

Minutes

OF THE MEETING OF THE COUNCIL OF THE LONDON BOROUGH OF BARNET held
at The Town Hall, Hendon, NW4, on Tuesday, 9 September 2008.

PRESENT:

- *The Worshipful the Mayor (Councillor John Marshall)
- *The Deputy Mayor (Councillor Mukesh Depala)

Councillors:

*Maureen Braun	*Andrew Harper	*Sachin Rajput BA (Hons)
*Fiona Bulmer	Christopher Harris BA BSc	PgD Law
*Terry Burton	MPhil	*Robert Rams
*Anita Campbell	*Helena Hart	*Barry Rawlings
*Wayne Casey BA (Hons)	*John Hart BA MA	*Hugh Rayner
MIIA	*Lynne Hillan	*Colin Rogers
*Danish Chopra	*Ross Houston	*Lisa Rutter
*Dean Cohen BSc (Hons)	*Anne Hutton	*Brian Salinger
*Jack Cohen	*Julie Johnson	*Kate Salinger BEd (Hons)
*Melvin Cohen LLB	*Duncan Macdonald	*Gill Sargeant
*Brian Coleman, AM, FRSA	*Caroline Margo	*Joan Scannell
*Geof Cooke		Alan Schneiderman
*Richard Cornelius	*Linda McFadyen	*Agnes Slocombe SRN RM
*Jeremy Davies BA (Hons),	*Kath McGuirk	Ansuya Sodha MBA (Middx)
CPFA	*Andrew McNeil	Cert Ed, DipM (CIM), AMBA
*Tom Davey	*Alison Moore	*Andreas Tambourides
*Claire Farrier	*Jazmin Naghar	*Joanna Tambourides
*Anthony Finn BSc (Econ)	*Matthew Offord	*Daniel Thomas BA (Hons)
FCA	*Charlie O-Macauley	*Jim Tierney
*Mike Freer	*Monroe Palmer OBE, BA,	Daniel Webb
*Brian Gordon, LL.B	FCA	Richard Weider
*Eva Greenspan BA LL.B	*Susette Palmer MA	*Marina Yannoudakis BSc
(Hons)	*Bridget Perry	(Hons) MA
	*Wendy Prentice	*Zakia Zubairi

*denotes Member present

49. PRAYER (Agenda Item 1):

The Mayor's Chaplain offered prayer.

50. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE (Agenda Item 2):

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Ansuya Sodha, Daniel Webb, Richard Weider and Alan Schneiderman who had a very close member of his family rushed to hospital.

The Worshipful the Mayor, on behalf of the Council expressed concern to Councillor Alan Schneiderman and his family.

51. MINUTES OF MEETING HELD ON 13 May 2008 (Agenda Item 3):

RESOLVED – That the minutes of the meeting held on 13 May 2008 be approved

52. OFFICIAL ANNOUNCEMENTS (Agenda Item 4):

The Worshipful the Mayor announced that Major Paddy O'Brien had been moved out of intensive care and was now back on a normal ward. A card signed by Members would be passed onto him. The Mayor said that Major O'Brien's wife was very grateful for the interest that Members had taken and expressed through prayer, letters and telephone calls.

With permission of the Woshipful the Mayor, Councillor Wayne Casey announced the death of Henry Wako Muloki, the Kyabazinga (King) of Busoga in Jinja District. Barnet Council is twinned is with Jinja and Councillor Casey requested that the Mayor write to the Ugandan High Commissioner passing on the Council's condolences to the citizens of Jinja at this sad time. The Mayor said that he would do so.

53. DECLARATIONS OF PERSONAL AND PREJUDICIAL INTERESTS (Agenda Item 5):

The following personal and non prejudicial interest were declared relating to Agenda Item 9.2 Opposition Policy Item Strategy to ease the high cost of living. The Member concerned remained in the chamber and took part in the discussion and voted in respect of the item indicated:

- Councillor Daniel Thomas as he works for Building Society that provides Mortgages.
- The Worshipful Mayor as he has deposits with the same Building Society.

54. BUSINESS REMAINING FROM LAST MEETING(Agenda Item 6):

None.

55. QUESTION TIME FOR MEMBERS (Agenda Item 7):

Questions were put to the Leader and the relevant Members of the Cabinet. Those questions, together with the original answers provided and the text of any supplementary questions and answers are set out in an Appendix to these minutes.

56. SUSPENSION OF COUNCIL PROCEDURE RULES TO DEAL WITH AN EMERGENCY MOTION

Councillors Mike Freer under Council Procedure Rules, Section 1, paragraph 14.1 proposed motions seeking the Council's consent to Suspend Council Procedure Rules to enable him to table and debate an emergency motion relating to NHS Reconfiguration. . The motion was seconded by Councillor Matthew Offord.

Upon being put to the vote, the motion proposed to suspend Council Procedure Rules in the name of in the name of Councillor Mike Freer was declared carried.

Councillor Jack Cohen proposed an amendment to add “*Council object to the removal of Transfer Elective Surgery.*” Councillor Freer accepted the amendment.

Upon being put to the vote, the substantive motion was declared carried

RESOLVED - Council is dismayed that the Labour Government has agreed to the NHS Reconfiguration Panel’s recommendations that will see the loss of Accident and Emergency facilities, and downgrading of other health services, at Chase Farm Hospital.

Council is appalled that the recommendations of the Joint Overview and Scrutiny Committee on this matter have been ignored.

In addition, Council regrets that consideration of the Council’s own “Barnet Model” has been completely absent from proceedings.

Council believes that the plans are not in the interests of patients in either Barnet or Enfield, and will lead to extra strain on services at Barnet General, which could severely affect the level of care at that and other local Hospitals.

Accordingly Council requests the Chief Executive writes immediately to the Secretary of State for Health, Alan Johnson MP urging the Minister to reconsider his stance.

57. VARIATION OF ORDER OF BUSINESS

Councillor Joan Scannell, duly seconded, moved under Council Procedure Rule, Section 1, paragraph 10.2.2, that the order of business relating to Agenda Item 8 be varied so that Motions 8.2 and 8.4 be heard first.

Upon being put to the vote, the motion was declared carried.

RESOLVED – That the order of business be varied to allow Motions 8.2 and 8.4 to be debated and voted upon in advance of votes being taken on the other motions on the Agenda.

58. MOTION IN THE NAME OF COUNCILLOR FIONA BULMER (Agenda Items 8.2)

Motion 8.2 in the name of Councillor Fiona Bulmer was moved. Debate ensued. Upon being put to the vote the motion in name of Councillor Fiona Bulmer was declared carried.

RESOLVED – Council is proud of Barnet’s Schools, which offer an excellent education to children and young people across the Borough.

Council welcomes the recent GCSE and A-Level results in the Borough, with Barnet’s schools being, once again, among the leading centres of learning in the UK.

Further, Council is pleased at our pupils’ excellent Key Stage 2 SATS, although Council is dismayed at the appalling mistakes made by the Government and their contractor in administering the exams and publishing the results.

Council however condemns the disastrous manner in which Ed Balls MP is running the Department for Children, Schools and Families, including the shambolic administration of this year’s SATS tests, and the constant attempts to interfere with our Schools’ admissions processes.

Accordingly, Council resolves to congratulate Barnet's pupils, parents and teachers on their superb results, and asks that the Cabinet continues to support and enhance the Borough's first-rate Schools and resists Government attempts to undermine them.

59. MOTION IN THE NAME OF COUNCILLOR ANDREW HARPER (Agenda Item 8.4 and 13.1.4 (i) (a))

Motion 8.4 was moved in the name of Councillor Andrew Harper. An amendment in the name of Councillor Susette Palmer was moved. Debate ensued.

Upon being put the vote the amendment in Councillor Susette Palmer name was declared lost. Upon being put to the substantive motion was declared carried.

RESOLVED - Council is proud of all Barnet's Parks, which help to preserve this Borough's reputation as an attractive and green place to live.

Council believes the Premier Parks Policy, established to ensure that every resident enjoys a high quality open space with a full range of facilities within a mile of their home, has been central to this achievement.

Further, Council welcomes work to ensure other parks are maintained to a high standard, and the improvements made to encourage biodiversity in non-Premier parks.

Accordingly Council is proud that an unprecedented seven of the Borough's Parks have been awarded a Green Flag Award this year, recognising the quality of our open spaces and the plans for their future.

Council therefore calls on Cabinet to work to ensure our Corporate Plan goals for parks are realised, and that investment in our parks and open spaces is maintained for the benefit of all our residents.

60. MOTION IN THE NAME OF COUNCILLOR ALISON MOORE AS AMENDED BY COUNCILLOR MIKE FREER (Agenda Item 8.1)

An amendment was moved in the name of Councillor Mike Freer.

Upon being put the vote the amendment in Councillor Mike Freer name was declared carried. Upon being put to the vote the substantive motion was declared carried.

RESOLVED - Council celebrates the outstanding achievements of Team GB at the Beijing Olympics, including the Bronze medal in the 400m Hurdles Final achieved by Natasha Danvers of the Shaftesbury Barnet Harriers.

Council asks the Chief Executive to write to all local Team GB members congratulating them for representing our local community, London and Great Britain on the international stage.

In addition, Council wishes the GB Paralympics Team every success during the current Paralympics, and further asks the Chief Executive writes to all local Team GB Paralympians after the events, congratulating them on their achievements.

