

Neighbourhood Scrutiny Committee - Brian Candeland & Matt Schreibke (combined report)

Again this was the first since the election, but the business followed on seamlessly from the previous year. This Scrutiny committee covers diverse subjects ranging from climate change to libraries. Officially 'Neighbourhoods' has responsibility for 'creating neighbourhoods that meet the aspirations of Manchester's citizens' (popular word 'aspirations'). The meeting was chaired by Councillor Daniel Gillard and there were 2 main items on the agenda – 'Archives +' and 'Plastic Bag Petition'. It started at 2 pm. The Executive Member for Neighbourhood Service, Councillor Nigel Murphy, sent his apologies.

Before these, there was a brief report from Councillor Peel from the Waste and Recycling Group. Basically very little was reported on as the group is focusing on assessing the first 100 days of Biffa delivering the waste contract. The reporting officer said that they had been approached about recycling by a community group in Moss Side. Councillors asked about who was on the committee, suggesting a low level of scrutiny of the group. The next meeting of this group will be on 11th June, and it will be an evening meeting. There will be a detailed report for the Scrutiny Committee in November. This Group is defined as a 'Task and Finish' Group. The intention of these is that they complete a task then disband; it was felt in this case that there would be a need for a body to deal with waste and recycling indefinitely.

Archives +:

This area concerns Libraries and other information / archiving resources. The task work is ongoing and this was a periodic report. The representatives answered questions on funding, specifically from Heritage lottery, whether the treasures on tour program (which introduces the archives to school groups) could be extended to older people, where Archives recruited volunteers from and were there physical displays of pictures planned in addition to the digital ones. The answers were; funding is fine as all targets are being met or exceeded, extending treasures on tour would be looked into, Archives gets volunteers from a central pool of library volunteers and placements from the universities and there is currently a physical display of photos of Mancunians holidaying in Blackpool in the Central reading room.

The officers were also looking at how they could pool resources with the other 9 Greater Manchester boroughs.

Plastic Bag Petition:

A petition raised by concerned citizens, calling on the banning of plastic bags, had received over 1,000 signatures – consequently the Council were obliged to discuss it. Some recommendations had been made previously and this item was an update on those recommendations. This session was attended by the Executive Member for the Environment, Kate Chappell as well as the relevant council officer.

There was some discussion around the 'bio-bags' provided by the council for food waste. It was noted that the new batch were very thin and of poor quality – had we changed supplier? We should revert to the better quality bags next time – this was referred to Nigel Murphy, Executive Member for Neighbourhood Services. It was also suggested that stocks of the bio-bags be held at libraries, and possibly schools. It was commented that we get poor service from suppliers of refuse / recycling bags generally.

Councillor Chappell was asked if the council were putting enough pressure on the big supermarkets. She replied that the council felt they had very little influence over them, as individual shops had little leeway over corporate policy; consequently the initial focus had been on small local shops where the council felt they could exert more influence. It was noted that the Government is

bringing in legislation to apply a charge on single-use plastic bags anyway; it was also noted that this legislation lacked clarity around what constituted 'single use'. If the legislation leads to bag which are so thin that people use multiple bags, then it will be counter-productive. The council should put pressure on the Government and Supermarkets to ensure that the principle of the legislation is honoured.

Whilst the original petition had requested the introduction of a Bylaw around plastic bag use, the Council had decided on the basis of their own legal advice, that a local bylaw couldn't be used as it wasn't a local issue; this was queried.

Other points made:

- we should put more pressure on takeaways to reduce the amount of packaging they use
- home deliveries by Supermarkets use an excessive number of bags – should put pressure on them to reduce.
- Many firms use private companies for waste disposal/recycling – what pressure can the council apply here?

Councillor Chappell stated that there was a 'Sustainable Production and Consumption' initiative being launched as part of 'Manchester – A Certain Future'.

A rubbish pilot scheme was mentioned and Cllr Chappell encouraged places to be put forward to the list of potential pilot areas. Three pilot areas will be chosen. Cllr Kirkpatrick suggested that the 'Little Hands make big changes' school project within the 'clean city' scheme be extended beyond the initial 44 schools. It was agreed that this would be attempted although no clear plans were made. Cllr Loughman asked whether private disposal firms paid the same landfill tax as the council and it was confirmed that they did.

There will be an update on this subject after the new national legislation comes in in October – so will be at the November or December meeting. I have to say I did not get the impression that the Council regarded it as an important subject.

General Points

At this point the Chair closed the meeting, after 45 minutes in total (but see below). If my report seems rather boring and lack-lustre, it reflects the meeting. There was a distinct lack of energy - reading the minutes of the previous meeting that seemed to have been much livelier (maybe partly due to the agenda including climate change and the attenders including Marc Hudson). Perhaps they're all still recovering from the election result. Something else which was notable was the extent to which power has been outsourced to the private sector, leaving councillors with little to do besides the oversight of contracts. Councillors Austin and Loughman get a mention for most contributions (in my unmeasured observation).

By my count there were 3 members of the public observing, including (Brian Candeland; Matt Schreibke observed the meeting online).