

Audit and Governance Committee – 11 December 2023

Written question from Cllr John Medland to the Audit and Governance Committee:

How many financial settlements of disputes (separately incoming and outgoing) has this Council made during this and the last financial year, what is their aggregate value per year, and how many and of what aggregate value have not been fully (including value, terms, contract parties etc) publicly disclosed due to commercial confidentiality?

Does this committee believe that refusal to disclose the terms of such financial settlements involving disputes, contract failures etc is open and transparent?

Response

There are two questions.

The first question requests information and I will ask the relevant Cabinet member to provide a response. Discussions at past meetings of Cabinet and Corporate Scrutiny Committee appear to be relevant to this question.

On the general principle of openness and transparency, I would expect Isle of Wight Council to be operating in line with the government's "Local government transparency code". A link is <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/local-government-transparency-code-2015>

I note also that the Local Government Association has published guidance at <https://www.local.gov.uk/our-support/research-and-data/data-and-transparency/local-transparency-guidance>

The code and guidance recognises the importance of disclosure of information to the public proactively and in response to enquiries. Both also recognise that information may be confidential and exempt and that there is a statutory basis for non-disclosure.

Once the Cabinet member has provided a response, it will be appropriate for this to be published.

It may also help Cllr Medland to know that, some time ago, I discussed with both our external auditors the statutory basis for the extent to which financial information relating to disputes may be disclosed or not disclosed in the council's accounts. If it would be of assistance I would be happy to ask for a briefing note to be prepared.