61. MOTION IN THE NAME OF COUNCILLOR ANDREW McNEIL AS AMENDED BY COUNCILLOR BRIAN COLEMAN (Agenda Item 8.3)

An amendment was moved in the name of Councillor Brian Coleman.

Upon being put the vote the amendment in Councillor Brian Coleman was name was declared carried. Upon being put to the substantive motion was declared carried.

RESOLVED - Council believes that street trading activities need to be regulated effectively to ensure Barnet offers attractive and accessible shopping environments for all residents.

Further, Council is pleased that the Street Trading rules mean that pavements can be kept free of obstructions, allowing those with disabilities, with young children, and the elderly, to shop with ease.

In addition, Council notes that the charging structure is in line with the law and only allows the Borough to recovers its costs

Council believes a pleasant and clear commercial area makes for a successful business environment which can draw and retain shoppers.

Accordingly, Council calls on Cabinet to continue its policies to de-clutter and make Barnet's Town centres attractive and dynamic, which includes the proper enforcement of Street Trading Regulations, as under the new scheme.

62. MOTION IN THE NAME OF COUNCILLOR KATH McGUIRK (Agenda Item 8.5)

Councillor Kath McGuirk requested that Council consent to her motion being withdrawn. Upon being put to the vote Council consented to the motion being withdrawn

RESOLVED – That the motion in the name of Councillor Kath McGuirk be withdrawn.

63. MOTION IN THE NAME OF COUNCILLOR JULIE JOHNSON AS AMENDED BY COUNCILLOR FIONA BULMER (Agenda Item 8.6)

An amendment was moved in the name of Councillor Fiona Bulmer.

Upon being put the vote the amendment in Councillor Fiona Bulmer name was declared carried. The substantive motion was declared carried.

RESOLVED -

Council is pleased at the sale of 3 dinghies by the administration for a nominal £1 to the Sea Cadets for use on the Welsh Harp.

Council further notes there is a huge range of activities available to young people in Barnet, including many sporting activities. Council congratulates the many young people in Barnet who have achieved sporting success in the past year, including the excellent performances at the London Youth Games in July.

In addition, Council notes that the Administration agreed to seek the re-provision of the Youth Sailing Base at the Welsh Harp as part of the West Hendon regeneration scheme.

Accordingly, Council request Cabinet progresses with the regeneration of West Hendon, so the re-provision of a Sailing Base can be considered as part of that scheme.

64. VARIATION OF ORDER OF BUSINESS

Councillor Lynne Hillan, duly seconded, moved under Council Procedure Rule, Section 1, paragraph 10.2.2, that the remainder of business relating to Agenda Items 9.1, 9.2, 13.1, 14 be brought forward and dealt with before the Break

Upon being put to the vote, the motion was declared carried.

RESOLVED – That the order of business be varied to allow the remainder of the business on the agenda of the Council meeting to be brought forward before the Break.

65. ADMINISTRATION POLICY ITEM: VOULANTRY READING (Agenda Item 9.1)

Councillor Matthew Offord proposed the item and moved that it be adopted.

Debate ensued on the Policy Item. Upon being put to the vote the Policy Item was declared carried.

RESOLVED – Council is proud of its Library Service, which offers free access to books as well as information, education and ICT facilities for our residents.

The Borough’s libraries also help boost literacy, which is the key to a successful education, dramatically increasing the life-chances of our children.

Though Barnet enjoys high levels of literacy, there remains a problem with childhood illiteracy nationally, and there are some individuals within the Borough for whom reading is a problem.

Barnet’s Libraries could offer a solution by facilitating a Borough-wide Voluntary Reading Scheme to children who have difficulty with words. This not only could help boost Barnet’s already high literacy rate, but also set a good example of best practice to other areas, especially those locations where many children suffer from poorer reading skills.

Accordingly, Cabinet is requested to investigate how a Voluntary Reading Scheme could be developed in the Borough’s Libraries, and examine the cost implications and other practical matters (such as CRB checks), of such a proposal.

66. OPPOSITION POLICY ITEM AS AMENDED BY COUNCILLOR LYNNE HILLAN: STRATEGY TO EASE THE HIGH COST OF LIVING (Agenda Item 9.2)

Councillor Jack Cohen proposed the Policy item and moved that it be adopted.

An amendment in the name of Councillor Lynne Hillan was moved. Debate ensued.

Upon being put to the vote the amendment in the name of Councillor Kath McGuirk was declared lost.

Upon being put to the vote the amendment in the name of Councillor Lynne Hillan was declared carried.

Upon being put to the vote the substantive motion was declared carried.

RESOLVED - Council notes with concern the current economic pressures on Barnet residents. The rising cost of fuel bills, inflation and mortgages are beginning to bite. Council regrets the Labour Government’s mishandling of both the economy and public finances, meaning there is little money available nationally to help hard-pressed residents.

Council believes it right to ensure it does everything within its powers to ease the burden on our residents.

There are many way in which this Council can use its unique position to assist our residents through these difficult economic times. Examples of ways this Council can help to tackle the high cost of living include;

- **To support the LGA Campaign for the main energy companies to invest in Home Insulation Schemes**
- **To campaign for fair tariffs for prepayment customers**
- **To press the energy companies to roll out the installation of smart meters that display the cash cost of energy used.**
- **To investigate running a good neighbour scheme to look out for elderly and vulnerable and infirm this winter**
- **Continue work already underway to increase benefits take-up advice.**
- **To provide help and advice to those struggling with Mortgage repayments.**

Council asks the Cabinet as a matter of urgency to work on its own and with our strategic partners draw up a comprehensive strategy to implement all or some of the above or any other ideas.

67. REPORTS OF CABINET (Agenda Item 10)

None

68. REPORTS FROM OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEES (Agenda Item 11)

None

69. REPORT OF OTHER COMMITTEES (Agenda Item 12)

None.

70. REPORTS EXEMPTED FROM THE CALL-IN PROCESS BECAUSE THEY ARE URGENT (Report of the Democratic Services Manager – Agenda Item 13.1.1)

In the case listed below the Chairman of the Cabinet Overview and Scrutiny Committee agreed that the decision proposed was reasonable in all the circumstances, was urgent and therefore has consented to the proposed decision being exempted from call-in:

- (i) The Leader of the Council approved agreement to the Freedom Pass methodology of costs apportionment. Each London Borough Council and the City Corporation had been asked by London Councils to sign a letter confirming agreement to terms to settle a dispute referred to arbitration relating to the Freedom Pass costs apportionment between the boroughs.
The report ~~is~~ was exempted from call-in as the signed letter of agreement had to be deposited with London Councils prior to the date of the next meeting of the Cabinet Overview & Scrutiny Committee on 8 September 2008.

71. LEADER'S SCHEME OF DELEGATION: (Report of the Democratic Services Manager – Agenda Item 13.1.2)

The Leader has advised the Democratic Services Manager that Councillor Lisa Rutter has relinquished her role as Assistant Cabinet Member for Community Engagement and Community Safety.

RESOLVED – That Council note the amendment to the Leader's scheme of delegation and that the Democratic Services Manager has made the appropriate changes to the Council's Constitution.

72. DELEGATED POWERS OF EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF RESOURCES (Supplemental Report of the Democratic Services Manager – Agenda Item 13.1.3)

The Executive Director of Resources, Nick Walkley, is currently on a year's secondment to the Department for Communities and Local Government.

The Constitution sets out express powers which are exercisable by the Executive Director, primarily relating to land transactions. Clive Medlam, as Chief Finance Officer and Deputy Director of Resources, is authorised by the Resources Directorate scheme of delegation to deputise for the Executive Director in his absence. Mr Medlam is also acting as Director of Resources during the secondment of the Executive Director.

Given the projected length of the secondment and for clarity in the decision-making process, Council is asked to confirm, for the period of the Executive Director's absence, authorisation for the Director of Resources to exercise the powers delegated to the Executive Director for Resources as set out in the Constitution

RESOLVED - That the Director of Resources be authorised to exercise the powers delegated to the Executive Director of Resources as set out in the Constitution during the Executive Director's absence from the Council.

73. COMMENTS RELATING TO THE WORK OF THE CABINET (Agenda Item 15)

Comment: Councillor Geof Cooke

Residents in Woodhouse Ward living in private houses with short gardens and to the south end of these gardens on Council owned allotment land there is a row of very large, very tall trees with the trunks just inside the allotment land and so these residents are living in permanent shadow. The Council officers have been asked to deal with this issue and the response has been from the officers that the trees are not dangerous, no subsidence involved and the residents have no legal right to light. Is it not the case, Mr Mayor, that the residents of our Borough are entitled to their Council to act as a good neighbour in this matter and to deal with the trees itself? Although the residents do have a legal right to remove overhanging branches themselves we are talking about very big trees, we would need specialist tree surgeons to do it safely and the expense would be considerable.

Response: Councillor Andrew Harper

Well, thank you very much Mr Mayor. I'm very interested to hear the example that Councillor Cooke has mentioned. I wasn't aware of it before. The Council is actually in

the process of preparing a revised tree management plan which will shortly be made public and as we do that I will bear in mind the particular problems that he has raised.

