

**Council Questions to Cabinet Members
12 September 2006
Questions and Responses**

Question No. 1**Councillor Brian Gordon**

During the course of the last Council meeting, certain Councillors openly defied the ruling of the Mayor, causing the Mayor to have to shout, gesticulate and bang her gavel just to be heard. Would the Leader join me in condemning such rebellious behaviour and stress that the Mayor's authority in this Chamber must be obeyed?

Answer by Councillor Mike Freer, Leader of the Council

This Administration has worked hard to restore the dignity of the Mayoralty. Failure to respect the Mayor, the first citizen of the Borough, shows a lack of respect for the Council, its Members and the people we serve. All Members must observe the Mayor's rulings.

Question No. 2**Councillor Monroe Palmer**

Would Councillor Coleman provide an update on the unsightly and frightening woodstack at Staples Corner. It rises high into the sky and towers over this busy junction. Are we just waiting for yet another major fire in the west of the Borough, right next door to a major regeneration project?

Answer by Councillor Brian Coleman

Councillor Helena Hart (Cabinet Member with responsibility for Public Health) and I met with Council and Fire Brigade Officers to agree a plan for dealing with this potential threat to public health and safety. All the avenues opened to us were explored using Health and Safety Legislation and the GLC General Powers Act.

I have personally written to the Chairman of Network Rail, who are the freeholders of the site to remind them of the disruption to their core business of providing rail services caused when this site caught fire. I have received an acknowledgment but not yet a substantive reply. Councillor Hart and I are keeping a close personal eye on this matter and are happy to talk to Ward Members at any time.

Question No. 3**Councillor Ansuya Sodha**

Given the Leader's downgrading of the importance of promoting equalities by scrapping the all-party Cabinet Equalities and Social Inclusion Committee, (a) how will the Council ensure all-party Member oversight of equalities issues, (b) how will officers be held accountable on equalities – not only by Cabinet Members – but also by administration and opposition scrutiny Members, (c) how will council taxpayers be assured that there is equality for all in Barnet if there is a lack of monitoring, and (d) how will black and minority ethnic Members be involved in monitoring equalities issues?

Answer by Councillor Mike Freer, Leader of the Council

Equalities has not been downgraded but has in fact been given greater prominence. As Leader I will champion equality and diversity issues. Equality and diversity is integral to everything we do and is not best served by abrogating responsibility to a sub-committee.

Each and every Council report will have to comment on equalities and diversity implications. This Council will deal with equality and diversity and not just talk about it.

The Cabinet Equalities and Social Inclusion Committee was neither a pro-active user forum and nor did it make executive decisions, and therefore its exact nature was unclear.

- (a) all-party oversight will be achieved through Scrutiny Committees as oversight is their core business;
- (b) equalities issues will be mainstreamed through the established channels for monitoring and reporting performance (including Cabinet OSC for executive decisions made by Cabinet). Incidentally the notion of 'officers being held accountable' seems at odds with the constitution in which accountability lies with members of the Council who are advised by officers;
- (c) equalities targets will be embedded in other documents such as Key Priority Plans which will continue to be monitored and scrutinised;
- (d) on the assumption this refers to Members of the Council: BME Members will be involved in monitoring equalities issues in exactly the same way as all Members.

To suggest equality and diversity is only a matter for BME Councillors is ridiculous as Cllr Sodha may be surprised that equality and diversity is not simply a matter of race.

Question No. 4

Councillor Brian Gordon

There are still quite a number of roads within this Borough which have speed humps. This is despite their widespread unpopularity and the lack of statistics to show that they have reduced road accidents. When is the Council going to move those that remain?

Answer by Councillor Matthew Offord

The Council's policy continues to be that when resurfacing or other works are carried out which require the removal of traffic calming measures, we take the opportunity to consider whether the same, or altered, measures need to be reinstated.

Question No. 5

Councillor Alison Moore

The Association of London Government is proposing to cut its grants budget by one third and supposedly 'repatriate' a share of this grant budget to Barnet Council from April 2007. Can we have an assurance that the funds supposedly to be 'repatriated' to Barnet will actually be invested in Barnet's voluntary and community sector and not simply cut from this Council's budget; and what consideration will be given by Barnet Council to contributing to London-wide projects and projects with neighbouring boroughs where appropriate to the benefit of Barnet residents?

Answer by Councillor Mike Freer, Leader of the Council

In line with Council procedures any repatriated monies will be matched against Council priorities. Clearly the funds would be valuable to our vibrant voluntary sector.

With regard to pan-London organisations, each application would be evaluated on its own merits as to what the organisation could add to the well-being of Barnet residents.

Question No. 6**Councillor Brian Gordon**

Please could you give a brief progress report on the most recent measures being taken to make traffic wardens more user friendly and reduce the number of inappropriate penalty charge notices being imposed?

Answer by Councillor Matthew Offord

By April 2006, the following measures had been introduced:

- charges for residents' parking permits frozen until April 2008;
- a review of all existing controlled parking zones will start during this financial year;
- pay and display users now get a five minute grace period after the expiry of a ticket;
- households buying a resident parking permit are given five free visitor vouchers;
- parking attendants wait and make observations for at least five minutes to check if vehicles likely to be making a delivery from yellow lines or parking places are loading or unloading;
- the council has signed up to the Moovit scheme, which allows delivery drivers to be paged if they are away from their vehicle.

