**Residents’ Association Councillor asks “Can things get any worse for David Hodge and the SCC Conservatives”**

Residents’ Association and Independent Councillors at SCC are wondering what further revelations and mishaps can befall the ruling Conservative Group at SCC before the county elections in May.

Following on from the row over misdirected text messages and a supposed sweetheart deal with the Government, which led to exchanges in the House of Commons between the Prime Minister and the Leader of the opposition, tape recordings of a private speech by David Hodge to his Conservative backbenchers were leaked to the press much to his embarrassment.

In the past week David Hodge has been forced to resign from his high profile role as Leader of the Conservative Group on the Local Government Association and independent Report by CIPFA has finally been published revealing sharp criticism of the Conservative’s handling of the Council’s finances and including their failure at the February Budget meeting to produce a credible cost reduction plan.

**Haslemere Independent Councillor Nikki Barton said:**

“Can things get any worse for David Hodge and the SCC Conservatives? David Hodge may have formally resigned as the Leader of the LGA Conservative’s but there can be no doubt he was told to go. His lack of openness and the high profile criticism of his action mean that he had become a liability for the Conservative Party nationally”.

Despite the SCC Conservatives rallying round to defeat the vote of no confidence in at last week’s Council Meeting **Resident’s Association Councillor Eber Kington** is not convinced David Hodge has the full support of his Surrey colleagues:

“The leaked tape from the private meeting of Conservative’s must have come from a Conservative county councillor. In addition one conservative has defected to UKIP and another who was sacked now sits on the opposition benches. It was also interesting to see how many Conservatives were absent from the Council Meeting when the vote was taken on the Motion of No Confidence”.

Speaking about the Independent CIPFA Report which challenges some of the Conservatives claims about SCC’s financial position **Residents’ Association Councillor Stuart Selleck** said:

“The CIPFA Report doesn't make good reading for David Hodge and his Cabinet who seem to have spent more time whinging about the lack of money rather than undertaking the service reviews needed to seriously tackle the deficit”.

The CIPFA Report included several criticisms including:

* SCC’s spend is high & proportionally £100m more than the average of other similar county councils
* SCC does not have a unique financial challenge and, in terms of spending power reduction for 2017/18, its change is below average.
* SCC’s Budget strategy in February was based on an overly optimistic assumption on success of referendum and an absence of a credible cost reduction plan

Leader of the Opposition on SCC, **Residents’ Association Councillor Nick Harrison** said:

“With County Council elections coming up in May all these issues need debating publicly. During the previous county elections four years ago there was a Surrey based radio discussion and debate with all political parties and the Residents Association represented. We now need that to happen again in 2017”.