Comment: Councillor Wayne Casey

Mr Mayor, my comment on the work of the Cabinet does what it says on the tin. The only point I would like to re-emphasise is I am not asking the Cabinet Member to comment on a planning application – that would be totally inappropriate. I just need a re-assurance that if the planning application goes through the Lawrence Street Allotments and Gardens Association can have green convenience.

Response: Councillor Mike Freer, Leader of the Council

Just as well the Cabinet Member for Planning is not here so he won't be able to be embarrassed. The Allotment Society or Lawrence Street Allotments and Gardens Association was written to on 16 June which clearly stipulated that landlord permission had been confirmed subject to one or two issues regarding the toilets but planning permission being granted. So that's all in the public domain, the Allotments and Gardens Association has that confirmation and reassurance. I give you a copy of the letter.

Comment: Councillor Jeremy Davies

Thank you, Mr Mayor. I would just add to what's being actually put on the order paper tonight. It has been my experience, and that many other members in other wards have had experience, to street lighting and complaints are coming from residents and that have been addressed to the Lighting Contractor. But, yet again, on Saturday, I had another complaint from a resident that the contractors are not listening to them and not obviously discussing it properly with the residents and I think we as members of this Authority need assurance that all these issues are being dealt with appropriately, because we thought these had all been resolved previously, and I hope I don't get another complaint because yet again each time we have a wave of complaints every time there is another road scheduled for David Webster for re-lighting.

Response: Councillor Andrew Harper

Thank you, Mr Mayor. I certainly hope that Councillor Davies doesn't get another complaint as well. But, if there are any specifics then he is welcome to drop me a line and I will see what can be done about it. Certainly in answer to some of the most specific points that he made in what's been put before us tonight, the first five years of this 25 year PFI contract are about replacing lighting columns that are structurally reaching the end of their lives or their lighting levels are poor in relation to the current British Standard Code of Practice for lighting of the highway. This will take care of nearly 70% of the lighting columns in the borough and the remaining years will target columns as they reach the end of their lives. Councillor Davies has made a note about the Code of Practice. The British Standard Code of Practice is the only one that's in existence, providing guidance on lighting levels for various road types and areas etc. It does not set a timetable for compliance. The total project cost is just over £132 million across 25 years of which £56 million comes from Central Government PFI credits, that's £75 million from the Council's resources. Thank you.

Comment: Councillor Julie Johnson

The Welsh Harp sailing base in West Hendon which Barnet closed in 2004 continues to be neglected. West Hendon Regeneration will not deliver a new sailing base for many

years. With demand outstripping supply for boating activities generated no doubt by the recent Team GB, Cabinet should be proactive in meeting this demand. They should reopen the West Hendon sailing base so that youngsters can participate in water sports in the run up to the London 2012 Olympic Games. The contribution of three second dinghies is not enough. It's too little too late.

Response: Councillor Fiona Bulmer

Yes, if Councillor Johnson would like to advise on where the source of the funding will come from to address the problems of building and sailing we would be happy to consider them. But, the reality is that we provide a whole range of sporting activities for young people across Barnet. I mentioned some of them earlier and we will continue to look at providing that diverse range of activities within the funds we have available.

The meeting finished at 9.32

Council Questions to Cabinet Members**9 September 2008****Questions and Responses****Question 1****Councillor Duncan Macdonald**

Can the relevant Cabinet member please advise whether a town centre strategy is being developed specifically for New Barnet? If yes, when will it be published? If no, then why has the Council been promising such a document since 2002?

Answer by Councillor Melvin Cohen

The Council has not been promising a document since 2002. As endorsed by Cabinet in March this year, the Council is developing a Suburban Town Centres Strategy as part of the emerging Local Development Framework to ensure that the social, economic and environmental well being of all of the boroughs centres is maintained and enhanced.

The Council will be bringing forward planning strategies for four of its key town centres at North Finchley, Edgware, New Barnet and Chipping Barnet over the course of the next 6-12 months. A planning strategy will also be produced for Whetstone in the future. Work is progressing at different stages in relation to these and full community consultation will be undertaken as draft documents are prepared. A strategy for New Barnet will be available for initial consultation early in the New Year.

Supplementary Question 1**Councillor Duncan Macdonald**

Mr Mayor, thank you. I would like to ask then why we haven't had a town centre strategy and it's taken till March this year to start thinking about having one?

Answer by Councillor Melvin Cohen

Mr Mayor, these things are not done on the turn of a hat, they do take time to work out and we are in the process of dealing with this and the proofs of those will be demonstrated very very soon.

Question 2**Councillor Brian Gordon**

Can the Cabinet Member for Investment in Learning please outline the progress on the Burnt Oak Library refurbishment?

Answer by Councillor Matthew Offord

The redevelopment of Burnt Oak Library is in the final 3 weeks of the programme. The internal and external 'shell' of the build has just about been completed (complete re-wiring, plumbing, new boilers and water pressurisation system). The interior of the building has been remodelled and the new ceilings and walls plastered and decorated. The new entrance ramp has been laid ready for the new wall and entrance and additionally the lift has been installed ahead of schedule.

Over the next three weeks the final 'layers' will be added – these are key pieces and each section of the programme going forward is dependent on the schedule happening on time. These layers include steel fabrication, flooring, furniture, IT and the restocking of the library.

The building is now fresh, light and has the feeling of a brand new structure whilst retaining the original exterior of the building.

Supplementary Question 2**Councillor Brian Gordon**

I'd like to tell you that from my own sounding there's a great deal of enthusiasm throughout the Borough, much more widely than just Burnt Oak itself, about the future library, certainly, in my own ward of Hale, I would like the Cabinet Member to comment on the fact that the Labour opposition refused to support the Burnt Oak library rebuild at the Council fairly recently. I'm sure they've changed their minds about that, but would you like to comment and join me in looking forward to using the library which will certainly become a tremendous boon for the public and for Barnet as a whole?

Answer by Councillor Matthew Offord

Thank you Mr Mayor. It is bizarre that the opposition decided they would not support the refurbishment of Burnt Oak library. I think that Councillor Gordon was quoted in the paper speaking about an MP, he described as in the twilight of his parliamentary career, and his comments that we neglect Burnt Oak. I think that not only the Library, but also the other work we have done in the area, shows that we take all the citizens of the Borough very seriously. In particular regard to the library I would like to point out to Councillor Gordon and also the other members of the Council that the library will open on Monday to Friday from 10 o'clock to 5 o'clock – with late night opening on a Thursday and also on a Saturday from 9 o'clock to 5 o'clock. That, as I'm sure he will know, will mean an additional day's opening on Monday – yet again further evidence that we have taken the needs of all the Borough into account in the provision of services.

Question 3**Councillor Agnes Slocombe**

Why have Barnet Homes / the Council stopped cutting back huge trees in Council tenants' back gardens and when was the policy changed to stop pruning them?

Answer by Councillor Lynne Hillan

Barnet Homes' policy towards trees in tenants back gardens is to deal with dead, dying or dangerous trees only, unless the trees are causing subsidence.

Other than this the trees will be the responsibility of the tenant unless there is a specific hardship or vulnerability. There has been no recent change in this policy. In addition, they have a five year programme of maintenance for trees in the communal areas of housing estates.

Supplementary Question 3**Councillor Agnes Slocombe**

Can the Council continue to lop trees that are over 50 years old in any residents gardens?

Answer by Councillor Lynne Hillan

Thank you. I'll certainly ask Barnet Homes to have a look at that particular estate.

Question 4**Councillor Jack Cohen**

You wrote in the Barnet Press "foreign travel does broaden the mind". If this is the case is your mind any the broader for taking a trip last year to America at the Taxpayers expense?

Answer by Councillor Mike Freer, Leader of the Council

Yes.

Supplementary Question 4**Councillor Jack Cohen**

Yes thank you. Councillor Freer isn't the truth that your trip to America was not only over budget but was a complete waste of council tax payers money? And if it wasn't a waste of money can you now, this evening, give us six examples of how the residents of this Borough have benefited by your trip?

Answer by Councillor Mike Freer, Leader of the Council

Well where do I start? First of all, it gave both myself and the other leaders from the public sector (there was a Liberal Leader, I think the Liberal Leader of another London Borough) who attended access to some of the leading management and business experts in the world.

Mr Mayor, just some of the benefits, they're in no particular order:

- access to some of the other leaders of the public sector that were there including one of the senior deputy mayors for Mayor Johnson;
- the Chairman of the Audit Commission;
- a variety of networking opportunities with other authorities going through similar change processes;
- access to the world's best business brains in terms of change management;
- customer advocacy; and
- public sector improvement.

Most of these lecturers charge £20,000 dollars a session and we had access to about 15 of them. In terms of some specific development back in Barnet to some of the learning on customer, advocacy feeding directly into this CRM program. The session we had on life time contracts is feeding into the future shape of the Council and in terms of the whole way of public sector improvement both in terms of some of the national organisations and the public sector organisations are also feeding into some of the major improvements in customer service initiatives and in the future shape of the Council. If Councillor Cohen wishes to apply to attend the vital vision programme if he feels he can pass the rigorous selection procedure I'm more than happy to tell him how to apply, and I'm more than happy to lend him any of the text books and required reading that was required for this training course.

Question 5

Councillor Brian Gordon

Could you please tell the Council how Barnet is currently ranking regarding customer satisfaction on refuse collections, in comparison with the rest of London?

