

**Council Questions to Cabinet Members  
4 November 2008  
Questions and Responses**

**Question 1**

**Councillor Daniel Thomas**

Please could the Leader of the Council outline his activities in building relationships with the new Mayor of London?

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

The Administration has continued to develop strong links with the Mayor's Deputy Mayors, Milton, Clements, Barnes and Malthouse as well as ongoing dialogue with the Deputy Mayors on housing policy, regeneration, policing and general issues concerning the Suburban Agenda. Most recently the Mayor's advisor on Housing attended the Borough's Housing Conference and has committed to maintaining dialogue.

**Question 2**

**Councillor Duncan Macdonald**

Can the relevant Cabinet Member please advise if works to existing roads and pavements (including street lighting) in the Borough follow the guidance set out in the DETR's Manual for Streets?

**Answer by Councillor Andrew Harper**

The Manual for Streets (MfS) publication produced jointly by the Departments for Transport and Communities & Local Government replaces Design Bulletin 32 and its companion Design Places, Streets and Movement.

The new guidance in MfS is being used on new developments with regard to agreeing the residential layout on new build and also agreeing adoptable highway layout. MfS is not used on planned maintenance schemes unless the street layout is subject to re-design.

MfS provides guidance on the design of layouts, construction, adoption and maintenance of new streets. It covers the design considerations for residential streets and lightly trafficked local roads although some of its principles may be applied to other road types where appropriate. It is not, however, meant to be used on heavily trafficked roads as these are covered by the Highways Agency's Design Manual for Roads and Bridges.

**Question 3**

**Councillor Zakia Zubairi**

When will the rat-infestation at the Log Cabins in Grahame Park be resolved, and the facility re-opened to local residents?

**Answer by Councillor Fiona Bulmer**

The activities provided at Log Cabin are being provided from St Augustine Church Hall. The service will continue at these premises until the planned move to the new building "Green Top", scheduled for January 2009.

**Question 4**

**Councillor Brian Gordon**

The recent report of the Campaign to End Child Poverty (CECP) stated that although Barnet has a relatively low proportion of children from poor families, there are some areas within the borough which contain some of the highest concentrations of poverty in London. Whereas these problems are basically caused by national economic factors, could you please indicate some of the ways in which our Council is working to alleviate these problems?

**Answer by Councillor Fiona Bulmer**

The Council provides support to vulnerable families through the 'Building Resilience Supporting Independence' strategy which provides range of help from both Council services and the voluntary sector. Barnet's Children's centres, which are focused in more deprived areas of the Borough, provide childcare, parenting support and help parents find employment and training.

Raising educational achievement is also a vital factor in tackling poverty and Barnet schools have an excellent record in helping children from all backgrounds do well at school and gain the qualifications that will help them succeed in their adult lives.

**Question 5**

**Councillor Duncan Macdonald**

Can the relevant Cabinet Member assure me that all street lights replaced by DW lighting under the PFI project are as the letter to residents puts it "life expired" and are at "risk of structural failure"?

**Answer by Councillor Andrew Harper**

The programme of street lighting column replacement extends for a five-year period. The priority order of replacement is based on a number of factors, however the age and condition of the lighting columns is the most important when evaluating the priorities. The replacement programme requires replacement of 16,786 lighting columns in total, Borough-wide, of which approximately 50% are life expired. The structural integrity of a lighting column can not be guaranteed beyond the manufacturers stated life expectancy and therefore the risk of structural failure places an increased liability on the contractor / Council.

The industry guidance documents recommend that a risk management approach is used over time to reduce this liability, with consideration given to funding a time managed replacement programme, to avoid any columns becoming life expired as the preferred option or where funding is difficult instigating a programme of structural testing and replacing those columns which fail the tests. As of now, half way through the five-year programme, the vast majority of the life expired columns have been replaced. The contractor has therefore amended his consultation letter and no longer refers to columns being life expired, hence potential danger of structural failure is largely eliminated.

**Question 6**

**Councillor Julie Johnson**

Leaseholders on the West Hendon Estate are receiving bills for upwards of £1000 to pay towards new community digital TV aerials. Some of these residents have free boxes – why are they still expected to pay towards equipment they do not use?

**Answer by Councillor Lynne Hillan**

The Government has placed a statutory duty on Council housing landlords to provide access to digital television as part of the 'Switchover' from analogue to digital.

Under the terms of the lease, Council leaseholders are required to contribute towards the cost of installing or renewing the communal TV and / or radio aerial. The system will receive digital and satellite services and will mean that there will be no further need for individual dishes or set-top boxes. As with all communal TV aerials, it will be available for all residents to use.

The average cost of the system is around £350 per property. If individual leaseholders were not charged, there would be a significant loss to the HRA, which would be borne by tenants.

**Question 7**

**Councillor Brian Gordon**

Are we satisfied that parking enforcement officers are allowing sufficient time for motorists to interpret the parking signs and obtain tickets from machines before proceeding with issuing penalty notices?

**Answer by Councillor Andrew Harper**

This is very much dependent on the nature of the contravention. For example, if a vehicle is parked on a waiting and loading 24/7 restriction, this would be an instant contravention, in that no stopping or parking is permitted at any time. However, in saying this it takes an enforcement officer between 3-5 minutes to issue the penalty and complete the required evidence such as their pocket book and photographic evidence. With pay and display or residents bays, enforcement officers do give a five-minute observation wait time before starting to issue a PCN as drivers may be obtaining a visitors voucher or pay and display ticket. This is in addition to and before the time taken to issue the penalty and prepare the additional evidence. Therefore, it is felt that sufficient time is being given for motorists to check signage and obtain the necessary voucher / ticket prior to a penalty being issued.

