

MANCHESTER CITY COUNCIL SCRUTINY COMMITTEE MEETINGS MAY 2015

I attended last week's MCC Economy and Communities Scrutiny Committee meetings on the 27th May. As usual, I'm happy for material in it 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 led by the new Chair Cllr Angela Stogia, replacing Cllr Joanne Green. There was a big attendance of Councillors, including newly elected Cllrs Appleby, Bridges and Farrell. Other attendees included Sirs Howard Bernstein(HB) and Richard Leese (RL).

Item 5 **The City's Economy.**

This was a Powerpoint based presentation by Sir Howard. Some members were disappointed there was no written report they could have scrutinised in advance, but apparently this didn't happen last year either. It sounded like this is a regular annual 'state of the nation' report. Sir H started off with some statistics on Manchester's population, which he expects to reach 600,000 by 2025. He contended it is the fastest growing city in the UK, with a 40% increase in the 20-25 age group, partly driven by graduate retention. He also stated employment growth outperforms UK and other non UK 'core cities', with out of work claimants down 9.6% between November 2013 and November 2014. For the future, he said all economic models show employment growth in the 2015-2015 period in construction, scientific research and other sectors. He went on to contend that sustained investment in long-term transport infrastructure will drive growth, e.g. the Northern Hub, HS2 and HS3, and a fully integrated transport network. Other significant factors would be developing the north west as a global centre for scientific innovation, transformation of the north's cultural 'offer' and fiscal devolution (DV note – this section seemed more about GM than Manchester itself).

Under development update and opportunities, he said the aim of the economic plan includes providing housing close to the main employment centres, ensuring developments are of high quality and contain the right tenure balance. Other items mentioned included: HS2 and HS 3; science and technology e.g. science research and development at Alderley Park and the Medi Park (DV not sure where the latter is and the former is not in Manchester); Central Park; Airport City; First Street North; the Northern Gateway/NOMA (round the Co-op head office); St Johns Quarter (mixed use development, including a permanent home for the Manchester International Festival) and the Civic Quarter. On the last of these, he said it provided an opportunity for 10,000 new jobs in the wider area driven by the transformation of St Peter's Square and its public realm.

He made some mention of the Evergreen Fund, which apparently is public sector money which is used to spur private investment in development. He gave the Spinningfields development as an example of where this fund had been used - £12 million, which bought in £75 million of developers' investment.

He went on to identify some key challenges to unlock economic growth:

- improving residents' skills;
- stimulating the residential for sale market;
- providing homes for working households;

- delivering further welfare reforms;
- progressing the works and skills plan;
- using devolved powers to control and influence funding.

Off slide, he mentioned health changes related to DevoManc briefly, also: business support services; a £450 million housing fund (lending will start from 1st July in all areas of Greater | Manchester); re-regulation of bus services; and the GM spatial framework (land use policies to suit GM's growth ambitions). Apparently the DevoManc Bill will be published on Thursday (28th May). His presentation took 30 minutes. In my opinion, the economic plan sounds like a continuation of the neo-liberal, trickle down economics of the past 20 plus years – the Tories would have been proud of it. There was, regrettably, no mention of: sustainability; climate change; environmental limits to growth; redressing income inequalities; opportunities in outlying wards; reducing the need to travel; or the impact of the plan on the economies of surrounding local authorities!

The Chair then opened up the meeting to questions from Councillors. Sirs Howard and Richard did a double act in this section, with Sir Richard seeming to me to be a bit too keen to stop Sir H saying much. A brief summary of some sensible, understandable and relevant questions is as follows:

1. Is HS2 going ahead? A - Yes, the latest prediction is that HS trains will reach Manchester in 2030, the line itself by 2033 (RL).
2. How do we ensure that private investors make public realm provision in developments, maintaining the quality of life for everybody, including provision for walking and cycling (Cllr Shilton Godwin, incidentally Chair of the Cycle Forum)? A - the Council is ensuring ground level storage in new developments (DV – about time!), investing in commuter cycling routes, the City Centre will be pedestrian friendly. More generally, there has been a 28% increase in employment rates, not entirely due to migrant labour, and child poverty has reduced from 44% of children 5 years ago in Manchester to 33% now. Council initiatives have influenced this (RL).
3. The economic plan seems to be reliant on migrant labour and international investment – what are the risks of this (Cllr Raikes)? A - Some barely relevant stuff about foreign investment (HB). There is a risk related to withdrawal from the EU, as lots of migrant workers are from Spain and France (RL).
4. In the past the UK has seen successful scientific research but development has been done abroad. How are the Council and its partners ensuring this doesn't happen again e.g. with graphene (Cllr Hackett)? A - Not really answered, apart from some platitudes about the use of global partners to maximise benefits (HB).
5. How will the plan connect Manchester residents to the benefits of growth with respect to business support (Cllr Bridges). A - Some flannel from HB; mention of Manchester Chamber of Commerce and the living wage (RL).
6. Demand led education, skills and training ' was a phrase used in the presentation. How are MCC intending to respond to this with respect to the 'fragmentation of education' in the last 5 years (Cllr Wilson)? Neither HB nor RL provided a satisfactory answer in my opinion.

Item 6 **Overview Report.**

In response to a request from questions on the report (which was included in the papers for the

meeting), Cllr Smitheman asked about waste collection from a site in her ward.

The meeting then was adjourned at 1105, and members of the public (just me!) were asked to leave the room. The meeting resumed later in private session to discuss the work programme for 2015-16.

The **COMMUNITIES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**, still chaired by Cllr Rawlins, started on time at 1100hrs. Attendance seemed a bit sparse compared to the Economy Committee. The chair welcomed new member Cllr Sarah Judge, declared that all the recommendation in the Overview Report have been responded to, and closed the meeting to the public (just me!) at 1102hrs. After I had left the room the Committee resumed to discuss the work programme for 2015-2016.

Post meeting comment: I really don't understand why the public were excluded from these two meetings when they went on discuss their work programmes – surely these are fairly non-controversial! When my computer system gets back to normal later this week I'll email the Chairs to ask why this was the case.

Dick Venes,
Hon. Secretary, Manchester Green Party.

2nd June 2015.