

CITY COUNCIL MEETING 20 FEB 2012. Speech by Minute Item 89

My name is MH-J. I am secretary of OX.PAG.¹, and a member of several old folks' social clubs. I meet many pensioners, rich + poor, able-bodied and disabled. It is the latter who use the TWO Dial-a-ride minibuses in Oxford City. Both are fully booked up 52 weeks a year.

I have known for some months the County plans to take over Dial-a-ride in April. On 5 Feb I attended the County's cabinet mtg to discuss the matter. As you know it decided to have just ONE minibus in each district. I learned that THIS year the City contributes £61,000, but nothing next financial year. I therefore put a question to your Board mtg on 8 Feb asking 'Why?'

The answer I got was confusing, illogical + on one point UNTRUE! I quote "...over £4 million was transferred last year from the City to the County to fund concessionary transport which obviously includes dial-a-ride..." Obvious? Really? Next day I checked with the County officer in charge of dial-a-ride... "That is NOT true", he told me. The answer goes on "...this is not the case for education." What does that mean? What does the pronoun 'this' refer to? I asked a city officer on 8 Feb. 'I just write what I'm told to', he replied. I still don't know... In fact education and transport are BOTH run by the County, and that is why the City says it will no longer contribute. So why is it budgeting over £300,000 for education??

Of course education is important and some Oxford schools have poor results. That is why 2½ years ago I went to the Oxford Academy at Littlemore. I was shown round by the Head, Mr Reading, + I offered to pay for a large map of the world, as I've noticed that modern young people often don't know where countries are! But education is a matter for the County, so I am glad to learn from Cllr Tiffy that City will cooperate in raising attainment with the County.

I am forced to the conclusion that the ruling Labour group thinks backward children are more important than disabled pensioners. Most pensioners I know find that disgusting! But it will no doubt be pushed through by the undemocratic Labour majority on this council. Yes! Undemocratic because the numbers of cllrs of different parties do NOT proportionally represent the political views of the voters of Oxford. For the last 10 yrs or more there has been NO Conservative cllr though about ¼ of the voters usually vote for that party. As a democrat I find this outrageous. The undemocratic first-past-the-post system, left over from the 18th c. is now used in NO other European country. But wait! Last May we did for once have a democratic vote, a referendum, and 23 of the ¼ or so of people who bothered to vote wanted to retain the f.p.t.p system. To its credit Oxford was one of the few places which voted for a more democratic system. No wonder lots of people do not bother to vote at all. They know that in so-called safe seats it's pointless.

Actually I did once stand for election to a district council. It was in 1973 in Dorchester on Thames. I just beat the sitting Conservative by 20 votes. I was re-elected to the SODC with increased majorities in 1976 + '79 despite the rising tide of Thatcherism! I sat as an Independent.

Then for family reasons I moved to Marston + soon realized that the City Council is dominated by party politics, + will no doubt continue to be so. I hope I will soon be in a better world - meantime I shall continue to support poor and disadvantaged pensioners.

1 OXPAG = Oxfordshire Pensioners' Action Group. (started in 1982)

Please phone before 10am if anything is not clear.

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