even went so far as to write "It seems strange as the lorry won't be ready for this summer season." It would appear therefore she had decided on the reason for the date change with no evidence. If she had asked me, I would have explained the reason. She seems to have forgotten that 17 applications fell to be determined, not one.
65. I did not state that FBC would be transferring its grant. I said it had received the same request. In the event it decided not to pay the grant. I was contacted by [REDACTED] to ask whether the grant could be made instead to Solent Stars. I said to her that I doubted that would be possible and a fresh application would likely be required but I would ask the question. I did ask Nicola Horsey and she suggested that [REDACTED] should write to her which I understand she did.
67. I did say that in my view neither organisation should be paid the grant and it should be open to them to apply again if they wished. Thankfully, the grant was not paid to either organisation, thereby protecting the reputation of the County Council.
68. The investigator has details of the assault that I witnessed. [REDACTED]
71. I do not recall such a conversation and can find no record of such a conversation. If the Director had any concerns about my handling of any issues within my portfolio, she could and indeed should have raised them with me at the time. No officer ever expressed to me any concerns about any issues relating to grants and nor was I ever provided with any training on how to handle grant applications.
72. It was natural that I would query the email regarding the grant as I thought that it was similar to the grant that was originally written up for approval. I was passed from officer to officer until I received an answer. I prefaced each call with the fact that, as I had a personal interest, I would not be involved in taking the eventual decision.
73. The applicant asked me when the decision would be made. I saw no reason not to ask the grants officer because I was confused to understand why it had not been added to the spreadsheet of applications.

75. Given that on 22nd October 2019 I received an email stating that the Solent Stars grant should not be awarded yet apparently “in early November the grants team advised [REDACTED] that the application would not be processed in time for the November decision day” is a bit strange but was in any event overtaken by the withdrawal of the application.

77. I prefaced all my comments with the fact that I had an interest and would not be involved in making the decision. There is nothing in writing to that effect as the grant application was never formalised into the spreadsheet and was withdrawn within six weeks and before it could be considered.

I did indeed show someone a video of me driving a lorry – that was three months after the grant application was withdrawn and approaching a year after I had passed my tests. I really cannot see it as being of any relevance and it concerns me that there is an attempt to conflate the two issues. Again, a private matter that has no relevance or place in this investigation.

CLLR HERON

84. I DID leave the room. There was no “rest of the meeting” as the decision Cllr Heron was making was the one and only item for him for decision. I had made my decisions on 16 grants, ended the meeting, left and did not return. Not surprisingly Cllr Heron’s comments are really quite vague given that he was being interviewed nearly a year after what would have probably been to him an inconsequential 5-minute event that is difficult to recall after such a long period.

CLLR WOODWARD

97. It was 21st August 2019 that PC Morris and [REDACTED] first came to see me on behalf of the Rockets. I had never heard of them prior to that. It was the first time I had met or spoken to either of them.

106. It was on 2nd February 2019 that I sent a spreadsheet to Miss Lambert highlighting my interest and that I would not be taking the eventual decision. This was before the grant application was even submitted. I attach that in evidence (SW9) including the date stamp showing that I made the statement on that date, not April 2019, as stated (SW10). I did make a similar comment on the April 2019 spreadsheet when it can be seen (SW3) that it was the grants officer who made the suggestion that an early decision should be made by the end of April, not me. It appears from her comments on this application and others that the decision would be an officer decision and merely noted at my May decision day.

109. Having consulted my diary, on 23rd May 2019 I was invited to present certificates at a Royal Naval gliding course at Solent Airport in Fareham which clashed with the

originally proposed decision day timing which would have been the reason I asked for it to be moved. In fact, having also checked my Facebook page the posting of 23rd May is on it and is attached (SW1). I arranged for the date to be changed due to another engagement. I had no further need to be in Winchester that day as the morning's Culture and Communities Select Committee which I always attend was also cancelled. I was invited by [REDACTED] Chief Instructor for the Royal Navy on 2nd April 2019 (invitation attached - SW2). A couple of weeks later I contacted Nicola Horsey to ask for the decision day to be moved. I was aware that there were 17 grants falling to be determined and I was keen to make the decisions as soon as possible. I agreed a date of 7th May 2019 which was suggested not by me but by the democratic services officer. I did not have "extensive contact" with officers about any particular grant. I had contact about all 17 grants.

