

MANCHESTER CITY COUNCIL SCRUTINY COMMITTEE MEETINGS DECEMBER 2015

I attended MCC's Finance Scrutiny Committee on 17th December. As usual, I'm happy for material in my report to be forwarded to other interested parties, with the proviso that it's my interpretation of events and details may not necessarily be completely accurate.

The **FINANCE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE (FSC)** was chaired by Cllr Carl Ollerhead, with City Treasurer Richard Paver alongside him. Also present were Executive members Cllrs Flanagan (Finance and HR), Nigel Murphy (Neighbourhood Services – items 5 and 6), Priest (Deputy Leader – item 5 only), Chappell (Environment – item 6 only) and Leese (leader – item 7 only). 8 out of 12 members of the Committee attended. I was the only member of the public attending in person.

Item 5. Communications Subgroup – progress report.

Officer Jennifer Green, Head of Strategic Communications, introduced this item. The report from the subgroup aimed to provide a greater understanding of how the Council's communication service works and to determine if there were ways in which it could be improved. Members went straight to questions. Cllr Hassan noted the tweet table showing the number of followers in 24 wards and suggested web pages could be used instead of ward newsletters. It appears twitter accounts were set up some years ago and are used by local officers with the aim of interacting with local residents. There was some discussion on the communication preferences of residents i.e. print versus on line. Officers reported that the Manchester Strategy consultation had been the most successful on line communication, with a large number of responses. Cllr Lanchbury noted that the different modes of communication included British sign language and interpreters. She commented on the continual push towards IT and said that there are still residents who do not have internet access – there is still a need for other types of communication. She went on to recount how she had been on hold for an hour on the social services helpline last Friday – it just had a message to go to the website! Cllr Priest said there had been no shift in policy but email communication is very much cheaper than answering a phone. He also said there has been no evidence of behaviour change due to ward twitter accounts, although most of the tweets will be information to hopefully influence behaviour change.

Cllr Davies opined that there had been a recent improvement in communication, but the public do not have the technical knowledge of officers. She also pointed out errors in online consultations and consultations that Councillors find out about too late. There was little advance notice to Councillors about press releases. She was assured that the consultations issues will be sorted out, and Cllr Priest said that press releases only go to Councillors when they affect local residents. He said the time scale required by the media preclude otherwise (!).

Cllr Cooley asked about the launch of an 'age friendly charter' and how communications influence the update of this. She wanted Manchester to be 'branded' as an 'Age Friendly City'. Cllr Priest agreed but said this was not the right Committee to progress this issue – children and families or Communities would be a better remit.

The Chair summed up the discussion, recommending more training for members on new media and Cllr Lanchbury's issue be pursued.

Item 6. Neighbourhood Delivery Services performance update.

An officer, strategic lead for waste disposal, opened this item, which concerned a report on issues such as waste disposal, fly tipping, highway defects and drainage. However, questions and

discussion focussed almost entirely on waste collection and the teething problems encountered due to a change of contractor from Enterprise to Biffa in July 2015. Cllr Lanchbury mentioned the phrase 'improvements are expected' in the report and asked if things are getting better. She asked for a short report in January to demonstrate improvement. Cllr Hassan asked about the 'missed bin' statistics and lack of improvement. Cllr Murphy responded, saying that there had been changes in the bin collection programme in the autumn and statistically the missed bin figures are low. The Chair expressed concern about the knock on effects of missed bins e.g. additional street cleaning and officer time – this is a financial issue. Cllr Murphy mentioned the cost of returning to collect missed bins. The Chair also raised the failure to deliver collection calendars – Cllr Murphy undertook to look at this.

