

**Council Questions to Cabinet Members  
19 December 2006  
Questions and Responses**

**Question No. 1****Councillor Susette Palmer**

Could Cabinet Member advise which libraries are likely to be moved and where?

**Answer by Councillor John Marshall**

There are currently no plans to realign libraries. However, the Library Service will clearly react to the Council's Regeneration Policies and will almost certainly want to relocate the Grahame Park Library. Obviously any decisions will be subject to the usual democratic controls in which I am sure Councillor Palmer will play a full role.

**Question No. 2****Councillor Brian Salinger**

Can the Lead Member for Housing please list all the shared ownership schemes that have been offered for sale in the last year, and those that are approved and in the pipeline. In respect of each scheme can the lead member state for those already completed:

- The number of units (by size....number of bedrooms)
- The average cost of each size of unit.
- The dates on which each development was completed.
- The dates on which each development was advertised for sale.
- The dates on which each sale was completed.
- The arrangements for advertising the availability of each development.
- The arrangements for interested parties to view each development.
- The number of successful applicants who were 'key workers' broken down by employment (teachers, NHS staff, housing, planning staff etc).

In respect of those in the pipeline can the lead member indicate

- 1) The numbers and sizes of the units expected.
- 2) The anticipated date on which they will be completed.
- 3) The arrangements that are in hand to market those properties?

**Answer by Councillor Lynne Hillan****Shared Ownership completions for the last year**

The total shared ownership properties delivered in the last year amount to 28. 4 one bedroom properties and 24 two bedroom properties. The incomes required to acquire these properties range from £20,700 to £25,000. The shared ownership properties are on the following schemes:

**Connections House, N3** (formerly known as the TA Centre) – 6 x 2 beds. Completed in December 2005. All but 1 sale was completed by April 2006. Remaining unit was sold November 2006. Minimum salary was between £20,700 and £21,700

**Chevil, Brunswick Park, N11** – 6 x 2 bedroom flats, completed February 2006. All but one property was sold by November 2006 and the remaining property is under offer. Minimum salary £21,500.

**Montclair Court, Holden Road, N12** – 4 x 1 bedroom properties and 6 x 2 bedroom properties. Completed in March 2006. All but one sale completed by 31 October. Remaining sale due to exchange shortly. Minimum salary £22,465 for 1 bedroom properties and £25,000 for two bedroom properties.

**Cheviot Court, Oakleigh Road North, N20** – 6 x 2 bedroom properties. Completed April 2006. All but 1 properties sold in November 2006. Remaining property under offer. Minimum salary £25,000.

In the future Housing Corporation funded schemes will also be marketed through the zone agent, Metropolitan Home Ownership, as well as the existing arrangements. The Council will continue to prioritise those interested in purchasing.

All the Housing Associations marketing these shared ownership developments advised the Housing Development team of the dates for viewing and these were duly advertised in both the Barnet Press and the website. Viewings for these properties were all held after handover of the properties took place and with the exception of Connections House they were small developments that did not have a show flat.

All these schemes were developed specifically for applicants from Barnet Council's housing register and as such the occupation of the purchasers is not available.

#### **Shared Ownership properties in the pipeline**

There are 324 shared ownership units with planning permission at this point in time. As more schemes come forward and receive planning we expect this figure to increase. The 324 units excludes any shared ownership on the regeneration estates. Shared Ownership schemes with planning permission are listed below:

**Osidge Park (Former Barnet College site), N20** – 15 x 2 bedroom flats and 14 x 1 bedroom flats – available in two phases of December 2006 and April 2007.

**Greyhound Hill, NW4** – 3 x 2 bedroom keyworker flats available February 2007.

**16 High Street, Barnet, EN5** – 10 x 2 bedroom flats and 8 x 1 bedroom flats available February 2007.

**Site at Tarling Road, N2** – 6 x 2 bedroom flats available August 2007.

**Barnet Trading Estate, EN5** – 4 x 2 bedroom flats and 6 x 1 bedroom flats available from Summer 2008.

**Lankaster Gardens, N2** – 2 x 2 bedroom flats and 1 x 1 bedroom flat available from Summer 2008.

**Wellhouse Hospital Site** – 6 x 1 bedroom flats available from Summer 2008.

**Beaufort Park, NW9** – 50 x 3 bedroom flats, 100 x 2 bedroom flats and 50 x 1 bedroom flats available from Summer 2008 onwards.

**New Fieldways, Barnet, EN5** – 12 x 2 bedroom flats and 10 x 1 bedroom flats available from Summer 2008.

**Broadfields, Edgware, HA8** – 24 x 1 and 2 bedroom flats available from Summer 2009.

**Hendon Football Club, NW2** – 24 x 2 bedroom flats, completion expected Summer 2008.

There will be both shared ownership and shared equity available on our regeneration sites. Actual numbers have yet to be agreed.