It was the grants officer who stated in her resume of grants in early April 2019 (SW3) that the decision on the Rockets grant and two others should be made in April.

FINDINGS OF FACT

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- a. I neither chased officers nor pressed for decisions.
- b. The decision day involved grants to 17 organisations, not just one.
- c. This is untrue. I was not determining the application therefore it was irrelevant whether or not I was any sort of Cabinet member. Any changes to Cabinet positions can be made by whoever is the Leader at any time and without notice. The new Leader was not appointed until 17th May 2019. The date was changed due to a prior engagement I had as described and to which I received an invitation in April 2019.

I did make a comment on the April 2019 spreadsheet when it can be seen (attached at SW3) that it was the grants officer who made the suggestion that an early decision should be made by the end of April, not me. It appears from her comments on this application and others that the decision would be an officer decision and merely noted at my May decision day.

- e. I was not in the room. I made the decisions on 16 other grants and left.
- f. This is untrue. I made it clear in February 2019 that one of the applicants was known to me therefore I would not be making the decision. This was a full month before the application was even submitted and 3 months before the decision fell to be made. Of course, a personal interest allows the Member making the declaration to take a full part in the decision-making process.

- g. By the time the decision was made [REDACTED] was no longer an employee of my company.
- j. I did not support the application. I asked questions around its progress. As it never made its way to me for comment I could not have supported it or otherwise.

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- a. The claim that I “chased officers and pressed for decisions” is certainly contradicted by the evidence. The grants submission system had failed, and I highlighted that fact.
- b. The evidence from the complainants attributed to [REDACTED] is untrue and is hearsay as demonstrated in her witness statement and attachments (SW11). The investigator’s statement is inferring false motive to my request to change the date which I have already explained.
- c. The comments attributed to me and to [REDACTED] are untrue as per her statement (SW11). Also, the new Leader could not appoint his Cabinet until 17th May when he became the new Leader so the date of 7th May was irrelevant – morning or afternoon. Having consulted my diary, on 23rd May 2019 I was invited to present certificates at a Royal Naval gliding course at Solent Airport in Fareham which clashed with the originally proposed decision day timing which would have been the reason I asked for it to be moved. In fact, having also checked my Facebook page the posting of 23rd May is on it and is attached (SW1). I arranged for the date to be changed due to another engagement. I had no further need to be in Winchester that day as the morning’s Culture and Communities Select Committee which I always attend was also cancelled. I was invited by [REDACTED] Chief Instructor for the Royal Navy on 2nd April 2019 (invitation attached – SW2). A couple of weeks later I contacted Nicola Horsey to ask for the decision day to be moved. I was aware that there were 17 grants falling to be determined and I was keen to make the decisions as soon as possible. I agreed a date of 7th May 2019 which was suggested by the democratic services officer, not by me. The claim by the complainants is therefore false on any balance of probabilities and there is no evidence to support it but plenty to contradict it.

It was the grants officer who stated in her resume of grants in early April that the decision on the Rockets grant and two others should be made in April. (Spreadsheet attached as SW3).

- e. I have stated I was not present, and I was not. Cllr Heron did not state categorically that I was present. Half a dozen other attendees would I hope be able to recall me leaving the room although we are talking about a 5-minute event that happened 19 months ago. As there were 6 other people in the room the balance of probabilities does not suggest I am not telling the truth. The investigator would need to have interviewed all of them which he did not.