Question No. 7**Councillor Geof Cooke**

An internal audit report has delivered a damning verdict of 'no assurance' on the Council's Controlled Parking system. In response the Head of Service reported to the Audit Committee on 20 June 2006 that: "4 PAs [parking attendants] have left the Council's service in the last three months and there is no current business case to replace". This appears to confirm that the Cabinet regards parking enforcement not as a means of ensuring the free flow of traffic nor as a way of giving resident and business purchasers of parking permits value for their money by deterring unauthorised parking, but rather as a way of raising revenue from the long suffering public, to be assessed on a purely financial basis. Do you have an alternative explanation?

Answer by Councillor Matthew Offord

No it does not. This Administration does not needlessly employ people in any service area. As greater compliance occurs in parking then the numbers of PAs should reduce through natural wastage and other reasons.

The Audit Report you refer to was related to the position as it was in March 2005. Under my direction, the Parking Section was already committed to a programme of identifying need for change at that time and significant changes have taken place across the service. As part of a scheduled follow-up, officers are currently preparing feedback responses to the Audit Report that will demonstrate that necessary changes have been implemented.

Question No. 8**Councillor Jane Ellison**

Can the Cabinet Member for Environment and Transport please advise me about the arrangements for litter picking and cleansing on the stretches of the A1, A41 and A406 that run through various wards in this Borough including, in the case of the A1 and A41, Hale Ward.

Answer by Councillor Matthew Offord

We aim to sweep nearside channels, footpaths, verges & driveway crossovers 9 times per year. Central reservation and offside channels are normally swept 6 times per year (this operation is subject to TfL providing traffic management to enable safe working) this generally involves fast lane restrictions which TfL refer to as 'Block Closures'. All of the above works are carried out at night to minimise traffic disruption.

Litter removal on nearside verges, footpaths, subways and pedestrian bridges is carried out on a weekly cyclic basis at night. In addition to this, responsive works are carried out for EPA removal of litter and flytipped materials, these works are ongoing.

Litter clearance from central reservation prior to grass cutting is the responsibility of TfL.

Question No. 9

Councillor Kath McGuirk

Please provide percentage and actual figures for all four quarters of the 2005/6 financial year for the levels of sickness absence for the Council's parking attendants.

Answer by Councillor Matthew Offord

Sickness in 2005/6 in the parking enforcement team has been recorded as follows:

1st quarter	424 person-days.	9.0%
2nd quarter	447 person-days.	9.2%
3rd quarter	610 person-days	12.3%
4th quarter	384 person days	8.2%

Question No. 10

Councillor Hugh Rayner

Please could the Cabinet Member confirm what arrangements Barnet Council makes for its parking attendants to take short breaks, meal breaks and toilet breaks when they are on patrol away from Council facilities.

Answer by Councillor Matthew Offord

The management and supervisory officers in the parking enforcement team identify and review from time to time (taking into account feedback from officers) suitable locations for toilet breaks for each beat covered. These will, where possible, be public facilities, but it may also be the case that suitable private facilities will be agreed for use.

Meal breaks are programmed into an officer's day, and the parking attendant is required to notify their base when they start and finish their meal break.

It would not normally arise that officers take any other "short break" during their working day any more than any other council officer would expect to take breaks other than meal breaks and toilet breaks. However, being in an outdoor environment, severe weather conditions might result in the need for a break to be taken, and in such an event the parking attendant would request such a break and give the reasons for it to their supervisory team with whom they are in contact with by mobile phone.

Question No. 11**Councillor Gill Sargeant**

Following the fire at Beaufort Park and the decision of St Georges to rebuild the damaged block with concrete construction what is the Council doing to undertake a full inquiry into what has happened and to urgently review the densities and the standard of construction on the site?

Answer by Councillor Melvin Cohen

Timber framed buildings form the majority of residential homes worldwide. It is mainly in Britain that the traditional masonry construction is more popular. The use of timber frame is considered to be less ecologically damaging than masonry because timber is a quickly renewable resource.

Timber frame construction, when complete, has all the fire resistance required of it by our Building Regulations. The problem is that until a building is finished, with its combustible frame not provided with a fire resisting lining, it is vulnerable to accidental conflagration, or even arson.

The Building Regulations do not control the fire protection whilst the building is under construction. If no person is living in the building, then the Regulations consider that there is no risk. The matter of safety before the building is finished is under the control of the Health and Safety Executive who are, I believe, carrying out an investigation. The Fire Brigade is also preparing a report on the fire.

Building Control had checked the plans and had been carrying out regular inspections of the construction to ensure compliance with the Building Regulations. It is not considered that the fire and its spread would have been due to any Building Regulation infringement.

An internal review has disclosed no irregularity in the Building Control Department procedures.

The member can resubmit her question when the results of the Fire Brigade enquiry and the HSE enquiry, both of which are ongoing, are known. Any further action at this time is premature and wholly inappropriate.

As to a review of densities this is with respect a complete red herring there are thousands of higher density units built throughout the country with timber frame construction and I know of no reports that these are all burning to the ground.

Question No. 12**Councillor Brian Gordon**

It has been reported that more than half of motorists who appealed against penalty charge notices between April 2005 and March 2006 won their appeals. Have you got any comments to make on this?

Answer by Councillor Matthew Offord

The first point to bear in mind is that less than 2% of the penalties issued by Barnet's Parking Attendants are the subject of an appeal. With regard to the 'success' of the motorist in having their appeal upheld, it is the case that in 2005/6 51% of appeals considered for penalties issued by Barnet's Parking Attendants were found in the appellant's favour. This is – one would concede – "more than half" but only by a small margin. By comparison, London-wide the equivalent figure was 56% in favour of the motorist.

