



Communities and Local Government Committee

The Committee met at Manchester Town Hall

Public question and answer session with a Manchester audience on the local impact of: The Government's Cities and Local Government Devolution Bill, HC 369

Monday 26 October 2015

[This session was not recorded or webcast]

Members present: Mr Clive Betts (Chair); Jo Cox; Helen Hayes; Kevin Hollinrake; Julian Knight; David Mackintosh; Angela Rayner; Mary Robinson; Alison Thewliss.

Q1 Chair: We are members of different political parties and we are having an inquiry into devolution to discover what is happening throughout the country? Is it working? Are the right things being devolved? Are they being devolved in the right way? Are the right governing mechanisms being put into place? Normally we take evidence in more formal sessions than this, and if you want to stay later on, you will see that we will ask questions and probe witnesses mainly from the local councils but also others who may have slightly different views, to try to get on the record what their views are. At the end, after several weeks—because we have other sessions back in Westminster—we collect all our evidence together and then we produce a report. As I say, we are a cross-party group of MPs but we try to come to a conclusion, a report, based on the evidence that we hear, so it is quite important today that we hear from yourselves as members of the public in Greater Manchester about what your views are. We will take that on board along with all the other sessions, so please stay for the later sessions after yours when we hear from witnesses, and we will get on to some business as well.

We have obviously come to Greater Manchester because it has been seen as the lead area in the country on devolution, the area that has been

Oral evidence: The Government's Cities and Local Government Devolution Bill, HC

going ahead faster than others, showing the way, doing things at a speed perhaps other areas have not caught up with. It is obviously important and an obvious place to come to hear from you and others about what is happening here, is it going in the right direction, are the right things being done, is everyone being involved or not in the process? Those are the sorts of things we want to try to explore.

It is an opportunity for you so I am going to throw it open to you to make your comments about how you see things. The first obvious question, and some of my colleagues will come in as well, is what do you think about the devolution process so far? How much do you and other members of the public actually know about what is going on? I suppose that is a good starting point. What do you think about it? Anyone feel brave enough to make a start and give your views? We have a roving mic going around.

Stephen Hall: All right. In terms of what the public of Greater Manchester know about this—my name is Stephen Hall, by the way. I am the president of Greater Manchester Association of Trades Union Councils, which is the TUC body representing over quarter of a million people in Greater Manchester. We have been out and campaigned and what we found is that in terms of how many people are aware this is a public engagement, the answer is none at all. The fact is in Leigh West ward, where the chairman of the Greater Manchester Combined Authority lives, there was less than I think it was 10% knowledge that this process was even taking place. I think the most we had was about 20% and that was in Sir Richard Leese's ward in Crumpsall, and he is one of the main front people for this. The public of Greater Manchester do not know that it is really taking place or what it is about and certainly they are not involved in any of the process. As a trade unionist I can honestly say at no point have I been asked to be involved in this. I have had to find out when things are going on and what is happening. I would not have known about this meeting itself without indirectly receiving an email via some university professor. I think this is a serious empowerment of the people and we are not even involved in the process.

Generally, I am in favour in devolution but this does not seem to—I tend to agree with Wigan's MP when she said this sounds like devolution by diktat. It does not involve the people. I cannot see anything saying you are empowering the people when they are not actually involved in the process. There is no mechanism, as far as I can see, for me being involved in it.

Chair: Okay, thanks. Would you like to come in?

Pia Feig: Hello, my name is Pia Feig. I live in Trafford Met and I am a member of Keep our NHS Public. I would just like to say that I think the public, the local public, are specifically being excluded from discussion about this and I will give you an incident from the health service. Very soon after the announcement, a very vague announcement, about Devo Manc devolution, all the CCGs in Greater Manchester pledged their support for Devo Manc. Now, they were supposed to represent the health interest of the local people and yet they had gone into no consultation with those people who were trying to be active in promoting health and in supporting the NHS. They made a statement, a public statement, that was just them talking about themselves, and that is what I see devolution is about: one group of people in central London passing power to another elite group of people locally, and the people of Manchester and Greater Manchester have no say and no control over the process.