### **Other low cost home ownership products**

Other low cost home ownership schemes that will be available are as follows:

Discount Market Sale properties at Beaufort Park – approximately 240 units.

First Time Buyers Initiative at Beaufort Park – approximately 50 units.

Open Market Homebuy approximately 23 units per annum and is available to keyworkers, existing public sector tenants and applicants in temporary accommodation whom Barnet has a duty to house.

Further details can be obtained from the Housing Development Team.

### **Question No. 3**

**Councillor Julie Johnson**

What was the overall cost was of the Brent / Barnet court injunction regarding previous raves on the Welsh Harp / Brent Reservoir and how much did Barnet Council contribute to those costs?

### **Answer by Councillor Matthew Offord**

Apart from in-house legal and officer time, there was not any direct cost to the Council.

### **Question No. 4**

**Councillor Duncan Macdonald**

At present the Council insists that the creation of crossovers (linking a resident's drive to the road) is undertaken by its own contractor. This can lead to inflated costs to the resident as there is no opportunity to choose a contractor and a prolonged wait for the work to be done (8 weeks in a recent case reported to me by a resident). The work also has to be paid for in advance. Would it not be fairer to adopt a system similar to that used in building control where such works are subject to an approvals system with the work inspected upon completion to ensure that the work is up to the required standard?

### **Answer by Councillor Matthew Offord**

The Council has appointed two Term Maintenance Contractors for constructing crossovers. Both contractors have been appointed following a Competitive Tendering process to ensure residents get value for money.

The crossover service is provided to the residents on a strictly rechargeable basis and, in order to avoid exposing the Council to unnecessary risks, residents are required to pay in advance.

Following a system similar to Building Control would mean that the residents would need the Council to approve their proposed specification and their contractor or select their preferred contractor from a list of approved contractors. In fact this system was used some time ago and the Council found that this created the following problems:

- Supervising various contractors working at different parts of the Borough;
- Controlling the quality of work carried out by different contractors;
- Co-ordination of works on the highway to ensure minimum disruption, as required by the Traffic Management Act 2004.

The additional supervisory costs which will be required to address the above problems, and are payable by the resident, will more than offset any savings that can be achieved by using other contractors. It must be emphasised that even though the initial construction cost for a crossover is payable by the resident the Council is responsible for their future maintenance and is therefore in our interest that all crossovers are constructed to a consistently high standard.

**Question No. 5**

**Councillor Brian Salinger**

Will the Lead member please tell the Council how many units of housing have been offered to the Council by each of the almshouse or other charitable housing organisations in Barnet in the last two years and can the Lead member assure the Council that all vacancies to which the Council have nomination rights have been taken up by people referred by Barnet Homeseekers?

**Answer by Councillor Lynne Hillan**

In Barnet there are approximately forty housing associations and almshouses which are registered with the Housing Corporation and referred to as Registered Social Landlords (RSLs).

The standard nomination agreement for RSLs requires that 50% of one bedroom and 75% of family sized properties which are true void should be offered to council nominees. `True voids' are newly built properties or relet vacancies that are the result of the death of the tenant, eviction, or the household moving out of the borough.

In addition, all schemes which are funded by the Council or are built on Council land require 100% nominations for a minimum of 10 years. Schemes subject to S106 require 100% nominations in perpetuity.

Not all almshouses are RSLs and the Council is only entitled to formal nominations to RSL units. The Housing Corporation Regulatory Code requires that all RSLs offer a minimum of 50% of true voids to the Council.

Lettings are monitored monthly using lettings returns provided by the associations and the council's own lettings data. Annual information is available from the Housing Corporation and this is checked against other data.

The table below shows the total numbers of units due to the Council from housing associations and almshouses from 1 April 2004 to 31 March 2006, the total numbers offered to the council and the total numbers taken up by the council.

<b>Size</b>	<b>Number of units due to the Council</b>	<b>Number of Units offered</b>	<b>Number of successful nominations</b>
Studio & 1 bedroom including sheltered	158	158	134
Family sized ie 2 bedrooms +	441	445	445
<b>TOTALS</b>	<b>599</b>	<b>603</b>	<b>579</b>

Overall therefore the Council was offered the correct number of units and for family sized units was offered slightly more than the amount due. Sometimes however some associations may offer more than the requirement and others offer less than the requirement. Where an association does not meet the requirement, officers will meet with the association to arrange that the debt is repaid.