Answer by Councillor Andrew Harper

I am pleased to report that in the most recent, 2007/08 residents' survey refuse collection received a high rating of 78% (good to excellent) and was again the highest rated individual service of the Council, as in 2006/07. The service was rated in the 2006/07 MORI survey at 83%, ranking the refuse collection service 7% higher than the London average of 76%.

Supplementary Question 5

Councillor Brian Gordon

Councillor Harper, are you finding as I do that there's hardly any complaints at all now coming with regard to the refuse collection which is obviously illustrated by the figure that you've given me very helpfully here, and that we really have something to be proud of. Many of us can remember when there was complaint after complaint about inadequate collections and now it's all changed. But, can I just ask you one thing, one particular rider. I do occasionally get complaints from people that the bins, the recycling bins and the wheelie bins, are just left strewn all over the pavement and not put back properly into the place they come from. For elderly people this is particularly difficult but for people generally it makes a terrible mess. Can we try and get that sorted out a little bit more effectively?

Answer by Councillor Andrew Harper

Thank you Mr Mayor. Firstly, I am very grateful to Councillor Gordon for what he said generally speaking about the collection service. It is indeed proving to be very good indeed and very popular as I pointed out in my speech in this chamber back in July.

With regards to the specific concerns he has, certainly the new contract for recycling which will begin very shortly has some very stringent requirements written into it about the way that bins are treated and replaced on properties. But, I note what he says also about the black bins and I will certainly look into that. That's really not acceptable.

Question 6

Councillor Julie Johnson

When will the West Hendon window replacement programme actually be completed?

Answer by Councillor Lynne Hillan

Due to complete end of June 2009.

Supplementary Question 6

Councillor Julie Johnson

Thank you for your answer Councillor Hillan. Residents were originally told that the windows were going to be replaced this summer. Why is it taking so long, and will it ever happen?

Answer by Councillor Lynne Hillan

Yes of course it's going to happen. Unfortunately it took slightly longer to get through the planning system than we had anticipated and the contractors are saying that it will take a little bit longer because there are issues about scaffolding and also due to the new aerials that they are putting up. But, it will be completed by the end of June 2009.

Question 7

Councillor Jack Cohen

A former Barnet Top Tory wrote, in relation to the sale of land at Underhill inquiry, on the Hendon Times website "The reality is that this investigation has cost more than it needed to and dragged out for far too long because the Conservative Administration was useless in the way it handled matters". What is your reaction to these comments?

Answer by Councillor Mike Freer, Leader of the Council

No former Top Tory wrote such comments. My reaction is to ignore the pent up frustrations of others.

Question 8

Councillor Brian Gordon

What are the criteria applicable as to whether or not residents are given prior information regarding the intention to cut down or remove trees in their streets?

Answer by Councillor Andrew Harper

There is currently no legal requirement for information to be given to residents prior to tree removal. However, our current procedures are as follows:

- No notice is given where a tree is to be removed on the grounds of emergency health and safety works
- Trees removed for health and safety reasons and / or subsidence that will significantly change the streetscape and/or is a mature specimen, are posted with a notice advising of this work detailing the reasons and contact details of the department; properties in the vicinity that may be affected receive the same notice.
- Notices are posted on trees where a requirement to remove large mature trees arises. This was done last week where four mature Horse chestnut trees in Gallants Farm Road were found to be dead and decayed and were removed. We will be replacing all four with residents choice of replacement tree.
- Where young or immature trees are found to be dead or are removed for other reasons, no prior notice is given.

New procedures are proposed for the above in a Tree Strategy for the borough, which is currently in draft form.

Supplementary Question 8

Councillor Brian Gordon

Is it possible that we can increase the amount of notice, when we are going to take down trees or remove trees or cut them down in their road. I ask the question because I've had certain recent involvement in this. Rudyard Grove is one example, Hale Drive another, where people phoned me very upset when trees were cut down. There were good reasons for it, I'm not denying, but they weren't told in advance. They certainly didn't see any notices on trees, and they were very upset. I think it's a question of good public relations that we do explain to people what we're doing in this respect, not just chop down trees without proper notice. Some people are very attached to their trees.

Answer by Councillor Andrew Harper

Thank you Mr Mayor I'm very happy to look into the particular circumstances that Councillor Gordon has raised and also the more general point.

Question 9

Councillor Barry Rawlings

How many meals on wheels could be provided for the same price as Councillor Freer's junkets to the States?

Answer by Councillor Lynne Hillan

The Vital Vision programme is not a junket and has been paid for out of the training budget. No one who has required a meal has been deprived of one and therefore the issue does not arise.

Supplementary Question 9

Councillor Barry Rawlings

Yes, thank you and thank you for the answer. But the points not about whether anybody has been deprived of a meal, it's the cost of this you say has come out of the training budget. Could Councillor Hillan tell us if and the reasons why she considers the money spent on it is more of a priority than say training in child protection or protecting vulnerable adults out of the training budget?

Answer by Councillor Lynne Hillan

I think that the Leader has given you an adequate answer to that. It was an excellent training course. We were very fortunate that he was willing to give up that amount of time to go on it and we have an excellent Council as a result of it.

Question 10

Councillor Jack Cohen

At the last Council Meeting your Cabinet colleague said he held the Cabinet and Overview Scrutiny Committee in contempt. Do you agree with him?

Answer by Councillor Mike Freer, Leader of the Council

No.

Supplementary Question 10

Councillor Jack Cohen

I'm quite worried about what I say now, I think Mr Lustig has probably got lots to do never mind chasing up the reports to him. At the last Council meeting, talk about reporting to monitoring officers, Councillor Coleman said he held the Cabinet Overview Scrutiny Committee in contempt. Since then he's also seems to hold our Olympic athletes in contempt. Councillor Freer isn't it about time you sack Councillor Coleman, and if not, why not?

Answer by Councillor Mike Freer, Leader of the Council

Mr Mayor, Councillor Coleman is a Councillor of robust views, from memory one of the issues which he took umbrage about, about the behaviour of China was of course its unwillingness to tolerate dissent or a difference of opinion. I, for one, am not prepared to go down that particular route and if any of my Councillors have a democratic right to have a difference of opinion that is their right and I'll defend their right to have that opinion, even if I disagree with it. That is what is called democracy. You may not recognise it in your group

Question 11

Councillor Brian Gordon

Please could we have an update as the present position regarding the proposed Controlled Parking Zone in the Burnt Oak area, which indirectly affects a number of roads within my Ward?

Answer by Councillor Andrew Harper

A statutory consultation on a proposal for a Controlled Parking Zone in the Burnt Oak Area was carried out in June of this year. The consultation invited comment on a single CPZ that would operate on Mondays to Fridays between 10am and 11am, and 2pm to 3pm.

The consultation period is now over and analysis of all comments received is almost complete. Meetings between Council Officers and interested local residents, including a school are to take place over the next few weeks, and subject to comments made in those meetings it is anticipated that a report on the consultation findings and conclusions will be completed shortly, and consequently I expect a decision on the future of the scheme will be made by the end of September.

Supplementary Question 11

Councillor Brian Gordon

My last one for the evening, you'll be pleased to hear. Councillor Harper, with regard to the Burnt Oak prospective controlled parking zone, it's good to know that it is going to be only an hourly restriction in the morning and afternoon but could you please see to it, if you are able to do so, that the Councillors of the relevant wards, and that's not just Burnt Oak, but I would suggest Hale, where many of our residents are affected by this, are kept informed at all stages along the way. Perhaps we could be fully informed of what the final decision is and where these restrictions are going to be - before the announcement is made to the public?

Answer by Councillor Andrew Harper

Thank you Mr Mayor. I'm very grateful that Councillor Gordon and one or two of his colleagues have shown such great interest in this and have given their views, it's been very helpful. Not all Councillors in the area have been so obliging or so forthright. But, certainly I'm happy to ensure that both he and his colleagues are kept informed during what has been a very long drawn out process. But, it's been very important in terms of the way that many different people have been consulted and had the opportunity to give their views, as this process now draws to a close.

Question 12

Councillor Kath McGuirk

Given the merry-go-round at City Hall, when does Councillor Coleman think he will finally get his stint as a Deputy-Mayor or does he agree that Boris Johnson is not really interested in listening to outer-London Boroughs like Barnet?

Answer by Councillor Mike Freer, Leader of the Council

The Mayor of London chooses his own Deputy Mayors and I would not wish to second guess any future appointments. As for listening to outer-London Boroughs Mayor Johnson has appointed a former Leader of an outer London Borough as one of his senior Deputy Mayors who also represents the Mayor on London Council's City Suburbs Working Group and is establishing an Outer London Commission. In just four months the suburbs have had more influence than in the eight years of Labour's Livingstone.

Supplementary Question 12

Councillor Kath McGuirk

Thank you Councillor Freer for your answer. To date there has been no real evidence that the suburbs are benefiting from many of the Mayor's policies which is pretty clear that Mr Coleman has now dropped the baton on his own ambition but that we do hear that he is very interested in being Mayor here. Tories can remember Roger Evans who was clearly so worried about Boris Johnson's ability to run London that he has proposed that the major role at City Hall should be handed over to an Assembly Member. So if we're talking democracy, as you've already stated, do you agree with this assessment of the situation and, if not, are you going to replace your Cabinet with an unaccountable highly paid quango?