Question No. 13**Councillor Agnes Slocombe**

When will 'home loss money' be available to West Hendon estate residents who wish to move because of the regeneration?

Answer by Councillor Anthony Finn

The purpose of the home loss payment scheme is to compensate certain categories of occupier who are required to leave their homes permanently because of redevelopment.

The legal framework is set out in the Land Compensation Act 1973.

In order to be eligible for home loss a person must be displaced from their home in consequence of one of several specified events. These include the compulsory acquisition of the premises, the redevelopment of the land or the making of an order for possession under Ground 10 or 10A of the Housing Act 1985.

The person displaced must have occupied the premises for at least one year as his or her only or main residence and must be a secure tenant, secure licensee, leaseholder or freeholder.

The council has discretion to make a home loss payment where a person has been displaced but only met the occupation criteria at the time of the displacement rather than for a full year prior to the displacement.

Where the council obtains possession of a property by agreement, where a ground 10 or 10a possession could have been obtained, the council is able to make a home loss payment.

Home loss payment will only be paid if there is an established link between the displacement and the grounds for displacement. In limited circumstances where a resident makes their own arrangements to move as a result of the regeneration they will be entitled to home loss payment. They will however have to establish that there is a link between them moving and the regeneration scheme.

The regeneration schemes in Barnet are phased over a number of years. Tenants including those living on West Hendon will become eligible for home loss payments at the point when their homes are scheduled for decanting. This is likely to be up to a year before their home is due for demolition.

Leaseholders and freeholders will be eligible for home loss once a Compulsory Purchase Order is in place and they have vacated their homes. However, there is a discretionary power to make a payment to the owner who sells voluntarily (so long as compulsory powers were available).

Question No. 14**Councillor Daniel Webb**

Please could the Cabinet Member outline what progress is being made in improving street lighting in the Borough, and in particular, within Underhill Ward?

Answer by Councillor Matthew Offord

The Street Lighting PFI Core Investment Programme (CIP) is due to commence during September 2006. In the first year an average of 20 roads will have the lighting improved on a monthly basis. The programme increases during the 5 year CIP period with up to 40 roads being relit per month at its peak.

Over the lifetime of the CIP programme, street lighting in the Underhill ward will be replaced as part of a smaller annual programme which will include around 450 columns being replaced each year. These will be prioritised on age, condition and quality of lighting.

Question No. 15**Councillor Barry Rawlings**

In the Cabinet Member for Education's response to question 10 at the June council meeting he welcomed the steady improvement in attendance at primary schools. In the Best Value Performance Plan presented at the same meeting it clearly shows that attendance at primary schools got worse [indicator 46]. Which is the truth?

Answer by Councillor John Marshall

There is no contradiction between my answer and the figures in the Best Value Performance Plan. The figures in the Plan related to the academic year 2004-05. My comments referred to a briefing I had been supplied with in respect of the school year 2005-06. Although that briefing obviously referred to all the information currently available Council will welcome the fact that the Education department still believes that there was an improvement in 2005-06 as I indicated at the last Council meeting. I should like to thank the Councillor for letting me reiterate this.

Question No. 16**Councillor Brian Gordon**

Would you please express the solidarity of this Council with the residents of Ramat Gan – and indeed other towns of Israel and Lebanon – who have been so severely troubled by the unprovoked Hezbollah terrorist attacks from South Lebanon and the resultant war, together with our fervent hope that a lasting peace will be achieved in the region?

Answer by Councillor Mike Freer, Leader of the Council

The terrorist attacks on Israel are to be condemned and we remain steadfast in our support of our friends in Ramat Gan and those towns of Israel and Lebanon troubled by Hezbollah attacks.

Question No. 17**Councillor Ansuya Sodha**

Which Director / Head of Service is responsible for briefing administration and opposition scrutiny members on equalities issues?

Answer by Councillor Mike Freer, Leader of the Council

On a corporate level, Jill Stansfield, Director for Children's Services, but service-related equalities issues are led by the relevant Head of Service.

Question No. 18**Councillor Kate Salinger**

Please could the Cabinet Member for Housing provide an update on work being done to tackle homelessness in Barnet?

Answer by Councillor Fiona Bulmer

Over the past three years, the housing service has succeeded in reducing the numbers of people accepted as homeless by 40% and has reduced the number of people in temporary accommodation by 34%. This has been achieved through our pioneering housing options service that helps people to access a range of options to meet their housing need. The reduction in the use of temporary accommodation has also saved council taxpayers more than £2 million a year.

Question No. 19**Councillor Alison Moore**

On all planning applications for new domestic properties there is a Section 106 levied to cover the impact on education; what was the total sum of money for each year and how has this money been used in 2002/3, 2003/4, 2004/5 and 2005/6?

Answer by Councillor Melvin Cohen

The question is predicated on an incorrect understanding of the true position. The Member should know that not all “residential developments” require contributions for education purposes. The criteria regarding the requirements for education contribution are set out in the Council’s Supplementary Planning Guidance, “Education Contribution from Residential Developments 2000”. This is currently being revised and updated.

Essentially schemes involving the provision of small dwelling units such as studios and one bed dwellings are not regarded as family accommodation and therefore do not attract a contribution. Affordable housing and purpose built accommodation such as sheltered housing is also exempt.