The 24 units to which the Council could not nominate successfully were all units of sheltered housing:

Fifteen of these units were at schemes where applicants should be of Jewish faith and insufficient bids were received. Four were at a scheme which has recently been more difficult to let. Two were almshouses which restrict eligibility to applicants living in specific postcodes. One was a sheltered unit with shared facilities. One was a studio flat which is hard to let. One was in a scheme which is usually popular but on this occasion there were insufficient bids.

Further details can be obtained from the Housing Development Team.

**Question No. 6**

**Councillor Geof Cooke**

How does the final version of the Safety Scheme for High Road, North Finchley differ from the version notified to ward Councillors and what safety justification is there for the differences?

**Answer by Councillor Matthew Offord**

There is currently no kerb build-out and the existing zebra crossing covers the three lanes of the southbound A1000. There was an initial suggestion to make some small kerb alignment changes that extended the footway on the east side of the High Road and immediately south of the Friern Watch Avenue junction. The cost of making this change including the necessary alterations to street furniture and drainage was costed to be in the region of £10,000.

**Question No. 7**

**Councillor Monroe Palmer**

Would the Leader explain how Barnet Council can even consider granting alcohol licenses to establishments apparently in breach of planning permission. If the answer is that planning enforcement is a separate issue, wouldn't it be a matter of urgency to deal with the matter of enforcement before the granting of a license is considered?

**Answer by Councillor Melvin Cohen**

Licensing and planning are two separate legal frameworks, each with its own legislation and guidance. In the case of licensing, there are four objectives:

- Prevention of crime and disorder
- Protection of children from harm
- Public safety
- Prevention of nuisance.

These are the only matters that may be taken into account in determining a licence application.

The planning service is a responsible authority under the Licensing Act and receives copies of applications. It has the right to object to a licence application, but may only do so on the grounds of one or more of the stated objectives.

When an application is received, the licence must be granted unless there is an objection, when there will be a hearing. At a licensing committee hearing, representations relevant to the objectives are taken into account, including any from Planning.

The Council's own licensing policy makes it clear that a licence may be granted where planning permission has not been obtained. A licence is only one of the permissions that may be necessary for lawful operation of a business. The expectation is that the applicant will seek planning permission to regularise the position before trading. The licence does not give the right to trade without planning consent, or prevent planning enforcement action from being taken if necessary.

In practice, it may be that planning restrictions on opening hours were applied some time ago, without taking individual circumstances into account. For example, there may be restrictions on opening hours that were intended to minimise nuisance. Where there has been a recent licensing hearing at which nuisance issues were properly considered, it might not be appropriate for Planning to enforce a purely technical contravention of planning consent. If however Planning believed that there was a nuisance arising from licensed premises, they could enforce a planning restriction or ask for the licence to be reviewed.

It has been suggested that it would be an offence for a business to operate without planning permission, or in breach of a planning condition. An offence can only occur if Planning Enforcement have served a breach of condition notice and the condition is not complied with after the time period given. Such a notice would only be served if there was sufficient evidence of an actual problem, such as nuisance.

**Question No. 8**

**Councillor Richard Weider**

At the last Council meeting the Cabinet Member for Environment mentioned work being conducted to improve street cleansing in the borough. Could he please outline these plans?

**Answer by Councillor Matthew Offord**

This Administration is now in the process of developing a Borough wide Signature Street Cleansing Service. To this end, myself and officers of Environment and Transport have reviewed how the current service arrangements can be improved.

Briefly, it is proposed to increase the number of town centres served by Town Keepers from 13 to 20 and to develop residential cleansing teams, supported by rapid response crews to deal with non-routine cleansing. The improvements will be supported by hotspot teams dealing with transport hubs and stations.

The proposed changes will be highly visible to residents, as staff undertake these duties. The proposals will be complimented by the Clean Borough Strategy which will be considered by Cabinet in January 2007. An implementation date for the proposals has yet to be determined but is likely to commence progressively over the coming year.

**Question No. 9**

**Councillor Linda McFadyen**

How does the Cabinet Member propose that the Council responds to the "dignity challenge" set by the Care Services Minister Ivan Lewis?

**Answer by Councillor Lynne Hillan**

The Council welcomes this initiative and is fully committed to promoting the dignity of the people we serve. This includes respecting the people who come to us for help, recognising their need for privacy, autonomy and respect in the way the Council assess their needs and the way care is delivered.

Adult Social Services already operate a person centred care approach and has a multi-agency Adult Protection Committee.

**Question No. 10****Councillor Jeremy Davies**

Could the Cabinet Member confirm, under the powers gained by Local Authorities under the Clean Neighbourhoods and Environment Act, since the Act came into force, how many maximum fines and custodial sentences have been issued for fly tipping and how many spot fines have been issued to those dropping chewing gum and cigarette butts?