**Question 8**

**Councillor Duncan Macdonald**

Please could the relevant Cabinet Member advise the number of meeting rooms / offices within the Boroughs offices that are equipped with AV / Video conferencing facilities and the number of meetings that took place in those rooms where that equipment was utilised within the month of September this year?

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

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**Question 9**

**Councillor Kath McGuirk**

Will the Cabinet Member tell me the criteria used for the adoption of roads within the borough and how many roads have been adopted each year since 2002?

**Answer by Councillor Andrew Harper**

The Highways Act 1980 lays down the process for a highway authority to adopt a road and empowers the Council to accept the maintenance liability for un-adopted roads. These can be either newly constructed development roads, or established roads, which have not been adopted previously. It is usually the responsibility of the owner(s) to bring the road up to standard prior to its adoption.

The reason why a road(s) may not have been adopted will be that it doesn't comply with the Authority's specification for the construction of roads for adoption, or it doesn't meet the design guide criteria for the layout of adopted roads.

A new or existing un-adopted road will be adopted as a highway, maintainable at public expense, if it meets with the following requirements when it is built:

- The road must form a direct link with the existing public highway network.
- It must be of benefit to wider community.
- The carriageway and footways must be of widths and gradients that offer a safe passage for pedestrians and vehicles.
- The carriageway and footways must have an approved means of surface water drainage. The surface water drains usually gets adopted by the Highways Authority if it purely collects run-off from the proposed adoptable highway. If there are private drains connected to this drainage system, then this needs to be adopted by Thames Water Utilities Ltd before the Highways Authority can consider the road(s) for adoption.
- The street lighting must meet the current local requirements and national standards.
- The materials used within adoptable highway must meet the current adoptable construction standards.

- If a road is to be adopted, its design must be approved the Highways Authority and the construction must be supervised by the Highways Authority under an Agreement pursuant to Section 38 of the Highways Act 1980. The owners must also get our formal consent before any work can take place on a new or existing public highway.
- The freehold owner/s of the land must dedicate the road as a public highway when it is built, at no cost to the Council, under a Section 38 Agreement of the Highways Act 1980. This agreement says that we will adopt the roads if they are built too a pre-defined standard of detail and construction. A financial contribution towards future maintenance may also be included if non standard materials are used within proposed construction.
- The road must remain open to the public at all times when it is formally adopted.

Prior to the transfer of drainage agency agreements back to Thames Water Utilities Ltd during 1997, the adoption agreements for roads and sewers were progressed by the Council. Since the transfer, there have been long delays in finalising sewer adoption agreements with the Water Authority. This has caused delays in getting roads adopted. We have numbers large developments that were built during late 90's still awaiting for the roads to be adopted. Therefore the adoption process can take a long time and while the road remains un-adopted, it is in the ownership of the developer who is also responsible for the maintenance of the road/s within the development.

Since 2002, we have adopted the following roads and footpaths in the borough:

- 2002 Agnesfield Close; Fallowfields Drive; Hawthornden Close; Summerfields Avenue; Pond Close; Thistly Close (bell mouth); Harwood Close (Short Section); Newstead Close (Short Section)
- 2003 Cheriton Close; Lichfield Close; Osborne Close; Verwood Drive; Northgate Drive (Extension)
- 2004 Nil
- 2005 Balmoral Avenue; Baron Close; Duchess Close; Earl Close; Highgrove Close; Kensington Close; Viscount Close;
- 2006 Halton Close; Tewkesbury Close (Turning Head); St. Vincent's Lane (bell mouth)
- 2007 Hampton Close; Footpath linking Balmoral Avenue and Regal Drive; Regal Drive (short section adjacent to Station Approach- Boundary Wall Opening); Old Rectory Gardens (short section); Manor Park Crescent (short section)
- 2008 Nil to date

#### **Question 10**

#### **Councillor Brian Gordon**

At the recent Hendon Area Forum questions were raised about the need to improve the toilet facilities at Hendon Park. It is understood that this matter is being attended to. Could we please have an update as to progress?

#### **Answer by Councillor Andrew Harper**

Yes, the matter is in hand. Work specifications for the following two options are currently being drafted, ready to put out to quotation:

- A. The provision of a fully accessible toilet via a radar key equipped with hot water and hand drying facilities that will meet the needs of the operating licence for the nearby café. Decoration of the current ladies and gents single cubicle toilets.
- B. The provision of more facilities for ladies and gents with the extension and refurbishment of the current single toilets, provision of a fully accessible toilet for the public. The provision of a staff only toilet equipped with hot water and hand drying facilities.

S106 monies have been identified to fund the project and a contribution will be required from the café operator for the provision for both an exclusive facility for his staff or the provision of hot water and hand drying facilities within the fully accessible toilet. The preferred option is to increase the quantity of facilities available at the site but this will depend upon the cost of the works.

A meeting is to be held with the lessee of the café in the w/c 27 October to discuss current progress and the two separate issues:

1. The provision of toilet facilities for his staff required for the café to operate and his contributions towards this.
2. Public toilet provision for the park and café customers.

Meanwhile, since the last site meeting on 29 August the following problems have been reported and actioned:

- Blocked drains – cleared.
- No lights – repaired.
- No toilet roll holders – fitted.

The lessee of the café is responsible for the cleaning of the toilets and provision of consumables including toilet roll and soap.

