

## MANCHESTER CITY COUNCIL SCRUTINY COMMITTEE MEETING OCTOBER 2015

I attended MCC's Economy Scrutiny Committee on 28<sup>th</sup> October. 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 **ECONOMY SCRUTINY COMMITTEE (ESC)** was chaired by Cllr Suzanne Richards. There was a good turnout of members, but the usual 'enforcers' Cllrs Leese and Flanagan were absent, perhaps an indication of the lack of contentious issues in the agenda. I was the only outside person attending apart from a mature Masters student. The agenda was taken out of listed order.

### Item 11. **Cumulative impact of welfare reforms.**

The item and 25 page report was introduced by Angela Harrington, the Council's Head of Work and Skills, Growth and Neighbourhoods. The business moved straight to questions, Cllr Karney giving the obligatory diatribe about all problems being the fault of the Tory government, and George Osborne in particular. His suggestion that Mr Osborne be invited by the Committee to see the effects of his welfare reforms on struggling working families in Harpurhey was supported by several other members. Cllr Strong spoke about how the Council could keep up pressure on employers re living wage commitments, and Cllr Shilton-Godwin expressed concern re the impacts of the reforms on people with disabilities. Cllr Peel (City Centre) raised the issue of homelessness in relation to the reforms. He would like to see more data on levels of homelessness in the city and whether the reforms have caused an increase in the problem (apparently there was a report on homelessness to the Neighbourhoods Scrutiny Committee yesterday). Cllr Green referred to a meeting held 2 years ago in Harpurhey with Graham Stringer MP and various community groups. She suggested this be reconstituted to gather more recent evidence on the impact of welfare reforms. Cllr Hacking referred to sections 5.17 and 5.19 of the report concerning advice services, which he thought were contradictory. Ms Harrington said that there had not been a huge reduction in advice consultations due to changes in working methods – e.g. advisers are now travelling to different areas of the city.

DV note- the report seems to be quite an informative document and includes appendices on: changes in housing claimants by ward; homelessness presentations (cases); and scenarios showing the impact of the reforms on various family situations.

### Item 5. **Greater Manchester Combined Authority (GMCA) strategic decisions.**

The Chair had called for this report due to lack of clarity on DevoManc issues. The report was introduced by Jessica Bowles, Head of Policy, Partnership and Research. Cllr Strong opened the questions by expressing concern about the lack of information on the issues of scrutiny and public consultation. He expressed the view that current AGMA scrutiny is not fit for purpose and spoke briefly about possible cross Council boundary variations on issues such as Sunday trading. Cllr Wilson supported his views on scrutiny, which would be needed at GM level. He was also concerned that the overall strategy within DevoManc is not clear i.e. power will be gained in some policy areas, but lost in others, quoting as an example David Cameron's aim that all schools will be academies (i.e. outside LA control) by 2020.

Cllr Peel was also concerned about the lack of public consultation on DevoManc and asked if any work is being done to roll out a plan to give information to the citizens of Greater Manchester. Cllr Green said that members needed information on expected outcomes in order to do scrutiny properly. She also asked about a review of GM colleges currently in progress. Cllr Moore acknowledged the public perception that the DevoManc deal is being done behind closed doors, quoting a meeting held on the previous Monday with restricted access to the public. In response to the questions about consultation, Cllr Priest (Deputy Leader, attending on behalf of Cllr Leese) was not specific about when the time will be right for public information and/or consultation (DV comment – when the deal is sealed and delivered of course!) and pointed out the difficulties of negotiating the deal with the Tory government 'behind closed doors'. Ms Bowles referred to the 'Manchester Strategy' currently out for public consultation, to which she said there had been a 'tremendous' response.

The Chair concluded the item by stating she would ask the acting GM Mayor to attend the Scrutiny Committee to discuss some of these issues, and noted that engagement of GM residents is necessary for them to feel 'ownership' of the devolution process.

#### **Item 7. Greater Manchester Talent Match.**

This item was a powerpoint presentation by the Greater Manchester Centre for Voluntary Organisations on their Talent Match programme, which aims to provide individual coaching in skills and work placement for young people who are not referred from Job Centre Plus and thus may be 'hidden' from other assistance. One of the coaches spoke about a typical case and a young man who had been helped by the programme also recounted his story.

#### **Items 6 and 9. Devolution – expansion of Working Well and co-commissioning of the Work Programme and Working Well.**

The Council's Chair of the Health Scrutiny Committee (Cllr Craig?) attended for this item. The reports were introduced by Matthew Ainsworth, GM Lead for Employment Initiatives and Steve Black, Working Well Team Manager. The reports concerned an update on progress on areas of the DevoManc agreement which include expansion of the Working Well programme from 5,000 to 50,000 people. Big Life is the organisation which has been delivering the programme in Manchester since March 2014 and this was the third time they had made a presentation to the Committee.

Cllr Davies was concerned about the lack of clarity on the outcomes statistics and information. In response to another question, it was explained that the expansion will be paid for by 3 funding streams, including the Dept for Work and Pensions and the European Social Fund.

There were several other questions and answers which were non understandable to the average person in my view!

Finally, Cllr Karney asked an interesting question about the personal economic benefits of stopping smoking, suggesting this should be added to the list issues affecting clients shown on page 3 of the item 6 report.

#### **Item 8. Update on the Work Programme.**

The Work Programme is a scheme replacing previous DWP programmes covering benefit claimants. The report for this item also included an appendix about the Work Company, which

delivers the programme in Manchester on behalf of Avanta and G4S (!). Work Company personnel attended this item, including a 'customer' who had been helped by the programme. Cllr Bridges asked for more information about the number of people engaged by the programme and the number of successful outcomes. Cllr Peel asked about the performance of the Manchester programme compared to national figures and targets – he was told the programme had achieved the minimum target levels in some areas. There was a brief discussion about the placing back in work of people over 50 who had technical skills from industries that are now defunct and how this related to the 'skill sets' required in the current jobs market.

**Item 10. Worklessness and Health.**

Cllr Paul joined the table for this item, but there was little meaningful discussion.

**Item 12. Overview Report.**

There was some mention of a bid for transport funds based on economic grounds – members would like to bring this to the November meeting for approval at the December Executive meeting as this is rendered necessary by the timescale for the responses to the bid application.

The meeting overran and finished late at 1220hrs.

DV comments – why were several of the items issues before this Committee? – the Health Scrutiny Committee seems more appropriate as several of the intervention programmes discussed seem likely to have little effect on Manchester's economy. It seems to me that the Committee, at least at this meeting, is being 'sidelined' from the real economic issues in Manchester such as overall economic policy, planning and sustainability.

Dick Venes, 3<sup>rd</sup> November 2015.