Ms Sue Devlin – written evidence (CCE0223)

Please note: I have only just found out about this call for evidence so, in the limited time available, I will provide free-form information rather than answering the questions provided.

1. I am writing about the ward where I live, Rusholme, in Manchester, Greater Manchester.

   Rusholme has a fascinating history, having been the ‘neighbourhood of choice’ chosen by the wealthy Victorian merchants involved in the cotton industry during Manchester’s time as “Cottonopolis”. These merchants were followed by wealthy professionals – academics, medics and journalists. All of whom wanted to live close to, but not in, Manchester city centre. In recent decades, Rusholme has welcomed waves of residents from all parts of the world, most notably Asia, giving rise to the “world-famous curry mile”, and more recently from the Middle East, giving rise to what some now call “shisha mile”.

   Rusholme ward straddles the Wilmslow Road, a main arterial road running south from the city centre. To the west there are tightly-packed terraced houses with small or no front gardens and a yard at the back opening into shared back alleyways. To the east the remaining Victorian villas and mansions remain, some still in their original large, landscaped gardens. These are mainly in institutional use now, in particular, as student halls of residence. Adjoining the Victorian area are streets of large Edwardian houses and large newbuild family houses.

   I mention all of this because it has led to the situation where Rusholme is a very diverse community. Here’s one academic paper amongst many: [http://mlm.humanities.manchester.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2015/12/How-is-language-choice-in-the-‘Curry-Mile’-district-of-Rusholme-Manchester-affected-by-different-domains..pdf](http://mlm.humanities.manchester.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2015/12/How-is-language-choice-in-the-‘Curry-Mile’-district-of-Rusholme-Manchester-affected-by-different-domains..pdf). In Rusholme, residents cover the full spectrum, from newly-arrived refugees fleeing war zones, to working and retired academics, medics and senior public and private sector professionals, all living in the same ward.

   As a result, Rusholme probably has more “social capital” than is usual, working voluntarily to solve the social problems they see in the streets they live in and walk through, in the ward where they live.

   As a result, there is a lot of activity aimed at increasing a sense of citizenship and civic engagement. I give examples in the following paragraphs.

2. “Imagine Rusholme”

   A Rusholme resident introduced a group of us to the concept of “Appreciative Inquiry (AI)”, and a group of ‘active’ residents ran a pilot event, bringing international AI experts together with Rusholme residents, community group representatives and traders, Rusholme councillors, Rusholme council officers, Rusholme partners – police, fire and rescue services, health service, etc, about 30 people in all. The pilot event asked the
question what did we like best about Rusholme, and how could we bring about more of what we like. The event was a great success and the room was ‘buzzing’ with energy and goodwill.

As a result, we ran two “summits” in Rusholme, each attended by around 70 people, and compiled two story books about the events. These are available via the following links:

- Imagine Rusholme! Summit 1 Storybook: Imagine Rusholme! Summit 1 Story Book G
- Imagine Rusholme! Summit 2 Storybook: Imagine Rusholme! Summit 2 Story Book G

Using a technique called ‘open space’, those present at the summits identified ten ‘discussions’ that everyone present wanted to take forward. These were:

1. Community Garden on Rusholme Grove + Joining Up Green Spaces, Hedgerows & Trees
2. Creative Rusholme
3. Litter Free Rusholme + Cleaner/Greener
4. On Our Bikes in Rusholme
5. Reducing Burglary
6. Respect for Rusholme + How to Work Positively with the Council for the Good of Rusholme
7. Rusholme & Wider World Issues
8. Rusholme Ward & District Centre Plans + Parking
9. Student Integration & Involvement
10. Sustainability

Some of the projects have progressed and continue today, largely based on the time available to each discussion’s team.

3. “Upping It”

A Rusholme resident living in the “Terrace Square” to the west of the Wilmslow Road got fed up of the amount of food waste going into the communal containers for general waste. The food waste was attracting squirrels who then tore the black bin bags and pulled the general waste all over the place, and, where the food waste either fell out of the container or was left on the floor close to the container, was attracting rats. She decided to do something about it. The result was “Upping It”.