**Answer by Councillor Matthew Offord**

Between April and October 2006 the Council has:

- Issued 13 Fixed Penalty Notices;
- Taken forward 7 prosecutions; and
- Issued 85 warnings with regard to waste enforcement including fly tipping and littering.

**Question No. 11****Councillor Brian Gordon**

A recent study by the Youth Justice Board revealed that many young people regard anti-social behaviour orders (Asbos) as “a badge of honour”. The study suggested that Asbos should only be used as a “last resort”. What is our view of this in Barnet?

**Answer by Councillor Brian Coleman**

The Council will use them as appropriate where the Council think they will solve the problems of anti social behaviour, street drinking, drug dealing, prostitution or other matters.

**Question No. 12****Councillor Alan Schneiderman**

What is the Council doing to ensure that Barnet can benefit from the London 2012 Olympics?

**Answer by Councillor Mike Freer, Leader of the Council**

The Council are working with London Councils and interested local MPs to ensure Barnet's voice is heard in the provision of a lasting legacy (apart from the debt).

**Question No. 13****Councillor Wayne Casey**

Will the Cabinet Member examine the possibility of instituting an alternative system to the one now enforced at Summers Lane Civic Amenity Centre where householders with small vans – e.g. the Renault Kangoo – are currently obliged to make an appointment before they visit the site even though they are only disposing of domestic recyclables, not commercial or business waste?

**Answer by Councillor Matthew Offord**

This practise is used to prevent traders from using the site as well as keep the traffic flowing. In the majority of cases, traders turn up at the site in vans wanting to use the site. The Summers Lane site is not licensed to accept trade waste and therefore the Council can not accept it. The system of residents making an appointment works well and there are no plans to change it. The appointment system ensures that for the majority of the time there is free following traffic into the site, particularly at the weekend and limits the abuse to staff.

**Question No. 14****Councillor Brian Gordon**

Peterborough City Council is using its CCTV cameras to catch people unlawfully dropping litter? Would this be a viable or acceptable idea in Barnet, or would it be considered too great an intrusion into people's personal lives?

**Answer by Councillor Brian Coleman**

It is not top of the list of my priorities for using CCTV.

**Question No. 15****Councillor Kath McGuirk**

Will the Cabinet Member tell me what the policy of the Council is on damaged and lost bins?

**Answer by Councillor Matthew Offord**

If the question relates to domestic wheelie bins, the answer is that wheelie bins that are damaged through fair wear and tear are replaced by the Council at no cost to borough residents, as are bins that are lost in the vehicle. Wheelie bins which are vandalised or lost through no fault of the Council or refuse collection crews are replaced by the Council at cost to borough residents.

**Question No. 16****Councillor Brian Gordon**

A debate is taking place among MP's concerning the Governments proposed Planning Gain Supplement, as to whether it should be collected centrally and then re-distributed to local authorities, as opposed to all revenue raised being retained locally. Does the Cabinet Member have a view on this?

**Answer by Councillor Melvin Cohen**

The Chancellors plans for a new land development tax would be a stealth tax (not unknown to this government) on new homes and urban renewal. Collected by HM Revenue and Customs the Treasury will pocket much of the cash rather than the money being spent on local communities. You only have to look at the Business Rate where the local authorities act as unpaid tax collectors and forward it to the Treasury. The Government proposes that 70% of the tax collected will be distributed to local authorities but 30% will be retained by central government.

My personal view (and I stress that this is my personal view and not part of formal Council policy) is that the tax is intrinsically iniquitous but if it is to be, then it should not be collected centrally but collected locally and retained locally.

I note however that the Chancellor in his pre budget Statement last week appears to have temporarily shelved his plans for Planning Gain Supplement. Could there be elections on the horizon?

**Question No. 17****Councillor Alison Moore**

Will the Cabinet Member tell me how many Council employed staff earn below £7.05 per hour?

**Answer by Councillor Mike Freer, Leader of the Council**

None.

**Question No. 18****Councillor Sachin Rajput**

Please could the Cabinet Member comment on Royal Mail's commitment to the Clean Neighbourhood Act?

**Answer by Councillor Matthew Offord**

As Royal Mail has not been directly asked, the best I can say is what is contained on their website. This explains "*We're committed to building our businesses. But we also recognise that, as one of the largest employers in Europe and because of the nature of the services we provide, we have an impact on the environment. As our businesses grow, it's our responsibility to take into account the environmental effects of what we do*".

I presume this means they will be eager partners in our Clean Borough Strategy.



**Question No. 19****Councillor Colin Rogers**

Planning Officers are asking their customers for feedback concerning LBB's handling of the planning process. Will the Cabinet Member tell me why they aren't asking local residents and objectors as well?

