

Council Questions to Cabinet Members
26 June 2007
Questions and Responses

Question No. 1**Councillor Brian Gordon**

Please could the Cabinet Member outline his plans for Fairway Primary School in Hale?

Answer by Councillor John Marshall

I am pleased to be able to confirm that Fairway Primary School, Fairway's Children Centre and Northway Special School are all included in the Council ambitious Primary School Capital Investment programme. We hope that rebuilding work in respect of these three school will be completed in 2010-11. Fairway Primary School will remain a one form of entry school.

I should like to congratulate all three Hale Councillors on the interest they take in their Ward.

Question No. 2**Councillor Jeremy Davies**

Would the Cabinet Member for Planning and Environmental Protection please inform Council how many retrospective planning applications there have been in the Borough, by ward, for following financial years, 2004/05, 2005/06 and 2006/07?

Answer by Councillor Melvin Cohen

The number of retrospective planning applications is attached below for the financial years requested:

Ward	2006/7	2005/6	2004/5
Brunswick Park	4	3	1
Burnt Oak	3	4	1
Childs Hill	10	6	6
Colindale	2	1	3
Coppetts	3	4	5
East Barnet	1	2	5
East Finchley	1	2	4
Edgware	1	3	1
Finchley Church End	16	8	8
Garden Suburb	14	3	5
Golders Green	4	9	1
High Barnet	11	6	7
Hale	8	10	5
Hendon	10	10	4
Mill Hill	8	5	0
Oakleigh	1	4	8
Totteridge	13	5	2
Underhill	6	3	2
West Finchley	7	5	5
West Hendon	6	4	3
Woodhouse	2	3	7
Totals	131	100	83

Question No. 3**Councillor Agnes Slocombe**

Does the Cabinet Member agree with me that all estate agents should be responsible for removing their for-sale or to-let boards within 14 days once the sale / letting has been made and not leave them in place for months at a time?

Answer by Councillor Melvin Cohen

The property market is a dynamic one in an attractive borough like Barnet and sales and to-let boards are a sign of activity and necessary for transactions and rentals to take place. The Town and Country Planning (Control of Advertisements) (England) Regulations 2007 grant 'deemed consent' for many temporary advertisements, that is to say prior consent is not necessary for their display. The estate agent's boards granted deemed consent are restricted in their size and number. A further restriction requires that they are removed within 14 days of completion of the sale, or granting of a tenancy. The date of completion is, however, often difficult to establish. Where such signs are exempt from control the Council has no formal planning powers to seek their removal. As Cabinet Member for Planning and Environmental Protection I would encourage estate agents and property owners to be responsible and sensibly recycle their obsolete signs once a sale or letting has been agreed, but ultimately that is a matter for them.

Where there is formal planning Advertisement control the Council may grant temporary consent and require subsequent removal. Few estate agents for sale or to let signs fall within this category.

Question No. 4**Councillor Brian Gordon**

How successful was Barnet's road gritting operation on the day of snowfall in January?

Answer by Councillor Matthew Offord

I believe very successful. The actions taken by the Environment & Transport Service over the period of 7-9 February were as follows:

A heavy gritting took place on the Wednesday afternoon in anticipation of the overnight weather conditions. This was followed by the gritting of footways around transport hubs (tube stations and major town centres) starting at 9.30pm.

The gritters were used to put down a heavy carpet of material on primary roads (major traffic carrying and bus routes) from 2am. After the snow started to fall at 3.50am we gritted all the primary routes twice between 4am and 7.30am. The gritters were then switched onto dealing with the main through routes across the borough eg. A1000, A5109 to assist the morning peak movement period. Fortunately, because snow was already lying when people awoke many were put off from commuting by car and the traffic flows were very much lighter than normal.

At 8am one gritter was deployed to East Barnet to treat the secondary routes in that area, acknowledging the likely greater local movement generated by the local bye-election. All gritters continued to treat the primary routes through the morning and into the afternoon. At 2pm two gritters were used to treat the secondary routes in East Barnet and Oak Hill Park area until dusk.

