

COUNCIL MEETING – THURSDAY 27 APRIL 2023

COUNCIL PROCEDURE RULE 14, QUESTIONS BY MEMBERS

Councillor Farmer asked:

Following the damning independent TIAA audit report into the management of the Shapley Heath project, Audit Committee asked Cabinet to provide a response to the management recommendations contained within the Shapley Heath Audit Review report, and to review the application of project governance, financial controls, and reporting for the Shapley Heath project and to provide a response to Audit Committee on lessons learnt.

This independent review of the role of Cabinet and Members (an internal member review and reflection report) was prepared by Emanuel (Manny) Gatt and published on 6th February 2023.

Which of the findings of this comprehensive independent report does the Portfolio Holder for Place not agree with?

Councillor Cockarill responded:

The independent review was a constructive process which led to a set of informed recommendations. Cabinet accepted the findings and recommendations of the report at its meeting on 2nd March.

Councillor Farmer asked a supplementary question:

The Shapley Heath Project broke governance rules, broke procurement rules, failed to control finances, and spent over £820,000 without achieving one key milestone.

There was little engagement with the Opportunity Board and nothing of substance was reported to it.

The Opportunity Board did not endorse the Project and Cost Plans.

The 'Manny Gatt' report says:

“When questions were raised by members throughout the timeline about financial spend and governance of the project, the answers given failed to fundamentally address the concerns raised.”

And

“Notwithstanding the Opportunity Board’s role, the cabinet remains ultimately accountable for all the councils’ projects and the portfolio holder is responsible for holding officers to account and alerting cabinet about areas of concern.”

The Leader of the Council has accepted the findings of this report in full at Cabinet.
Audit Committee has accepted the findings of this report in full.

It is clear where the responsibility lies with the Portfolio Holder.

When therefore will the Portfolio Holder for Place resign as a consequence of the shambolic Shapley Heath project?

Councillor Cockarill responded:

I will not be resigning.

This project was looked after by an Opportunity Board drawn from all members of this group, of all parties represented and the Independent. Cabinet is ultimately responsible for project management in the council. But opportunity was given to all Members of this Council to give their views.

Cabinet has received the recommendations and agreed with them, and work is ongoing to improve project governance on this Council.