

Question received for the Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member (Property, Assets, Commercial Services and Major Developments) from Councillor David Howarth

Written question to the Deputy Leader, Cabinet Member for Property, Assets, Commercial Services and Major Developments, Councillor Anniela Bylinski-Gelder. On 21st of July this year, I wrote to the Head of Audit and Risk, the Director of Finance, and the Monitoring Officer to raise major concerns about both the lack of governance and the financial irregularities surrounding £15,000 of council tax payers' money in relation to the Middleforth Community Gardens project at Havelock Road, Penwortham.

To date I am still awaiting a response to my request for a thorough investigation. You, as the Cabinet Member responsible, allocated £15,000 of council tax payers' money under the Boost Fund Plus to the Penwortham Community Hub in relation to the Middleforth Community Gardens, despite the fact that Community Hubs were not eligible to apply.

The eligibility criteria clearly stated that to be considered for a boost fund plus award, applicants must have:

- Been based in South Ribble, or have demonstrable experience of delivering services in South Ribble.
- Been a registered charity, a not-for-profit organisation, or a constituted community group.
- Had a bank account registered to their group or organisation.

The Community Hub therefore was ineligible to submit any application. It then transpired that the sum of £15,000 was paid into a third-party bank account namely Penwortham Town Council unbeknown to them, to settle an invoice received on 20th April 2023 for works tendered for and ordered by South Ribble Borough Council. Could the Deputy Leader therefore explain how a sum of £15,000 of South Ribble Borough Council tax payers' money can be paid into a third-party bank account without the recipient's knowledge, for a grant they didn't apply for, to pay an invoice for work they didn't order?

Which further leads me to the questions - how does the award of £15,000 from the Boost Fund Plus to a Community Hub which is ineligible, meet with the requirements of the Local Code of Corporate Governance?

How does this attempt to circumvent financial regulations sit with public perception and the ethical standards set out in the Nolan Principles especially as the scheme was prominent in political literature during the recent local elections?