The forecast was for some light snow showers during the afternoon with a keen frost overnight. As this would result in very slippery conditions as the thawing snow froze, we put down another heavy carpet of grit on primary routes at 7pm. and re-gritted the transport hubs around 9pm. Two gritters then worked through the night treating all primary routes with all gritters back on the secondary routes from 7.30pm on the Friday morning. Fortunately the overnight freezing conditions did not materialise and the snow was generally cleared from all movement corridors in time for the morning peak period. Approximately 600 tonnes of salt was used over the three days.

In addition, on the Thursday morning we deployed our parking enforcement staff (18 no.) into the town centres. They did not issue tickets as it would be difficult with lines covered from view, but were able to inspect the condition of the footways in particular and phoned into their Action Desk with requests for gritting which were passed onto and actioned by the winter maintenance team.

The street cleansing operation was already on standby for manual gritting activities and it was decided that street cleaning would be suspended and all resources switched to manual gritting of the borough's town centres and other priority locations.

In addition, it was decided to cancel the refuse operation for the 8th February 2007. This decision was taken in the interest of health and safety and to avoid the risk of road traffic accidents. Refuse staff worked loading the street cleansing fleet with salt. Crews were dispatched to manually grit the borough's town centres and other priority locations.

The total number of staff employed on manual gritting was 135. This figure can be broken down to show 64 were from street cleaning, 30 from refuse and 41 from grounds maintenance. All resources from the aforementioned services were diverted to gritting footways and other priority locations. This activity continued through the day up to 9pm.

Question No. 5

Councillor Duncan Macdonald

Further to my question about the cost of software licensing. Could you provide a breakdown of the annual cost provided in the previous answer by supplier? Can you also confirm if these costs include maintenance contracts on software which are often part of the licence agreement? If maintenance costs are excluded can you list those by supplier separately?

Answer by Councillor Mike Freer, Leader of the Council

This information is commercially sensitive.

Question No. 6

Councillor Alan Schneiderman

What is the final Council Tax collection rate for 2006-07 and what in cash terms is the shortfall compared with the predicted income?

Answer by Councillor Mike Freer, Leader of the Council

The in year collection rate for 2006/07 is 94.6% but the actual collection rate that will be achieved (we vigorously pursue late payers) will be very much higher. The shortfall is £150,000.

Question No. 7

Councillor Brian Gordon

Do you agree with the Local Government Association's campaign to increase the number of local councillors who are women, or do you consider that the gender of local councillors is largely irrelevant as long as they are capable of doing a good job?

Answer by Councillor Mike Freer, Leader of the Council

I support the recruitment of more women and men of the highest calibre.

Question No. 8

Councillor Duncan Macdonald

Can you explain why Barnet runs its own assisted travel scheme instead of supporting the TFL run taxicard scheme? Barnet being one of only two London Boroughs not to contribute to this scheme.

Answer by Councillor Lynne Hillan

The scheme is actually run by London Councils, not TFL. Barnet decided to run its own voucher scheme in order to give our residents choice to make their own arrangements with a variety of taxi firms who accept the vouchers. This scheme is running successfully as Barnet is an Outer London Borough and is not regularly on the radio Taxi's circuit.

However, TFL as the main funder is currently reviewing the service due to cost increases and we are awaiting the outcome. In the meantime, we will continue running our own scheme which is beneficial to our residents.

Question No. 9

Councillor Andrew McNeil

Will the Cabinet Member tell me how many new tree wardens volunteered in the periods 1998-2002 and 2002-2007 respectively under the boroughs tree warden scheme?

Answer by Councillor Matthew Offord

For the period from 1998-2002, there were approximately 70 wardens. From the information that is available to me, I can advise that at the beginning of 2002 there were approximately 36.

Question No. 10

Councillor Brian Gordon

The London Safety Camera Partnership has called for more speed cameras to be introduced in Barnet. What is your view on this?

Answer by Councillor Matthew Offord

The London Safety Camera Partnership has identified sites across London which meet the Department for Transport casualty criteria for speed cameras to be considered. The casualty criteria is just one part of the overall assessment which needs to be carried out before installing speed cameras or taking other action.