### **Question 11**

### **Councillor Jack Cohen**

At a recent Cabinet and Overview Committee meeting you confirmed that residents in NW11, NW7 and NW2 do not receive equal coverage in home care service response. Please will you provide me with more details? Please include in your reply the number of residents affected, the type of service not being provided, and an explanation of what is being done to rectify this.

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

It was stated that the following postcodes can be difficult to cover with this service: NW11, NW7, NW2, NW4, EN4, EN5

All Homecare provisions including short term / one off packages and ongoing packages 07/08	Packages by postcode
35	EN4
88	EN5
30	N11
46	NW2
40	NW4
50	NW7

All service users are in receipt of homecare. Occasionally the care package may need to be split across 2 agencies to provide the full 7 day coverage of need and in emergency situations alternative services are secured to ensure service user safety pending the start up of the home care package.

The difficulties tend to occur at certain times of the year namely holiday periods / school holidays when more care staff are not available.

It is anticipated that the council and homecare agencies will shortly reach a voluntary agreement where there will be a system of 'first / second call' in designated areas when it comes to matching the requests for care to the providers.

Building coverage in this way through a better managed system of purchasing should help providers in compiling more realistic rosters for the provision of services to the residents of Barnet, reducing care travel time and improving coverage in each area of the borough without inflating the overall cost of the service.

The smooth implementation of this new system will be supported by the recently centralised care sourcing function known as **brokerage**, so that all demand for homecare is channeled through one access point acting as a more effective pivot between demand and service provision.

In addition officers are working with parking and have fed the specific issues for domiciliary care visits into the review of parking permits.

**Question 12**

**Councillor Alison Moore**

How much did the Council spend on investment advice from Butlers between 2006-2007?

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

The Council paid Sector Treasury Services Ltd £15,435.00 for treasury advice during 2006-007.

**Question 13**

**Councillor Brian Gordon**

Who is best placed to serve on and Chair the Crime and Disorder Panels in London?

**Answer by Councillor Brian Coleman**

Elected members and in the case of Barnet, me.

**Question 14**

**Councillor Jack Cohen**

Please explain how the Council allowed a video containing an anti- Semitic content to be released on the internet.

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

The Council is embarking on new ways in which we can engage and capture the views of residents to assist the shaping of future service provision. Part of this work included the recording of 17 videos with residents in the Childs Hill and Hale wards of the Borough.

Each video was recorded by an external third party and edited prior to being sent onto the Council where a further viewing took place. One video was uploaded on 28 September 2008.

One complaint was received in relation to the video from a resident.

Corporately, discussions took place as to whether the video should remain to stimulate debate or be removed however following an e-mail from the Leader of the Council at 7.30am on 3 October 2008 the offending video was removed by 9am the same day.

Any future videos uploaded to Council websites involving the views of residents will follow the OFCOM Broadcast Guidelines, will be subject to a double editing process and will be vetted by the Council's Strategic Equalities Advisor.

Mistakes occur it is how they are handled that is important and my response was swift once the issue was brought to my attention.

**Question 15**

**Councillor Barry Rawlings**

Cabinet made a decision sometime ago to award the contract for hosting the LINK to the Community Investors Development Agency. Can the Cabinet Member update me on progress with that contract and the LINK?

**Answer by Councillor Lynne Hillan**

Formal contract negotiations with CIDA commenced on 1 September after expiry of call-in and a ten day standstill period as required by EU Procurement law. CIDA challenged a lot of our standard contract terms and conditions, and in particular the requirement for a performance bond and the terms of the bond. As a result the signing of the contract was not straightforward and has been a protracted process with both parties seeking professional advice. However all outstanding issues have now been resolved and the final contract documentation is now ready for signature. The contract will be backdated to 1 September.

The database of all interested LINK parties has been passed to CIDA and they have begun to communicate with them, inviting them to LINKS induction sessions they are holding and circulating a bulletin for LINKS members in Barnet and the other Boroughs where they won the contract. They have also begun to make contact with some key local agencies relevant to the LINK including BVSC.

**Question 16**

**Councillor Brian Salinger**

Will the Cabinet Member please update members on the present position with regard to the future use of the Stanley Road Playing Fields? Will the Member please include in his response details of any meetings held between Councillors and Officers of the Council to discuss the way forward and any meetings that have been held between Councillors and / or officers of the Council with other interested parties in the last three months?

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

Stanley Road Playing Fields is currently leased. The Council has no current plans for the land and the East Finchley Community Development Trust will be encouraged to discuss with the leaseholder their proposals.

I have met and been briefed by Officers on 20 June, 1 August, 12 September and 24 October.

**Question 17**

**Councillor Jack Cohen**

I refer to your delegated powers report 640. This relates to the Colindale Area Action Plan – Preferred Options. You state the preparation of the Colindale AAP is being financed by Fairview New Homes. Do you mean that Fairview is paying the all the associated cost as set out in paragraph 5 of the report? If not how much of this is being paid by this Council?

**Answer by Councillor Melvin Cohen**

As stated in the delegated powers report referred to, the preparation of the Colindale Area Action Plan (AAP) is largely being undertaken by a multi-disciplinary team of planning consultants supported and overseen by staff from the Planning, Housing and Regeneration (PHR) service. The work being carried out by the consultancy team is being initially financed by Fairview New Homes Ltd, a key landowner and developer working in partnership with the Council.

Fairview own the former Colindale Hospital site and the Brent Works site within the AAP study area for which they will be preparing separate major planning applications.