Answer by Councillor Mike Freer, Leader of the Council

I couldn't quite follow what the gist of that question was. Well my understanding of the question is that I have confidence in Boris Johnson's ability to run London and I think he's off to a strong start and the suburbs have had more influence in four months than we ever had under Livingstone.

Question 13

Councillor Jack Cohen

Please provide the number of Council Employees (excluding school based staff) who at 1 April 2004 earned:

- a) £50,000 – £75,000 per year
- b) £75,000 – £100,00 per year
- c) Over 100,000

Please provide the same information as at 1 April 2008.

Answer by Councillor Mike Freer, Leader of the Council

The 2008 salary ranges you enquired about equate to following spinal points:

Salary Range	Spinal Points
£50,000 – £75,000	Barnet Broad Band (57 – 70) BB4 (205 – 213) BB5 (231 – 238)
£75,000 – £100,000	BB5 (239 – 249)
Over £100,000	BB5 (250 – 253) Directors (All) Executive Directors (All) Chief Executive

Comparing Spinal Points at 1 April 2004 and 1 April 2008 it is revealed that the number of senior managers / senior professionals in Council has only increased by six as detailed in the chart below.

Spinal Points	1 April 2004	1 April 2008
Barnet Broad Band (57 – 70)		
BB4 (205 – 213)	96	95
BB5 (231 – 238)		
BB5 (239 – 249)	12	14
BB5 (250 – 253)		
Directors (All)	8	13
Executive Directors (All)		
Chief Executive		

Therefore the change in the number of managers earning >£50K is more due to year on year pay awards rather than a significant increase in the number of senior managers/ professionals.

Another factor that can affect pay is the need to pay market value to recruitment and retain staff. Planning and “Social Services” are two areas where in the past market forces has made it difficult to recruit and retain staff.

Supplementary Question 13

Councillor Jack Cohen

Thank you Councillor Freer. The figures you provide are interesting and probably deserve people seeing them further, but for this evening I note there’s been a 40% increase in salaries of over one hundred thousand pounds. Of the staff that do earn over a hundred thousand pounds are you able to tell us this evening and if not I’ll be quite happy to have it in writing as soon as possible, how many of these staff receive other incomes from other posts they may hold elsewhere.

Answer by Councillor Mike Freer, Leader of the Council

As you’d expect Mr Mayor that information is not available to me at my fingertips but I am sure that the head of paid service will provide the information if appropriate.

Question 14

Councillor Kate Salinger

Please would the Cabinet Member join me in congratulating Barnet’s Primary School pupils on their SATs results?

Answer by Councillor Fiona Bulmer

Yes, I am delighted to report that Barnet’s provisional Key Stage 2 results are again in the top 10 for all authorities in English, Maths and Science.

83% of pupils achieved level 4+ for Maths, placing Barnet 6th nationally and 78% of pupils achieved level 4+ in both Maths and English, also the 6th best result in the country.

Supplementary Question 14

Councillor Kate Salinger

I thank the Cabinet Member for her answer and ask if she will join me in condemning the performance of the contractors who were tasked with marking this year’s SAT papers and the Government which oversaw the shambles that produced the results which caused a lot of misery for many of our pupils, teachers and parents?

Answer by Councillor Fiona Bulmer

Yes, I entirely agree with Councillor Salinger. Sadly, it was not a surprise given the staggering incompetence of this Government and the Education Department in particular. The shame really is that it did overshadow the excellent results of young people in Barnet and I hope we'll have a chance to congratulate them in more detail later on. So, I welcome Councillor Salinger's point of drawing attention to that, but, we shouldn't let it overshadow the excellent achievement of Barnet's children.

Question 15

Councillor Alison Moore

Councillor Coleman accused Nicky Gavron of "having blood on her hands" for handling the Olympic torch. Does he also believe that Boris Johnson has "blood on his hands" for handling the Olympic flag and how does he think his original statement affects Barnet's standing locally, in London and internationally given the Mayor of Barnet has also raised an Olympic flag at Cophall Stadium?

Answer by Councillor Mike Freer, Leader of the Council

Councillor Coleman has a long history of supporting human rights in China and opposing Chinese oppression of religious freedoms amongst entitled to his views on the Olympics.

China may have not been an ideal choice as a beacon of democratic freedom but we can be proud that the 2008 Olympics are sandwiched between Athens and London – representing the cradle of democracy and the Mother of Parliaments. Councillor Coleman's views will have no impact on Barnet locally or internationally as they are personal to him and he was not speaking on behalf of the Council.

Supplementary Question 15

Councillor Alison Moore

Thank you Mr Mayor. Councillor Freer, Councillor Coleman is a Cabinet Member for Community Engagement with the responsibility for community cohesion. Do you think his comment helped the large local Chinese community in Barnet cohere better?

Answer by Councillor Mike Freer, Leader of the Council

My understanding, Mr Mayor, is that as home of the largest Chinese community that many fled to Hong Kong in fear of Chinese oppression I suspect that many of them actually share his view of China

Question 16

Councillor Jack Cohen

How many unfilled vacancies are there and what sums do they amount to in the current financial year?

Answer by Councillor Mike Freer, Leader of the Council

There were 570 vacancies in Council as of 15 July 2008 with salaries amounting to £13,420,685 (based on minimum spinal point).

Of the 570 vacancies, 160 can be directly matched as being covered by agency staff.

One hundred and forty seven (147) posts are either advertised or at the later stage of recruitment. However, recruitment to some vacancies are on hold pending local restructures.

Supplementary Question 16**Councillor Jack Cohen**

Councillor Freer, I am sure your reply will shock most of the Council Members here this evening. We have 570 vacancies with salaries amounting to at least £13.4 million at best. Councillor Freer, where has the money gone, this £13.4 million, but more important where are these vacancies, are they in the Adult Social Services Directorate, is it the reason why our streets are not being properly patrolled, is it the reason why we have more and more complaints from our residents. Simply we are not employing the staff and the money we appear to be saving is being pitted away.

Answer by Councillor Mike Freer, Leader of the Council

Mr Mayor customer satisfaction of course remains very high. I suspect he is getting more complaints from his residents / ward, because he is doing more work now because they nearly lost their seats. There is a vacancy rate built into the base budget and so it is nothing unusual to have vacancies as we go throughout the year. In terms of customer facing staff e.g. street cleansing or social care - then of course that's when we would use agency staff.

Question 17**Councillor Maureen Braun**

What action is the Cabinet Member taking to ensure the users of the Sunningfields Road Surgery, within the Hendon CPZ in my Ward can park more easily for their appointments?

Answer by Councillor Andrew Harper

In response to representations by the health centre, the Council will be reducing the hours of three pay and display bays outside the premises.

The proposal is to reduce the hours to 11.30am to 2.30pm which will make free parking available in the earlier part of the morning. The Council cannot guarantee that only health centre visitors will use the facility so the use of these bays will be monitored to assess whether the objective is met. The necessary amendments to the existing traffic management order are being made and subject to all statutory requirements being met will be effected in October.

Supplementary Question 17**Councillor Maureen Braun**

Thank you Mr Mayor. I would like to thank the Cabinet Member for his response to the situation in my Ward and also to ask if this is going to be carried out also throughout Barnet because I think it's very good that we can be flexible in our parking arrangements where possible, particularly around Health Centres.

Answer by Councillor Andrew Harper

Mr Mayor, you know I am very glad that Councillor Braun asked me about this. Indeed, I am very grateful to her and her Ward colleagues who have successfully drawn to my attention the particular problems at the Sunnyfields Road Surgery and I am very happy to try to assist there as indeed I am sure the officers will be very happy to try to assist in similar circumstances elsewhere in the Borough.

Question 18**Councillor Andrew McNeil**

What is the Cabinet Member doing to ensure the safety of pedestrians during the major gas main works at the Bald Faced Stag junction and along East End Road?

Answer by Councillor Andrew Harper

Responsibility for the management of traffic and pedestrian movements around street works is the responsibility of the utility company carrying out work on the public highway. As with all such operations, the Council's Street Works Inspectors are visiting this particular site regularly and any deficiencies in the signing and guarding of the works are being brought to the attention of the utility company for rectification and/or improvement.

Prior to commencement of this project, Officers met with National Grid Gas to agree the scope and timing of the work. The work being carried out is to upgrade the gas services that have been prone to numerous leaks over recent times. The most disruptive element at the A1000 junction has been carried out during the school holiday period when peak traffic flows are lighter.

It has been necessary for TfL to make some changes to the routing of buses servicing the area. Following local representation, Officers arranged with TfL for an additional temporary bus stop to be positioned on the High Road near the junction with Fortis Green to improve bus access for local users. As is the nature of this type of work, Officers are in continuous dialogue with the utility company to address future working arrangements and adjustments / enhancements to movement and safety of all traveling modes.

Supplementary Question 18

Councillor Andrew McNeil

Thank you Mr Mayor. I am grateful to the Cabinet Member for his reply. However, he has failed to properly address my main concern which is that the pedestrian phasing is to be removed altogether combined with the fact that motorists are taking advantage of the fourway working to avoid the usual prohibitions on the right turns into East End Road to the highways and from Potters Street onto the High Road. This junction has become a very dangerous place indeed for pedestrians. Will you come with me to see for himself?

Answer by Councillor Andrew Harper

Mr Mayor, I am sorry but I missed the main thrust of Councillor McNeil's question but he didn't actually talk about the pedestrian phasing in the submitted question. However, I am certainly happy to go and visit the situation for myself.