The figures below indicate the sums which have been received in total:

2002/03	2003/04	2004/05	2005/06	Total
£238,426	£355,301	£193,554	£1,578,676	£2,365,957

The figures below represent the application of S106 funding on Education projects:

S106 funding applied to Education projects financial years 2002 to 2005**Financial year/Application Amount applied Comment****2002-03**

Burnt Oak Youth Centre	£	561,000	Upgrade of accommodation
Northway Special School	£	49,650	Transfer of demountable to provide additional accommodation
Mill Hill School	£	403,315	Contribution to expansion works
Year total	£	1,013,965*	

2003-04

Burnt Oak Youth Centre	£	9,707	Upgrade of accommodation
Hendon Library	£	291,940	Upgrade/refurbishment
Year total	£	301,647	

2004-05

Frith Manor	£	325,454	Contribution to school rebuild project
Mill Hill County	£	102,907	Contribution to expansion works
Ashmole	£	310,196	Contribution to expansion works
Year total	£	738,558	

2005-06

Available for PSCIP and other Education schemes		£	311,786
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Grand total £ 2,365,957

* This figure will include S106 monies received in prior years.

Question No. 20**Councillor Richard Weider**

Has the responsible Cabinet Member received any correspondence from the approximately 2000 teenagers from this borough, who have recently been on their holidays in Israel about how their tour was severely disrupted, as they had to avoid being attacked by the missiles from Lebanon, which is putting northern Israel under constant attack?

Answer by Councillor Mike Freer, Leader of the Council

To date I have not received any correspondence but I suspect the teenagers affected by the terrorist attacks would be preoccupied with their safety. We stand firm in support of Barnet residents affected by the terrorist attacks in Israel and Lebanon.

Question No. 21**Councillor Geof Cooke**

Please tell me: (a) Which community, foundation and voluntary aided schools in the borough have water sprinklers to tackle fire, and (b) which schools is the Council planning to equip with sprinkler systems?

Answer by Councillor John Marshall

All the schools which have been rebuilt in the past 4 years have been fitted with sprinkler systems. As the Councillor knows the Council is about to enter a massive school building programme. Clearly I would expect that these new schools will have sprinkler systems.

Question No. 22**Councillor Lisa Rutter**

Please could the Cabinet Member for Education tell Council how many children took part in the Libraries Service's Reading Mission this summer?

Answer by Councillor John Marshall

I am glad to be able to report that this has been a great success due to the dedication of the Head of Libraries, Tricia Little, and Hannah Richens, Principal Librarian for Children. Last year 3150 children participated. This year we set a target of 3500. In the event 4629 children participated. THIS IS A 50% INCREASE.

Question No. 23

Councillor Kath McGuirk

What was the cost of hiring the QC to prepare for and represent the Council at the Hendon FC lands tribunal hearings, and what has been the total legal cost to the Council of dealing with the Lands Tribunal matter?

Answer by Councillor Mike Freer, Leader of the Council

The cost of Leading Counsel in dealing with this matter amounts to £42, 825 to date. The time spent on this matter by the Council's legal officers amounts to 800 hours to date, covering a period of 3 years. Naturally the Council is correct to defend it's position. I am sure Cllr McGuirk would agree this expense would have been necessary to handle the Lands Tribunal issues to resolve matters relating to the social housing scheme proposed by the last Labour administration or our private housing and care home scheme.

Such costs will be netted of against any capital receipts from the land sale proceeds

Question No. 24

Councillor Andrew Harper

Would the Cabinet member for Environment and Transport please give LBB's perspective on the recent National Audit Office report which suggested that at the end of the decade, local authorities across the country would find themselves having to raise taxes in order to pay fines levied by Government as a result of the UK failing to meet EU targets for the amount of waste sent to landfill?

Answer by Councillor Matthew Offord

The report highlighted the significant risk that the UK will not meet the target for reduced quantities of biodegradable waste to be landfilled in 2010 and 2013, set out in the Landfill Directive.

The UK has passed these targets to waste disposal authorities by giving them an allowance of biodegradable waste that can be landfilled by year until 2020. For Barnet these targets have been given to the North London Waste Authority, as the joint waste disposal authority for seven London boroughs (Barnet, Camden, Enfield, Hackney, Haringey, Islington and Waltham Forest).

If the UK fails to meet the EU targets on waste disposal then it is very likely that it will be fined by the EU. The Government has indicated that the fine would be passed back to those waste disposal authorities that failed to meet their individual targets. The Government has also said that it would fine those authorities that failed to meet their individual targets £150 per tonne for each tonne that they exceed their target. If the North London Waste Authority was to exceed the targets and be fined, then these costs would be passed back to the seven boroughs – including Barnet.

However it is anticipated that the North London Waste Authority will meet the target for 2010 and that will be in no small part because of the role played by this Council in achieving our statutory 27% recycling target last year and having already made a good start on future levels.

Question No. 25

Councillor Gill Sargeant

Could the borough give a breakdown on the expenditure of the Living Spaces award for Rushgrove Park?

Answer by Councillor Matthew Offord

Rushgrove Park Living Spaces Scheme

	Living Spaces funded items	actual spend
Pond area	Refurbish pond and stream	5,164.00
	New pump/waterworks	1,214.00
	Bow-top fencing	7,263.25
	Shrub/tree pruning/re-seeding grass area	2,690.00
	technical problems with pump	350.00
	New trees for the park	838.85
	planting of trees	487.63
	Total	£18,007.73

	LB Barnet funded items	
Play Area	Benches and play equipment	3,640.00
Pond area	Additional works	
	extra works to pond	368.00
	New water supply pipe	900.00
	repair further leaks – due to start Sept 2006	£1,876.00
	Total	£6,784.00

Grand Total	£24,791.73
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Question No. 26

Councillor Brian Salinger

Will the cabinet member please provide a list of all the sites in the Borough, visible from the road, where the Council is aware of, or has treated within the last 12 months, Japanese Knot Weed?