Whilst Fairview are forward funding the consultancy work, the overall cost of this will be shared amongst other landowners / developers as they bring forward their sites for development and make a contribution to the strategic masterplanning of the area. These include Barnet College, the British Newspaper Library, Genesis (Zenith House), Middlesex University and the Metropolitan Police.

The principle of financing planning frameworks in this manner is well established and assists in securing full stakeholder engagement and sound and deliverable strategies. A similar approach has been adopted for the Mill Hill East Area Action Plan.

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

What is the current market value of the Dollis Valley estate?

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

The estate is primarily a Council estate and so could not be sold on the open market. Accordingly there is no market value.

**Question 19****Councillor Brian Salinger**

Will the Cabinet Member please advise members of the progress being made by Barnet Homes to improve the council owned housing stock (outside the 4 regeneration estates) to the 'decent homes' standard?

**Answer by Councillor Lynne Hillan**

4000 homes have been brought up to the Decent Homes Standard including:

- ✓ 1742 window replacements
- ✓ 1100 heating systems upgraded
- ✓ 1600 bathrooms upgraded
- ✓ 3000 kitchens upgraded

**Question 20****Councillor Jack Cohen**

Please provide me with details of tasks undertaken by the Assistant Cabinet Members since their appointment.

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

They have continued in the unpaid capacity to support Cabinet Members in policy development and in the delivery of their portfolio.

**Question 21****Councillor Julie Johnson**

The building site that was formerly the residential home for the elderly on the West Hendon Estate is in a disgraceful state. It is now sometime since the building was demolished but the area has become rat infested, full of dumped rubbish and targeted by gangs of youths especially at night. The fence, which does nothing to keep people out, is covered with graffiti. How much longer do residents have to endure this eyesore?

**Answer by Councillor Lynne Hillan**

The site is owned by Catalyst Group and when they have been advised of the site being dumped with rubbish or the hoardings being damaged, they do respond, albeit somewhat slowly. Environmental Health have had no reports regarding rat infestation but they are visiting the site to investigate rats, putrescible rubbish and insecure hoardings and will report their findings to Catalyst so that they can remedy the problem.

Barnet Homes periodically removes the graffiti from the hoarding at Perryfields. They have plans to use the hoarding for street art and it is hoped to do this during the first half term in 2009. They will be working to get some match funding from one of our partners to cover the cost of an artist and the paint.

**Question 22****Councillor Brian Salinger**

Will the Cabinet Member please make a statement about the fire at Garth House?

**Answer by Councillor Lynne Hillan**

In the early hours of Sunday 5 October 2008 a fire broke out at our sheltered scheme at Garth House on the Granville Road Estate. Residents were successfully evacuated initially to an adjacent church hall whilst the fire was tackled by the fire brigade and emergency services.

Residents were then moved to the Rosa Freedman Centre on the nearby Whitefields estate where they could be cared for more comfortably and where their health needs etc. could also be checked. I can confirm no one was hurt in the incident.

Of the 29 residents displaced initially 5 stayed with their relatives, 5 after a care assessment were moved to Apthorp to receive a greater level of support and 19 were placed in the nearby Holiday Inn where a member of Barnet Homes' staff also stayed with them.

Barnet Homes made emergency funds available to residents on the Monday after the weekend incident to ensure they could replace small items of immediate need. Many residents will not have their own insurance and we will continue to ensure they are appropriately supported and compensated.

The fire has caused significant damage to the building and in particular the upper floor and roof. The cause of the fire is still unknown and is currently being investigated by the fire brigade. Garth House was secured the next day by Barnet Homes including a 24 hour security guard to protect the belongings of residents. A safety hoarding around the site has now also been erected.

There are ten flats in the annexe of the block which appear to be largely undamaged. A further number of flats on the ground floor have mostly suffered water damage only whilst the top floor flats have been destroyed with their contents.

Residents were moved to the Holiday Inn at Elstree as the original hotel could not cater for them beyond the first night. We have continued to have a member of Barnet Homes' staff staying in the hotel with residents to offer suitable support whilst we secure permanent alternative accommodation.

Staff are currently involved in salvaging belongings from Garth House where possible for residents. Barnet Homes have sought contributions to a fund to help residents who have lost their belongings from a variety of commercial and voluntary organisations.

Excellent progress has been made in seeking alternative housing for displaced residents by staff of the Council and Barnet Homes. The current position [as at 20/10/08] is that just 8 Garth House residents remain in the Holiday Inn Elstree. Of these five have tenancy commencement dates for 27 October and we are actively seeking alternative accommodation for the remaining three.

A Barnet Homes Officer continues to stay at the hotel to provide support and advice to the residents. It should also be noted that the staff at the Holiday Inn Elstree have been extremely helpful and co-operative in assisting Barnet Homes and the London Borough of Barnet in dealing with this issue.

There has been excellent and seamless joined up working here by staff from all the relevant organisations. The emergency and business continuity plans worked smoothly and the commitment of all staff has been exceptional.

### **Question 23**

### **Councillor Jack Cohen**

Will you join with me in thanking the Emergency Services, Council Officers and Staff at Barnet Homes for their prompt and professional response in dealing with the fire at Garth House?

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

The Leader and I attended Rosa Friedman on Sunday morning to visit the residents that had been decanted. The Council Officers and staff from Barnet Homes had the situation under control, reassuring residents and families, contacting relatives, organising emergency accommodation, practical assistance and counselling and reassurance.

Councillor Freer and I went on to Garth House where our excellent emergency services had the situation under control. I would certainly join with you in thanking everyone and add my gratitude to the first Fire Crew on site who assisted all residents out of danger without any casualties.