Question 19

Councillor Jack Cohen

How many Officers and others attended the away day at the Hendon Hall Hotel. What was the cost of putting on this event?

Answer by Councillor Andrew Harper

I assume Councillor Cohen is referring to an event held on Friday 4 July. It was organised at my request, on assuming the Environment and Transport portfolio, to meet with the Director of Environment and Transport, his management team and other Senior Officers to discuss forthcoming budget and other policy matters. Councillor Rams, Assistant Cabinet Member, was also in attendance.

The cost of the day was £408 inc. vat, which included coffee, lunch for nine and the usual meeting room facilities.

Supplementary Question 19

Councillor Jack Cohen

Councillor Harper, this event at the Hendon Town Hall cost £50 a head and I do question whether it is necessary to have these events at outside venues particularly the Hendon Hall Hotel when we now know that we are supposed to have placed the equipment at North London Business Park including large TV screens for which we are told that justification is that we don't need to spend money on presentations. Why couldn't you have this meeting in North London Business Park and save the taxpayer £400?

Answer by Councillor Andrew Harper

Mr Mayor, quite frankly I thought that it was very good value in that Hendon Hall Hotel charges are at very modest rates. Certainly we could easily have paid a lot more money elsewhere so I thought it was a good deal.

I thought it was extremely valuable that we actually got offsite and we were able to clear our heads and think about some long term strategic issues that I wanted to address in the meeting. Of course I expect Councillor Cohen knows about this meeting, because he will be aware that two of his colleagues, Councillor Casey and Councillor Davies, met with me during the course of that day at the hotel. I decided to add value to what we were doing that day and to use those particular facilities by having a meeting with Councillors Davies and Casey which was held at their request on a Ward matter because it was particularly convenient for all of us that we should meet there.

Question 20

Councillor Dean Cohen

Please would the Cabinet member join me in paying tribute to Barnet's students for their excellent GCSE and A-Level results?

Answer by Councillor Fiona Bulmer

Yes, I congratulate pupils and their teachers on another outstanding set of results.

Provisional figures show there was a 3.3% rise in the number of pupils gaining 5 or more higher grade GCSE passes. This gives Barnet a 74% success rate compared with 66% nationally. The percentage of pupils gaining 5 or more A* – C including English and Maths improved by 3.9% up to 63%.

Provisional results at 'A' level show a slight improvement on last year and again puts Barnet's overall performance above the national average.

Supplementary Question 20

Councillor Dean Cohen

Thank you Mr Mayor. I thank the Cabinet Member for her answer. Please would she pay tribute to our faith schools for which, in particular, produce some outstanding results despite the frequent attacks made on them by this Labour Government.

Answer by Councillor Fiona Bulmer

I am delighted to pay tribute to our faith schools and indeed all our schools across Barnet and it is very sad that the Government continues to attack and undermine excellence of which we have so much in Barnet I think parents and teachers and residents recognise that the Labour Government wants to undermine that excellence and not support it whereas this Administration will continue to fight for our faith schools and all our excellent schools.

Question 21

Councillor Alison Moore

Has the Mayor of London agreed to fund any safety improvements at Henlys Corner yet?

Answer by Councillor Andrew Harper

Transport for London are in the process of developing a pedestrian crossing and safety scheme for Henlys Corner. Representatives from Barnet met with Senior TfL Officers on 12 August to discuss this scheme. Further development work is required and the Council requested that TfL provide further technical information about the scheme and also the potential impact it may have on a larger scale scheme in the future. If money were not likely to be available, I don't think TfL would be in a position to discuss any proposals with us. However, at the present time, the scheme is not yet fully drawn, is not formally approved and has not been subject to public consultation.

Supplementary Question 21**Councillor Alison Moore**

Thank you Mr Mayor. So the answer, Councillor Harper, is no then. Boris Johnson has not yet agreed to fund the safety improvements. A pedestrian crossing and safety scheme were ready to go, subject to statutory consultation, earlier this year with the funding agreed by the former Mayor. When is it actually going to happen?

Answer by Councillor Andrew Harper

Mr Mayor, thank you very much. I know that Councillor Alison Moore was not in the meeting that I and the Leader and other senior Officers had with Transport for London recently when it was perfectly clear that their plans were not yet fully formed. Indeed the budget that was talked about before the Londonwide Elections, which was allegedly some £5 million, we were told by Transport for London that already risen to £8½ million and was still rising as they further clarified their plans. So it's not yet a fully formed scheme but I have no reason to think that moneys will not be available by the time TfL finish deliberating on what they might be offering.

Question 22**Councillor Wayne Casey**

Will the Leader confirm that an investigation is taking place in to the increases in the projected final costs for the Aerodrome Bridge Replacement scheme and will the leader tell me when he expects the investigation to be completed?

Answer by Councillor Andrew Harper

The Leader has asked me to reply. Yes, an investigation is taking place; completion is expected by the end of this month.

Supplementary Question 22**Councillor Wayne Casey**

Mr Mayor which Member or Members of the Council received a responsibility allowance from the Council taxpayer in return for accepting responsibility for this project?

Answer by Councillor Andrew Harper

Well I am not quite sure what he is driving at there but we will wait and see what the outcome of the investigation is before I make any further comments.

Question 23**Councillor Ross Houston**

At the last Council meeting the Cabinet Member said that Barnet was one of three boroughs that collectively delivered 2,258 affordable homes in 2006/7 and that if every London Borough achieved these levels London would deliver over 24,000 affordable homes a year. Given that Barnet's contribution to those 2,258 affordable homes was only 59 how will Barnet achieve its London Plan target, and how will Barnet re-house the 16,000 families who are currently on the housing waiting list?

Answer by Councillor Melvin Cohen

With regard to the London Plan, the new Mayor set out recently in July his direction of travel in 'Planning for a Better London'. The Mayor highlighted the need to deliver 50,000 new homes between 2008 and 2011 by working in partnership with the boroughs rather than by setting a prescriptive target. The Mayor is currently progressing an alteration to the London Plan to remove the 50% affordable housing target. It is estimated that the London Plan alterations and the Mayor's new Housing Strategy will be published in the next 6 months.

The Barnet Unitary Development Plan sets out a broad target of half of new homes to be affordable either through shared ownership/intermediate or social rent. Barnet however is not immune to the credit crunch and the serious downturn in the housing market for which most housing associations (RSL's) are also affected is having a major impact on the financing and delivery of new homes.

Barnet along with every part of the country is closely monitoring the global financial and housing market situation and where necessary London-wide housing targets may require reviewing.

The waiting list at 30 June 2008 in Barnet comprised 14600 households. Of these, 2424 are homeless and in some form of temporary accommodation, and another 2547 are Council and Housing Association tenants who have registered for a transfer. The remaining 9600 or so are waiting list applicants, who will have varying degrees of priority for housing.

Essentially not everyone on the waiting list is necessarily in urgent housing need. The list includes those who consider affordable housing as their preferred or one of a number of housing options, and those who decide to get onto the waiting list ladder before they need or want to move, particularly as the priority system is heavily based on waiting time.

Clearly, there is not enough affordable housing to meet this current demand in the Borough, and we have and are working to develop a range of options to prevent homelessness and to assist households access the private rented sector as an alternative to affordable housing.

Our approach currently includes:

- A rent deposit scheme to help people access the private rented sector
- Private landlords forum
- Housing Options and advice service
- Sanctuary scheme to help victims of domestic violence remain in their home

The challenge presented is not of course unique to Barnet. All Boroughs face, to varying degrees given the affordability gap a difficulty in managing and reducing their waiting lists. Barnet's waiting list remains average in relation to London as a whole with figures for other authorities ranging for example from approximately 5700 in Richmond, 7000 in Enfield and 12000 in Hounslow to 15000 in Ealing and 29000 in Newham.

The strategic approach the Council is adopting to housing supply through the preparation of actions plans and other planning strategies has the benefit of creating certainty and the conditions necessary for speedy delivery in any market upturn.

Supplementary Question 23

Councillor Ross Houston

Thank you for your answer, I have a supplementary. Thus to suggest that many of those on our waiting lists are not in urgent housing need is staggering and fails to recognise that many people don't go on the list because they see no hope of being housed by Barnet. Does Councillor Cohen not accept that to answer my previous question by saying that Barnet was one of three Boroughs that collectively about 250 affordable homes without mentioning that Barnet's contribution to that was 59 was to use what he called my question "deliberately mischievous"?

Answer by Councillor Melvin Cohen

Mr Mayor, like the Councillor just repeated his previous question I repeat my previous answer.

Question 24

Councillor Wayne Casey

In all its catering arrangements, what effort is made by the Council to ensure suppliers supply and use only free range products (i.e. where animal welfare is of paramount importance, where the routine use of antibiotics, steroids, hormones and growth promoters is avoided and where animals are fed with full traceability) and to what extent does the Council encourage schools etc to do the same?

Answer by Councillor Fiona Bulmer

Free range products are not generally purchased by in house managed school kitchens due to the substantial additional costs of these products. Sourcing sufficiently large quantities of free range products would also be a major problem, particularly for poultry.

Schools that arrange their own catering make their purchasing decisions according to their own priorities.

