

**Council Questions to Cabinet Members**  
**15 April 2008**  
**Questions and Responses**

**Question 1****Councillor Duncan Macdonald**

Can the Leader list the Leader listen meetings that he has led and any other Leader listens meetings that anyone else has led in a deputizing role stating who led them and where they were located?

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

I have led the Leader Listens events in the following Wards: Finchley Church End, Hale, Underhill, Brunswick Park, Childs Hill, East Finchley and Edgware.

Councillor Offord chaired, East Barnet, Mill Hill, West Hendon and Coppetts.

I have co-chaired Leader Listens events together with the Deputy Leader in Burnt Oak, Woodhouse and Colindale.

**Question 2****Councillor Brian Gordon**

What work is the Council doing to help schools build links with the Police to help ensure children feel safe both in and out of school?

**Answer by Councillor Fiona Bulmer**

The children's service works closely with the police and welcomes the initiatives taken by the Borough Commander to strengthen the police's work with schools and the youth service.

There are 8 police officers who are based at secondary schools. The Council's youth workers and primary and secondary schools also have good relationships with the Safer Neighbourhood teams in their areas and Head teachers continue to build strong links with a range of the Borough's police teams.

This work is underpinned by the Barnet Safeguarding Children Board (now chaired by the Borough Commander) which brings together all the key agencies involved with safeguarding children and young people at both a strategic and an operational level.

**Question 3****Councillor Alison Moore**

How many direct mail letters from the Leader and the Deputy Leader have been paid for and sent out by the Council to residents in Barnet in the last year – excluding Leader Listens mailings – and how much has the cost of this been to the Council?

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

All headteachers re Ofsted results Oct 07 x 54 letters	£ 11.88
All headteachers primary schools music festival June 07 x 61 letters	£ 13.42
NHS Clinical Strategy consultation update Aug 07 x 32 letters	£ 7.04
Finchley Memorial Hospital - possible redevelopment Apr 07 x 274 letters	£ 60.28
Edmunds Walk Residents Sept 07 x 37 letters	£ 8.14
Stanhope Road Residents Aug 07 x 197 letters	£ 43.34
Strawberry Vale Residents Sept 07 x 205 letters	£ 45.10

Strawberry Vale Residents Nov 07 x 205 letters	£ 45.10
Strawberry Vale Residents May 07 x 205 letters	£ 45.10
Residents Hamilton Rd/Brackenbury Rd – Feb 08 x 12 letters	£ 2.64
Residents Byng Rd/Marriott Rd/Cecil Ct/Wentworth Rd June 07 x 213 letters	£ 46.86
Residents of West Hendon Estate x 634 x 2	£420.00

The Deputy Leader has also written other letters e.g. in Hampstead Garden Suburb, however due to annual leave of my PA I have not been able to provide full details.

**Question 4** **Councillor Susette Palmer**

Are there any plans to resite the North Finchley Library, currently by Sainsbury's and designated a leading library away from the shopping centre?

**Answer by Councillor John Marshall**

The Council is aware that several developers have sought to redevelop the former Furnitureland site. It has been suggested that at least one would like to provide a new Library. Clearly this would have advantages over the present site as it would be on the main road. It would be irresponsible to ignore this opportunity. We will keep local residents fully informed unlike the previous administration.

**Question 5** **Councillor Brian Gordon**

Would the Cabinet Member accept commendation on behalf of all those concerned for the excellent organisation that went into the Holocaust Memorial Day Event at Middlesex University, which was highly professional, with very moving prayers, speeches and presentations?

**Answer by Councillor Brian Coleman**

Yes. This event has become a significant occasion and I am grateful to all the participants, to Middlesex University and the Council staff who worked so hard to ensure a fitting commemoration of Holocaust Memorial Day.

**Question 6** **Councillor Julie Johnson**

Precisely which budget will the £4m come from to pay for the recently announced replacement window works, and other major repairs on the West Hendon estate and the Dollis Valley estate? What was this money earmarked to be spent on before the decision was taken to spend it on these repairs?

**Answer by Councillor Lynne Hillan**

Some of the funding had already been earmarked for Regeneration estates. Also because of the progress on the Decent Homes programme the demands on the miscellaneous repairs and maintenance programme have been reduced and we have identified savings within this, to fund the remainder of the programme.

**Question 7** **Councillor Brian Gordon**

How many "Green Flag" awards do we anticipate being won by Barnet's parks this year?

