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## Council leader accuses MP of smearing him

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Council Leader Richard Farnell

Rochdale Council's new leader, Richard Farnell has accused Heywood and Middleton MP Jim Dobbin of trying to smear him for saying Councillor Farnell should not have taken up the role while an investigation into sexual abuse at Knowl View School in the early 1990s takes place.

Councillor Farnell, who was reinstated as leader last week, was leader of the Council between 1987 and 1992 and MP Jim Dobbin said on the Sunday Politics show on BBC today (Sunday 8 June) it was "not wise" for him to be leader while the review takes place.

Mr Dobbin said: "Because Richard was leader of the council at the time that these accusations were made - even though he may well have known not known anything about it - I think it is wrong for him to be taking up the leadership at this particular time."

However, Mr Dobbin was challenged about his position as he was deputy leader of the Council and went on to be leader before becoming an MP. On the programme Mr Dobbin claimed that he had known "nothing at all" about the allegations during his time as Mr Farnell's deputy. He said the first he knew of the allegations of abuse at Knowl View was in 1999 when a person he described as a young man made allegations of abuse that had happened to him at Knowl View as a boy. In fact, the person who made the allegations was not a young boy who had been abused, rather it was Martin Digan, a qualified social worker who blew the whistle on the abuse and who handed a dossier to Mr Dobbin's office. Talking to Rochdale Online today he was very angry, he said: "Jim Dobbin was disgraceful on the BBC Politics programme, I handed him a detailed dossier. I was not some troubled teenager, which is the impression he conveyed."

Councillor Farnell was also annoyed at Mr Dobbin's comments, he said: "Any

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