Lilian Burns: Thank you. Lilian Burns. You said you want to understand what people know and think about devolution. As someone who has engaged with the planning process on a voluntary basis for various for NGOs for 20 years and as a former journalist, I have expended some time trying to keep abreast of a vast changing and increasingly complex situation. My response to you is that the lack of guidance requiring combined authorities to be established in a particular way and the many emerging versions of what constitutes combined authorities and what they are responsible for is adding to the already confused scene of local enterprise partnerships with different boundaries from local nature partnerships that were supposed to track them. It is actually leading to a situation that is taking local government away from the local citizen. Not only is it near impossible for the average citizen to follow the new sub-regional set-up, it is impossible to interact with it because there is no requirement on combined authorities to set up something comparable to the SEEPs that existed during the time of the regional assemblies and the leaders' forums. The SEEPs, the social, economic and environmental partners, were a means by which the third sector could engage in a fully participative manner with emerging agendas. With the regional spatial strategies and the regional economic strategies, those bodies and those spatial planning documents have now been scrapped, but what we now have coming forward is a new type of statutory sub-regional planning document. Greater Manchester is the first combined authority in the country to have started work on a spatial framework, which will overlay the local plans. There have already been two consultation stages. I understand a third one is imminent. Within the emerging Greater Manchester framework document are huge growth aspirations and

plans for over 240,000 houses by 2033. The green belt has received almost no attention, yet all the third sector or environmental NGOs have been able to do so far is to gaze on in alarm from afar and simply submit responses, which are not given any more weight than those of an individual. At least under the previous regional set-up bodies such as Voluntary Sector North-West and the North-West Environment League had seats on the regional planning group and the regional transport group and so on, as well as on the main Assembly and had the opportunity to make their voices properly heard at the formative stages of key planning documents. The current devolution set-up is placing ever more power in very few hands and is actually moving away from localism.

I would just like to say to the trade union chap who spoke first that the trades unions are one of the bodies on the SEEPs along with universities and a whole host of other bodies. You really felt you were engaged and being listened to in that process.

Barbara Dresner: Thank you. My name is Barbara Dresner. I live in Tameside and I am a member of Keep our NHS Public. I am also a member of my local PPG, Patient Participation Group. I have been asked to give a talk on Thursday about this devolution process because nobody there knows anything about it. We have had no letter through the door, no communication as voters, as citizens, as to what is going on here. I am steaming because I planned to come to this meeting today and the website or whatever it was told me it was full. Can you see how many empty seats there are here? I am absolutely steaming. This is really, really wrong. This is very wrong. You need to talk to your public. We said we did not want a mayor. We have had a mayor imposed on us. It is time for democracy to return to Greater Manchester.

Q2 Chair: Okay. Well, I am sorry if you felt not welcome. You certainly are very welcome. All I would say is we had a number of seats identified as the number we could accommodate in the room and we had that number of people say they were coming. Now, if people do not turn up, okay, but thank you for coming and making sure one of those seats is filled.

Terry Tallis: Thank you. I am Terry Tallis. I am chair of Stockport NHS Watch. As a group we are very worried about the devolution plans as applying to health, but that is not what I want to make comment on today. I just want to endorse what my colleagues have said about the complete, utter and total lack of democratic involvement in this process. Shortly after the announcement of Devo Manc I asked our

then MP, Mark Hunter—we have four MPs in Stockport; he was my local one—when he knew about the plans for Devo Manc. He said he knew two weeks before the official announcement. Another MP learned about it actually on the day. But when we asked our clinical chair of our CCG, he said he had known about it for six months. He is an unelected person. He is an officer. This is not right. The public need to be involved. We need to know the process and we need to know before decisions are made. This is a huge democratic deficit.

Stephanie Dyer: Thank you, Stephanie Dyer from the Royal College of Nursing. I echo everything that has been said about the lack of public engagement and the apparent absence of democracy. We represent over 48,000 nurses and healthcare assistants in the north-west and what surprises and, I suppose, concerns us is the fact that they have not been engaged in this either. They do not understand, like the public, what devolution means, what it means for them. Now, if we are going to transform this NHS and social care system, we need to be working with the communities. We need to be working with the people who work in the services because they have to develop and work in new and different ways. What we have is a legacy of ill health because of the history of deprivation and worklessness. We are trying to move very quickly to a new system with insufficient workforce, inability to recruit more, to train people, and we need this pump priming, a recognition that there has to be some real strategy and some real investment in getting people from here to there in terms of having a workforce that is ready to deliver this public health agenda. That does not appear to be something that, first, is affordable or, secondly, is being talked about. I think at the very minimum we should be talking to the public and getting them to think about what they can do to help the system and talking to the people who work in the system so they can understand what it means for them.

Q3 Chair: The other thing that the Committee is trying to get at as well is concerns about lack of involvement in the process but in the end are people generally feeling that having powers devolved to the area rather than being done centrally in London is a good thing or not? We are trying to pick a flavour of that up as well, if people could think about that in their contributions.

Ali Abbas: Hello. I am a local resident in Manchester, born here, born and bred. So in terms of the question you just asked, I think the feeling that I have from speaking to people is that devolution is a good idea per se, but it is what that devolution looks like. At the moment, there is a real issue—and I have to echo what people are saying here—about

lack of involvement. It feels like this is going to go on behind closed doors without any kind of engagement with people and it is really hard to engage with. It takes a real effort to even get any basic information about this deal and what it means.

