

**Council Questions to Cabinet Members  
11 September 2007  
Questions and Responses**

**Question No. 1**

**Councillor Brian Gordon**

Could you please tell the Council what positive developments emerged from the June meeting organised by Hale Councillors, at which you spoke, regarding the problems of excessive traffic around Worcester Crescent and Mill Hill County High School?

**Answer by Councillor Matthew Offord**

The meeting enabled all those who attended to share their views on issues that affected them and also enabled everyone to suggest ways in which they felt improvements could be made with traffic flow and parking.

It was clear from the meeting that the two main issues of congestion and obstructive parking affected everyone to some degree, but in particular in Ramilies Road and Worcester Crescent. It was agreed that a further meeting would take place in September when more concrete proposals to remedy the situation would be presented for discussion and also an update on possible measures within the grounds of Mill Hill School itself which could also lead to improvements in the area. Of particular encouragement was the efforts being made by Mill Hill School in introducing measures aimed at minimising the impact of their motoring pupils in the area.

**Question No. 2**

**Councillor Monroe Palmer**

Can the Cabinet Member justify why Barnet offers a 330ltr Blackwell composting bin for £20 whereas Camden residents get them at £10 including delivery? This has resulted in an additional £110,490 to date raised from Barnet residents rather than if they had been Camden residents.

**Answer by Councillor Matthew Offord**

Each individual local authority makes its own arrangements regarding home composting bins. The price that the units are sold for will be determined by the price per unit from the distributor and the financial contribution that the individual local authority makes, to offer the unit at a reduced rate. The financial contribution made by each local authority will be dependent on the money available, the quantity of units that the local authority expects to sell in one year and which type of home composting units it wishes to promote.

We do not 'make' any revenue from selling home composting bins to residents.

In 2007/08 the 330 litre Blackwell composting bin is available to Barnet Council for £23.95. Barnet Council then subsidises each sale of this home composting bin by £3.95.

Barnet offers the greatest range of home composting bins of any authority in London. In total each year Barnet Council spends approximately £10,000 on subsidising home composting bins.

**Question No. 3**

**Councillor Alison Moore**

Will the Leader welcome the new 50p bus fare that will benefit people on income support in Barnet including lone parents, carers, and the long-term sick?

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

A special concession for some of those residents on benefits is welcome but I have doubts as to the morality of depriving a developing country of much needed income that could benefit a population arguably in greater need than our own.

**Question No. 4**

**Councillor Brian Gordon**

Would you please inform the Council about the tougher stance being adopted by our Administration against fly-tipping around the borough?

**Answer by Councillor Matthew Offord**

For the last four years, Barnet has employed an increasingly tougher stance on dealing with people engaging in illegal fly tipping.

The decision to take decisive action was prompted by in excess of 10,000 tonnes of construction and demolition waste being dumped in Barnet in 2003, mostly by 32-tonne tippers.

A full-time post was created to deal with fly tipping and, within two years, the amount of large-scale industrial fly tipping had reduced to zero. The number of small scale incidents of fly tipping also dropped by 1,400 between 2004/5 and 2005/6.

To achieve this, Barnet introduced a range of initiatives:

1. Undertaking multi-agency operations with the police, Environment Agency, the Vehicle and Operator Services Agency (VOSA), the Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency (DVLA), HM Revenue and Customs and the Met Police Specialist Operations unit
2. Using overt and covert CCTV
3. Restricting access to land
4. Strategically and effectively using the media – including the seizure and crushing of a 32-tonne tipper lorry in February 2004, covered by London Today
5. Prosecuting 33 fly tippers over the last two years

In 2006, Barnet was one of a handful of authorities highlighted in a good practice guide for tackling fly tipping for local councils, produced by the Jill Dando Institute of Crime Science.

Fly tipping is still reducing in Barnet year by year, and looking to the future, the newly set-up Community Protection Group has made tackling fly tipping one of its top priorities, particularly targeting the 'white van man'-type tippers using an intelligence-led approach.

**Question No. 5**

**Councillor Monroe Palmer**

Can the Cabinet Member explain how the GMB union using Audit Commission statistics ranked Barnet as a clean Borough, whereas I have received many complaints such as from Elmcroft Avenue which says "I am ashamed when I have visitors. Golders Green and Finchley Road, especially around the bus stops are absolutely filthy and never seem to be swept adequately. Elmcroft Avenue is not too clean either. Dirt has accumulated again and weeds are growing along the edges of the pavement – they have never been removed." She adds "A lot of my time is in Camden or Westminster and they are spotless compared to Barnet". Does this support Twain's comment that there are "lies, damned lies and statistics."

