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Council's debt for the year revealed

by Mike Dinsdale

Its official, Whangarei District Council debt — a hot topic during the recent local body elections — was \$137 million at the end of June, but the current debt won't be known for another eight months.

At its first meeting on Wednesday the new council formally adopted its annual report for the 2009/2010 financial year, which revealed a debt of \$137,659,000, compared to \$122,326,000 the previous financial year. The debt does not include interest borrowing. As well, the planned \$20 million sale of the Cad Boys land had not happened.

Councillor Sue Glen asked what the current debt level was.

Warwick Syers, head of the council's finance and support committee, said the reality was that this council has "very, very, little" influence on its current debt level until June 30, next year.

"Because the previous council in June set the annual plan for this year," Cr Syers said, "we won't know what debt the previous council left this new council until June 30, 2011."

Under questioning from Cr Crichton Christie, Mr Cutforth said he had dropped plans to carry out a full audit of the council's books, which he said was a priority during his election campaign, as it was not necessary.

Cr Christie said a full audit would cost more than \$135,000.

Mr Cutforth said he was informed that the Audit Office had already audited the council's book.

Former Mayor Stan Semenovoff was in the public gallery for the first meeting on Wednesday.

Mr Semenovoff was swept into power in the 2007 elections on a platform of stopping the high debt/high rates culture of his predecessor.

Net council debt at the end of the 2007/2008 financial year, Mr Semenovoff's first after re-election as mayor, was to be \$131 million.