Answer by Councillor Matthew Offord

The Council does not maintain a register of known locations, visible from the road or otherwise located.

Question No. 27**Councillor Barry Rawlings**

Looked after children who are the subject of a care order receive priority treatment in the community schools admissions policy, but how does the policy deal with children who have been adopted and are therefore the subject of an adoption order?

Answer by Councillor John Marshall

It is widely recognised that Barnet is at the forefront of good practice in respect of looked after children. That is why their results are better than the national average and better than those enjoyed by our London neighbours.

Looked after children are given priority as they may have to leave their family home to go into a foster home. By giving them priority they are assured of stability in their education. Children who are adopted do by definition have that stability. Children who are in the process of being adopted are treated as looked after children until they are adopted and receive that priority.

Question No. 28**Councillor Brian Salinger**

The Housing Corporation claim that 41% of new homes funded by them are constructed using 'modern methods'. In the light of the fire at Beaufort Park, can the Cabinet Member confirm that such building methods are considered to be safe for their occupants when the buildings are completed?

Answer by Councillor Melvin Cohen

Modern methods of construction in this Country, including timber frame, are being promoted by the Government. They are not unique to affordable housing funded by the Housing Corporation and are methods of construction used by many house builders building for private sale and for other uses. Modern methods have been used to build many new developments in other countries, for example European Countries and USA, but in Britain we have been slower to move away from our traditional house build construction of bricks and mortar and low rise, low density, houses.

Any new development has to be built in accordance with the Building Regulations, and these Regulations ensure that the completed building will be fit for purpose and meet safety standards which include fire protection and containment. Given that homes built using modern methods of construction have to meet the Building Regulations, there is nothing to suggest that when completed such buildings are less safe than homes built using traditional methods.

With regards to Beaufort Park, we are still awaiting the results of the investigations by the Fire Authority and the Health and Safety Executive.

Building Control carries out regular inspections to ensure compliance with the safety standards contained in the Building Regulations.

Question No. 29**Councillor Ansuya Sodha**

Many residents say that the Area Forums are an important point of contact with council officers and Members. Could we please have confirmation on the continuation of the six Area Forums during the lifetime of the present administration (and that they will not be cut to three forums) and an assurance that the six Area Forums will continue to meet on a regular basis every two months?

Answer by Councillor Mike Freer, Leader of the Council

The Council will continue to provide area forums across the various wards and communities that make up the Borough and its parliamentary constituencies. It is not currently envisaged that the frequency of the Forums would decrease.

Question No. 30**Councillor Brian Salinger**

In the interests of upholding the law, does the member agree that licensees who breach the terms of their licence, face the real prospect of having the licence revoked if not renewed?

Answer by Councillor Melvin Cohen

The Councillor has not stated which of the multitude of licenses he is referring to. However, there are clear provisions in law to allow for the revocation or non-renewal of licences for licensees who breach the terms of their licence. If there is sufficient evidence, breaches will be addressed appropriately.

Question No. 31**Councillor Alison Moore**

If the Cabinet Member could set out the specific details of how the housing commuted payments for new affordable homes have been used that were levied from the former Friern Barnet Town Hall and the Professional Development Centre planning applications?

Answer by Councillor Melvin Cohen

PDC – £1,108,000 received

Professional and Development Centre – £1.108 million was received in November 2004. This commuted sum was used to support the Housing Association Capital Programme 2005/6 to fund new affordable homes. £361,000 contributed to the costs of a scheme with Ealing Family Housing Association at Tarling Road, N2 and the remaining £747,000 towards the costs of new affordable homes at New Fieldways, Barnet with Notting Hill Housing Trust.

Friern Barnet Town Hall – £692,000 received

Friern Barnet Town Hall – £692,000 was received in March 2005. £13,000 of this contributed to the costs of the New Fieldways development which was included in the Housing Association Capital Programme 2005/6. The remaining £679,000 will support the Housing Association Capital Programme 2006/7 which contributes towards the costs of new affordable homes.

Question No. 32**Councillor Andrew Harper**

Would the Cabinet Member for Education and Lifelong Learning join with me in congratulating Barnet schools and pupils on their achievements in this summer's public examinations – not least, for example, QE Boys, Henrietta Barnett, St Michael's RC Finchley, all of which featured in the top tier of the league tables, but also the other schools where many children did extremely well at GCSE, AS and A level?

Answer by Councillor John Marshall

I should like to welcome the great successes of these three schools. I should also like to congratulate ALL Barnet schools, their head teachers and staff upon the excellent results that we achieved this year. I don't want to signal out individual schools. To do so is invidious when the overall results were so good.

Question No. 33

Councillor Kath McGuirk

If the Cabinet Member could make a statement on the re-introduction of the council's pest control service and how many call-outs have been made and treatments applied since the service resumed in May 2006?

Answer by Councillor Melvin Cohen

The new fee paying pest treatment service has conducted 778 visits to 506 properties since coming into operation in early May 2006. There are currently two pest control officers employed in the service. This information is accurate to 29 August 2006. We have introduced Saturday appointments starting 2 September. The service is on target to be self-financing.