“Upping It” started out as a project to stop residents putting food waste into the general waste containers and to encourage them to put it into the food waste containers. That way it would generate income for Manchester City Council (MCC), rather than incur a cost for its disposal as general waste.

What was unique about “Upping It” was that the Rusholme resident went door to door, introducing herself as a local resident. She explained the problem of food waste in and around the general waste containers and implored the resident to avoid food waste if they could, and if they couldn’t avoid food waste “never, ever, ever put it in the general
waste container; only ever put it in the food waste container” (I can hear her saying it now!).

At the same time, she realised that many households weren’t fully up to speed on what type of waste goes into which bin – Manchester City Council has a quite complicated four-bin system: black = general waste; brown = glass bottles and jars, plastic bottles, etc; blue = paper, cardboard, drink cartons, etc; green = food and garden waste. So, the conversations with each household expanded to cover this information too.

As she went door to door, she came across all sorts of different cultures, and all sort of different languages were being spoken, but, also, she spoke to people who didn’t know their neighbours and had never spoken to other residents in their same street.

Having started to tackle the food waste problem, the Rusholme resident moved on the next problem – the overgrowth, litter and fly-tipping in the back alleyways shared by these terraced properties. The resident in question had already “greened” her own back alley by clearing the weeds, uncovering the lovely cobbles, building raised beds, planting flowers and food and creating a decked area for neighbours to come and go socially.

Joining up with a small team that had already started a similar project in the neighbouring ward of Moss Side – Avenues and Alleyways – and seeking to appoint a ‘street rep’ to lead on activities for each street, the team set about systematically tackling each back alleyway in the “Terrace Square”. In 2013, they were awarded Manchester City Council funding to expand their work: http://www.manchester.gov.uk/directory_record/125687/upping_it_%E2%80%93_the_terrace_square. In November 2014, the “Upping It” team won the ‘champion of champions’ award at Manchester City Council’s annual “Be Proud” awards: http://www.manchestereveningnews.co.uk/news/greater-manchester-news/pride-manchester-named-glitzy-town-8198465.

This project has brought about an immense improvement, but key to it was going door-to-door and seeking to identify a “street rep” for each street. “Upping It” succeeded in upping the amount of food waste going into the correct bin and upping the cleanliness and greenery in the shared back alleyways, but also in “upping” community relationships and cohesiveness.

The Rusholme resident who started it all has since learnt Urdu and is now learning Arabic so she can really connect with members of her community. In her own street, residents organise welcome parties for new residents, celebrations for new babies, and goodbye parties for those moving on, all of which celebrate the culture of the arrivals, the babies, and those leaving.

4. Rusholme & Fallowfield Civic Society

This civic society, a constituted community group, was established in 1969 and is therefore coming up to its 50th anniversary.
As is to be expected, its role has evolved over time, however, the objects set out in the original constitution still stand:

a) To stimulate public interest in and care for the beauty, history and character of Rusholme and Fallowfield and their surroundings.
b) To encourage the preservation, development and improvement of the features which go to make pleasing conditions in which to live and work.
c) To encourage high standards of architecture and town planning in the area.
d) To pursue these ends by means of meetings, exhibitions, lectures, publications, other forms of instruction, study and publicity, and promotion of schemes of a charitable nature.

as does its original area of interest – Rusholme and Fallowfield wards, and surrounding areas.

A key aspect of the society’s committee’s work is scrutiny of the performance of the Rusholme (and Fallowfield) ward councillors on behalf of the society’s members, in the context of the objects set out above.

To do this, the committee meets monthly with an agenda that includes the following items:

- Review of current Planning & Licensing applications
- Review of current Manchester City Council and other consultations
- Review of current Council Policy scrutiny.