Transport for London are leading on the assessment of the sites. This includes site layout surveys and average speed surveys. Transport for London has identified sites in Barnet where they would like to look at whether a speed camera would be an appropriate measure.

We have asked them to provide us with the accident data for these sites so we can do our own analysis of the accidents – particularly to determine whether speed was a factor in the accidents or not.

Question No. 11

Councillor Jack Cohen

I refer to your recent reply to my question under the (now abolished) executive rule 3 procedure. This was in relation to the pay and display bay in Cricklewood Lane. Please provide separately, the cost of purchasing the ticketing machine; the cost of installing the machine, the cost of changing the parking designation; the cost of new signage; the cost in officer time.

Answer by Councillor Matthew Offord

Current cost of a single P&D machine is £2350.

Current cost to install is £150.

Sign (remove existing, manufacture and erect new one) would be about £100.

The actual cost in officer time is not available as it has not been possible to establish the length of time it took to draft order, consultation and works procurement for one ticket machine as part of the overall scheme.

Question No. 12

Councillor Ansuya Sodha

What is the administration doing to increase the number of women in senior management positions in the Council?

Answer by Councillor Mike Freer, Leader of the Council

In 2001/02 the % of women in senior posts was 40.4% and is now 52%. We will continue to ensure we are an attractive place to work.

Question No. 13

Councillor Sachin Rajput

Please could the Cabinet tell us what plans he has to support nature conservation and bio-diversity in non-Premier parks and greenspaces?

Answer by Councillor Matthew Offord

In order to support nature conservation and bio-diversity in green spaces, a programme has been prepared to bring the 'countryside' and the benefits associated with the greenbelt further into the urban fabric of Barnet. Areas of amenity green space have been identified for conversion into semi-natural green spaces. An initial target of 20 areas has been identified with schemes that propose to change the management regimes ready for implementation at various times from this year onwards. The proposals include changing the intensity of grass cutting, the planting of native tree species to create new oasis for wildlife, the establishment of small scrapes (shallow ponds), the planting of endemic wild bulbs and the enhancement of public recreation throughout the Borough.

The plans have an emphasis not only on re-creating and helping the natural environment, but on involving the community in both the establishment of the changes (where for example new planting is required), and the maintenance and 'adoption' of the sites as local areas to be proud of and involved with. Signs will be erected to explain to those not directly involved what is occurring in their local green space. The proposals will develop in conjunction with site management plans, the involvement of community partners, the costs of the proposals and further landscape change options where applicable.

Question No. 14

Councillor Anne Hutton

Will the Cabinet Member tell me how much Greenwich Leisure charges for its concessionary card and whether there are any restrictions on its use?

Answer by Councillor Andrew Harper

Concessionary cards are available to residents of the borough. There are two types of membership:

- annual pay and play membership which costs £1.00 and entitles users to discounted rates (up to 50%) on activities
- prepaid – these can be paid monthly by direct debit at £21.25 or annually at £212.50.

Those entitled to a concessionary card are: people on income support, housing benefit, council tax benefit, receive jobseekers allowance (income-based), working families tax credit (income-based), senior citizens (60+) or people under 25 on the following schemes: foundation modern apprenticeship, advanced modern apprenticeship, NVQ training scheme or life skills training.

Those with a concessionary membership have unlimited access to the centres between 9.00am and 5.00pm Monday to Friday and on weekends. (Swimming allows unlimited access before 5.00pm Monday to Friday and at weekends). People using the centre outside of these times can still do so, but will be requested to pay the standard member activity rate.

Question No. 15

Councillor Daniel Thomas

Please will the Cabinet Member for Children join me in thanking and congratulating the Head of Brookland Infant and Nursery School, Mrs. Sheila Abbott, on making the school so successful in her 25 years in the post? Please will she further pay tribute to Mrs. Abbott's many outstanding achievements in that position that have included her receiving the Barnet Civic Award?