**Answer by Councillor Matthew Offord**

We are hoping for seven. Six re-submissions and a new location – Edgwarebury Park.

**Question 8****Councillor Alan Schneiderman**

Does the Leader think that the Local Strategic Partnership should make decisions about key public services while meeting in private?

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

The Councillor is mistaken, the LSP by itself does not 'make decisions about key public services' as suggested in the question. The Government's recent consultation paper 'Creating Strong Safe and prosperous Communities' helpfully clarifies the status of the LSP: *'LSPs are a collection of organisations and representatives coming together voluntarily to work in partnership'....and 'provide the forum for collectively reviewing and steering public resources, through identifying priorities in Sustainable Community Strategies and LAAs. But as non-statutory bodies they are not the ultimate decision-makers on such plans. All target-setting, and consequent financial, commissioning, or contractual commitments proposed by LSPs, must be formalised through the relevant local authority, or through one of the other LSP partners (for example, if policing, or health resources are involved).'*

**Question 9****Councillor Bridget Perry**

What does the Cabinet Member for Public Health think the above inflation increase in prescription charges will mean for residents in the Borough?

**Answer by Councillor Helena Hart**

A recent Citizens' Advice report found that as many as 800,000 people in England failed to collect a prescription last year due to the cost. This year the Government has increased the charge for an individual item by yet another 25 pence – bringing it to £7.10 from April 1<sup>st</sup>.

Added to the loss of the 10% tax rate band, here we have yet another measure which cannot fail to harm the most disadvantaged and vulnerable residents of the Borough.

**Question 10****Councillor Anne Hutton**

What process will the administration go through to decide how to spend the £8m in "area based grant" that the local authority has received from the government?

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

The usual budget setting process will be followed and this was explained in the budget report already published:

"The Council Budget report said the following: Area Based Grant (ABG) replaces Local Area Agreement (LAA) grant in 2008/09. The various grants are aggregated by Government into a single monthly payment. Unlike LAA grant, ABG comes with no conditions and it is for the Council to determine spending priorities. This is a significant change in the funding regime, which enables the Council to review and challenge expenditure that was previously "protected" by the fact that it was grant funded."

However– ABG is now nothing more than a second allocation of Formula Grant, **but with one significant exception – there is no floor protection at the end of the three year funding period.**

**Question 11****Councillor Daniel Thomas**

Developing a sports and physical activity strategy for the Borough was a key recommendation in the Sport and Leisure Best Value Review, adopted by Cabinet last July. Could the Cabinet Member please tell me what progress has been made?

**Answer by Councillor Andrew Harper**

We have now in Barnet a Community Sports and Physical Activity Network which is well established and brings partners together on a regular basis.

I'm pleased to report that It has very quickly developed not only a Strategy for Sport, Physical Activity and Physical Education, which will be finalised within the next few months, but also four projects to attract new funding, all of which have passed Sport England's initial selection process. Together, these will ensure that the tremendous collective effort that already goes into local sport and recreation is harnessed in helping people to keep fit, providing activities for young people, developing Barnet's sporting talent and contributing to the strong sense of community that it engenders. The strategy will also ensure that we progressively strengthen the infrastructure and capacity to keep on improving what we have to offer in the Borough. I am intent on ensuring that we use local facilities and resources to maximum advantage and that the Council acts as a positive force in helping all concerned to deliver the strategy and help create an active and healthy future for Barnet residents.

**Question 12****Councillor Alison Moore**

What will Assistant Cabinet Members actually do?

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

Assistant Cabinet Members will, without receipt of any additional allowance provide support to Cabinet Members in the discharge of their portfolios.

**Question 13****Councillor Brian Gordon**

Please could the Leader outline how many Freedom of Information (FOI) requests and questions he has received about the Leader Listens initiative and who they were from?

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

Most enquiries have been made by Mr Andrew Dismore MP. To date these have been handled outside of the Freedom of Information (FOI) process. However Mr Dismore has now started to use the FOI process, the average cost of responding to these enquires is £150 including the time of two Council Officers and myself.

**Question 14****Councillor Ross Houston**

Will the Cabinet Members responsible for planning and housing confirm whether the administration supports affordable housing provision being part of every housing development?

**Answer by Councillor Melvin Cohen**

The Borough's Unitary Development Plan (UDP) states that the Council will seek to negotiate the maximum reasonable amount of affordable housing on sites of 10 dwellings or more, or on sites of 0.4 hectares or more, having regard to the Council's target that half the housing provision over the UDP period (up to 2016) should be affordable.