**Question 24**

**Councillor Charlie O-Macauley**

What penalties are charged by the Council to building contractors who fail to carry out their duties within the agreed timeframe, and if none are charged why not? [For example, the re-furbishment of Burnt Oak Library the completion date for which was not met].

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

The typical form of contract used with building contractors is the Joint Contracts Tribunal (“JCT”) range. Within these and other contracts is usually the facility for Liquidated Damages (LD's) should contractors fail to achieve an outcome within agreed timescales. However, LDs cannot be punitive and have to be set accordingly in respect of value based on the nature of the construction. If making a claim for Liquidated Damages, the Council would need to demonstrate that it had suffered loss as a result of the contractor’s breach of contract. This is the mechanism open to the council and is used in accordance with the particular contractual obligations for the scheme in question.

In respect of Burnt Oak Library delays were experienced due to a number of incidents outside the contractor’s control. Asbestos was found which resulted in a 3 week delay; inclement weather delayed works to the entrance and some specialist items such as a curved glass entrance required extra time to ensure quality and safety was ensured. None of these elements were directly attributable to the contractor and, I am sure you would agree, were necessary works.

**Question 25**

**Councillor Brian Salinger**

The Cabinet Member will recall a question that I asked him in January about the increasing problems of prostitution in the Borough. Will he join me in welcoming the decision of the Times Group of Newspapers to cease accepting advertisements for so called 'personal services'?

**Answer by Councillor Brian Coleman**

I am unconvinced that the two matters raised by the member in his question are related.

**Question 26**

**Councillor Susette Palmer**

Who is monitoring the whereilive.com website?

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

All content is moderated by the Council’s Social Media Manager prior to being published.

**Question 27**

**Councillor Barry Rawlings**

Would the Cabinet Member give me an update of the latest position with regards to the back-log in billing users of both meals on wheels and homecare services? Is the billing for these services now fully up to date, and if not, why not?

**Answer by Councillor Lynne Hillan**

Home care and meals invoicing performance is monitored regularly in service and reported to CRC.

**Home Care**

As At...	less than 6 weeks			6-10 week			11-14 weeks			15 weeks or longer		
	Providers	Clients	Value	Providers	Clients	Value	Providers	Clients	Value	Providers	Clients	Value
13 October 2008	4	190	£49,020	4	396	£136,224	4	259	£139,213	2	148	£101,824

The invoicing backlog on homecare has improved consistently over the last six months in particular over the past five weeks, where there has been a 20% reduction in the overall arrears in billing. Whilst the current backlog will improve further it is better than it has been at any stage over the past 18 months.

A couple of home care providers have had particular difficulties due to one-off information systems technicalities and these have distorted the overall position. These have now been resolved.

The current position can be further improved and dedicated officers are working with each provider. The position is monitored each week by a team of officers and considered monthly by the Social Services management team.

Furthermore it should be noted that clients are invoiced on the agreed actual number of hours and minutes of care received each week and hence now receive a far more accurate and fairer invoice than in previous years. Similarly as a result of the new systems, the Council now only pays for the actual hours of care delivered, rather than on hours commissioned, and this has had a discernable positive impact on expenditure.

### **Meals**

The backlog is now stable at between 6 to 8 weeks. With monthly invoicing and the time necessary to resolve any queries it is not realistic for this to reduce any further.

The possibility is however being examined of moving to weekly invoicing which will improve on this further.

### **Question 28**

### **Councillor Brian Salinger**

Will the Cabinet Member outline exactly what improvements to the North Circular Road he is expecting to be carried out over the next 2 / 3 years?

### **Answer by Councillor Andrew Harper**

Transport for London have two improvement schemes which will affect the North Circular Road in the borough in the next 2/3 years.

The first is the improvement of the section through Bounds Green. This scheme involves widening Telford Road to two lanes in each direction, upgrading the junctions with pedestrian facilities, removing two pedestrian footbridges and installing a bus lane between the A10 and Green Lanes. The planning processes for this scheme are complete and work is due to start in early 2009 with the replacement work of a gas main.

The second scheme is at Henlys Corner. TfL are proposing an at-grade scheme which will provide pedestrian facilities across the A406 while minimising the impact on traffic. The scheme will increase the separation between each carriageway of the A406 and A598 and create areas in the central part of the junction where vehicles turning right can wait safely. The layout is a combination of a roundabout and crossroads and has been described as a 'half hamburger'.

The Council is working with TfL on the development of the scheme to ensure it provides pedestrian facilities without having an undue impact on traffic. TfL are currently working on traffic models of the junction to confirm the robustness of their design. The scheme will cost in the order of £8.5m. Subject to statutory procedures, TfL are aiming for construction of the scheme to start in 2010/11. This work would overlap with the work at Bounds Green and therefore it will be particularly important for the temporary traffic management arrangements to be carefully planned for both schemes.

**Question 29****Councillor Monroe Palmer**

Can the Administration explain the statement issued about the investments in Icelandic Institutions which said “The cash for the (Council’s) pension fund is managed in-house and there will be an exposure to the pension fund, .... since all funds are pooled for investment purposes ...”. How does this tie up with the decision of 10 September Pensions Fund meeting which agreed that the cash funds of the pension fund be separated from the funds of the Council?

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

Councillor Palmer may be confusing two separate decisions. The Pension Fund Committee requested that the cash be accounted for in separate accounts but is pooled for investment purposes thus achieving economies of scale.

**Question 30****Councillor Alan Schneiderman**

Was the deposit of £27.4m of the Council’s money in two Icelandic banks a “good use of resources”?