The other thing is that even the bodies that are in place now, such as the Greater Manchester Combined Authority, are extremely opaque. I was talking to a local councillor in Manchester recently and he was saying he does not even know how decisions get made or who is on what boards, and he is a local councillor in Manchester. So if he does not know, how can any of us hope to know or engage with that process? If this process means giving more powers to the GMCA and the GMCA being some kind of scrutiny body of the new elected mayor, how can we engage with that when we do not even know what the GMCA is doing now and there is no real engagement with that at all?

If I come back to the scrutiny question as well, I think, looking slightly forward, if we do have this elected mayor, which, as people have mentioned, has been roundly rejected by the people of Greater Manchester in the past, how do we hold that person to account? I was talking to a friend recently about this and he was saying he lives in Trafford. His councillor is a Labour councillor. Trafford is a Tory council. So the representative on the GMCA who holds the mayor to account is a Tory person, so this person now, his elected councillor, will have no influence over that Tory leader and that Tory leader is the person who is then trying to hold the elected mayor to account. What is happening now is this person's democratic involvement is much further away than it used to be from decision making and that is a real issue, which comes back to the question of: how is this devolution designed? We have seen elsewhere—for example, in London—there is an elected Assembly which holds the mayor to account. The question is: why is it different here? Why do we get these effectively unelected people holding the mayor to account in that they are elected indirectly through us electing councillors who then appoint a leader who then sits on that panel, on that board, but that is long distance rather than having a directly elected person.

Just very quickly, finally it is about the purpose of devolution and why we are doing it. Absolutely, I agree on the principle that decisions should be made locally by local people for local issues and that makes absolute sense, but it feels like this deal is very much driven by what the national Government wants it to be rather than what local people want it to be. It is very much driven on economic growth being the magic bullet that will solve all problems and we know full well economic growth does not work as a solution to many really serious issues that are out there

about equality and environmental degradation. It is a question of how do we frame devolution and what are the objectives of devolution? Is it purely about growing the economy or is it about improving people's lives, tackling inequality, dealing with the serious environmental issues such as climate change, so something there about what is devolution for as well as how it is done.

Wendy Cox: Hello, my name is Wendy Cox. I am from Rochdale, so you are getting the whole across the county here. I have actually only lived there for a year and before that I lived in Liverpool. I was in Liverpool on Saturday thinking, "Why isn't Liverpool part of the northern powerhouse?" That is just a Liverpool/Manchester thing that I have lived with for the last 12 months.

The issue around Devo Manc for me was it came quickly out of nowhere. As a nerdy person, I read the document and I thought this is based around money and doing something quickly. Then I looked at some of the paragraphs in the document and thought this was not very well drafted. As an Australian from birth, I was used to a federal system where there are lots of checks and balances and lots of opportunities to engage and make sure that there was no power held somewhere. As somebody now living in Rochdale, which is not the most affluent community and has issues of inequality and diversity that are a challenge for all of us, I thought this is going to take everything into Manchester and it is going to be the London of the north. That made me anxious as well as a person with concern for people on the fringes. That is my anxiety about the whole thing.

Q4 Chair: Okay. Don't worry too much about Liverpool. The mayor of Liverpool is coming to give evidence this afternoon to us. I think Liverpool is very much seen as part of the northern powerhouse. That is a concept we have to think about as well, but Liverpool is certainly on the agenda for us this afternoon as well.

Francesca Gains: Hello, I am Francesca Gains from the University of Manchester. I was part of a team that evaluated the first city mayors through the 2000 Act and I certainly can see some of the advantages of an elected mayor because of the way in which they can reach out to all parts of the community and perhaps do not have to spend as much time working with their own party to work out how to move forward. I do see some advantages. I would like to separate out what people quite rightly feel is the imposition of an elected mayor from where we are now and talk about how to make the arrangements work going forwards and the importance of designing arrangements to ensure

transparency, to ensure that decision making is clear, how people can feed into that decision making of elected councillors and other stakeholders, and how to hold the mayor to account.

I recognise and fully accept what people say about not having had the chance to contribute, but there is a debate happening. I have spoken at five or six public meetings. I was at a meeting last week with the interim mayor. There are conversations happening and as well as expressing the concern that this was an imposed move, I think this is a real opportunity to try to engage with how the arrangements can be improved going forwards. That is something that patently is not really spelled out in the Bill, which is rather vague and loose on how accountability and scrutiny should happen.