**Answer by Councillor Melvin Cohen**

The current customer satisfaction survey that has recently been undertaken by Barnet Council Planning services is a statutory 3-yearly survey required by Central Government and limited by government parameters to applicants and agents only. This is a national best value performance indicator (BVPI 111) which local planning authorities are measured and compared in terms of the customer's satisfaction rates. Barnet's recent BVPI 111 customer satisfaction survey results produced a 10% improvement in the satisfaction level with some two thirds of applicants and agents satisfied with the service. Barnet Planning service is keen also to find out what as many customers think of the service and not be constrained by the Government's methodology in the BVPI. It therefore undertakes additional customer satisfaction surveys for all customers using the Planning Reception or on line services on an ongoing basis. The results to date show a healthier satisfaction rate than the more limited measurement of applicants and agents. Saying that Barnet is keen to listen and improve its services continuously for the benefit of all its customers, applicants, agents, objectors and local residents/businesses.

**Question No. 20****Councillor John Hart**

Please could the Cabinet Member provide an update of the situation regarding tube services between Mill Hill East and Finchley Central?

**Answer by Councillor Matthew Offord**

London Underground has introduced a new Northern Line timetable which includes the removal of 'through' trains serving Mill Hill East off-peak. The through trains have been replaced by a shuttle train service operating on a 15 minute frequency between Finchley Central and Mill Hill East.

As the Mill Hill East branch is only single track for much of its length, with a single platform at Mill Hill East station, the branch line has resulted in operational difficulties for some years. The service to and from Mill Hill East also means a reduction in the number of trains running to and from High Barnet.

The removal of the through train service, along with changes at the southern end of the route, significantly reduces the complexity of the operation of the Northern Line. This means the line can be restored to normal operation much more rapidly after disruption, as there are fewer timetable and train location factors to take into account.

The disadvantage is that Mill Hill East passengers are required to change trains at Finchley Central, which in the southbound direction requires passengers to cross from platform 3 to platform 1 via the footbridge.

**Question No. 21****Councillor Anne Hutton**

Will the Cabinet Member tell me what the total cost of the recent extension and refurbishment of the Compton School was and give me a detailed breakdown of the funding sources and amounts used to pay for the works?

**Answer by Councillor Fiona Bulmer**

The total projected cost of the extension was £5,320,000.

The funding sources were:

Barnet Council capital	£1,980,000
Barnet Council revenue funding	£64,000
DfES Targeted capital Funding (supported borrowing through Supplementary credit approvals) after a bid from Barnet Council:	£2,670,000
Schools Access Initiative 03/04	£80,000
Schools Access Initiative 05/06	£60,270
Schools Devolved Formula capital contribution	£100,000
Fire Officer works	£173,000
New Deal for Schools Secondary Modernisation 06/07	£120,000
New Deal for Schools Secondary Modernisation 06/07 contingency	£72,730

The school also borrowed £354,000 against their devolved formula capital grant.

All figures are subject to confirmation on acceptance of the final account.

**Question No. 22**

**Councillor John Hart**

Please would the Cabinet member give assurances that all future developments in the Borough will include requirements relating to rainwater conservation and sunlight entrapment?

**Answer by Councillor Melvin Cohen**

No. I cannot and will not bind myself or this Council in such prescriptive fashion. My policies will be flexible and as far as possible based on empirical evidence and not dogma. To do otherwise, in my opinion, would be contrary to planning law and practice.

However, I refer the member to the draft supplementary planning document on sustainable design and construction which contains pioneering and innovative policies which I am quite sure will make most eclectic Yuletide reading and I look forward to receiving the members observations thereon early in the new year.

**Question No. 23**

**Councillor Agnes Slocombe**

Will the Cabinet Member tell me what the criteria are for the placement of hired skips on the kerb side of the public highways? Is there a time limit by which skips should be removed? Are skip users advised that they must not drop rubbish on the pavements? Who is responsible for ensuring the skips are lit after dark and how is this monitored?

**Answer by Councillor Matthew Offord**

Skip Licences are issued in accordance with section 139 of the Highways Act 1980 and the responsibility for complying with the conditions of the Licence rest with the skip company. This includes ensuring that the skip is adequately lit and is not used in a manner that allows its contents to fall on to the highway.

Their use is monitored by complaints which are received by the Council.

**Question No. 24**

**Councillor Brian Salinger**

Reports in the local papers suggest that the Government is back-tracking on its promise to finance the 'decent homes programme' with the possible result that the Council will not meet the 2010 target. Will the Lead Member please spell out what the implications for this change in funding might be, both for residents and Barnet Homes and what steps she, the Directors the Board and officers of Barnet Homes are taking to address this issue?