Answer by Councillor Fiona Bulmer

Mrs Abbott has worked tirelessly for the whole school community and she is held in the highest esteem by pupils, parents, staff and colleagues. At the same time as her work in her own school, Mrs Abbott has undertaken a variety of other roles in the local authority, sharing her expertise and experience across the wider educational community. She has been a valued member of many committees over the years, liaising with a range of external agencies and businesses to support the work of our schools.

I am delighted to record my formal thanks and congratulations to Mrs Abbott for her outstanding service to children in Barnet.

Question No. 16

Councillor Geof Cooke

What action has been taken in the last three months to address the high likelihood – high impact corporate risks relating to:

- a. lack of revenue and capital resources to fund school rebuilding;
- b. service continuity in the event of an emergency;
- c. availability of accurate and timely customer service information.

Answer by Councillor Mike Freer, Leader of the Council

Officers continue to monitor the risk register for the likelihood and impact of all major risks facing the Council. Officers advise Cabinet Members as and when issues arise on options for mitigation.

Question No. 17

Councillor Hugh Rayner

Please could the Cabinet Member inform Council how many lamp posts were installed under the Council's PFI contract at the end of April 2007?

Answer by Councillor Matthew Offord

1,764 new lighting columns have been erected. A further 1,800 are being placed in the six months up to the end of October 2007, making a total of circa. 3,600 renewed lamp columns.

Question No. 18

Councillor Kath McGuirk

What action has the Council taken in the last three months to address the high likelihood – high impact corporate risks relating to the shortfall in the number of parking attendants?

Answer by Councillor Matthew Offord

Officers continue to monitor the risk register for the likelihood and impact of all major risks facing the Council. Officers advise Cabinet Members as and when issues arise on options for mitigation.

Question No. 19

Councillor Richard Weider

Please will the Leader confirm that he will write to the Vice-Chancellor of Middlesex University calling on him to distance the University from the position of the Universities and College Union and any of his staff, that has called for an academic boycott of Israel?

Answer by Councillor Mike Freer, Leader of the Council

I have already done so.

Question No. 20

Councillor Ross Houston

What action has the Council taken in the last three months to address the high likelihood – high impact corporate risks relating to increasing homelessness?

Answer by Councillor Lynne Hillan

Officers continue to monitor the risk register for the likelihood and impact of all major risks facing the Council. Officers advise Cabinet members as and when issues arise on options for mitigation.

Question No. 21

Councillor Brian Salinger

Does the Leader agree with the speakers at the conference held on 10th May at NLBP entitled Behind Closed Doors, that early intervention and support for children with behavioural problems, and those children who have been exposed to domestic violence, is the best way to try to ensure that those individuals are less likely to turn to crime and violent crime in later life?

Answer by Councillor Mike Freer, Leader of the Council

Yes.

Question No. 22

Councillor Jim Tierney

What action has been taken by the council in the last three months to address the high likelihood – high impact corporate risks relating to housing supply being constrained by regeneration plans?

Answer by Councillor Anthony Finn

Officers continue to monitor the risk register for the likelihood and impact of all major risks facing the Council. Officers advise Cabinet members as and when issues arise on options for mitigation.

Question No. 23

Councillor Brian Salinger

Will the Cabinet Member for the Environment please advise members how many speed humps have been installed in new locations on Borough maintained roads in the last 12 months?

Answer by Councillor Matthew Offord

No new speed humps have been installed in new locations in Borough maintained roads in the last 12 months.

Question No. 24**Councillor Linda McFadyen**

What action has been taken by the council in the last three months to address the high likelihood – high impact corporate risks relating to poor governance of health partnerships?

Answer by Councillor Helena Hart

Officers continue to monitor the risk register for the likelihood and impact of all major risks facing the Council. Officers advise Cabinet members as and when issues arise on options for mitigation.

Question No. 25**Councillor Brian Salinger**

The Council has decided to terminate the contract with Baytree Ltd who have for a number of years cared for people recovering from mental health problems. Will the Cabinet Member please advise members of:

- a) the number of people who will have to be re-housed as a result of this decision?
- b) the number other people will be re-housed elsewhere if the accommodation to be used by ex Baytree residents is currently being occupied by other people recovering from mental illness?