Q5 Chair: Okay, I suppose that throws up a challenge, one or two of those comments, about elected mayors. On the one hand, Manchester in particular has rejected the idea of an elected mayor fairly recently. On the other, Salford already has a mayor. Is that going to cause confusion—I do not know if anyone is here from Salford—about having two mayors? But then there is the complaint about lack of democracy in the process, so isn't an elected mayor bringing some democracy to the process? There are issues there. Do we have views about the issue of the mayor?

Male Speaker: Yes, I think the first comment would be that—sorry, I should just say I am a member of Trafford UNISON trade union. I work in Manchester; I live in Trafford, despite my accent.

Clearly, there has been a lack of communication with the electorate into the detail of devolution, that is obvious from some of the contributions, but I think it is an improvement on what we had before. One of the problems about the mayor referendum, it was not—well, part of it was that we had different decisions in neighbouring councils. Manchester rejected it because it was on a super-mayor basis with significant executive powers. Salford decided differently, to accept it, but both of them were very, very small turnouts in the elections. So even the referendum is questionable in terms of legitimacy when you only have a minute part of the electorate taking part in it.

I think the arrangements were very hurried. They were done at such a speed that I think it is fair to say a lot of the councillors did not know a lot about the details, certainly a lot of the managers did not, the staff and the trade union did not. There has been a catch-up exercise, if you like, to make sure that that information gets out and clearly there is still a hell of a lot more to be done. I think this is a step in the right direction. In future with the devolved structure, decisions on health, a

major part of our spending within Greater Manchester, will be made by elected council leaders rather than non-elected NHS managers. I think this is a valuable process and opportunities there but the devil is in the detail and there is a lot more that has to be done to bring people on board.

Terry Tallis: Can I just make another point—I know I have spoken before—about the role of the mayor? One of my very big concerns about these new proposals is about the fate of a public NHS. My understanding is that the London mayor does not have responsibility for the massive budget and organisation of health and social care that the Greater Manchester mayor will have. Linked with what appears to be very little public control over that post when the mayor has such responsibility for such a large budget and such an area of welfare, I think it is a very serious area of concern for us.

Q6 Chair: Okay. The Committee's remit is to look at devolution and while the Devolution Bill currently does not cover London, we will be looking whether devolution should be extended further in London as well. That will be one thing we are examining.

Will Berryman: I am more concerned about the financial side and the economic management.

Chair: Could you say who you are?

Will Berryman: I am Will Berryman. I live just down the road and I only just found out that this was happening. Like a lot of people, we are concerned that the financial side just has not been open. You look at all the funding, the Government will still get the VAT; the Government will still get the income tax from the jobs. All the well-paid jobs will be paying their council tax in Cheshire, almost certainly. It just seems to be a huge draw on Manchester. Where London can essentially print its own money, as it did with quantitative easing, Manchester cannot. Its only source of income will either be Government or taxing the people who cannot afford to move. Probably the most troubling of all the things that we have seen already is that Oaktree Capital, a vulture capital company that did such a damaging job in Detroit was soon after offering hospitality to Manchester City Council officers and housing association officers at the Bridgewater Hall, and took a presence in offices at Barbirolli Square. The vultures really are circling and if you lived in Manchester you would see it every day. There seems to be no regulation, no publicity. We are being lined up. It really is we are being lined up because all the other details depend on money as a way of

mobilising resources, people and so on, and it is all set up to be drained.

Chair: Okay, thank you. Julian, you have a question.

Q7 Julian Knight: Yes. Thank you very much, ladies and gentlemen, Julian Knight, MP. I just have a question to throw out there to everyone. Anything in these plans that you have read to date that you find exciting, that you find is something you really want to take control of locally?

Male Speaker: I think it depends. It is never quite an easy answer, is it? I think certainly transport is one thing that has been a real issue for people in Greater Manchester over quite a long time, and we have always looked towards London and the powers that London has over its transport system. Certainly, if we can get more influence locally over what our transport system looks like, I think that would be a boon if that money and that power is used correctly.

I think planning potentially as well could be a big opportunity but it is also a massive risk. Again, it depends if planning is designed purely to maximise economic growth, which feels like the direction of travel, or whether we are looking to plan in a more sustainable way to make sure that we build communities that work in the future and do not exclude people who cannot afford a car and that support development in the right places rather than development at all cost. So, potential definitely for benefits that could come to Greater Manchester but also risks around those if they are not done in the right context with the right scrutiny and constraints.