### **Answer by Councillor Lynne Hillan**

It is correct to say that the Government is back-tracking on its commitment to achieve the decent homes standard by 2010. Their rhetorical position is that they would encourage authorities to consider extending the programme if this enables them to take into account the wider neighbourhood renewal objectives to which Ruth Kelly is committed, rather than taking a narrow view of new kitchens and windows. The reality is that more authorities have applied for ALMOs than anticipated and the costs of achieving the standard have escalated. They therefore need authorities to take longer, so that the spending can be spread out over a longer period. They have called in ALMOs to discuss the way forward.

Officers of Barnet Homes and the Council went to a meeting at DCLG on 2nd November. They made it quite clear that refusing to take longer was not an option. The Council equally made it clear that we were well advanced with the regeneration agenda, a point they acknowledged, and that we had no authority to negotiate backtracking on the commitments made to tenants. We took one of our construction partners with us who very eloquently made the case about the supply chain and contractual costs that would result from varying the agreed term of the programme. However it is apparent that, behind the rhetoric, it is simply the case that the funding will be stretched out, probably to 2013/14. The Council already have funding confirmed for 2007/08. While not agreeing to anything the Council did indicate that if it were to be reduced after that, the Council would need at minimum a steady level of funding for 08/09 (rather than the increase currently projected in the programme profile), with any reduction coming in subsequent years, to avoid significant additional costs.

At present this is a consultation and review exercise. A ministerial announcement is expected before Christmas but no announcement of revised funding will be made until after the CSR next year.

### **Question No. 25**

### **Councillor Julie Johnson**

The out of hours noise nuisance service is not providing the level of service that the Barnet residents have a right to expect. I understand that the equipment used is now outdated. Will the Cabinet Member tell me when or this will be replaced and what the staffing levels for this service are on Friday, Saturday and Sunday evenings?

### **Answer by Councillor Melvin Cohen**

On Friday, Saturday and Sunday evenings the staffing level for the Out of Hours Noise Service is two Officers. In Summer months during peak demand this rises to four Officers. This level of staffing has remained unchanged since the Out of Hours service was established.

The Council have sufficient noise equipment that is fit for purpose.

It should be noted that instruments such as sound level meters are used to assist with investigations, a vast majority of cases do not require the use of equipment as the evaluation of Statutory Nuisance is a professional decision based on subjective criteria.

This is the third non specific "complaint" about the noise service, all of which have been generated in the Hendon and West Hendon area, questions have been responded to at the relevant Area Forum and Overview and Scrutiny. If there are specific complaints it would be useful if they were raised with the Environmental Health managers so that they can be addressed, and enable us to continually improve. Complaints by innuendo will not assist this process.

If there was a wholesale failure of the noise service, as implied, the Council would expect complaints from other parts of the Borough.

The Council are advised that as part of the roll out of the Council-wide modernised "CISCO IP" phone system, that the emergency telephone service (ETS) will be upgraded in the early part of 2007. This system will enable calls to be routed directly to the noise officers rather than be handled by an operator and then passed to a noise officer. It should be noted that if officers are out on site dealing with a complaint, calls will go to their mobile phone voice mail. This system should assist with call handling, but will not completely cure the problem of call queuing during very busy times.

This system will have the advantage of being able to record the number of calls abandoned by the caller, and will also record the number of out of hours service requests that occur outside the hours that the noise service operates.

Gary Davies is the manager for ETS, he can be contacted on 020 8359 5590, should any further information be required regarding the new telephony.

**Question No. 26**

**Councillor Robert Rams**

Please could the Cabinet Member outline his proposals for the future of Barnet's Allotments?

**Answer by Councillor Matthew Offord**

A review of alternative management arrangements has been undertaken to determine what proven models exist. From the models available and considering those that are working successfully, the favoured option is to transfer the entire service to a single body, as demonstrated by a number of Councils across the country. This action will create the simplest management structure without unnecessary complications created by alternative structures running in parallel.

This action will allow a more efficient and responsive management arrangement to be created and it is proposed to devolve the management to a trust or equivalent organisation formed from the current Federation of Allotment Associations. Given the Federation's long and successful history of allotment site management and service improvement it is considered perfectly placed to become the new devolved allotment management body and to provide the allotment services direction.

Devolving the management of the allotment service will bring decision-making closer to the allotment plot holders. It will enable the managing body to determine its own priorities for the benefit of all tenants. The proposal will take the service and tenants outside the routine budgetary pressure of the Council and provide the service with a greater degree of financial independence. This action will give the Federation and its tenants the decision-making power to make things happen, creating an impetus for increased voluntary support by allotment plot holders, which will lead to a more flexible and allotment plot holder driven service.

