

Economy Committee Meeting 2nd of September

The meeting started at 10:02 with the chair, Cllr Richards, being so keen to get going with receiving reports she had to be prompted to note the minutes of the previous meeting and receive members' interests.

The first item was on the Medipark development next to Wythenshawe hospital. The briefing carried on from the concerns raised at the last meeting regarding Medipark's future in the light Wythenshawe not being chosen by Healthier Together as one of the four Greater Manchester Specialist Hospitals. The committee members seemed to have worn themselves out last time this item was discussed and so didn't have too many questions to ask. Those Councillors who did ask questions seem to have problems staying on the item of Medipark and instead asked questions about Healthier Together or other hospitals. The Chair asked what was being done to ensure that Wythenshawe residents had the skills to get jobs at the park. Officer Eddie Smith replied that Medipark would be part of the Airport Enterprise Zone and so would fall under its skills plan.

The Chair then called a break as the officers for the next item had not arrived yet. Item 6 was a report on the Manchester Strategy (a cross-agency 10-year plan for the City led by the Council). Mr Leese (Leader of the Council) and the officer introduced the item. Mr Leese seemed to be suggesting that the plan was less Council-led than it actually is. He also stated that the yearly 'State of the City' reports which are connected to the plan are "warts and all" (MS: I don't accept this.) The membership of the Leaders Forum, which meets regarding the Manchester Strategy and is comprised of representatives from different organisations and businesses, was discussed by members. Cllr Simcock was concerned that the group should include people connected to manufacturing; the Chair Cllr Richards queried the gender balance of the forum. Cllr Razaq asked if small businesses were represented. Mr Leese stated that 16 of the 40 leaders are women and that the right balance needs to be struck between representation and people having the necessary skills. (MS: this seems to suggest he believes women don't have the skills and that they are there for their gender only). Officer Hines replied that the list of Leaders was available, she also said that groups nominated who they wanted to represent them on the Forum and that this meant there was no direct way of ensuring gender balance. She did say that efforts were being made to make sure that the membership is as broad as possible.

Cllr Karney said that it was important that the strategy be communicated to people in the right way (MS: a statement he says quite a lot and one which makes me uneasy). He was also concerned that health matters did not receive enough prominence in the report. Cllr Peel was also concerned about the brief mentions of a number of areas as well as questioning the lack of targets to measure a number of stated aims. Other members made remarks about targets. Cllr Wilson questioned the absence of a clear hierarchy of concerns given the uncertain financial position the Council will be in over the next five years. Mr Leese, by way of reply, said that "we shouldn't reduce our ambitions" (MS: who said 'we' should?). He went on to say that the strategy can't go into detail about everything (MS: but this doesn't address why the economy is so much more prominent than health). He said that targets would be added at the next stage of the draft.

Cllr Davies raised concerns that the Leadership Forum was not seen by the public as being transparent. She noted that their activity was not updated on their website and that

references to it in the Manchester Strategy make it appear top-down (MS: because it is). Mr Leese rejected the idea that it was top-down or unaccountable. Mr Leese also rejected her idea that the public should have more influence in regards to the Leaders Forum. The Leader of the Council (Mr Leese) informed the meeting that we need leaders. The Leader of the Council also responded to a question by Cllr Bridges regarding contradictory goals by arguing that emissions in the City could decrease even if passenger numbers at the airport could increase.

The meeting then moved on to item 7, a report regarding Manchester spatial planning in regards to Greater Manchester spatial planning. There was some discussion regarding the Community Infrastructure Levy (currently Manchester doesn't use it). Mr Leese stated that if it had been enacted then no building work would have been done in the city over the last few years. He said that its use would be reviewed. There was a question from the public concerning whether private health building would be included in any Community infrastructure levy. The Chair didn't seem to read out the question which is the procedural thing to do but seemed to rephrase it. Mr Leese responded by saying yes but that the Council should look at existing ways of getting developers to pay for things, such as using section 106. (MS all of which would be reasonable if the Council ever actually used section 106.)

Mr Leese left the meeting along with executive member Chappell, who said nothing at the meeting at all. Then item 8 was the setting up of a Tax Avoidance Task and Finish Group. It was agreed that one should be set up.

The final item was the Overview Report and members discussed the Committee's work schedule. Cllr Simcock wanted the 'excellent' data from the quarterly economic dashboard to be noted.

The meeting highlights the following:

- Some members ask questions barely relevant to the item being discussed.
- Mr Leese chooses how to answer questions on his own terms, even when they are asked by his fellow Labour Councillors.
- Chairs find it hard to stick with procedure when everyone is of the same Party and there is a 'chummy' atmosphere.
- There was a private meeting before the official one and I wonder what went on in it.
- The Council Executive continues to proclaim to be open and transparent, even though this is very gently questioned by Labour Councillors.

The above is an abridged impression of the meeting. For more detail please contact me at: mschreibke@hotmail.co.uk

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