This is ‘grunt work’ and quite a heavy workload for the society’s committee of nine, but we do it because we have come across situations where Rusholme councillors either aren’t aware of, eg, the implications of particular planning or licensing applications, or they are aware of the applications but aren’t aware of the implications of the applications. Likewise, consultations and policy.

I would argue that they should be, but the fact is, they aren’t. Many Rusholme residents consider that this is because 95 of 96 Manchester City councillors are Labour, and that Labour councillors don’t have to work too hard to retain their seats. I acknowledge that these might be controversial statements, but factual nevertheless.

For example, the last time Rusholme councillors met with Rusholme residents to discuss ward issues was on 21st September 2016. Please note that the Rusholme councillors meet with the Rusholme Labour Group every month to give account of themselves, and hopefully receive scrutiny of their performance in the role, but this is a closed meeting and the content of the meetings aren’t made public.

I’d be interested to know what the House of Lords thinks of this in terms of its likely impact on what Rusholme residents think about citizenship and civic engagement in our ward.

5. “Portrait of a Street”
Two members of a Residents’ Association in Rusholme living in a street of Edwardian houses that celebrated its 100th anniversary in 2011, came to realise how unusually multicultural their street was.

One resident, a photographer, and another, a creative writer, decided to visit each property and, with the permission of the occupants, tell the story of how they came to be living in the street and take a photograph of them as a family unit in front of their property.

Their stories have been anonymised and shared, and the subsequent book aimed at 8 – 12 year olds serves to demonstrates the power of:

- Getting to know and learning about the residents in the street where you live.
- How fascinating, scary and sad the stories can be.
- How such an exercise has the effect of pulling everyone in the street together and generating a mutual respect for differences and similarities.

6. **Other**

If I had the time I could tell more stories about Rusholme – we have a friends of a park group, a forest school activity: “long term programmes within a natural space, led by a qualified practitioner [that] focus on developing personal, social and emotional life skills through learner-led, nature-based learning”: [http://forestschools.com/what-happens-at-a-forest-school/](http://forestschools.com/what-happens-at-a-forest-school/); three community centres providing childcare, youth services, age friendly services; a community forum focused on alleviating isolation amongst the older people in the ward, tackling dementia and supporting carers, so much to talk about...

7. **The Role of Councillors**

The Manchester City Council’s Constitution describes the role of councillors as follows:

Roles and functions of all councillors. Key roles. All councillors will:

i. collectively be the ultimate policy-makers and carry out a number of strategic and corporate management functions;
ii. bring views of their communities into the Council's decision-making process;
iii. effectively represent the interests of their ward and of individual constituents;
iv. deal with individual casework and act as an advocate for constituents in resolving particular concerns or grievances;
v. respond to constituents' enquiries and representations, fairly and impartially;
vi. participate in the governance and management of the Council;
vii. be available to represent the Council on other bodies; and
viii. maintain the highest standards of conduct and ethics.

I wonder who is supposed to solve the problems in each ward. Rusholme has many problems. Is it councillors? Is the above description enough?
8. **Learning from Private Sector Companies**

Private Sector companies **have to** solve problems, and they **have to** ensure “citizenship”, ie, full employee participation; and “civic engagement”, ie, peak employee performance in their role. How do they do that?

- Careful recruitment/selection processes – not applicable in this context.
- Induction – how do we welcome new residents to their ward? Do we enthuse them with the ‘ward’s USPs’ – its unique selling points? Why they should be proud, excited and enthused to be living there? Is there a booklet, in their preferred language, enthusing them about where they live?
- Training – what do they need to know to be a successful citizen in their ward? Who are their councillors? What can their councillors do for them? Is there a residents’ association/civic society/neighbourhood watch scheme for them to join in their area?
- Facilities – what is available to them? Community centres, community groups, parks, etc.
- Mentor – who can help them succeed – their councillors?

9. **Transforming the Role of the Councillor**

What do councillors do at the moment? Reactive, bureaucratic, party-partisan work?

What should they be doing?

Proactive, personalised, door-to-door work to ensure every resident, trader and visitor to their ward is succeeding and enjoying wellbeing?