**Question No. 27**

**Councillor Alan Schneiderman**

Will the Cabinet Member tell me how many telephone calls were taken by customer services teams (on the Council's four main numbers) during the first and second quarters of 2006/07 and how many of these calls were missed or lost?

## Answer by Councillor Andrew Harper

Calls answered and calls missed in first and second quarters of 2006/7:

### 1.1 Switchboard

Quarters 1 & 2, year 2006/07

Source: Realtis Telephone system

Description	Apr 06	May 06	Jun 06	Jul 06	Aug 06	Sept 06	Total
Calls Answered	34540	433860	44416	45558	33266	40233	195841
Calls Abandoned	Data on calls abandoned was not able to be produced from the old switchboard system. The team moved to new technology as a result of the MOI project on Oct 14 <sup>th</sup> 2006 and therefore the first full month available for data on abandoned calls will be November 2006, however this will be heavily impacted by the BT problems that the Council experienced during this period.						

### 1.2 Customer Care Unit

Quarters 1 & 2, year 2006/07

Source: Store a call

Description	Apr 06	May 06	Jun 06	Jul 06	Aug 06	Sept 06	Total
Calls Answered	5214	6721	5968	2824	7887	5749	26153
Calls Abandoned	285	609	379	473	348	3394	5488
Commentary	During the month of Sept the team moved to a new location and started to use the new call centre technology, much system testing was carried out in the live system and therefore the stats presented for Sept should be treated with caution. Statistics for the third quarter will see a much more stable set of figures for the number of calls abandoned.  The abandoned call figures for this period also include those customers that chose to leave the queue and leave a message on the answer phone.						

### 1.3 First Contact and CRM Team

Quarters 1 & 2, year 2006/07

Source: Realtis Telephone System

Description	Apr 06	May 06	Jun 06	Jul 06	Aug 06	Sept 06	Total
Calls Answered	1383	1796	1723	1806	2180	2741	11629
Calls Abandoned	1140	1562	1222	1162	1274	1273	7643
Commentary	The abandoned call figures for this period also include those customers that chose to leave the queue and leave a message on the answer phone.						

It should be stressed that this data was being captured by a number of different systems, resulting in inconsistencies in results recorded. The 'Modernising our Infrastructure' project have tackled inconsistencies in data recording and the performance of the contact centres is now managed and monitored on a daily basis using consistent methods.

Whilst the Council recognises that the response record for telephone calls has not been exemplary, the Council are currently implementing plans to improve customer service through an overarching, single and coherent approach to better customer care through the Customer Access Delivery Plan.

**Question No. 28**

**Councillor Bridget Perry**

Please could the Cabinet Member tell us if he has a solution to the issue of parking on crossovers in Barnet?

**Answer by Councillor Matthew Offord**

The Council does not currently enforce against parking over crossovers. To date our approach has been that it is a matter for the Police to deal with as being an obstruction, as they are the enforcement authority.

The Council does not use short stretches of waiting restriction to protect dropped kerbs. While the Council will consider the provision of white lines markings across crossovers at various locations, they are advisory and do not represent an enforceable restriction.

Legislation contained within the London Local Authorities & Transport for London Act 2003 provides that a penalty may be issued by the local authority in respect of this type of obstructive parking. The Council do intend to develop a strategy for enforcement using this legislation. This will require a request for enforcement to first be made by an occupier of the property with the dropped kerb, will need to be robust enough to cover household and neighbour disputes and malicious requests for enforcement.

**Question No. 29**

**Councillor Kath McGuirk**

What impact does the Cabinet Member believe a 440% increase on charging for use of Council land will have on community groups across the borough?

**Answer by Councillor Mike Freer, Leader of the Council**

The impact will depend on the % of overheads the charge represents in the overall overheads of organisations and on the sources of income organisations have for meeting such expenditure.

**Question No. 30**

**Councillor Alison Moore**

The Council recently failed to prevent the installation of a number of phone masts across Barnet because the lawyers acting for the telecom company concerned took advantage of a loophole in the wording of the notice served by the Council to prevent them doing so. Will the Cabinet Member tell Members what action he has taken to ensure that this doesn't happen again?

**Answer by Councillor Melvin Cohen**

In my opinion the best thing to do to solve the problem is to abolish the "Prior Approval" System. Government has set its face against that having extracted hundred and millions of pounds from the phone companies in Licensing Fees.

The problem is that phone companies do not have to use any particular form for prior approval applications provided they quote the relevant part of the regulation, a simple letter will do. Hundreds of letters come in everyday to the Council and it is easy to miss a letter which in fact is prior approval application.