Answer by Councillor Lynne Hillan

The contract with Baytree expired in April 2006 and was extended for a further year to allow time for a review to be carried out by Supporting People in conjunction with mental health professionals, users and carers.

Accommodation is currently provided for 45 residents supported by Social Services.

There are currently 19 people who will be moving on to more suitable accommodation, thus freeing up their current homes for Baytree residents. Other residents may be moving directly into independent living.

Question No. 26**Councillor Barry Rawlings**

Will the Cabinet Member clarify what the national Conservative Party's policy is on selection in secondary schools?

Answer by Councillor Fiona Bulmer

The Conservative Party's position supports the work we are doing in Barnet to ensure every child receives the high quality education that will help them to achieve their full potential. It recognises the rich diversity of Barnet's education provision in Barnet – a provision that includes high performing selective, faith, comprehensive schools and academies.

Question No. 27**Councillor Alison Moore**

How much extra income would the Council have received if it had managed to achieve the target Council Tax collection rate for 2006-07 of 96.5%?

Answer by Councillor Mike Freer, Leader of the Council

I refer the Councillor to the answer I provided to her colleague Councillor Schneiderman. She may wish to confer with him.

Question No. 28**Councillor Colin Rogers**

At the moment it is difficult to get a tree protected unless it is under threat from a planning application. Does the Cabinet Member agree that mature trees in the borough that are not causing damage to property, and are not involved in a planning application, are a valuable amenity and need protecting?

Answer by Councillor Melvin Cohen

Trees are often a valuable amenity and which ensure we have a green borough. We are fortunate that Barnet is abundant with trees and has a very high number of Tree Preservation Orders (TPOs). It also has one of the busiest Trees Planning services in London. Many other trees not with TPO protection benefit from Conservation Area protection, of which there are 17 areas across the borough protecting thousands more trees. It is therefore important to prioritise the level of tree protection where there is significant amenity value and where there is a threat from development. It is not sensible to impose blanket controls over all trees as this would undermine the purpose of protection on the grounds of amenity value and likely to put the Council at risk. It is considered that given the high numbers of TPOs and conservation area protection of trees in the borough the council has the right balance. Where there is a sustainable and justified need the council will consider the serving of a new TPO.

Question No. 29

Councillor Zakia Zubairi

What is the Council doing to deal with the problem of dog-fouling on the pavements in Colindale and elsewhere in the Borough?

Answer by Councillor Matthew Offord

Dog fouling problems are dealt with by a combination of Verbal / Written Warnings and / or Fixed Penalty Notices.

Question No. 30

Councillor Ansuya Sodha

When will West Hendon get it's own Town Keeper?

Answer by Councillor Matthew Offord

West Hendon's Town Keeper service was launched on Friday 8th June.

Question No. 31

Councillor Julie Johnson

There has been recent press coverage of the scandalous state of the road surface along West Hendon Broadway in the Hendon Times. Given that constantly patching and re-surfacing the road is repeatedly costing council tax-payers money what role is the Council playing in getting Three Valleys Water to sort out the underlying problem that is leading to the subsidence?

Answer by Councillor Matthew Offord

The Street Works team are aware that Three Valleys Water has experienced a number of problems in the area with water leaks and have, as a consequence, dug up the road in several locations. Following inspections Street Works officers are now in discussion with Three Valleys Water about the extent of reinstatement works which are required to return the condition of the road to an acceptable state.

Question No. 32

Councillor Kath McGuirk

What assessment has been made of the effect to the Council's income as a result of the new parking regulations due to come into force on 1 July?

Answer by Councillor Matthew Offord

The introduction of new parking regulations may change the current behaviour in the way the public park and may result in increased compliance of the parking contraventions. It is not possible to factor this in at present until data is available to assess the impact of differential charging.

Question No. 33**Councillor Alan Schneiderman**

What has been the cost to the Council in penalty payments during 2006-07 as a result of invoices not being paid on time?

Answer by Councillor Mike Freer, Leader of the Council

Nil.