Cllr Ali asked about penalty clauses in the Biffa contract for missed bins. An officer confirmed that there are penalty clauses in the contract, but this is dependant on the ICT system for monitoring collections, which will be in place by the end of the tax year (April 2016). Cllr Ali asked how penalties can be worked out when the ICT system is not in operation, to which Cllr Murphy gave an unsatisfactory answer. The Chair stated that this was a financial issue which was legitimate for the Committee to question. An officer said that the approach is not to be 'punitive' as this could affect the benefits of the Council/contractor partnership. The Chair referred to item 3.4 in the report, which detailed cost figures for following up residents requests. An officer confirmed these costs are not reclaimed from Biffa.

Cllr Davies referred to the waste, drainage and highways issues and their wider costs to businesses, damaged vehicles etc but noted that the cost of working out the costs would be astronomical. It was agreed by members that they should be aware of this in relation to Manchester's image. The Chair summed up and recommended that the Neighbourhoods Scrutiny Committee should look at some of the issues raised and that a check should be made on the issue of bin collection calendars.

Item 7. Demographic Change.

Officers Sarah Henry, Head of Performance and Intelligence (DV – it's W1A all over again!) and Janice Gott, Head of Finance, introduced the report. Demographic change in recent years has seen the population of the city grow beyond the 2015 target set by the Community Strategy (480,000) to an ONS estimate of 520,000 in 2014. Ms Henry noted that the report does not include the latest statistics on student population, which is due in January 2016.

Cllr Lanchbury asked about paragraph 2.2, which mentions a reduction in the take up of free school meals. Ms Henry said the indicators are showing that the city is becoming less deprived (!). The Chair said he would like the Economy Scrutiny Committee to look at the report as it appears to cover several other committees' areas of interest. Cllr Cooley was concerned about the number of 60+ year olds and how this will require more services. There was some discussion about whether the number of students is declining - the information in the report indicates a decline, but Cllr Leese asserted this is not the case.

Item 8. Setting of the Council Tax Base and Business Rates Shares for Budget setting Purposes.

This report was introduced by City Treasurer Richard Paver. The aim of the report was to advise on the method of calculating various incomes. The City Treasurer, in consultation with the Executive

member for Finance and Human Resources has delegated powers to deal with these and related issues. Mr Paver noted that the council is seeing growth in the council tax base, with a near 3% increase this year. Business rates are still under consideration as it is a very volatile system. He and the Exec member will make decisions on exemptions from business rates. The Chair noted the report is similar year by year – there were no questions from members.

Item 9. Overview Report.

This report provides information on items including: progress re previous recommendations; key decisions; items for information; and work programme. Unusually for this regular agenda item, Cllr Lanchbury raised an issue with a response to a Committee recommendation, concerning a report back from the Building Control department on s106/CIL agreements. Cllr Lanchbury was concerned that a report on the Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL, a measure replacing s106) did not answer the Committee's questions. She complained that officers had spent 9 months to provide half a page of information. The Chair said this should be referred to another scrutiny Committee, such as neighbourhoods. Cllr Davies added that she wanted to know more about plans for CIL and then members and officers could develop a plan for dealing with it. She suggested the Chair should look at old Committee minutes to see if questions had been answered. The Chair agreed the information provided was unclear and undertook to contact the relevant officer for better information. Cllr Davies also raised the issue of how prescriptive the Government guidance on CIL is – there was no information on this in the short report. The Chair said he would ask for a full report on this rather than just an item for information – this was agreed by members.

The Chair also mentioned the Item for Information on the tracking of Council Motions – specifically re his motion being marked 'no action taken'. (DV – for information, the tracking table shows the date a motion was passed, its title, resolutions, the member of the Council's senior management team of officers responsible for the resolution and the action taken as a result of the motion).

Item 10. Ethical procurement Task and Finish Group.

The minutes of the group meeting on 4th December were included for this item. A member asked when the committee would receive the final report of the group. It seems the next step will be for the Committee to consider decision 1 in the minutes – to request that a survey of suppliers similar to the one carried out by Bristol Council be carried out, the proposed questions to be brought back to the group for comment prior to the procurement committee survey authorising the survey being carried out.

The meeting closed at 1155hrs.

Dick Venes, 5th January 2015.