Question No. 34

Councillor Olwen Evans

Please could the Leader of the Council outline the attendance record of the MPA Link Member for Barnet, Mr. Peter Herbert on the various bodies responsible for community safety in the Borough?

Answer by Councillor Mike Freer, Leader of the Council

The Community and Police Consultative Group (CPCG) meets quarterly: this is not a council-led forum and is serviced by Barnet Voluntary Service Council, but it does have Member representation.

BVSC advise that Mr Herbert attended once in 2001, twice in 2002 and twice in 2003. He last attended 15 July 2003.

Barnet Safer Communities Partnership is the statutory Crime and Disorder Partnership for Barnet (currently chaired by Cllr Coleman). The MPA has observer status at the Partnership Board. The last record of Mr Herbert attending is 10 November 2004. The Board has met either two monthly or quarterly and therefore has met at least eight times since then.

Question No. 35

Councillor Barry Rawlings

If the Cabinet Member could make a statement on the kinds of issues and challenges (such as emotional and behavioural difficulties) facing Barnet children who have been adopted and their parents, and how the Council assists parents and children in dealing with these issues both during the adoption placement and after the adoption order has been issued?

Answer by Councillor Chris Harris

Context

By far the majority of children placed for adoption nationally (and in Barnet) have come through the care system – very few are relinquished babies.

Significant proportion of Barnet adopted children are from multiracial backgrounds and thus require sensitive matching.

Many Barnet adoptive families adopt children from other authorities throughout the country. Some Barnet children are placed outside the authority, either for safety reasons, or in order to find an appropriate match.

There is also a significant flow of adoption from overseas into Barnet.

Recent Adoption Legislation recognises that rather than being a one-off event, adoption is a life-long process for all parties involved – i.e. birth family, adoptive family and the adoptee, and places new duties on local authorities to assess all parties and provide appropriate support at any stage if requested. Adoption remains a lifelong, irreversible measure which transfers full parental rights and responsibilities from the birth parents and local authority to the adoptive parents.

Barnet is a member of the North London Adoption Consortium – with Haringey, Enfield, Camden and Islington and also two voluntary Adoption Agencies, Norwood and Parents for Children.

Where it is not possible to place a Barnet child with our own approved adopters, we seek to find a family within the Consortium if possible. The Consortium works together to:

- share information about waiting children and families,
- provide training and development opportunities for staff and adopters,
- commission services to meet the needs of all those affected by adoption,
- take a joint approach to preparation for adoption.

Common Issues for children being adopted

Identity and contact with birth family

It is now recognised that being adopted is an important part of a person's identity which is lifelong, although it may be more of an issue at certain stages. Some children adopted from the Care System remember their birth families clearly and may even continue to have direct contact with them. Others may not think much about having being adopted until adolescence, or even adulthood, when they have their own children or at other significant life events – at any stage they may approach our adoption team for support and advice.

Role of Children and Families Service

During the adoption process, adoptive families are given as much information as is available about the child's background. The child is given a Life Story book, which will have photographs and other information about their birth family – this is usually compiled by the foster carer or social worker. At the time of the adoption, the social worker will write a "Later Life" letter for the child, explaining the council's role in their adoption.

Before the adoption order is made, a contact plan is drawn up – this can be either for letterbox contact between the birth family and the adoptive family, or in some cases it may involve direct contact, either supervised or unsupervised.

The Adoption Team acts as a mediator in these arrangements, if required, and will offer help in writing letters or arranging and supervising meetings.

Specialised counselling can be accessed through the Post Adoption Centre, to which Barnet subscribes. Barnet residents are entitled to four free sessions and may apply for further help if necessary.

Specific Health, Education or Behaviour Issues

Even children placed for adoption as babies may have been subjected to the effects of drug or alcohol abuse during pregnancy, and may have been born addicted themselves. Research indicates that this may be related to disturbances in behaviour or personality which may not become apparent until the child is much older. Often this will become an issue once the child is at school. Adoptive families often find that schools are unaware of specific issues which may affect adopted children. The adoption team supports families in their communication with schools. This is an area which will benefit from increased multi agency working as our children's services become more integrated.

Mental health problems are another very common issue for adoptive families. Older children will often have experienced abusive or distorted relationships and may have had several changes of carers prior to their adoption. They may never have been in a sufficiently safe and consistent family setting to form a healthy relationship with any trusted adult figure, and this often leads to "attachment problems" for children placed for adoption. During our adoption preparation groups and throughout the assessment process these issues are discussed and addressed, but the reality can be very challenging for adoptive parents. The Adoption team supports families experiencing these difficulties by:

- Offering support programs for adoptive parents – such as a 7 module course held one Saturday a month commissioned from Adoption UK. ("A Piece of Cake")
- Offering places on a parenting skills course at Coram Family.
- Referral to our specialist adoption CAMHS workers at Edgware Hospital
- Referral to specialist support agencies such as Post Adoption Centre.

In some circumstances, the adoption team will arrange respite care for a family experiencing extremely distressing and exhausting behaviour.

We recognise that very often adoptive parents and children can offer each other mutual support and understanding of the very special challenges they face. We have set up a programme of social events to enable adults and children to meet each other. We also plan to set up a series of workshops on issues which are of particular interest – e.g. contact, telling children about adoption.