Question No. 34**Councillor Ross Houston**

What housing benefit related income loss did the Council suffer during 2006-07 as a result of Pericles implementation and what level of compensation has been paid by the supplier?

Answer by Councillor Lynne Hillan

The implementation of Pericles, as with any major new system, has had both direct and indirect costs. There has been some loss of subsidy income due in part to the need to shut the system down for a period to transfer data from the old to the new system and in part to functionality problems with Pericles. We have not yet signed off acceptance of the product and discussions about any supplier liability for losses form part of the discussions necessary before that is done. Figures for losses are therefore currently of commercial sensitivity and it would not be in the Council's interests for me to quote them at this time.

Question No. 35**Councillor Julie Johnson**

How many households, and people, are currently in temporary accommodation on the West Hendon estate?

Answer by Councillor Lynne Hillan

As at 31 May 2007 there were 63 households, 145 people, in temporary accommodation on the West Hendon Estate.

Question No. 36**Councillor Alison Moore**

On what dates and in what locations have 'Leader Listens' events already taken place and what is the schedule for planned future events?

Answer by Councillor Mike Freer, Leader of the Council

Already taken place:

25 October 2006 – Finchley Church End

25 January 2007 – Hale

24 May 2007 – Underhill

12 June 2007 – Woodhouse

Scheduled but no venues fixed:

September – Mill Hill

October – East Barnet

November – Childs Hill

December – West Hendon

Question No. 37**Councillor Linda McFadyen**

Given the appalling start to the new meals on wheels contract, are there any lessons that the Cabinet Member has learned that would change what she agrees and the way she does it in the future?

Answer by Councillor Lynne Hillan

The Meals at Home did have problems at the start but these problems have now been resolved and complaints about late deliveries – which were high in the first two weeks – have almost totally disappeared.

The main problem was that the new provider was unable to deliver the meals in the time frame we set in the contract which is between 12-2 pm every day. The provider failed to fully appreciate the complexities of the contract – which is provided jointly with Enfield. The Council is following up the detail of these issues to see what can be learned for the council's future contracting.

Question No. 38

Councillor Agnes Slocombe

At the Council meeting in January the Cabinet Member promised to write to me with the amount of money collected from successful prosecutions of skip hire companies for the year 2005/2006. I have still not received his answer, can he please submit it now?

Answer by Councillor Matthew Offord

If you read the minutes of the meeting you will recognise that I said I would respond in the fullness of time – I did not make what you assert as a “promise”.

There have not been any occasions when it has been necessary for a skip company to be prosecuted through the courts. A procedure operates that where it is identified that a skip has not been licensed the skip company is required to pay a fixed fee for failing to apply for the license and they are also required to pay the appropriate licence fee. If these fees are not paid the skip company is ordered to remove the skip from the highway.

Question No. 39

Councillor Linda McFadyen

Road sweepers leave bags of leaves at the side of the pavement whilst sweeping the streets. Under the current contract what is the maximum length of time these bags can be left on the pavement before being cleared?

Answer by Councillor Matthew Offord

The bags that are placed at pre-arranged locations on the footway contain litter and other arisings following either litter bin emptying or street cleaning. In residential streets the service aims to remove the bags of arisings on the same day they originated, e.g. in conjunction and with the four 4 weekly cleaning operation or at the very latest (subject to the volume of litter and arisings collected by the removal teams) by noon on the following day. In town centres the bags will be removed during the shift in operation, so any bags left between 7am and 3pm will be cleared within those hours and same for the late shift from 3.30 pm onwards.

Question No. 40

Councillor Barry Rawlings

How long does it take on average to get an initial educational psychologist assessment, and how many cases are currently waiting for assessment?

Answer by Councillor Fiona Bulmer

The educational psychology team has no waiting list.

Referrals to the educational psychology team (EPT) for children at school are managed through joint planning meetings with the school. These meetings determine the work programme for the school's linked educational psychologist (EP). If cases requiring urgent action arise during the year, an immediate response is made by either the school's linked EP or another EP.