**Answer by Councillor Matthew Offord**

The figures referred to by the GMB were the outcomes of the Councils BV199 (a) survey for litter and detritus which is carried out 3 times per year across 300 randomly selected/but statistically valid transects across the borough. The survey is carried out using the ENCAMS methodology which is nationally accepted practice. This BV199 is a statutory measure used by all councils across the country and has to be reported to DEFRA annually.

I am also pleased to advise that the first survey carried out in the 2007/8 reporting year by external consultants across the first 300 transects has reported a score of 9% for BV199 (a) against the corporate target of 12% This is clear externally validated evidence of the high standards of cleaning being achieved by the council as a result of the changes made to the street cleaning service.

**Question No. 6**

**Councillor Julie Johnson**

Will the Environment Lead Member join me and local residents on a walk-about on the Welsh Harp to talk about the issue of security and the protection of this SSSI site?

**Answer by Councillor Matthew Offord**

Yes.

**Question No. 7**

**Councillor Brian Gordon**

Earlier this year, it was announced that the London Borough of Barnet is accepting funding from an external government source to educate young people against fundamentalist extremism and hatred. Has this money been received and how is it being used or proposed for use?

**Answer by Councillor Brian Coleman**

Barnet was awarded £96,000 to work with young Muslims. This money is from the preventing violent extremism pathfinder delivery fund and has been paid over as part of our Local Area agreement.

The Council is using the money in partnership with a number of organisations including the Metropolitan Police, Middlesex University and Barnet College to support six projects including Community research, training for Imams and Youth Workers, working with Muslim young people, Madrassa Citizen programmes, public lectures and supporting women's groups.

**Question No. 8**

**Councillor Monroe Palmer**

Could the Cabinet Member explain why cars can park in the middle of the grass area within a premier park where no attempt has been made to lock half of the double entry gates or to raise the rhino post. Is this a new policy decision?

**Answer by Councillor Matthew Offord**

There is no reason why cars should park on grass areas in the park unless, for example, it is as a result of site inspections by service officers. Officers will however always park on the highway unless parking restrictions or available space make this impractical.

No, this is not a new policy decision.

**Question No. 9****Councillor Zakia Zubairi**

How many Fixed Penalty Notices have been issued in the last year in Barnet for:

- a) dog fouling
- b) litter
- c) fly-tipping
- d) graffiti?

**Answer by Councillor Matthew Offord**

- a) 1 Fixed Penalty Notice has been issued for dog fouling,
- b) 20 fixed penalty notices for litter offences
- c) There is no specific Fixed Penalty Notice for fly tipping.
- d) 4 Fixed Penalty Notices for graffiti.

**Question No. 10****Councillor John Hart**

Please could the Leader of the Council confirm whether or not the Council has ever bought products from Remploy?

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

Yes we have purchased from Remploy over the past few years:

2006/07 £552.49  
2005/06 £722.63  
2004/05 £2194.01  
2003/04 £28309.66

**Question No. 11****Councillor Andrew McNeil**

How many written and verbal warnings have been issued in the last year in Barnet for:

- a) dog fouling
- b) litter
- c) fly-tipping
- d) graffiti?

**Answer by Councillor Matthew Offord**

- a) 1 warning was issued for dog fouling
- b&c) Warnings for litter and fly tipping are recorded as a combined figure and total 105 for the period
- d) 4 police cautions have been issued with regard to graffiti.

**Question No. 12****Councillor Hugh Rayner**

Is the Cabinet member aware of anti-social behaviour in the Glengall Road area and will he consider requests from the Hale and Edgware ward Councillors to consider the installation of CCTV?

**Answer by Councillor Brian Coleman**

Yes I am not least because the hard working Councillors for Hale and Edgware wards have brought the matter to my attention and that of Council officers on a number of occasions. I am pleased to tell Councillor Rayner that proposals for CCTV in the area have been added at my insistence in to the report on the CCTV programme to be brought to the October meeting of Cabinet.

**Question No. 13****Councillor Ross Houston**

How many successful prosecutions have there been in the last year in Barnet for:

- a) dog fouling
- b) litter
- c) fly-tipping
- d) graffiti?

**Answer by Councillor Matthew Offord**

- a,b &c) The less bureaucratic approach of warnings and Fixed Penalty Notices have been used instead of prosecutions.
- d) With regard to graffiti, the Police take prosecutions for criminal damage forward. In the last year there have been 8 prosecutions. Additionally 4 cautions have been issued and 5 Anti-Social Behaviour Contracts have been signed

**Question No. 14****Councillor John Hart**

Please could the Cabinet Member for Transport and Environment give me an assurance that Uphill Road NW7 will be resurfaced?