Finally the following information leaflets are currently being printed:

General information leaflet about adoption
Preparation Training for Adopters
Letterbox contact for Adoptive Families
Adoption Support Services for Adoptive Families
Letterbox for Birth Families/relatives
Adoption Support for Birth Families
Adoption Information for Birth Families
Adoption Records

Question No. 36**Councillor Ansuya Sodha**

Would the lead cabinet member for equality confirm they have an officer team that is actively working on a disability equality scheme and action plan, and could the member please outline what progress has been made?

Answer by Councillor Mike Freer, Leader of the Council

Yes, there is a team led by the Director of Children's Services and including representatives from the Resources Directorate and Corporate Performance Office.

The Scheme has been out to public consultation between 11 July and 31 August, and will be reported for decision to 16 October Cabinet. The Scheme will be accompanied by a 12 month Action Plan pending the development of a single Equality Scheme in April 2007

Question No. 37**Councillor Alison Moore**

If the Cabinet Member could present the details of any car leasing scheme and schemes for car pooling and for taxi use by council officers on council business?

Answer by Councillor Mike Freer, Leader of the Council**Car Leasing Scheme**

The Council has not operated a car leasing scheme since 1994 for new staff as it was not felt to be a cost effective way to recruit and retain staff due to increasing operational costs. Staff who had leased cars were able to retain them and a decision was made in 1999 that existing holders of leased car would lose this entitlement on receiving a new contract with the Council. Currently there is only one member of staff who has a leased car, however this arrangement will cease later this year. When their current agreement lapses.

Car pooling

There is one existing scheme which operates within our Planning Service. This has operated for 5 years and involves the use of one car by members of staff from our Planning and Property service in undertaking their daily duties.

Taxi use

We do not use taxis for staff, other than the option for Democratic Service Officers to be able to use taxis if their Committee meetings continue beyond 9pm of an evening.

Officers from the Resources Directorate are currently formulating a staff questionnaire on the travel plans. This will help formulate an approach to reduce the number of car journeys of staff travelling to and from work and also during the working day.

Question No. 38**Councillor Kath McGuirk**

When is the Council going to introduce a hot line for residents to report broken pavements and potholes?

Answer by Councillor Matthew Offord

We are concerned to improve our response to the public on a whole range of environmental issues and to make it easier for the public to do this. This will be about publicising and improving the services offered through our recently modernised customer services call centre as well as via email and other more modern ways such as mobile phone. The forthcoming Customer Services Action Plan will set out how we intend to improve our responsiveness still further.

Question No. 39

Councillor Ansuya Sodha

How many officers are allocated to monitor the CPZ in West Hendon?

Answer by Councillor Matthew Offord

The Parking Team provides cover for the Hendon CPZ on a "whole area" basis so the figures available are for all of the Hendon Zones taken together rather than West Hendon in isolation:

Monday to Friday, 3 parking attendants a day
Saturdays, 2
Sundays, 1

This may be supplemented at any time by mobile officers on motor-scooters if a local need is identified.

Question No. 40

Councillor Alison Moore

How many planning applications have included a Section 106 agreement in 2004/5 and so far in 2005/6, and what percentage are these of the total planning applications made?

Answer by Councillor Melvin Cohen

year	Number of applications approved following S106 agreement	Number of all planning applications determined	percentage
2004/5	50	4394	1.14%
2005/6	37	3889	0.95%
2006/7 to date	12	1724	0.70%

However it should be noted that S.106 are only appropriate to a small percentage of applications: for information 3088 (79%) of planning applications in 2005/6 were others (i.e. householder and other small scale development).

Question No. 41

Councillor Ansuya Sodha

What support is being offered to those people organising Black History Month events this year, and what is the Council doing itself to organise events?

Answer by Councillor Mike Freer, Leader of the Council

Black History Month in Barnet is co-ordinated by a steering group which is supported by the Council and we have funded a brochure with details of events. These include performances, children's activities, exhibitions, workshops, celebrations and a schools' programme. This is about acknowledging the positive contributions that people of Asian, African and Caribbean descent have made to British society.

Details of events include:

- In all the libraries there will be a pack of quizzes on Black and Asian authors for children and displays of children's books and there will be a workshop on African dance at Burnt Oak Library.
- At Chipping Barnet Library the charity Adepta will be putting up an exhibition on Mary Seacole.
- In celebration of Diwali, henna painting will be demonstrated at East Barnet Library.
- Surestart families will be involved in activities at Chipping Barnet and Hendon Libraries.
- School classes will be invited to an event in each area by the author Jill Harvey.
- Church Farmhouse Museum will present an exhibition on the presence of Black and Asian people in the Barnet area from the 1760s to the 1960s. This also includes resources for teachers.
- The Minorities Achievement project will be holding a one day event where community groups and specialist book publishers will be available for members of the public to purchase resources and access advice and information.

Question No. 42

Councillor Alison Moore

How many times has the Council used the CCTV van since 1st April 2006?

Answer by Councillor Brian Coleman

29.

Question No. 43

Councillor Ansuya Sodha

Can I congratulate the Cabinet Member for Education on his recent appearance in the *Asian Voice* newspaper praising the Labour Government for awarding the investment that has built the brand new Children's Centre in West Hendon, and would he now care to sign a joint letter with me to the Secretary of State for Education to formally thank the Labour Government for this investment in Barnet's children?

Answer by Councillor John Marshall

I should like to thank the Councillor for acting as an unofficial press cuttings agency. Yes we have received some capital from the government but certainly not enough. The Leader, the CEO and I recently met with Lord Adonis and emphasised the need for capital funding. We also invited him to open the Parkfield Children's Centre – an invitation which he accepted in principle. I hope that the Councillor will also attend the official opening.

