

**PETITION – INSTIGATE INQUIRIES AND INVESTIGATIONS IN LIGHT OF DR EDILA’S
REPORT**

Executive Summary

Woking Borough Council has received a petition which asks the Council to instigate appropriate inquiries and investigations following on from Dr Gifty Edila's report.

In accordance with Woking Borough Council’s arrangements for petitions, the matter has been referred for consideration by the Council.

Recommendations

The Council is requested to consider the petition and determine accordingly.

The Committee has the authority to determine the recommendation set out above.

Background Papers:	None.
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1.0 Introduction

- 1.1 A petition has been received which asks the Council to instigate appropriate inquiries and investigations following on from Dr Gifty Edila's report. The petition has been received through the Council's online e-petition scheme and contains 647 signatories.
- 1.2 The number of signatures exceeds the threshold required for a petition to be referred to a meeting of Full Council and accordingly the Petitioner or their nominee has been invited to present the petition at Council.
- 1.3 The petition has been submitted in the following terms:

“We the undersigned petition the council to Instigate appropriate inquiries and investigations following on from Dr Gifty Edila's findings of December 2020 into all actions in public office of key members of the previous Council leadership (particularly, Messrs Bittleston, Morgan, Spinks & Bryant)

As local press accurately reported: <http://www.getsurrey.co.uk/news/surrey-news/woking-borough-council-kept-football-19606969> , previous WBC leadership failed in many material respects raising questions about (inter alia) process, procedure, conflicts, public expenditure and borrowings, the Nolan principles and acting appropriately in public office. Lessons have been learned to prevent any repetition, but Messrs Bittleston, Morgan and Spinks have now retired, with Mr Bryant to follow, but residents still do not understand is what these 4 - Council Leader and WBC's 3 senior officers- were doing over many years to lead to such a damning report. Additional specific investigations into their actions and behaviours are required, specifically on this project and if necessary into wider more general matters too if this was their modus operandi. Residents demand Open & Transparent local government in all our Councillors and Officers do.”

2.0 Petitions Scheme

- 2.1 As the number of signatories exceeds 400, the petition falls to be debated at full Council. In accordance with the Council's scheme for dealing with petitions, the petitioner has been invited to attend the meeting and present the petition. The presentation of a petition is limited to not more than three minutes, and should be confined to reading out, or summarising, the purpose of the petition, indicating the number and description of signatories, and making supporting remarks relevant to the petition.
- 2.2 Following the presentation, Members will have the opportunity to ask questions of the petitioner. Thereafter, the Council will discuss the petition and determine what action, if any, is to be taken.

3.0 Officer Comments

- 3.1 Appropriate inquiries and investigations have already been instigated, concluded, reported and actioned.
- 3.2 Independent investigations into the Woking Football Club and Associated Developments project have already been undertaken by an independent investigator, Dr Gifty Edila and the Woking Football Club and Associated Developments Task Group.
- 3.3 Dr Gifty Edila was introduced to the Council by the Local Government Association. She was given a wide brief to investigate and review the processes and actions of the Council in respect of the Woking Football Club and Associated Developments and to make appropriate recommendations to the Council arising from her investigation and review. The brief was open and not constrained in any way and she was given unfettered access to the Council and Officers to undertake her investigation. Those mentioned in the above petition were all

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interviewed as part of her investigation into their actions and behaviours connected to the project.

- 3.4 Dr Gifty Edila was well placed to undertake the investigation, she is qualified barrister, solicitor-advocate, and mediator. She has dedicated 28 years’ service to local government, 22 of which were spent in head/director of service roles and has extensive experience of regeneration work. She undertook a thorough independent investigation into this matter, her findings were published in full and the Council has accepted the recommendations.
- 3.5 Dr Gifty Edila’s recommendations have been embraced by the new leadership of the Council. The Council has taken steps to improve governance within the organisation, these steps extend further than those recommended by Dr Gifty Edila and include the implementation of a more robust approach to programme and project management framework.
- 3.6 Those mentioned in the petition have all now retired and the Council has no power to require them to co-operate with any further investigations. The Council has a new Chief Executive working closely with the Council’s Corporate Leadership Team. The Council has committed to improving the ways that the Council does its business to ensure openness and transparency in its newly adopted Corporate Plan and commitment to adopt a five year Corporate Strategy. The Council has recently appointed to (or is appointing to) the role of Head of Transformation and Digital to lead on project management practice that gives assurance on delivery performance aligned to Council priorities and provides quality and cost control.
- 3.7 The new leadership team is committed to working in an open and transparent way and will embed engagement and wide consultation into the way this Council does its business.
- 3.8 Further, in response to the recommendations from the Dr Edila report, the Council is requesting this meeting to approve additional investment into resources for the Oversight and Scrutiny Board to support their work and into obtaining Lexcel accreditation for our Legal Services. The Council is committed to a programme of change, to continue to review all its processes and practices to ensure that it works in an open and transparent manner.
- 3.9 It is not considered that any further inquiries or investigations are needed at this time. An update report on the recommendations set out in Dr Gifty’s report is reported to Council and the recommendations includes a commitment to update Council again in February 2022.

REPORT ENDS