John Pottinger: Hi, John, a concerned Mancunian from south Manchester. In answer to your question, sir, I really wish I could give you an answer to that but I do feel ignorant of the benefits and disbenefits surrounding Devo Manc. I think there has been insufficient information. I would echo much of what has been said about Manchester already and I am not going to cover that, but I do have concerns about the healthcare as well. We know we have the Government giving us a £6 billion budget, but we know that there is deprivation of healthcare in and around the Manchester area. We have people sleeping on the streets of Manchester, which is a problem. What I also seem to remember is George Osborne recently saying that the benefits of devolution depends on having an elected mayor. One must go with the other. Does that mean if we do not want an elected mayor, which Mancunians said they did not want in 2004, that devolution will not go ahead?

Alex Whinnom: Good morning, I am Alex Whinnom. I am the chief executive of the Greater Manchester Centre for Voluntary Organisation. We are the lead body for the voluntary, community and social enterprise sector across the Greater Manchester city region in a slightly privileged position having slightly more information about what is going on than most people but we are very concerned that that probably is quite surface. We have very good reach. We engage directly with about 3,000 voluntary groups every year and indirectly reach about 14,000. Most are very small ones.

We have done quite a lot of surveys of our own sector now of what their views are on devolution. On the positive side, in response to the gentleman, on the whole we are very, very pro devolution for good, sound economic reasons. We can see how it works globally, but we share all the concerns that have already been expressed in this room about how it is being done. Broadly, there are two very big concerns. First, there has been almost no consultation or involvement with the public, communities and voluntary groups and we do not think that is the right way to proceed and it will in the end be very ineffective because if even local councillors do not know what is going on, it is very unlikely to be possible to implement it fully. Secondly, a gentleman picked up earlier something along the lines of a real absence of a shared vision for what we all believe devolution should mean to the city and a strong feeling from my sector that it should be about reducing inequalities and running the city for the benefit of all the people so that we can all enjoy a better quality of life and so on. I am not quite sure that that is the vision that everybody is articulating at the highest level.

Again, in a positive light, there is a real wish to participate and to bring what we can to the table. We believe that the voluntary sector has a lot to give to this. It is about mobilising local people to do stuff for themselves and for their communities, often with minimal resources, and if we were allowed to share our ideas and to get much more involved in the detail in an accountable way, we believe there is a great deal our sector could bring.

James Tullis: Hi, James Tullis. I am from the University of Manchester. Just a point referencing the north/south divide, if you like, and it is really to do with investment. One can see perhaps in our sector that the so-called golden triangle of Oxford, London and Cambridge have already made multi millions of investment. We can see now from devolution the repositioning of the region and there is a greater redistribution of investment to the north. We have to recognise the National Graphene Institute, which just recently, on Friday in fact, the Chinese President visited. SKA, a massive astrophysics project

headquartered now at the Jodrell Bank in Cheshire, one of the biggest projects of its kind in the world, and soon the Royce Centre is to come to Manchester bringing partners in the north, Leeds, and also in the south. All those represent a massive investment into this region and I think that is a positive part of the economic story, the broader story of what devolution and the repositioning of the north can be. I think that is something that provides opportunity and hopefully an economic benefit as well.

Chair: Kevin, do you have a question?

Q8 Kevin Hollinrake: Yes. I hear loud and clearly the real frustration about the lack of consultation and transparency around this process and the potential lack of democratic accountability. Do people get a sense of the potential that might come forward with an elected mayor in rectifying some of those issues around democratic accountability? Isn't it your opportunity to elect somebody who can agree with that gentleman who said this is about creating opportunities for everybody across the city? Isn't that what this is about? It is an opportunity to elect somebody across Manchester who has a vision, who can do some real good for the whole city?

John Clegg: My name is John Clegg. I am secretary to the Greater Manchester Unite Community branch and a lot of our members are unemployed or in low income jobs and do not have very secure jobs. One of the points that I would like to make about this, in a very clear way, and how it is not for the benefit of all is on the issue of housing. My colleague mentioned earlier we have large numbers of homeless people sleeping on the streets in Manchester. I attended a Land and Housing Commission meeting a couple of weeks ago, which is part of the Greater Manchester Combined Authority. When you look at the policy on housing and look at the city council's policy on housing, they are actually identical. One of the issues is to do with the £300 million that was allocated to spend on housing. That can only be spent on private development. There were contributions at the commission meeting where they had already spent; the decisions are already being taken. This is the point I want to make: £66 million has already been allocated to various developments around Greater Manchester, including one company who is not skint and they were given a loan of £10 million. But the point I want to make is what is completely out of the equation is a commitment to build social housing. We have a situation in Greater Manchester where over 100,000 people are on housing waiting lists across the region and there is very little reference in the documents to building any social housing. It is all going to be

private developments and it is going to be high flung apartments to attract young professionals. That is what it is about. It is building properties for people who might come here rather than building properties for people who already live here and have housing needs.