- f. There is no requirement to state the nature of an interest – only whether it is personal in which case a Member can take a full part in decision and voting or disclosable pecuniary in which case the Member must take no part in the determination and must leave the room. I had a personal interest so according to the Code could have taken a full part in the process AND decision. In the event I went beyond the requirements and took no part in the decision.
 - j. I do dispute this for the reason given above.
 - k. This was not “accepted” by me. It is a matter of fact. But the two elements of obtaining a licence and driving the lorry are separated by a year so are of no significance or even a part of the complaints.
134. I was not “heavily” involved, and nor did I show “extensive” interest. Those are adjectives added by the investigator. I did not raise the application at my first decision day. I had other decision days prior to January 2019. In fact, at that time an application had not even been made. My interest and involvement in many applications is extensive; I have visited recipients of regular revenue funding to hear their views, explain mine and generally engage with them and learn more about their organisations. I have also visited a number of organisations prior to applications and after decisions on their grant applications. Sometimes these visits and contacts have resulted in email and telephone exchanges with officers, sometimes they have not. If this level of interest and contact is inappropriate such has never been suggested to me until now. I therefore refute the claim that my interest in these two applications was “unusually close.”
135. The investigator and Felicity Roe have sought to conflate the matter of applications from these teams with me studying for HGV licences. They appear to be claiming that I supported a grant just so I could drive a particular HGV. I have owned HGVs for years and if I ever want to drive one, I can drive my own HGV. There was no connection whatever between the two. My private ambition to achieve further HGV licensing was just that – private. That is why I was reluctant to discuss my private life with the investigator. The investigator’s statement that this was the “true motive” for my support for the application is simply not true. The fact I have an HGV licence was not a part of the original complaints but is something that the investigator has brought into the investigation to try and find motive for what he appears to have decided to be fact. The claim is preposterous. I have owned HGVs for the last decade and, if I was that desperate to drive one, I would drive my own.
136. The investigator states “it was only very shortly before the decision was made” that I notified officers I would not be making the decision myself. In fact, I advised officers on the afternoon of Sunday 2nd February 2019 (paragraph 106 wrongly states that to have been in April 2019 and that was my fault in not noticing the error in the original record of my statement at paragraph 15) and my comment is attached (SW9). This was a full month before the application was even submitted. I therefore advised officers of my interest over three months before the decision was made and for a second time on 12th April and of the reason for it. It can be seen (attached at SW3)

that it was the grants officer who made the suggestion that an early decision should be made by the end of April, not me. It appears from her comments on this application and others that the decision would be an officer decision and merely noted at my May decision day.

I did not "line" anything up and I have not seen in any of the evidence the investigator gathered any suggestion whatever by any officer that the recommendation to Cllr Heron to approve the grant was anything other than their own recommendation. I have no doubt the officers would have recommended refusal if they had any concerns. An Executive Member can be removed at any time by whoever is the Leader. If I really had "lined" everything up as the investigator states, then whether or not I was still an Executive Member would have been irrelevant.

137. I say again the recommendation to Cllr Heron was the officers' recommendation. To suggest that any of them would bow to pressure and that such pressure would extend all the way up the line to the Director is discourteous to the officers concerned. The decision day included 16 other organisations very keen to see their grant applications decided and I have already explained why I had the date changed. I was not as claimed "extremely" active, another adjective added by the investigator. I was active on all applications as appropriate. I did not "press" officers and the change to the date of the decision day was as already demonstrated of no relevance. I had a simple diary clash.
138. These are subjective comments. I was not influenced in any way and was impartial. Even suggesting a number of onerous conditions be applied to the application which, in the event, led to it failing as one of those conditions was the agreement of Fareham Borough Council to also make an identical grant.
139. These are subjective comments. I had no personal interest in using my HGV licence for a particular lorry and have seen no evidence suggesting otherwise. As I have stated I have my own HGV and have done for years. Nor have I seen any evidence of pressure exerted upon me by [REDACTED] in the matter of the grant. It is only because of my practising good governance that in the unfortunate events surrounding the Rockets and the assault by one director on another that the reputation of the county council in this matter remains intact as the grant was not paid.
140. While there was no requirement to state the nature of my interest I did so at the outset, prior to the grant application even being submitted. I could not have declared that interest any earlier. I was therefore not placed under any obligation and certainly exercised entirely independent judgement as shown by the evidence of my declaration which the investigator has chosen to exclude from his pack despite it having been in his possession and forming a vital part of my defence against his allegations.