Question No. 41

Councillor Geof Cooke

Which cafés and kiosks in parks are currently unused?

Answer by Councillor Mike Freer, Leader of the Council

There are 6 kiosks/cafes currently unused, but of these 4 are under offer for completion and re-opening shortly and the remaining 2 (at Cherry Tree Wood Pavilion and Scratchwood) will be remarketed shortly.

Question No. 42

Councillor Ansuya Sodha

How many children that were attending the Lakeview nursery are now attending the new Parkfield childrens' centre, and how many children from the West Hendon Estate are on the waiting list at Parkfield nursery?

Answer by Councillor Fiona Bulmer

When Lakeview Children and Families Centre relocated to Parkfield Children's centre, there were 16 children on roll. Six children moved from Lakeview to Parkfield and the rest transferred to schools.

There are now 64 children attending Parkfield Children's Centre:

13 0-2 year olds
22 2-3 year olds
29 3-5 year olds.

A further 52 3-5 year olds are taking up their early education entitlement in the nursery class in the main school. These places are filled currently and the 30 places which will become available for September are also filled.

Question No. 43

Councillor Barry Rawlings

Are the council satisfied that all Governing Body appointees go through Criminal Records Bureau checks?

Answer by Councillor Fiona Bulmer

Currently, there is no statutory requirement that school governors, (except those with unsupervised access to children) have Criminal Records Bureau clearance and it is at the discretion of schools to determine what requirements they wish to place on their governors.

Question No. 44

Councillor Charlie O-Macauley

How much does the council spend on Black History month each year and what proportion of council grant funding goes to BME organisations?

Answer by Councillor Mike Freer, Leader of the Council

£131,500 was granted to BME groups and £800 (plus officer time) was spent on Black History Month.

Question No. 45

Councillor Ross Houston

In line with the London Plan this council has an important target in it's Unitary Development Plan of aiming to secure at least 50% affordable housing in all new developments. The borough's own Housing Needs Survey has highlighted the significant need for more affordable housing for rent, as well as shared ownership. Could the executive member confirm her support for the policy promoted in the UDP and in the London Plan and in particular outline what she has done to promote the increase in affordable housing for rent in the borough, and what more could be done to help meet the desperate need of those Barnet residents, many of them families, who cannot afford to buy in the borough?

Answer by Councillor Lynne Hillan

The UDP has been adopted by the Council on the recommendation of Cabinet and therefore has my full support. Both the UDP and the London Plan aims to provide 50% affordable housing whilst adhering to the Boroughs three strand approach of Protect, Enhance and Grow.

The Housing Strategy was approved last year, seeks to widen choice and opportunity and is in line with both the UDP and the London Plan.

During 2006/07 we saw 323 affordable homes start on site against a target of 212. This includes low cost home ownership and socially rented. We saw 447 households take up housing options under the New Start (out of London) and private sector tenancy schemes, against a target of 350. We reduced the number of people forced to take temporary accommodation from the Council to 502, against a target of less than 600. We enabled 134 households to enter low cost home ownership for the first time.

Question No. 46

Councillor Charlie O-Macauley

What is the Council's policy on advance advertisement of road works (signage / direct mail etc.,) to the public?

Answer by Councillor Matthew Offord

A Section 58 Notice under the requirements of the New Roads and Street Works Act 1991 is published in the London Gazette and The Barnet Press giving three months notice of an initial batch of the Approved proposed works. The notice is also sent to all the utility companies operating in the borough and included on the Agenda for the quarterly co-ordination meeting with the utility companies.

Once the proposed start and completion dates with the contractor has been agreed, one month's notice is then registered on the street works notification system. A letter to residents and businesses is circulated at least two/ three weeks prior to the intended start date by the contractor. At least three days prior to the start date of the work another letter, from the contractor, is then circulated confirming the expected start and finish dates of the work.

A day before the contractor arrives on site notices are placed on parked cars which gives contact details and instructions to find alternative parking arrangements. Signs are also installed on the approach to work sites to identify the works, the contractor carrying out the works and to apologise for any inconvenience caused.