**Answer by Councillor Matthew Offord**

Uphill Road is in the Council's 'Reserve List' for carriageway resurfacing this financial year, and will be undertaken subject to additional funding being identified, or as other approved schemes are delayed / postponed.

**Question No. 15****Councillor Alan Schneiderman**

How many staff/posts in the Street Enforcement Service were cut in the 2006/7 budget?

**Answer by Councillor Brian Coleman**

Efficiencies meant the Council could reduce the number of posts by 18 of which 11 were vacant anyway.

**Question No. 16****Councillor John Hart**

What measures has the Cabinet Member contemplated please to ensure that residents on the western side of Barnet have convenient access to such services as planning enquiries now that so much is concentrated at NLBP?

**Answer by Councillor Andrew Harper**

Following a constructive consultation meeting with some local members, detailed work is now underway with services to confirm options for design and arrangements for service delivery at the proposed new customer access facility. A full programme of consultation and communications with residents and stakeholders has been formulated and further member input will be sought on this.

In line with the Customer Access Strategy, the objective of the new facility is to address and alleviate any issues for residents trying to access key services in the west of the borough. Whilst some customer-facing activities may continue to be based at NLBP, the new facility at Burnt Oak is one of a number of initiatives to improve access to services for residents, businesses and others using council services. These initiatives include improvements to our telephone, email and web arrangements as well as working with Libraries and through the Modernising the Way We Work programme to make access to council services and information easier and more efficient.

The business case for the new west of borough customer access facility is based on providing the services that people need most in those wards; evidence so far suggests that these should centre around services such as housing, council tax and children's and adults services. Having said that we want to ensure (a) that the facility can be used to its full potential and (b) that there are some second line, more complementary services available to customers that will mean they can access other council services without necessarily having to come to NLBP. Whatever we provide, the focus needs to be on ensuring that the new facility is not an extra step in the process eventually leading back to NLBP but that it can add value on its own.

Residents have access online to planning applications submitted after Jan 2006, which they can view at home, through libraries, NLBP, Hendon Town Hall, or the new West of Borough reception when it is built. File requests can be made in the usual way and the Planning Service can send the file through internal post to Hendon Town Hall or the West of Borough reception.

As well as providing an enquiry service in NLBP, Planning propose to provide a planning enquiries surgery two afternoons-a-week in the West of the Borough reception. Dependent on demand we may need to increase or decrease the service provided; this will be assessed on an ongoing basis to ensure that customer requirements are met. We also provide planning advice on the phone Monday to Friday 9am to 5pm on 8359 3000 and 24 hours-a-day access online to Frequently Asked Questions.

When planning officers are visiting sites, arrangements can be made with customers to meet on site at the same time.

**Question No. 17**

**Councillor Kath McGuirk**

Does the Environment Lead Member agree with the Council spokesman who was quoted in the Hendon Times on 2 August saying that dog fouling "is a problem that does not exist"?

**Answer by Councillor Matthew Offord**

The first of the triennial BV199 a litter surveys carried out by an external body reported a cleanliness standard of 9% which is an excellent indicator of the cleanliness of the borough. The survey looked at 300 transects across the borough and only two were reported with dog fouling.

**Question No. 18**

**Councillor John Hart**

Please could the Cabinet Member for Environment and Transport advise if there is any progress in discussions with TfL over the stupendous build-up of traffic when major events are held at Wembley Stadium?

**Answer by Councillor Matthew Offord**

Traffic count data for the A406 at Staples Corner, A41 at Elliott Road NW4 (just north of the A406) and the A5 at West Hendon has been examined and the traffic flow has not altered significantly when there are major events on at the new Wembley Stadium. Major congestion was however experienced in the Edgware / Stanmore area, believed to be due to the England versus Germany match on the evening of 22nd August, and officers are liaising with LB Harrow to see how on Wembley event day traffic in this area can be better managed.

**Question No. 19**

**Councillor Kath McGuirk**

Does the Environment Lead Member agree that the council must develop a pro-active approach to the enforcement of enviro-crime through appropriate legislation?

**Answer by Councillor Matthew Offord**

The Council has a pro-active approach and is working with other public agencies, the community, voluntary sector and local businesses to address this issue.

**Question No. 20**

**Councillor John Hart**

Please could the Cabinet Member for Planning explain the apparent reluctance of planning officers to use blanket TPOs to save important hedgerows and trees in them from attrition by homeowners and house developers?

