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Crossrail on track for a senior recruiting drive

Martin Waller: City Diary

Wanted: someone to hold the hand of the chairman of Crossrail.

Now the project finally has a funding package in place and with the Bill going through the House of Lords, it is starting to hire staff.

Crossrail is four independent non-executives short - the board, apart from the chairman Douglas Oakervee, are all secondees from Transport for London or elsewhere.

It also needs a grandly titled Chief of Staff to prepare for board and other meetings.

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- Crossrail firm gave cash to Labour
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Crossrail is still a long way from sticking a spade in the ground, but it's progress. The latest date for trains to start running is 2017. And to think at one stage there was talk of getting it done by the Olympics!

Meanwhile, I hear opposition is not entirely dead at Westminster. A cabal of unnamed MPs, dismissed as "whinges on the fringes" by my man, thinks that the project takes the wrong route or is an unnecessary extravagance.

Cappucino and a book, please

Just how many books about Starbucks can the market support? AbeBooks, the excellent new and used books website, has put together a list of the ten bestsellers and reckons five have been published over the past year alone. The top bestseller is a memoir of a former ad executive who lost his job, his marriage and his health before finding salvation behind the counter. How can the Starbucks chief executive compete? Howard Schultz's authorised version languishes in fourth place.

Pint-sized price cut

Lucy Neville-Rolfe, a director of Tesco, has written to this newspaper refuting claims that her company has cut alcohol prices more aggressively than its competitors, so contributing to binge drinking. At Tesco and its rival supermarket Asda prices fell by only 1 per cent over the past year, while at Sainsbury's they increased, she says. I appreciate the difficult and ambivalent position these businesses are in, but is this the first time a grocer has boasted of cutting prices, but not by that much?

Take it or leave it

Given that the regulator has just announced an investigation into claims that the British energy market is unhealthily dominated by only a handful of suppliers, should German concern RWE, which owns npower, not rethink the slogan on the front of its latest report and accounts? "If not us, who else?"

TIMES RECOMMENDS

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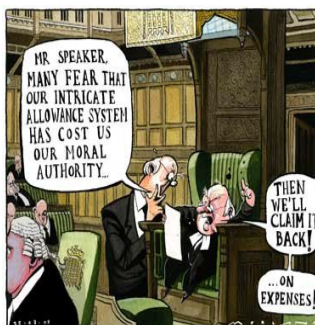
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