141. While there was no requirement to state the nature of my interest I did so at the outset, prior to the grant application even being submitted. I could not have declared that interest any earlier. I was therefore not placed under any obligation and certainly exercised entirely independent judgement as shown by the evidence of my declaration which the investigator has chosen to exclude from his pack despite it having been in his possession and forming a vital part of my defence against his allegations. The decision-making process was therefore totally open and transparent.
142. I DID declare my interest and leave the room.
148. I asked for the date to be brought forward because of a diary clash. Nothing more. There was no requirement for any reason to be given by me beyond the self-evident fact that I could not attend the original date. I was asked on 2nd April 2019 to attend the Royal Navy event on 23rd May 2019. If the investigator wished for that information, he only had to ask. In any event I have attached the evidence. To have made the decision day later would have been most unfair on the 17 grant applicants so I asked for it to be made earlier. In the event it was set for 2 weeks earlier. 7th May not 10th May as stated in error by the investigator. The grants officer, as the evidence shows, stated that three of the grants should be decided in April.

Portfolio changes can be made at any time by whoever is the Leader.

Unfortunately for the investigator's narrative the complainants' story about the date change does not fit the facts either in timings, facts or dates. To suggest otherwise is incredible in the extreme. I have to assume that this concocted and very inaccurate story came from a political opponent who was a member of the Conservative Party, had visited PC Collier, and was expelled from the Party at around the time the complaint was made [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] This is evidenced by the Chairman of the local Conservative Party, [REDACTED] in his evidence attached as SW12 as well as [REDACTED] in SW11.

149. Again, there were 17 grants to be considered. The investigator states that I asked for a particular grant's determination to be brought forward. My request was for all 17 applications to be heard on an earlier date as I could not make the original date. It is the grants officer who suggested earlier determination.
150. I did not remain in the room when the decision was made. It is unfortunate that the decision records are not complete, and I hope that will be changed in the future such that similar errors of recollection cannot occur.
153. The declaration I made was in a timed and dated spreadsheet which was made available to the investigator. It completely disproves his oft-repeated assertion including at paragraphs 140 and 141 that I did not make my declaration until very late in the process. He failed to supply the Panel with the evidence despite it being in his possession, so I have done so. I did make a similar comment on the April 2019 spreadsheet when it can be seen (attached at SW3) that it was the grants officer

who made the suggestion that an early decision should be made by the end of April, not me. It appears from her comments on this application and others that the decision would be an officer decision and merely noted at my May decision day.

154. I am not seeking to “hide behind” anything and such comments really do not assist with the rational consideration of the evidence. Someone seeking to “hide behind” something does not then publicly declare a personal interest in the matter. The investigator seems to be inferring that if officers were aware of the alleged (by him) involvement (by me) in the Rockets or the grant application they would have reached a different recommendation. I fail to see how Member involvement in a community group (there was none) or in assisting with a failed online process would affect proper consideration of the merits of an application. And of course, the officers were aware of my inquiry around the application process failure as it forms a part of the evidence.
155. If a resident asks for help in guidance or advice, I will always provide it. That is what Councillors do. I think it a very tenuous claim to say that assisting at the applicant’s request with the submission process of an application for a grant is the same as making a representation to the Council.
156. I have demonstrated that there were no pressures upon me regarding this application.
157. I am pleased that the investigator now accepts that I did not make my declaration at a late stage as he originally claimed. Now he criticises the detail of the interest. No detail of the interest is required, only that there was one. I however clearly declared why I felt I had an interest at the time before there even was an application to consider. In fact, as my declaration was due to one of the applicants working for my company and that no longer being the case by the time of the determination of the grant even that interest had gone away.

Still the investigator talks about bringing forward a determination date albeit he cannot prove motive. Also, that I supported the applicant to “complete” the application whereas that completion was in reality the problematic submission of the application through a faulty online portal. And as for “pressurising” officers – the definition of pressurising is “strongly persuading someone to do something they do not want to do.” I have seen no evidence that I did anything of the sort. I simply asked in passing when the application would be ready for a decision. This in no way makes the decision-making other than fully open and transparent.

158. I see no plausibility in attempting to link my driving licence status to unpaid and withdrawn grant applications to suggest motive. Such elements were not a part of the complaint and their only relevance appears to be to someone casting around in vain for motive. The investigator has no idea when I had driving lessons or when I took the required driving tests. Yet he seeks to link that element of my private life to unrelated grant applications. In the event of course I did answer the questions asked

about my driving licence status but still feel them not to be relevant to the original complaints.