Chair: Is there anyone who has not come in? Yes, the gentleman here.

Rashid Marr: My name is Rashid Marr. I am a resident of Fallowfield. On your question, an elected mayor is nothing to be excited about. There is literally nothing. I have participated in voter registration drives lots of times to get more people involved on a non-party political basis, just to get more people involved. The difficulty that people give as to why they do not get involved is that there is no reach, there is no possibility to communicate, you cannot even talk to your own councillors. When you talk about a representative for 2.8 million people, the distance then is even more massive. There are 10 boroughs in Manchester. They are all very different. One elected mayor cannot possibly be representative. It is an incredibly flawed model to impose on this area. If it was an elected mayor over an elected council that had lots and lots of local engagement possibilities, then people would start getting excited about it. If there was a possibility to start reframing local politics—because in Manchester we have a predomination of Labour councils, which just squashes out other views. It is fully elected, it has a large majority, but other views are automatically squashed out and that is just going to happen on a larger basis. There is no reason to think anything else. The behaviour of the GMCA and our interim mayor has done nothing to change that.

Q9 Chair: Is there anyone who has not contributed so far?

Stuart Taylor: Thank you. My name is Stuart Taylor and I am from Leigh. The fundamental point about all of this is that the devolution deal was not devolution, it was imposition. None of the general public at all have had any input into this whole process and everything else is downstream from that. It is trying to justify what is unjustifiable. The general public needs to be involved in all these massive processes that are going on and they have been excluded.

Stephen Hall: My answer to your point would be no, nobody is excited about it. I live right on the border with Bolton borough and the Bolton West constituency. People there say that they did not ask to be part of Greater Manchester in the first place. We have a slogan, “Devo Mancs, no thanks, we’re Lancs.” People consider themselves part of Lancashire. We are 20 miles from the centre of Manchester. All the

money will be sucked into Manchester, and we will be like the forgotten, on the outskirts of Greater Manchester. We certainly will not be getting the resources. They would like to see more power devolved to them so they can decide over local issues, whether we shut our local library, for example, or whatever, issues about our town. What we have seen is there will be less devolution or less power for them and it is going to be concentrated at a Greater Manchester level. It is not as if it is being devolved down because it is stopping at Greater Manchester and being concentrated there.

Male Speaker: Just briefly, responding to the gentleman's point there about the personality to unite, we keep on hearing, we have for donkey's years, about the "X Factor" generation who vote on television personalities and know nothing about policy, yet from the highest level all we are hearing is about personalities for a figurehead of a mayor and nothing about policies other than certain politicians who think they will be able to enact in a different situation things that they were not able to enact before. To this gentleman sat beside me, nobody has mentioned that we will train people how to manage Manchester. Do I get a say? No, of course I do not, but for those who do, what regulation, what quality standard is there?

Stephanie Dyer: In terms of what there is to be excited about I think the vision sounds exciting. From the Royal College of Nursing perspective, we would never argue against people being more healthy, all of the social determinants of health, those things being addressed, increasing the opportunity for work and children attaining academically, those things you would not argue against. But when you look at the detail, which is lacking, I read somewhere when Devo Manc was announced, Howard Bernstein saying that his vision was for every public sector pound they would attract three private sector pounds, which immediately puts the public sector in the junior partner position in terms of plurality provision. I think we really need to be concerned about the experience we have seen in health with Hinchingsbrooke where they struggle despite numerous funds from the Government to make delivering healthcare work and the failures that we are currently seeing in the social care system where the big hitters like Four Seasons and Bupa are struggling to deliver care and the vulnerability that that creates within the system when they go bust because they are only concerned about the return on investment. That is a key example of the £10 million being loaned to an already cash-rich private sector company, so that kind of vision is already starting to be played out.

Chair: Okay, my colleague wants to ask a question and then I will come back to other contributions.

Q10 Helen Hayes: I wanted to ask when you think not so much about the structures but when you think about the services which the 10 local authorities provide to you as residents at the moment and the services that the combined authority is beginning to provide, what are the areas that are most in need of changes? What are the things that are not working so well from the perspective of residents at the moment?

John Pottinger: Hi, John Pottinger. In answer to both the last two questions, sir, I was disappointed in your question because it is pretty much what your colleague had asked, which says to me are you really listening to what is being said to you?