We are considering other procedures to ensure correspondence is routed correctly and handled in good time.

**Question No. 31****Councillor Julie Johnson**

Barnet Council's target for CCTV installations in wards across the Borough is one per year. This target is obviously easily met as three have already been installed this year. Can the Cabinet Member raise this target so that wards such as West Hendon are at least confident of receiving their CCTV in the near future?

**Answer by Councillor Brian Coleman**

The Council will install as many CCTV schemes as possible with the appalling grant settlement the Council are given by this Labour Government.

**Question No. 32****Councillor Alan Schneiderman**

Will the Cabinet Member tell me what the average response time to letters received by the Council from residents is?

**Answer by Councillor Andrew Harper**

There is currently no corporate responsibility to monitor the timescale that letters are responded to. However, some services have provided data on correspondence and they are as follows:

**Environment and Transport**

Number of letters received – 1st Quarter 795, 2nd Quarter 809.

Number of letters responded to – 1st Quarter 790, 2nd Quarter 803.

Number Outstanding – 1st Quarter 5, 2nd Quarter 6.

% responded to within 10 day target – 1st Quarter 67.92%, 2nd Quarter 62.92%.

**Council Tax** (only record volumes of letters not the turn around time)

- Local Tax and Income around 7,000 per month average (collection and recovery teams).
- Student Finance around 800 per month average.

**Housing**

Only record their complaints and can provide information if required.

**Education** (only record complaints)

10 for the 1<sup>st</sup> quarter.

13 for the 2<sup>nd</sup> quarter.

Whilst the Council recognises that the response record for written correspondence has not been exemplary, the Council are currently implementing plans to improve customer service through an overarching, single and coherent approach to better customer care through the Customer Access Delivery Plan.

**Question No. 33****Councillor Kath McGuirk**

Earlier this year the Council declared HUGE investment in Golders Green Road. Can the Cabinet Member provide me with a breakdown of the money spent and what impact this has had on the regeneration of one of our many town centres?

**Answer by Councillor Matthew Offord**

The cost of the footway reconstruction works on Golders Green Road from the Finchley Road junction to Ravenscroft Avenue junction is £340,000 – I think that is a significant investment.

The works involve laying of 63mm thicker paving slabs. This is a specific enhanced specification that was used at North Finchley and allows for mechanical sweeping of the footway. Whilst the works are being carried out, a decluttering exercise is also taking place which includes re-locating sign plates on to lighting columns and removal of redundant posts, and removal of unnecessary guard rail. The works started in August 2006 and are due to be completed in January 2007.

**Question No. 34**

**Councillor Julie Johnson**

Can the Cabinet Member confirm that Barnet Council is no longer paying British Waterways to lease the car park of the former West Hendon sailing base as the sailing base closed three years ago? Can the Cabinet Member also tell me precisely when payments ceased?

**Answer by Councillor Mike Freer**

The Council does not hold a lease specifically for the car park from British Waterways. The car park is part of much larger areas of land bordering the Welsh Harp which the Council has held on long lease from British Waterways for many years. It comprises not only land used for the former Sailing Base but also for local nature conservation and public recreation, and includes land at the rear of Woolmead Avenue and Dehar Crescent which some residents licence from the Council as extensions to their back gardens.

The car park site is identified in the West Hendon regeneration scheme as the location for the new sailing base building which the Council is securing from the developers, Metropolitan West Hendon, through a Section 106 Agreement.

The car park also falls within the boundaries of those parts of the West Hendon regeneration scheme which the Cabinet Resources Committee, at its meeting on 28 November, agreed to include in a compulsory purchase order if necessary.

Metropolitan West Hendon and Council officers have jointly been in discussions with British Waterways over a period of time with a view to securing a sufficient renewed leasehold interest in the car park site and other lands sufficient to facilitate the provision of the new sailing base building by the developers.

**Question No. 35**

**Councillor Alan Schneiderman**

A resident recently bought a parking ticket using a machine in a Barnet car park only to find that while the ticket showed the correct payment, it displayed a shorter time than that advertised on the information board by the ticket machine and on the machine itself. The resident essentially failed to get the parking period they had paid for. Can the Cabinet Member give details of how many times incidents such as this have been reported to the Council, how much money has been inappropriately charged to residents and whether there are any cases when residents in receipt of such tickets have received penalty charge notices for parking longer than their ticket stated but not longer than they had paid for?

**Answer by Councillor Matthew Offord**

I have no reports of this type of incident happening and have no records of tickets being issued for the problem you describe. If a pay and display machine is found to be not working correctly, for whatever reason, there is a number on the machine for people to phone. I suggest this course of action for any future problems.