**Answer by Councillor Melvin Cohen**

I refer the member to my answer to Q28 of the Council meeting of 26 June 2007

**Question No. 21**

**Councillor Ross Houston**

Does the Environment Lead Member agree that preventing enviro-crime in the first place is a more cost-effective measure than clearing-up the results of enviro-crime?

**Answer by Councillor Matthew Offord**

I refer you to my answer to Question 19.

**Question No. 22**

**Councillor John Hart**

Please could the Cabinet Member for Housing assure me that all is being done to oblige/persuade owners of derelict and untenanted private house to release them for house-seekers in dire need?

**Answer by Councillor Lynne Hillan**

The Council does not seek to tell private home owners what to do with their properties. Where the property is unsafe or in breach of the housing acts or other legislation then enforcement action will be taken by Environmental Health Officers. In certain limited circumstances there may be grant aid available to owners to assist them in bringing their property back up to a proper standard. Otherwise, where we are aware of an empty home that could be brought back into use we will seek to work with the owner and our partners to see whether, for example, it could be used as part of our leasing programme to provide temporary accommodation for homeless people. There are currently more than 1200 properties in use in this way. We are satisfied that this, rather than heavy handedness, is the correct approach and that it has produced results.

**Question No. 23**

**Councillor Alison Moore**

Is there a formal agreement between the Police and the Council for the Safer Neighbourhood Team Police Community Support Officers, who are trained to issue Fixed Penalty Notices, to actually do so?

**Answer by Councillor Brian Coleman**

No.

**Question No. 24**

**Councillor Brian Gordon**

What is your comment on the recent report that there has been a marked reduction in the last year in the number of complaints made by residents about Barnet Council, as reported to the local Government Ombudsman?

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

The figures indicate an improving performance and the Ombudsman has observed that the Council's performance appears more encouraging than the position he reported upon last year.

The number of complaints received by the Ombudsman is down from 155 to 135 and very significant percentage reductions took place in both Education and Planning.

The Ombudsman's Office decided 156 complaints against the Council (because of "carry over" the number of decisions does not correlate with the number of complaints). Of those 156 complaints, the Ombudsman found:-

- 30 - Complaint Premature.
- 32 - Complaint Outside Ombudsman's jurisdiction.
- 20 - Ombudsman Exercised Discretion to Discontinue Complaint.
- 51 - No Maladministration.
- 22 - Local settlement.
- 1 - Formal finding of Maladministration Causing Injustice.

Excluding those complaints deemed out of jurisdiction and those referred back to the Council, the 24% figure for settlements and maladministration finding is below the national average of 28% and below the Council's figure of 35% in the previous year.

Premature complaints account for 19% of the total, compared to a national average of 28%. This is seen by the Ombudsman as an indicator that the public know how to access the Council's complaints procedure.

Average response time to enquiries received from the Ombudsman's office was just under 32 days. This compares to figures of 42 days and 41 days respectively in the previous two years.

Whilst there is obviously scope to do better, these figures do appear to confirm that there have been clear improvements over the past year.

**Question No. 25**

**Councillor Claire Farrier**

How many CCTV cameras does the Council now have across the Borough?

**Answer by Councillor Brian Coleman**

125.

**Question No. 26**

**Councillor Marina Yannakoudakis**

Please could the Cabinet Member give this Council an update on the condition of Barnet's Premier Parks?

**Answer by Councillor Matthew Offord**

The Council's Premier Parks Strategy and the parks themselves continue to go from strength to strength and the strategy is clearly working. The Council measures the quality and management of its premier parks against the Civic Trust's Green Flag standard and this year we have achieved Green Flag status at 6 of our premier parks.

**Question No. 27**

**Councillor Linda McFadyen**

How many copies of the Clean Borough Strategy, agreed by Cabinet this year, have been printed, what was the cost, and how many have been distributed to members of the public (whether individuals or businesses / organisations)?



**Answer by Councillor Matthew Offord**

A one off print run of 500 was produced at a cost of £985. The document is intended to be used as a promotional tool and was first used at the launch of the new street cleaning service at Brent Cross and has subsequently been made available at Golders Hill Centenary Event, Friern Barnet Summer Show, East Barnet Fair and the rest will be available at Watling Festival and the Grahame Park Fair.

**Question No. 28**

**Councillor Kate Salinger**

Please could the Cabinet Member outline how well Barnet's students did in the A-Levels this year?

**Answer by Councillor Fiona Bulmer**

The provisional results show that yet again Barnet's students achieved excellent A level results which were well above the national average and amongst the best in the country. I warmly congratulate all the pupils and their teachers on these excellent achievements.