In answer to you, already the Better Together programme is in disarray. We know that there is a problem with healthcare in Manchester and it is to do with the funding. We know there are people sleeping on the streets of Manchester, yet our Chancellor wants to drive a big toy train up to London so that he can get to London 20 minutes earlier at a cost of several billion pounds. That several billion pound investment into Manchester could do a lot for Manchester and they keep saying that we do not fully understand it. I am fortunate enough to have friends who are very intelligent, more than capable of reading whatever documents you care to put out, but we have not seen them, and they really do not understand what Devo Manc is all about. This to me is a top down approach. I think somebody from the north-east said something that I thought was quite nice. If you want to pass the buck, pass the bucks, but I have not seen any evidence that we are going to get funding sufficient to drive this through and we still do not understand what is driving through, apart from a new train service to Manchester through the green belt of Cheshire.

Terry Tallis: Can I just echo what the lady there from the Royal College of Nursing said and tie it in with your plea to let you know whether we think various things are good or bad? The problem about healthcare in Greater Manchester is that we do not know yet exactly what the demand is going to be. If you put that together with the new situation under the Health and Social Care Act where the Secretary of State no longer has a responsibility to provide healthcare for everybody in this country, merely to promote it, and then if you look at what has actually happened so far in terms of what you might think of as initial work or a blueprint in Healthier Together—God help us, they won a prize for the way they organised that. You could not really make it up because the way the involvement and consultation was organised for Healthier Together was a scandal. It was organised during the summer when most people were away on holiday and the fundamental research

work on which it was based was absolutely flawed, as David Oliver, who used to be the Government tsar for older people, has pointed out. The premise on which Healthier Together rests is that on the whole it will be better, especially for older people, if services are provided in the community, which we all know are actually pretty expensive, they will not need to go to hospital so much, which is one stage further up in terms of expense. That has been shown to be an absolutely flawed premise. It does not work like that and it is not cheaper. It does not keep people in their homes and it is more expensive because the whole thing does not work.

Now, on Healthier Together, those points were made to the consultation, but they have taken absolutely no notice. The lady over there and another gentleman have already alluded to the fact that social needs in terms of health are huge in Manchester. As a person representing a totally independent group in Stockport concerned about healthcare—we fund ourselves; we are not beholden to anybody—we do not know what we feel about this. This is partly why I have come today but also because we have no idea what the programme is going to be, what actually is going to be proposed. You talk about the difference. A lady up there said, “What is the difference between the services provided already and those provided by the combined authority?” Well, the short answer is we do not know because we cannot find out. That is what our big issue is. It is exceedingly difficult to find out. Meanwhile, as someone has already said, things are just going on. I would like to ask all of you: what is the status of this little exercise?

Q11 Chair: All I would say is we are here to listen today. We are not here to justify the current proposals or to explain them. We are here to listen to what people have to say to us in evidence and we will go away and eventually conclude our findings based on all the evidence we have heard. We cannot give answers today. We are really listening to you; that is what our mode is.

Male Speaker: Yes, thank you. On the answer to the question of which public services, it is a difficult question to answer because really what we would like to see, certainly in Manchester and I assume across Greater Manchester, is all the money that has been withdrawn from the authority should be returned and then we could improve our public services back to the levels that they were in 2010.

The other point I would make about public services is what is clearly stated within the devolution agreement is a commitment to commissioning. For the majority of people that I know within trade unions

and just generally in communities, commissioning means one thing. It means privatisation. That is what commissioning means. We understand the language and we understand what the plan is. The plan is all the public services that we currently have at one stage or another will eventually be privatised.

Female Speaker: I am very, very relieved to hear that you are going to be listening to us and I hope that we will see the responses to that listening as well. I would just like to comment that in Tameside, the powers that be have decided to form an integrated care organisation, the first one in this area, possibly even in the country. I understand there is no research that proves that an integrated care organisation is effective, value for money, and so on. Again, I have only found out about this by going to a CCG meeting and I would like you to take on board that these things are going on under the devolution umbrella in secret. You are asking me to comment on a document. What document? I have not seen a document today. You have to take on board what we say; it is very important because Tameside has one of the lowest health outcomes in the country. People's life expectancy is shorter there than in other parts of the country. I find that absolutely disgusting.

I would also like to make a comment about representation because, excuse me for saying so, your panel does not look very representative of the population of Greater Manchester.

Chair: Well, what I would say is that we are representative in terms of elected by our colleagues from the MPs in Parliament. We are here because we are elected and we did not choose ourselves in that way. Mary, you have a question.

Q12 Mary Robinson: Mary Robinson, MP for Cheadle, so I do represent some people who are going to be involved in this in the Greater Manchester area, in Cheadle, but I am here as a member of this Select Committee as the Chairman rightly says. A lot of the conversation today has been around things like accountability and scrutiny. Now, I firmly believe that a strong leadership relies on strong scrutiny, so I would be interested to hear from you how you would like that scrutiny to look. At the moment, it appears to be that the scrutiny of the mayor will be drawn from a pool potentially in the same way as currently happens with the CGLA with about 30 members, but how would you like the scrutiny of this to look?