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

At the time the deposits were made there was no problem with these banks and all advisors found no cause for concern. Your silence on the Council’s Treasury Management Policy hitherto, would support that view.

**Question 31****Councillor Daniel Thomas**

Could the Leader advise how many Freedom of Information requests have been received in the past 6 months and if the volume is spread across many individuals or a few?

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

We have processed 205 Freedom of Information requests in the last 6 months. Some 36% of the request come from 5 main sources:

Ranking	FOI Requests Clients	Number of requests submitted	Percentage of requests
1	David Miller	29	14%
2	Daniel Hope	21	10.3%
3	Newspapers, BBC, Channel 4	10	5%
4	MP’s	8	4%
5	John Connor Press agency	7	3.4%

**Question 32****Councillor Monroe Palmer**

Is the probable loss of over £27million of Council Tax Payers funds on investments in two Icelandic banks a Conservative created black hole of memorable proportions? How does Barnet’s Icelandic speculation compare with the investments of all other local authorities? Was the Conservative Administration’s policy of investing in fixed term investments purely to gain a small increase in the rate of interest a disastrous decision which will affect either the level of service and / or council tax and / or level of Reserves?

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

Councillor Palmer is of course an expert on financial black holes having been party of an £11m funding gap due to a pre-election spending spree. The spending spree which weakened the financial standing of the Council was AGAINST Officer advice a very important distinction over the current problem with deposits in Icelandic Banks which were made following (not against) advice.

The Council has not speculated in Icelandic investments but made fixed term deposits having followed independent external advice in line with the Council's prudent Treasury Management Strategy. A strategy that no Opposition Councillor commented on, raised concerns about or called in for scrutiny. Indeed Councillor Palmer as a Member of the Pension Fund Committee and its predecessor the Pension Advisory Panel has consistently acquiesced to the investment strategy.

It is worth remembering that making deposits in non-UK banks and financial institutions has been standard practice of this Council for many years, including during the period of Labour / Liberal Democrat coalition.

**Question 33**

**Councillor Ross Houston**

Will the Cabinet Member for Crime advise how many police officers will be cut in Barnet as a result of the first Boris Johnson budget?

**Answer by Councillor Brian Coleman**

None.

**Question 34**

**Councillor Robert Rams**

Economic commentators report the UK is now in recession. Has the Council seen any indication that there has been a fall of in NNDR collection?

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

To date we are aware that two major retailers have cancelled their direct debits. One advised us and agreed a course of action to remedy their arrears, the other has not made contact with the Council. To date collection is some 1.5% down suggesting that the recession is already hitting the Barnet economy and given the worsening of the national picture I would expect local conditions to worsen.

**Question 35**

**Councillor Duncan Macdonald**

With regard to the Leader's "Leader Listens blog" – Is this blog costing the taxpayer any money? If so, how much?

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

The cost of the Leader Listens site amounts to £400. This includes the cost of externally hosting the site.

**Question 36**

**Councillor Julie Johnson**

No consultation took place before it was decided on cost grounds that a gas supply would not be provided when the West Hendon Estate is regenerated. What plans are there for people many elderly who have only ever used gas for cooking, and are residents who have bought new gas equipment going to be compensated at the appropriate time?

**Answer by Councillor Lynne Hillan**

In approving the development master plan, the Greater London Authority required the new development to be sustainable and energy efficient and they will need to approve the strategy. The proposal from Barratt Metropolitan LLP is to provide a combined heat and power system as part of a comprehensive energy strategy. The system will supply space heating and water heating to each flat through an individual meter, and does not require a gas supply to individual flats.

The supply of gas to each flat just for cooking would be prohibitively expensive and would significantly further detract from the viability of the project, so preventing it from proceeding.

Although this energy strategy has not yet been fully approved by the Council, it is accepted that it is the best option and meets current high sustainability standards.

Residents who have previously acquired gas cookers will be able to replace them with electric cookers with the costs being met through the disturbance payments when they move to their new homes. The developers have agreed to hold further workshops to explain the strategy and the benefits of the proposals. Additionally, Barnet Homes, the Council and the Developers will work closely to assist residents into their new homes as the project proceeds.

**Question 37**

**Councillor Tom Davey**

Would the Cabinet Member for Resources confirm that the interest earned from investments has been used to support Council services and reduce demands on Council Tax payers?

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

In 2007/08, gross interest earnings amounted to £16.2m, and a reduction in the average rate of interest achieved on deposits would have had a considerable effect on the Council's outturn and final level of balances at the year end. This represented an average 5.91% return on deposits, and in order of magnitude should be recognised as funding the entirety of the Library Service (£7.2m), Refuse Service (£5.4m), General Fund Housing Service (£1.6m), and Planning & Environment Service (£1.6m), with some funding left over.

**Question 38**

**Councillor Duncan Macdonald**

With regard to the Leader's "Leader Listens blog" – If so, is it an appropriate use of public funds given that Councillor Freer already has a free blog on the Barnet Times?

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

The Leader Listens blog serves a different purpose to the blog hosted by the Hendon Times. The Leader Listens site allows me as Leader of the Council to obtain feedback from residents who attend the many meetings I hold around the Borough and provides the ability to share video footage of the meetings for those who were unable to attend. This increases democratic participation and engagement to a wider proportion of the Borough's residents.

You are also out of date as I have discontinued my Hendon Times Blog.

**Question 39**

**Councillor Barry Rawlings**

Would the Cabinet Member congratulate Finchley Memorial Hospital on its Centenary and welcome its future plans?

