

## What went wrong and who is responsible? Episode 7.

Episode 6 of this series revealed the process by which Newby and Scalby Town Council decided to commission what was described as “an independent external investigation” into grants awarded by The Woodsmith Foundation. The claimed reason given for this investigation was that an “unauthorised meeting” had taken place between Chairman Reg Towse, our friend Helen and the CEO of the Woodsmith Foundation. The investigation was to be carried out by Ian Morris who, it will be recalled, was the Northern Director of the Society of Local Council Clerks. Mrs Marley (a member of the SLCC) was delegated to brief Mr Morris and commission what was to become the infamous Maoni Report.

Before we examine the Maoni Report, we would like to say a few words about the Woodsmith Foundation, alongside others, who are completely innocent bystanders in this sorry affair. They offered a grant in good faith to the Council to be used to Support People 65+. The Woodsmith Foundation acted with absolute integrity throughout and it is regrettable that they became embroiled in what became known as the Maoni Affair.

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28/24
CONFIDENTIAL BUSINESS

28/24.1
**Supporting People 65+ grant from The Woodsmith Foundation.** Minute 24/24.1 refers. The confidential report from Maoni Consulting plus a confidential report by the Town Clerk were **received**. **Resolved** the consultant's report be accepted. Further **resolved** all the recommendations in the Town Clerk's report be **carried**. The Clerk was instructed to carry out those recommendations and write accordingly to the Chief Executive of The Woodsmith Foundation. **Resolved** the online transaction in the sum of £16,557.28 for repayment of the grant was to be authorised by Cllrs. Smith and Thompson.

The minute above is taken from the Extraordinary Meeting of the Town Council held on 2nd February 2024 - exactly one week after the Council decided to commission the Maoni Report. This meeting was a confidential meeting from which the public were excluded so the only information we have is the minutes of the meeting shown above. Unusually for this time, these minutes were not retrospectively altered *en bloc* and signed by the Chairman on 20 March 2024 so we can, with caution, consider them as being, within limits, reasonably accurate.

We are told that the Maoni report is confidential and it was **Received** by the Council along with another confidential report from the Town Clerk. It remains an abiding mystery why the confidential report from the Town Clerk was also unavailable to be disclosed to the Employment Tribunal. Our readers will recall the similar mysterious unavailability of another confidential report delivered by the Chairman at the previous meeting (see Episode 6) of the Council. Inevitably such mysteries result in speculation about the reasons for their non disclosure but that is not our task - which is to refer to the facts as far as we can. It was **Resolved** that the consultant's report be accepted and further **Resolved** that all the recommendations in the Town Clerk's report be **carried**.

It should be noted that we do not know what the recommendations in the Town Clerk's report were but we can see that £16557.28 was to be returned to The Woodsmith Foundation by **Cllrs Smith and Thompson** and the Clerk was instructed to write accordingly to the Chief Executive of The Woodsmith Foundation.

We can only marvel at Mr Morris's prodigious work rate as he managed to be briefed by Mrs Marley, research all of the considerable documentation, interview some of the people involved (but, for some unexplained reason, not Helen or Reg Towse) and produce a detailed report to Council in less than a week. There is no evidence in any of the above that the Members of the Council even saw the Maoni Report and there is absolutely no evidence that the clear conflicts of interest were disclosed to the Council or the “independent investigator.” As we move on to Episode 8 where we examine the Maoni Report in depth, we should recall that Council didn't expect the Information Commissioner to force disclosure - but we did, didn't we.