The investigator has chosen to exclude the spreadsheets where I exchanged information with the grants officer (SW9, SW10 and SW3) and half of the correspondence with my solicitor (SW13) in which his questions were answered and evidence was supplied by [REDACTED] and photographs of the injuries received from [REDACTED]. These exchanges also confirmed that [REDACTED] was happy to be interviewed by the investigator, but he chose to exclude her from his investigation. Why, given that every element of the complaints was attributed to what she had allegedly said to the complainants, was she not interviewed?

Contrary to his statement about me refusing to answer his questions I actually answered all of the investigator's questions and supplied documents that he requested, and he confirmed receipt of same (SW13).

COMMENTS ON THE ALLEGED BREACHES EVEN THOUGH THE INVESTIGATOR HAS NOW REMOVED THIS SECTION FROM HIS REPORT

3.2 Dealing with representations or enquiries from residents, members of communities within the administrative area of Hampshire County Council and visitors fairly, appropriately and impartially.

I am not clear how a grant application submission is a "representation or enquiry". You have not provided any evidence that I was influenced by anyone in reaching this conclusion. If helping organisations with grant applications is unfair, inappropriate and partial then I am surprised. I agree I was predisposed towards the application, but I was certainly not predetermined; in fact, I could not have been as I was never going to make the decision.

3.3 Not allowing other pressures, including the financial interests of yourself or others connected to you, to deter you from pursuing constituents' casework, the interests of the County Council's area, or the good governance of the County Council in a proper manner.

I had no other pressures and certainly no financial interest as I already own my own HGV which I use for my horses. My lifelong ambition to achieve additional HGV licences is nothing whatever to do with an unpaid grant to a motorcycle display team. I booked and paid for the training in 2018 long before the grant applications were discussed or indeed made and can prove same. The fact I made a number of suggestions of onerous conditions on any possible grant award should suggest the good governance of the County Council was high on my list of priorities. As should the fact that despite this only being a personal interest I withdrew from the eventual decision-making. The Code is clear that I could, with a personal interest, have made the decision. I chose not to.

██████████ had no “other pressures” to bring to bear and nor was she “connected to me.” She runs a not-for-profit community interest company as a hobby to support children.

3.4 Exercising independent judgement and not compromising your position by placing yourself under obligations to outside individuals or organisations who might seek to influence the way you perform your duties.

I was clear early on that I had an interest due to knowing one of the applicants. Nobody asked me to elaborate on that. This is the usual way for a personal interest to be declared – that one has such, not what it is. This alleged failure could only be the case if I was intending making a decision on the matters. My judgement is my judgment – views arrived at by me and nobody else. The same will be true of the officers. Their views too are independent and need to go high up an officer chain of command to be put forward as recommendations. I did not place myself under any obligations and nobody sought to influence me.

3.7 Contributing to making the County Council’s decision-making processes as open and transparent as possible.

I did declare my interest in the application at the earliest possible stage and stated what it was – before even it became an application and was submitted. I could not do it earlier than that. Nowhere in the Code does it state that the nature of a personal interest must be stated – merely that there is a personal interest. Again, I went further than required and declared that I knew one of the applicants. By the investigator’s own admission, I did not attempt to influence the decision maker and further I left the room while he made his decision.

FINAL COMMENT ON REPORT

I have already pointed out that I have not to my knowledge had any Code of Conduct training as a Member of the County Council although of course I always do my utmost to abide by it. I can categorically state that I received no training around the handling of Recreation & Heritage grant determinations. If any officer had any concerns whatsoever around my handling of or involvement in any grant applications they were bound to pass their concerns on, presumably to their Director (Felicity Roe), or even to the Chief Executive Officer or Monitoring Officer, in order for them to raise them with me if they felt unable to do so. If I had received a single concern from an officer, I would immediately have reviewed the way I dealt with grant applications. I have helped many organisations with advice on their grant applications as the application process is not easy. My motivation in this was purely out of a desire to help the organisations concerned, not for any personal gain for me or anyone I know.

Finally, a number of the conversations with officers took place 6 – 12 months prior to the investigation and I really am not surprised that some of the versions of event do

not tally and the investigator does point out that no records were kept of these alleged conversations.

The allegations against me have already been considered by a number of other bodies and dismissed. These include Hampshire Constabulary, The Conservative Party, Fareham Borough Council and recently the Local Government Ombudsman.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Seán Woodward". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Councillor Seán Woodward
24th November 2020