In exceptional circumstances, where the provision of affordable housing would prejudice the realisation of other planning objectives involving community benefit, the Council may consider accepting a lower amount of affordable housing in connection with a new development.

**Question 15****Councillor Wendy Prentice**

Does the Cabinet Member for Transport think that, according to a report in the London Evening Standard, it is acceptable that the Head of Transport for London to have threatened to cut the Transport Operational Command Unit budget (TOCU) because the Metropolitan Police raised safety concerns over bendy buses across the capital and the routing of the 384 bus through Barnet?

**Answer by Councillor Matthew Offord**

No, I do not. In fact, I think it is a disgraceful suggestion.

**Question 16****Councillor Kath McGuirk**

Why is the signature street cleaning service failing to meet key graffiti removal targets?

**Answer by Councillor Matthew Offord**

It is not. The problem is with private sector utility companies and graffiti on private property, not on Council-owned land.

**Question 17****Councillor Richard Weider**

Please could the Cabinet Member outline initial reaction, if any, from users to the newly-refurbished Edgware Library in my ward?

**Answer by Councillor John Marshall**

There has been a very positive response to the changes. The new toilet facility has been widely welcomed. RFID has also been widely welcomed. One resident said it 'is really impressive...it almost makes it worth paying your Council tax'. Another said it is 'Fantastic'. It made her 'feel connected to technology'. I personally was most impressed with the changes when I visited the Library.

**Question 18****Councillor Jim Tierney**

Does the Cabinet Member responsible for housing really believe that delivering only 8 intermediate affordable homes a year is going to solve the housing crisis in Barnet?

**Answer by Councillor Lynne Hillan**

During the last two years, the following figures demonstrate the numbers of affordable homes being provided in Barnet:

		<b>2006/7</b>	<b>2007/8</b>
<b>Starts on Site</b>	Units for rent	240	185
	Shared ownership	83	86
	Total	323	271
<b>Completed Units</b>	Units for rent	40	94
	Shared ownership	41	25
	First Time buyers Initiative	0	31
	Total	81	150

We expect supply of affordable housing to increase as the regeneration schemes take off, the following projection is from the Councils Annual Monitoring Plan  
<http://www.barnet.gov.uk/barnet-planning-annual-monitoring-report-dec07.pdf>.

**Table 27: Barnet affordable housing trajectory 2006/07**

	<b>2008 /09</b>	<b>2009 /10</b>	<b>2010 /11</b>	<b>2011 /12</b>	<b>2012 /13</b>	<b>2013 /14</b>	<b>2014 /15</b>	<b>2015 /16</b>	<b>2016 /17</b>
<b>Projected Affordable Housing Completions</b>	287	395	944	1,067	569	795	542	647	674

In addition, during 2007/8, 11 units were provided under the Discounted Market Sale scheme at Beaufort Park, with a further 14 due during 2008/9.

**Question 19****Councillor Bridget Perry**

As far as the Cabinet Member is aware please, are users happy with the changes made following refurbishment at Chipping Barnet Library in my ward?

**Answer by Councillor John Marshall**

Although the Library reopened only last week, the initial feedback has been positive.

**Question 20****Councillor Charlie O-Macauley**

Does the Cabinet Member for the Environment support the Kyoto Treaty on Climate Change?

**Answer by Councillor Matthew Offord**

Providing 'support' for any treaty, initiative or policy is simply gesture politics – it is action, which this Administration has demonstrated, which is more valuable.

**Question 21****Councillor Robert Rams**

Please could the Cabinet Member advise when a Planning Application for East Barnet School is likely to be submitted?

**Answer by Councillor John Marshall**

The architect will seek RIBA Stage D approval from the programme board on 25 April. If this is given the application will be submitted on 28 April.

**Question 22****Councillor Colin Rogers**

Does the Cabinet Member believe that the state of the road surface in Church Lane N2 is acceptable?

**Answer by Councillor Matthew Offord**

The only acceptable road condition is the one which has been resurfaced, something this Administration has made a key priority. Unfortunately it is also one which the Labour and Liberal Democrat Groups have both opposed.

**Question 23****Councillor Daniel Webb**

When does the Cabinet Member expect a Planning Application to be submitted for Whittings Hill School in my ward please?