Supplementary Question 24

Councillor Wayne Casey

Thank you Mr Mayor. Can I thank the Cabinet Member for her response but the question related to all of the Council's responsibilities and I don't think she was necessarily in the right position to answer that question. However, I will take her answer as it is, and could I just ask her with respect to her actual answer, do I take it the Council does not encourage schools to use free range products?

Answer by Councillor Fiona Bulmer

That is a matter for the schools.

Question 25

Councillor Julie Johnson

Has Barnet Homes concluded its negotiations with its contractors to finalise a price for the window replacement programme on the West Hendon estate, and if so what will the final cost be, and what will the final average bill to leaseholders be?

Answer by Councillor Lynne Hillan

Costs have been finalised with a total scheme cost of £900,000. The average leasehold bill for window replacements will be £940 after the discount has been applied.

Supplementary Question 25

Councillor Julie Johnson

Thank you for your response Councillor Hillan. Do you think £940 after discount is affordable and will you still be forcing those leaseholders to have their windows replaced even if they can't afford it and don't want it?

Answer by Councillor Lynne Hillan

Leaseholders who purchase flats, whether it be in the public sector or on one of our estate, do know that they do have to contribute to the repairs of that estate. They have all been consulted about this and they will all be expected to pay.

Question 26

Councillor Wayne Casey

Can the Cabinet Member confirm that Crown Group Services (or Crown Protection Services) have a contract with the London Borough of Barnet to both deal with dangerous dogs and rescue and re-home other dogs?

Answer by Councillor Andrew Harper

The Council currently employs a private company called The Crown Protection Service (CPS), to deal with stray dogs throughout the Borough on its behalf, under Section 149 of the Environment Protection Act 1990. The CPS operate a 24-hour, 7-day a week service, providing collection, receiving, kennelling, care and re-homing of dogs. The arrangement with the Council has been in operation since May 2004 following the decision to cease the in-house Dog Warden Service. Previous legal advice confirmed that the requirements of the law were being adequately met in discharging the Council's animal warden function to the CPS.

The CPS are not employed to deal with dangerous dogs. Dangerous dog-related complaints may be passed to the police direct for them to deal with, while those that are logged at the Council on its Customer Care Unit system are sent through to the police and RSPCA to deal with. The police have launched BARK – a multi agency group including the RSPCA, and a number of departments from the Council, to manage and deal with dangerous dog issues.

Question 27

Councillor Anita Campbell

What works are being done on the Dollis Valley estate as part of the window replacement programme announced by the Cabinet Member in her budget speech?

Answer by Councillor Lynne Hillan

Houses which form part of the retained housing on the Dollis Valley are currently having their windows replaced by United House. This work is following on from the internal works that are also being carried out to these homes. 90 homes are included within these works. These are located in Meadow Close and Crocus Field.

Supplementary Question 27

Councillor Anita Campbell

Thank you Councillor Hillan. Just one more question about the prices referred on from Councillor Johnson. There are some people who have actually priced these windows themselves and they are saying they are coming with a lot of cheaper quote than we are getting. Is that true?

Answer by Councillor Lynne Hillan

I have absolutely no idea whether it is true or not. In my experience you can get very very cheap windows but it does not mean to say that they are going to last or that they are going to be any good. All I can say is that Barnet Homes have selected a contractor who has sorted out a price and that's what is going to go ahead.

Question 28

Councillor Wayne Casey

To what extent do the current systems of public finance (including conventions such as the Barnett Formula) disadvantage local authorities in London and the South East and has any attempt been made to calculate how much this system actually costs Council Tax-payers (across the various bandings) in the London Borough of Barnet?

Answer by Councillor Mike Freer, Leader of the Council

It is widely accepted that current systems disadvantage London and South East councils. They are designed in such a way that enables Ministers to influence the balance of funding between regions. For example, Government grants to individual local authorities take account of Government determined relative spending needs and the resources that can be raised locally, a system known as equalisation. Councils with higher 'needs' receive more grant than councils with relatively lower needs or a larger taxable property base. This system is quite sophisticated but open to manipulation by changing the proportion of grant and / or the method of allocation targeted at need.

During the life of the present Government, ever more grant is being allocated according to their measures of need. In addition, their measures of need have been changed to take account of factors much less favourable to London and the South East, despite wide-spread concern that these factors are at best flawed and at worst deliberately chosen to target areas outside of the South East. It is probably not a coincidence that the present Cabinet membership represents poorer urban areas mainly outside of the South East.

Looking beyond Local Government Finance, for several years the Government's regional regeneration programmes have targeted billions of pounds on declining former industrial areas, especially in the north. Questions are now being raised as to how effective these programmes have been, especially now when much of the planned housing growth is in or around the South East. Failure in the North may be contrasted with the success of London Docklands.

The Barnett Formula is interesting in that it enables Scotland and Wales to receive financial benefits from England in the same way that the rest of England gains from London and the South East. At the same time, fear of losing votes in the 'less well off' areas has stopped Ministers making changes to address weaknesses in the Barnett Formula and local government finance.

The complexity of public finance makes it very difficult, perhaps impossible, to calculate definitive figures of how much London and Barnet have been disadvantaged financially. A big part of the problem is that only the Government has the necessary data to attempt such a calculation.

Despite this lack of information, a September 2007 report by the South East Counties Leaders attempted to match tax paid by individuals and business to Government expenditure by regions. The results for 2005/06 showed London making a net contribution to public finances of around £9bn based on location of residence (table below). This equates to a net contribution of £1,200 per head.

The above figures include business rates but looking at them in isolation, in 2008/9 Barnet contributes £95m to the national pool and gets back £79m, a loss of £16m. Indeed, Barnet's contribution to the pool exceeds its total Formula Grant by £5m (or £38 per band D property). If Barnet was able to exchange this year's local business receipts for Formula Grant it could reduce the council tax to just below the 2007/08 tax (i.e. a reduction of over 3.5%).

Finally, we have specific examples of how Barnet has been disadvantaged by micro changes to the system:

- In 2006/07, Government changed the way money was allocated for adult social services, which would have lost the capital £150m straight away if it were not for the transitional floor protection system (in itself an indication of how fragile the workings of Formula Grant are). We estimate that Barnet will lose over £1m grant per annum once transitional protection runs out (equivalent to a 0.7% increase on Barnet's 2008/9 council tax).
- Beginning in 2008/9, Government started to reduce the level of floor protection. This will speed up the drain of resources away from London and Barnet. As outlined at the beginning, the increased allocation of grant to need hits Barnet in particular as it is regarded as a relatively low need, property rich council. However, quantification would only be possible by government due to the complexities of the grant system.

It is clear that Government intends to continue taking resources away from London and the South East. This will become increasingly apparent through pressure to increase London's Council Taxes to pay for the regions.

Regional contributions to UK public finances 2005/06			
	Residence (£bn)	Workplace (£bn)	Mid-point (£bn)
North East	-8	-7.9	-8
North West	-11.8	-11.2	-11.5
Yorkshire & the Humber	-8.4	-8.1	-8.2
East Midlands	-0.8	-2.1	-1.4
West Midlands	-5	-5.3	-5.1
Eastern	5.1	3.2	4.2
Greater London	9.2	16.1	12.6
South East	15.1	12.1	13.6
South West	-5.1	-5	-5
Wales	-8.9	-9.1	-9
Scotland	-0.2	-0.9	-0.6
Northern Ireland	-7.3	-7.1	-7.2
UK	-26.1	-26.1	-26.1

Notes: Contributions include income tax, business rates, VAT, corporation tax, stamp duty, council tax etc.

Supplementary Question 28

Councillor Wayne Casey

Thank you, Mr Mayor. Mr Mayor I would like to sincerely thank the Leader of the Council for the detailed response to my original question. I think the information contained in is extremely valuable. But with respect to his comment that and I quote "it is clear that the present government intends to continue taking resources away from London and the South-East", can he assure us as the Leader of a significant London Borough and someone with strong links to be current front bench of the Opposition that a future Conservative Government will reverse the move of resources away from London and the South-East?

Answer by Councillor Mike Freer, Leader of the Council

Well Mr Mayor I wish I could commit Mr Cameron to lots of things but sadly that's not one of them. When I can tell Members is that the conversations I had with the Shadow DCLG Front Bench are that they are taking the issue very seriously and they understand in depth the inequity of the equalisation formula as it currently works and I have already committed to submit to the Shadow Minister for Local Government and Shadow Minister for London my views on the reform to the current process.

Question 29

Councillor Jim Tierney

Are homes that will be delivered on the major regeneration estates included in the Council's housing trajectory report?

Answer by Councillor Lynne Hillan

Yes, the regeneration schemes are included in the housing trajectory.

Supplementary Question 29

Councillor Jim Tierney

Thank you, Mr Mayor. Councillor Hillan thank you for your answer. Councillor Hillan, even though the regeneration estates are included, the directory still shows a shortfall of 4000 affordable homes compared to London Plan target – the current needs to be achieved by 2017. Some of the regeneration projects may not be delivered by 2017 which means there will be even a larger shortfall. How will you make up the shortfall amid the desperate housing needs in the Borough?

Answer by Councillor Lynne Hillan

Thank you. We are always looking at ways to provide new housing particularly for first time buyers for shared ownership and for rental, and as you know, we have many developers who come into the Borough. However, of course we cannot guarantee anything now with the Labour Party having put the economy in such a terrible mess. I can't guarantee any housing at all.