**Answer by Councillor Helena Hart**

Nothing would give me greater pleasure than to congratulate Finchley Memorial Hospital on its Centenary and I'm sure that every member of this Council would wish to join me in highlighting its proud record of service to the whole of the Borough over the last 100 years. The affection with which Finchley Memorial is held by patients and their families was amply demonstrated by the hundreds of people from far and wide who joined the Mayor at the Grand Centennial Celebrations at the Hospital on Saturday 18 October.

We have also welcomed and been most supportive of its future plans - one of the rare bright spots in plans for health services locally – including agreeing a planning specification for the site which facilitates the development of the new hospital. The PCT has also been successful in securing £9.9 million from the Department of Health Programme Investment Board for enabling works for the new Hospital and an outline business case for the scheme has been submitted and approved by NHS London.

Aided by our good relations with neighbouring Camden, the PCT has purchased the land required from Camden Council. These playing fields have not been used for over 16 years and will bring substantial local benefit if brought back to public use. The PCT plans to build on a portion of the site and use the remaining land to promote the general health and well-being of the local population. It will now begin a phase of much more detailed planning over the next year which will require a greater level of engagement of stakeholders. It is intended to open the new hospital in 2012.

At a time when other Boroughs are seeing hospitals closed and services cut, it is with the greatest pleasure and anticipation that here in Barnet – as a result of all our Administration's continued support and joint working and representations with the PCT – we will be able to welcome a brand new Finchley Memorial Hospital to carry on and extend the sterling service it has given residents over the last 100 years.

**Question 40**

**Councillor Daniel Webb**

Would the Cabinet Member for Resources confirm what percentage of the Council's cash reserves were held in Icelandic banks?

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

Approximately 8%.

**Question 41**

**Councillor Duncan Macdonald**

With regard to the Leader's "Leader Listens blog" – The Council has received a government grant of £100K to spend on these internet ideas. Is it appropriate to spend the money promoting the Leader rather than the Council?

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

The £100,000 received from the Department for Communities and Local Government is for a wider programme of activities and is not solely for 'Internet ideas'. Social media forms one element of our behavioural change initiatives. None of the funding from the Department for Communities and Local Government has been spent on the Leader Listens site.

**Question 42**

**Councillor Alan Schneiderman**

Will the Council be amending its treasury management investment criteria so that investments are not endorsed solely on the basis of ratings from credit rating agencies?

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

Cabinet made changes to the TM strategy on 23 October. The Council does not have the expertise or resources to undertake detailed forensic analysis of all potential counterparties itself, so a heavy reliance on the credit rating agencies is unavoidable.

**Question 43**

**Councillor Joan Scannell**

Would the Cabinet Member for Resources confirm what advice Officers take when deciding in which financial institutions to place deposits?

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

Treasury management activity is governed by the annual Treasury Management Strategy, which is approved each March by the Council's Cabinet Resources Committee. The strategy is prepared in accordance with the CIPFA Code and forms an important part of the overall financial governance framework of the Council, which is taken into account each year by the external auditor as part of the Use of Resources assessment and general audit work. In addition the Council uses external specialist treasury advisors.

One of the key elements of the strategy is the management of risk through an approved counterparties list the Council should place deposits with, the individual limits on the deposits placed with any counterparty, and the mix of short and long term deposit periods used. This is all designed to ensure the Council does not put all its eggs in one basket (e.g. the Western Isles Council and BCCI scenario), and to ensure that the council achieves a decent return on deposits.

The strategy states that the criteria used by the Council to select the counterparties with which it can place deposits are based on the long term and short term credit ratings used by the main credit rating agencies, Fitch, Moody's and Standard & Poors. The approved ratings at the time deposits were made were:

- Short term – 'F1' (Fitch) or 'P-1' (Moody's)
- Long term – 'A' (Fitch) or 'A1' (Moody's)

A Fitch short-term rating of 'F1' is defined as being best quality grade, indicating strong capacity for timely payment of financial commitments. The strongest possible credit rating for short term is 'F1+' which is defined as being best quality grade, indicating exceptionally strong capacity of obligor to meet its financial commitments.

A long-term rating of 'A' denotes expectations of low credit risk and the capacity for payment of financial commitments is considered strong. This capacity may, nevertheless, be more vulnerable to changes in circumstances or in economic conditions than is the case for higher ratings. The highest credit rating of 'AAA' is the highest credit quality and denotes an exceptionally strong capacity for payment of financial commitments usually Government issued debt. 'AA' credit ratings denote expectations of low credit risk and indicate very strong capacity for payment of financial commitments. The lowest investment grade rating is 'BBB' which indicates that there are currently expectations of low credit risk. The capacity for payment of financial commitments is considered adequate but adverse changes in circumstances and economic conditions are likely to impair this capacity. Fitch issue further credit ratings below 'BB' that range to 'NR' (not reported), these grades are known as non-investment or speculative grades.

#### **Question 44**

#### **Councillor Duncan Macdonald**

With regard to the Leader's "Leader Listens blog" – Has the Council taken on new staff to run this? If so, who will pay their wages when the grant money has gone?

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

The Council has not employed any new permanent staff to run the Leader Listens site.

#### **Question 45**

#### **Councillor Zakia Zubairi**

What is the Administration doing to re-furbish play areas around the borough that have been left to wither on the vine?