**Question No. 29**

**Councillor Ansuya Sodha**

What resources have been allocated in each Council department for the implementation of the Single Equality Scheme?

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

The Council has integrated our work on equality & diversity and so the whole of the Council's resources are committed.

**Question No. 30**

**Councillor Richard Weider**

Could the Cabinet Member please tell us how Barnet's children did in the Key Stage 2 tests this year?

**Answer by Councillor Fiona Bulmer**

Barnet's children achieved very good results again at Key Stage 2. In English 84% of children achieved level 4, in Maths 81% achieved level 4 and in Science 90%. These results are all above the national average and give Barnet pupils strong foundations on which to build as they enter secondary school.

**Question No. 31**

**Councillor Ansuya Sodha**

What targets and action plans have been set in each Council department to implement the Single Equality Scheme?

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

These are outlined in the Plan

**Question No. 32**

**Councillor Lisa Rutter**

Please could the Cabinet member for Public Health outline what action the Council took to address the recent outbreak of Legionnaires' disease around Sutherland House in West Hendon?

**Answer by Councillor Helena Hart**

Following notification from the Health Protection Agency of 3 cases of Legionnaires Disease in unusually close proximity to each other in West Hendon, Barnet's Environmental Health Service immediately checked their register of cooling towers and identified one at Sutherland House within close proximity to the cluster of cases. It was considered this might be a potential source and an inspection of the cooling tower was immediately carried out.

Whilst there was no evidence that the cooling tower at Sutherland House had actually been responsible for these cases, the conditions found were such that it was considered appropriate to close it by service of a Prohibition Notice under the Health & Safety at Work etc Act 1974. This removed any potential risk that its condition may cause. Samples were taken and sent to the HPA laboratory at Colindale and these have subsequently proved negative for Legionella bacterium.

Whilst circumstantial evidence pointed to Sutherland House as a likely cause it was not assumed that the incident was now under control. Environmental Health staff continued urgent investigations into other potential sources.

Interviews conducted by the HPA indicated that all cases had either been to or near Brent Cross Shopping Centre. Cooling towers at the centre were inspected by Environmental Health staff and found to be clean and well maintained. The cooling towers were inspected immediately the concerns were raised 8 August.

Two premises were also identified across the border in Brent. Officers liaised with colleagues in Brent Environmental Health and the Health and Safety Executive to ensure these were inspected and sampled. The Health and Safety Executive subsequently closed a cooling tower at premises in Brent.

**Question No. 33**

**Councillor Agnes Slocombe**

The recently published Library Strategy does not make much reference to the Borough's mobile libraries. Will any further investment go towards increasing the hours of the mobile libraries?

**Answer by Councillor John Marshall**

The Mobile Library Service is obviously under constant review. Currently it visits 28 sites each week including a temporary site whilst South Friern Library is being rebuilt. When the new Library is ready the Council will of course have additional time to reallocate. Meanwhile I am sure that Councillors and their constituents will welcome the very substantial investment being made in the Library Service.

**Question No. 34**

**Councillor Geof Cooke**

How many complaints by department (excluding housing) were received by the Council in the following years: 2006/7; 2005/6; 2004/5?

## Answer by Councillor Andrew Harper

### 1. Background

Complaints are currently received, logged and managed in service areas. This complies with complaints best practice and the Council's values of customer care. This method of managing complaints enables customers to contact directly those who are best placed to resolve the complaint. In some instances this is not appropriate, for example where a complaint has escalated or where the complaint is about the behaviour of a council officer from a particular department. In these scenarios alternative arrangements are in place. More information regarding the complaints process can be found at [www.barnet.gov.uk](http://www.barnet.gov.uk).

### 2. Recording of complaints

Due to the devolved nature of complaint management each service has developed their own method or system for recording complaints. These locally based systems are currently being replaced by a single corporate system to ensure more effective and proactive managing and logging of complaints.

### 3. Complaints data

Department	2006/07	2005/06	2004/05
Finance	12	41	57
Chief Executives Office	4	0	0
Children's Service	63	77	57
Community Care	28	199	229
Corporate Performance	1	0	0
Customer Service	37	17	35
Education	92	66	39
Highways and Transport	2192	2526	2230
HR	5	4	1
Corporate Governance	2	8	5
Planning	73	124	122
Regeneration	0	1	1
<b>Totals</b>	<b>2509</b>	<b>3063</b>	<b>2776</b>

### 4. Council Tax

The Council tax team began recording complaints in August 2006 and between August 2006 and March 2007, 106 complaints were received. The team is now recording complaints systematically and will be using the corporate system once it is rolled out later this year.