**Answer by Councillor John Marshall**

We enter Alcatel on 14 April. If there are no challenges we will proceed on 24 April with financial close. We expect contract signature in May 08. However if there are no challenges the design and build partner will submit a planning application on 28 April. This will enable work to start during the summer.

**Question 24****Councillor Andrew McNeil**

Does the Cabinet Member for the Environment support the “polluter pays” principle?

**Answer by Councillor Matthew Offord**

I have made my position on this clear many times in the Council Chamber. I suggest the member reviews past minutes’ of the debates and questions.

**Question 25****Councillor Linda McFadyen**

Would the Cabinet Member for Health advise the following:

- How many people in Barnet (broken down into adults and children) are recorded as suffering from asthma (yearly figures from 2002)?
- How many people in Barnet (broken down into adults and children) are recorded as suffering from pollution related illnesses (yearly figures from 2002)?
- How many people in Barnet (broken down into adults and children) have died as a result of pollution-related illnesses since 2002?

**Answer by Councillor Helena Hart**

Barnet Council does not collate the requested information, which has had to be obtained from the PCT.

No data is routinely collected by the NHS in relation to what is referred to in the question as “pollution-related illnesses” – nor is such information recorded on death certificates.

So far as Asthma itself is concerned, Asthma is caused by a reversible narrowing of the airways in response to mechanical or allergic irritation. Different people respond in different ways to such irritation and may find that they develop asthma symptoms with more than one irritant. Such irritants can include (in no particular order) tobacco smoke, other particulate or gaseous air contaminants including pollen (hay fever especially due to grass pollen is a common precipitant of asthmatic wheezing), certain weather conditions (e.g. sudden change in temperature, cold air, windy days, hot and humid days) animal fur and feathers, house dust mite and exercise. Asthma can be managed by avoidance of triggers and the use of medication, usually in the form of different types of inhalers to prevent attacks occurring and to treat attacks when they do.

General medical practice data on a number of disease areas has only become available since the introduction of the new general medical services contract. It was not collected prior to that and is only collected now within certain parameters. In 2007/08, there were 17,091 people registered with Barnet GPs receiving treatment for asthma. There were 16,464 in the previous year. This data is not available in age groups and therefore represents both children and adults.

The PCT has slightly more detailed information on people registered with Barnet GPs who were admitted to any hospital with a diagnosis of asthma, and these are shown in the table below.

**Table 1: Number of people registered with Barnet GPs admitted to hospital for asthma by age group and year**

Age group	Number of people with asthma admitted to hospital (rate per 100,000)		
	2004/2005	2005/2006	2006/2007
<b>0-19 years</b>	161	160	154
<b>20 years and over</b>	3	6	2
<b>Total</b>	164 (50.2)	166 (50.5)	156 (47.3)

It should be noted that the majority of people with asthma are managed wholly by their GP. Only a very small number have asthma attacks that are sufficiently severe to require hospital admission.

There is no hospital data after June 2007 at present, and as the NHS Clearing House no longer exists data from databases prior to 2005 is difficult to retrieve and cannot be obtained within the timeframe of this request.

**Question 26**

**Councillor Geof Cooke**

Excluding the Leader Listens, how much was spent by the Council last year on resident consultation?

**Answer by Councillor Andrew Harper**

The Council has spent approximately £197,000 on resident consultation during the financial year just ended (1<sup>st</sup> April 2007-31<sup>st</sup> March 08). This total amount does not include costs for officer time, the Leader Listens, Area Forums, the Civic Network or any planning application consultations.

In terms of officer time, the Council employs one and half Corporate Consultation officers, to provide quality assurance and to advise on consultations carried out by services. These officers are also responsible for any corporate consultations carried out by the Council. Total gross spend on these salaries is £54,000 per annum. In addition, consultation is a key activity for the Highways department and they have spent £215,637 in officer time running and analysing the results of consultations specific to that service during the last year.

Barnet Council consults extensively because 'Putting the Community First' is at the heart of all our corporate priorities. As part of this overarching aim we endeavour to involve and consult with our local residents and services users to ensure that the services we provide meet the needs of all our communities.

Also, from April 2009, as part of the Local Government and Public Involvement Act 2007, local authorities will have a duty to inform, involve and consult with their residents and service users. The Council will be inspected on these through the new Comprehensive Area Assessment, to be conducted by the Audit Commission.

Lastly, the public equality duties placed on all public authorities means that the Council is required to actively involve defined sections of Barnet's Communities.