Question 30

Councillor Claire Farrier

Why doesn't the Cabinet Member reduce the cost, or remove the cost altogether, of parking in the Watling car-park in order to encourage shoppers to park there rather than in residential streets?

Answer by Councillor Andrew Harper

The Council reduced the tariff last year in the Watling Avenue Car Park in order to encourage improved usage. Previously motorists paid £1.50 for parking up to one hour with £3 over 90 minutes. This changed to £1 for up to one hour and £1.50 after 90 minutes. As a result of the reduction in charge, patronage of the car park has increased significantly with usage levels commensurate with earlier years when charges were first applied.

Removing charges in the car park will not address the parking issues of the area. Free parking close to the tube station will most likely attract more traffic in from surrounding areas. A charge regime helps to manage the availability of spaces and optimise usage both for regular parkers and occasional visitors to the area, which in turn leads to increased vitality in the area generally. Given the current investigations into deterring non-residential parking in the area, the car park is integral in dealing with the displacement of non-resident, long term parking from the wider Burnt Oak area.

Supplementary Question 30

Councillor Claire Farrier

I assume that further reduction of charges in Watling Car Park is one of Councillor Offord's "other work in the area" in Burnt Oak, along with trying to impose most draconian controlled parking zone in the Borough. If reduced charges are the answer to parking issues in the area, then why is the car park still empty during the week?

Answer by Councillor Andrew Harper

Yes, I think Councillor Farrier just referred to my colleague Councillor Offord, who of course no longer has this portfolio, so I will give the answer. I was not aware the car park was generally speaking empty, we are trying to introduce a competitive charging regime that helps encourage parking and also takes a wider view of the situation in the community, so we will continue to monitor what happens in the Watling Avenue car park.

Question 31

Councillor Ansuya Sodha

When will the Freedom Pass be extended to operate 24 hours a day?

Answer by Councillor Andrew Harper

I am pleased to report that as part of his newly-announced fair and affordable fares package for 2009, Mayor Johnson has said that the Freedom Pass will be extended to 24-hours-a-day.

Question 32

Councillor Alison Moore

At the last meeting of the Cabinet Overview and Scrutiny Committee, the Cabinet Member said she hadn't decided whether grant-funded organisations that would lose their funding as a result of moving to the new third sector commissioning strategy would have their grant tapered to give them more time to find alternative funding. When will she make up her mind?

Answer by Councillor Lynne Hillan

It is not my intention to rush into ill-considered decisions on grants and I will consider service requirements on a market by market basis in line with our priorities. Where we intend to de-commission or re-commission a service, we will be open and say so. This has been agreed with the third sector. The Barnet Change-Up Group will be the forum for discussing detailed implementation of the changes and identifying best practice, but we will consult more widely where necessary.

Supplementary Question 32**Councillor Alison Moore**

Councillor Hillan, do you actually have any idea what you were doing? Last year, you said you were going to have a mixed economy of support commissioned and funded through SLAs while maintaining small grants. Then you changed your mind and said small grants would go and now I see that there is a current consultation on the future of small grants programme. Is this any way to treat our valued community and voluntary sector?

Answer by Councillor Lynne Hillan

Actually I do know what I am doing. The small grants are very very successful in the London Borough of Barnet and thank goodness that we have changed it since we came into Administration from all the strange schemes that there were in the past. The Change Up Group is looking at how we will be dealing with any grant applications in the future and I will not be pushed into or rushed into dealing with it myself.

Question 33**Councillor Alan Schneiderman**

The Council has made a series of cock-ups in the procurement of contracts and contractors over the last few years including meals on wheels, re-cycling, and the Aerodrome Road bridge replacement. The Council has also failed to make the savings it budgeted for from procurement. Is the Council capable of wholesale outsourcing as envisaged by the Future Shape of the Organisation project, and what protection will local people and services have if things go wrong?

Answer by Councillor Mike Freer, Leader of the Council

The Councillor exposes his ignorance of contract procurement and risk management by his question. This Administration has an enviable record in financial management reflected in:

- the rebuilding of reserves from the perilous situation his party left the Council;
- from the vastly improved CPA; score and
- the robust judgements on the Council's use of resources assessment by independent inspectors.

Question 34**Councillor Julie Johnson**

There has been about a 300% increase in investment in sailing as a sport in this country since the Sydney Olympics. In Barnet there has been an increase of about 3 second-hand dinghies. What more is Barnet Council intending to do to encourage sailing amongst young people in the Borough given the wonderful local resource of the Welsh Harp?

Answer by Councillor Fiona Bulmer

Young people in Barnet also have access to sailing opportunities as part of the London Youth Games, through a partnership with a local voluntary organisation. The Youth Service also supports a wide range of sporting activities and broader recreational opportunities and further activities are provided by the voluntary and private sectors. Those opportunities were further enhanced this summer with the range of activities provided by the Summer University programme.

Supplementary Question 34**Councillor Julie Johnson**

I ask again what more is Barnet Council intending to do to encourage sailing amongst young people in the Borough particularly using the Welsh Harp?

Answer by Councillor Fiona Bulmer

We have a very wide range of sporting activities available if you bother to read this splendid publication – you shall see that there are 28 different sporting activities including sailing and I think that diversity of opportunity for young people is a splendid commendation of the work that Youth Service has done.

Question 35**Councillor Kath McGuirk**

Is the Administration going to sell off or outsource the management of any of our parks to a private contractor?

Answer by Councillor Andrew Harper

A number of parks, parts of parks, nature reserves etc are currently leased to various organisations and trusts who manage these sites, for example Avenue House. There are proposals in the Brent Cross regeneration plan that the management of the current and the new parks that fall within this area may be managed by a management company; these will still remain the property of the Council.

Question 36**Councillor Kath McGuirk**

As discussed at the last Council meeting, the half-price travel concession for people on income support ended in August which means that those 2307 residents in Barnet who benefitted from this scheme will now be experiencing a 50% bus fare hike. When will the new replacement concession be introduced, and how will these residents be assisted in the meantime?

Answer by Councillor Andrew Harper

I am pleased to report that as part of his newly-announced fair and affordable fares package for 2009, Mayor Johnson has said that there will be a new, half-price travel scheme for Londoners on income support, to be funded by the Mayor and Transport for London rather than by the people of Venezuela.

Supplementary Question 36**Councillor Kath McGuirk**

Like Councillor Harper I welcome the fact that Boris Johnson has taken on the initiatives of the former Mayor Ken Livingston, both this one, and the free travel of the concessionary travel, but it comes at a price. 11% hitting many residents of the Barnet. Does Councillor Harper then agree these fare increases are fair and that should benefit to Barnet's residents?

Answer by Councillor Andrew Harper

Well, yes I do think that under the circumstances these are fair and affordable – this is a fair and affordable package that the Mayor has announced. I think he and his team have done their very best to ensure that is so. I think they have also done a pretty good job actually in continuing this scheme for low income Londoners but on a much more ethically, properly based system than was the case before under former Mayor Livingstone.

Question 37**Councillor Alison Moore**

Exactly how many people in Barnet are in receipt of direct payments and what is the breakdown between older adults and younger adults?

Answer by Councillor Lynne Hillan

There are 293 younger Adults in receipt of direct payments and 207 Older Adults. The following table shows the numbers of people in receipt of direct payments by service area. The total number of adults in receipt of direct payments is 500 and there are a further 57 parents of Disabled Children. *(These figures do not include Carers direct payments).*

Service Area	Number (July 2008)
Physical and Sensory Impairment	167
Learning Disabilities	72
Mental Health	51
Older Adults Mental Health	3
Total Younger Adults	293

Service Area	Number (July 2008)
Physical and Sensory Impairment	167
Learning Disabilities	72
Mental Health	51
Older Adults Mental Health	3
Total Younger Adults	293

Older Adults	207
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Total Adults	500
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Parents of Disabled Children	57
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Supplementary Question 37**Councillor Alison Moore**

Thank you Mr Mayor. Can the Cabinet Member confirm what percentage this represents for those in receipt of support from the Council, what her strategy is to increase that level and what her plans are where users are unwilling or unable to move to direct payment?

Answer by Councillor Lynne Hillan

I haven't got the percentage figures off hand but I am absolutely delighted to send them to you. Our social workers are working hard with everybody to provide direct payments to as many people as possible and as reviews are taking place I am sure that we will see an even greater rise than we have already got. Incidentally, we have got the highest number of direct payments in London, so I think that's quite an achievement.

Question 38**Councillor Kath McGuirk**

The Council has rightly ruled out reducing the number of bin collections, have they ruled out reducing the size of bins?

Answer by Councillor Andrew Harper

The Council currently has no plans to reduce the size of container offered to residents either for domestic refuse or for green garden / kitchen waste collections.

For operational reasons, we take a one size approach to refuse containers and supply a 240 litre container to all residents who do not have communal waste collection arrangements.

Question 39**Councillor Barry Rawlings**

What is more important: providing vulnerable residents with much needed adaptations in their homes or providing Directors with 40+ inch flat screen televisions in their offices?

Answer by Councillor Lynne Hillan

The issue of Presentation screens to Senior Management and major adaptations are completely different. The screens are a sensible saving as Senior Management no longer have to hire audio visual equipment. Major adaptations are provided by Barnet Homes and the annual funding has been increased from £500,000 to £1,300,000.