Chair: Is there anyone who has not come in yet?

Ron Ferguson: Ron Ferguson. I also am from Tameside. I am a member of a number of organisations within the borough, including Health Watch, and I am quite familiar with the changes to health happening in the health authority in Greater Manchester and particularly in Tameside. These are quite separate from devolution. I know that people in Tameside get mixed up and it seems from what I have heard here some of the people here are confusing it, too. As far as I am aware, they are totally unconnected. Now, I personally—I am not speaking for Health Watch or any other organisation—believe that devolution would be a good thing for Manchester. We have over many years seen terrific expansion of services within Greater London and we have not seen comparable increases in services in Greater Manchester. Now, this may be because London has had two pretty good mayors in Ken Livingstone and Boris Johnson, who have gone out and promoted the city. Now, I think this is one of the benefits of having an elected mayor is somebody who will go out and promote Greater Manchester, promote the facilities for industry, for development, for expansion, and I think that is the prize.

I also think, and I would like you to take this back, please, that HS2 should start in Manchester and not in London. It strikes me as being ridiculous that we talk about the powerhouse of the north and start building it in London. For heaven's sake, you have had Crossrail and what have you over the last few years and what have we had in Manchester? A few trams. I am sorry, this is simply not good enough. We have been ignored for too long. We need an elected mayor who can promote Manchester and get the MPs off their backsides to realise that we are people here, we want the services and we want the same services as London.

Chair: Is there anybody who has not come in?

John Stuart: My name is John Stuart. I live in east Manchester. You are going to get a council view later on, but I did spend nine years as a councillor in Scotland and two years as a council leader, so the scrutiny issue I think is quite key. What you have at the moment I think is an unsatisfactory system, partly because you have 10 council leaders there. Eight of those councils are Labour dominated and potentially there is a situation where, as someone has already referred to, you have the one party state of Manchester City Council writ large across the whole region and there is a real problem in trying to get plurality of views across there. Related to that is the tribalism and the localism that you will get from those council leaders to be seen to be standing up for what is right for their area as opposed to the greater city region is also an issue.

Somebody mentioned about getting control back over variable services and I think the people involved in the devolution process are absolutely key. That is the interim mayor. It is the council leaders of the councils who are there at the moment. Talking about devolution is a one-way street at the moment, devolving power potentially from London to Manchester. The detail of it seems to be more about culling the powers that exist across public bodies in Manchester as opposed to any more power coming from the centre. But devolution does need to stop with the mayor and with the 10 authorities and there can be structures put in place and it must be seen as an evolving process that devolves that power that has come to the Greater Manchester whole back out to the communities within Greater Manchester. That does not or should not stop at the current council boundaries. Where I live, if I walk 100 yards to the end of my street I am in Oldham, walk 400 yards the other way I am in Tameside, and 500 yards to the north I am in Rochdale. Lines on maps quite often do not mean an awful lot to people, particularly in an urban setting. What is really important is that devolution continues its process, the mayor, the 10 authorities, and you get a scrutiny process in there that reflects plurality across Greater Manchester but also has the opportunity for power to come further down. Whether that is a case of stopping scrutiny being done by the 10 council leaders and possibly having some sort of proportional election across Greater Manchester for perhaps two dozen commissioners to monitor the mayor, which would ensure geographic representation, and would ensure political plurality, true plurality as well.

Q13 Chair: Okay. I am sorry, I think everyone who has indicated has spoken at least once. Thank you very much for coming. We are going to have to move on now to our next formal evidence session, which starts at 10 o'clock. We are on quite a tight programme today and we have a visit after our three evidence sessions we are going to have now. So, thank you very much for coming along and giving us a range of views, certainly some quite challenging views, views that probably will be slightly different from those we hear in the formal evidence session later on, but we will certainly bear very strongly in mind the concerns about the lack of engagement, lack of understanding, lack of involvement that you put across to us, though obviously some positives as well about the intentions and what might come out of this process. You are all very welcome to come to our formal session, which starts at 10 o'clock. Thank you very much indeed for coming and giving your views.

Female Speaker: Excuse me, could you just tell us who you are taking evidence from?

Chair: I think it is down in the public domain. We are having eight witnesses. There is Tony Lloyd, who is the interim mayor; Sue Derbyshire, who is the leader of Stockport; Kieran Quinn, the leader of Tameside; Professor Karel Williams from Manchester University; David Fernandez-Arias, the Greater Manchester Referendum Campaign; Joe Anderson, mayor of Liverpool, Joanne Roney, the chief executive of Wakefield; and Chris Murray, who is a director of Core Cities. Okay, thanks, and we are having those three sessions shortly.