Question No. 44

Councillor Ansuya Sodha

If the Cabinet Member could please outline which organisations have been refused grants they applied for during 2005/6 and the current financial year 2006/7 so far, and give the reasons for each refusal?

Answer by Councillor Lynne Hillan

Only two grant applications were unsuccessful in 2005/06. To date, no organisations have been refused grants in 2006/07.

The two requests that were rejected last year were as follows:

(i) Barnet Mencap

An application (in Nov 2005) for a one-off grant of £1,500 towards the development of a website.

(ii) Greek Parents Association

The application was for a grant of £3,000 towards the cost of running classes in Greek language and dancing, which was not supported on the basis that cultural activities have, for many years, fallen outside the criteria for assistance from the grants programme. Although other work undertaken by the organisation has been grant funded in the past.

Question No. 45

Councillor Ansuya Sodha

What equalities training has the Council offered to, or is planning to offer to, Cabinet Members and scrutiny chairs, and which members have taken up this opportunity?

Answer by Councillor Mike Freer, Leader of the Council

The last formal equalities item in the member development programme was the conference on raising awareness about Disability in December 2004.

However, Officers are currently developing Phase II of the current programme which will have the theme:

"To optimize your abilities, uncover and enhance your under-used skills, to enable you even more effectively to undertake your diverse roles as a community leader and promote better understanding of democratic processes and the role of the council in the borough and beyond."

As part of this, it is proposed to enhance Members' knowledge of the diversity agenda by including work on the Equalities and Disabilities Standard, updates on the new Disability Discrimination Act and Age discrimination legislation as well as workshops on raising awareness around diversity and disability.

Question No. 46

Councillor Ansuya Sodha

Which Director / Head of Service and Cabinet Member is responsible for driving forward work on a disability equality scheme and action plan?

Answer by Councillor Mike Freer, Leader of the Council

Director of Children's Services with assistance from Director of Resources (on issues relating to equality as an employer).

Question No. 47

Councillor Ansuya Sodha

The Local Government Race Equality Standard is a very effective barometer for measuring councils' progress in equality. What progress has Barnet made with this?

Answer by Councillor Mike Freer, Leader of the Council

The question identifies that the Member is out of touch.

This standard was superseded some while back by the Equality Standard for Local Government. Barnet has recently progressed from level 2 to level 3 and has a target of meeting Level 4 by 2007/2008.

Question No. 48

Councillor Ansuya Sodha

Will there be festive lights for all the communities in West Hendon this year?

Answer by Councillor Matthew Offord

Subject to a request for a token contribution from the traders, etc, as has been the case in previous years, yes.

Question No. 49

Councillor Ansuya Sodha

If the Cabinet Member could set out the recent changes with regard to pay of teaching assistants in special schools and those in mainstream schools?

Answer by Councillor John Marshall

There was disquiet for many years that the very real contribution made by teaching assistants was not fully recognised. That is why new job descriptions and new pay scales for teaching assistants were implemented in September 2005. There are now 4 levels of teaching assistant job descriptions which provide the opportunity for promotion from one level to another. Teaching assistants in mainstream schools have enjoyed an increase in their pay of some £600 on average. I hope that the Councillor will welcome this as they did and I do.

So far as teaching assistants in special schools are concerned, there was an independent review which resulted in proposals being put forward on 26 June. Although UNISON rejected these proposals at the end of July, negotiations are continuing between the trade unions, the headteachers and council officers. We are confident that we will be able to report progress to the CJNCC. Members of that Committee such as the Councillor might prefer to comment at that meeting rather than now so that they are not held to have prejudged the issue.

Question No. 50

Councillor Barry Rawlings

How would the Cabinet Member explain Barnet, against the national trend, having an increasing teenage pregnancy rate and how is she going to reverse this failure?

Answer by Councillor Helena Hart

Whilst unfortunately there has been a significant increase of some 10.3 per 1,000 of 15-17 year olds falling pregnant, the numbers themselves are still low compared to the rest of London.

Having said that, action has already been taken to try and redress the upward trend and is included in the Children & Young Peoples' Plan with Barnet PCT as the lead agency. There is also a local strategy group which involves all partner agencies, including Health, Education, Youth & Connexions, Housing and the Voluntary Sector.

The local strategy and action plan in Barnet has been signed off by the DfES teenage pregnancy unit and includes the following measures:

- Sex and relationship education provided during PHSE in schools. Teachers and community nurses participate in PHSE certificate programmes.
- General advice and information to all young people, including where to access services that provide all advice information, support and contraception. This work is integrated into other relevant work plans. Young people "test" the service for user friendliness and accessibility.
- Improving access to services – there are 4 dedicated young people's clinics in the borough. Two are in designated priority areas.
- Free emergency contraception is available from Boots chemists and selected chemists across the borough, which is advertised.
- Advertising to the young population is updated and distributed regularly.
- Targeted work: In identified priority areas and for high-risk groups. The high-risk groups are:
 - Looked after young people, young offenders, those with poor education attainment, absenteeism and dislike of school.
 - Work through Youth and Connexions focuses on young people out of school providing a range of support.

As children's centres develop and the local sure start programme is rolled out across the borough, a wider range of services will be provided for teenage parents providing health, education and work support. There will be 3 children's centres by the autumn.

Data is being improved in Barnet as well as nationally to assist analysis of why young people become pregnant and what actions have maximum impact to avoid this.

Support for teenage parents is provided in terms of Housing, Education and Health.