#### **Answer by Councillor Andrew Harper**

Play areas are inspected and maintained to ensure they conform to safety standards and are suitable for use. Sadly, they are sometimes subject to vandalism which results in equipment requiring replacement as well as the need for replacement where equipment has come to the end of its life. Replacement happens as and when required. Where repeated vandalism occurs to the same equipment this may not be replaced for a period of time and in some cases removed in its entirety.

Investment in play areas is focused on Premier Parks and secondly other playgrounds in the borough as per the Premier Parks Strategy. Investment is sourced from the Greenspaces budget, s106 monies and external grants for which the Council bids.

**Question 46****Councillor Sachin Rajput**

Would the Cabinet Member for Resources please re-assure Council that work is undertaken to help pensioners receive any Council Tax Benefit they may be entitled to?

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

Currently our benefit take up campaign includes:

- Posters have appear on 'six sheet' boards (these are located near town centres and shopping areas) from Wednesday 9 September to 6 October. Further posters will appear at bus stops from 3 November to 1 December. So the entire campaign will run 9 September 2008 to 1 December 2008.
- We are currently running extra advice surgeries throughout the Borough.
- We are currently working with Welfare Rights on pensioner take up. We got a list from the DWP of pensioners in the area that do not appear on our benefit extract.
- We work with the Homeless Forum group.
- We work with Temporary Accommodation on providing DHPs to claimants in exceptional hardship circumstances.
- We have applied additional resource to the telephones to assist in expert advice re benefit.

**Question 47****Councillor Duncan Macdonald**

With regard to the Leader's "Leader Listens blog" – Members of the public have posted messages to Councillor Freer on the new blog but they have not been uploaded. Is Councillor Freer censoring messages which he doesn't like? What is the point of inviting people to join in, if he is not going to reply?

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

The Council follows best practice online participation guidance as developed by organisations such as the British Broadcasting Corporation and IBM. This includes the right for the authority to moderate out content deemed harmful, threatening, abusive or defamatory.

As at 17 October 2008 only one comment which was deemed inappropriate against the criteria has been received and therefore the content was not published. Therefore your assertion is incorrect.

**Question 48****Councillor Anne Hutton**

Will the Cabinet Member guarantee that the (next?) phase of Sure Start Children's Centres will be implemented by this Authority?

**Answer by Councillor Fiona Bulmer**

Good progress continues to be made in delivering children's centres that provide services that meet the needs of families in Barnet and options for phase 3 centres are being developed.

**Question 49****Councillor Daniel Thomas**

Would the Cabinet Member for resources detail any concerns raised by Opposition Councillors over the Council's Treasury Management Policy or indeed over any of the Council's cash deposits?

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

No concerns were lodged. Neither was the Treasury Management Policy called in for scrutiny by any opposition member.

**Question 50****Councillor Charlie O-Macauley**

When will the Administration re-introduce a Cabinet Committee whose sole remit is to ensure equalities are properly monitored in the implementation of Council policy?

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

This Administration has made more progress on equality and diversity since the subject became a personal responsibility of mine with regular progress reported through the many reports approved by Cabinet. This is far more effective than the previous talking shop approach of a Cabinet Sub-Committee that achieved little.

**Question 51**

**Councillor Gill Sargeant**

Will the Cabinet Member outline the timescales for development of additional community and youth provision in the Colindale Regeneration Programme?

**Answer by Councillor Fiona Bulmer**

The Colindale Area Action Plan will provide the framework to guide growth in Colindale over the next 20 years and will identify the range of facilities necessary the establishment of a sustainable community.

Expanded capacity for local primary schools, contributions to improvements to secondary school provision in the wider area, youth provision, open space and recreational improvements and new health facilities and other related community infrastructure will be delivered as new developments come forward.

It is too early at this stage to define when particular facilities will be provided but the Area Action Plan Draft Preferred Options Report, currently out to consultation sets out a broad programme for the delivery of the major development sites in the area. The specific nature of the community benefits and their provision will be clarified as detailed master plans are prepared for each of the key sites in consultation with the community over the next 2 to 3 years.

**Question 52**

**Councillor Gill Sargeant**

Can the Cabinet Member tell me what the date is for completion of Aerodrome Road works?

**Answer by Councillor Andrew Harper**

I assume Cllr Sargeant is referring to the Aerodrome Road Bridge Replacement project. The current phase of work involves:

- a) The building of the abutments and wing walls of the bridges in blockwork / stonework, and
- b) The diversion of all major utilities on the widened part of Aerodrome Road (south side).

Currently there two traffic lanes, one in each direction, running on the existing or old Aerodrome Road surface.

Once all the utilities are diverted, the new road construction on the south side will be laid above them. This will allow the next phase of the works, starting with the diversion of the traffic on the newly constructed surface. Unfortunately, due to various restrictions as a result of utility positions, it will only be possible to have one traffic lane (westbound) and it will be necessary to reinstate the previous one way traffic flow system. The next phase switchover is expected to be done before Christmas and it will free the remaining width of Aerodrome Road for excavation and construction at a lower level, to achieve the required headroom under the bridges. The project is envisaged to be completed in April 2009.

**Question 53**

**Councillor Gill Sargeant**

Will the Cabinet Member tell me what opportunity will there be for additional consultation for any Sheaveshill Road extension?

**Answer by Councillor Andrew Harper**

The proposed extension to Sheaveshill Road is a measure being considered as part of the Colindale Area Action Plan (AAP), where we are looking to secure improvements in movement across the area to help facilitate the projected increase in residential units. The option to extend Sheaveshill Road is included in the Draft AAP Preferred Options report. Consultation on this document has just begun and will run for seven weeks including two public exhibitions. Comments received will be carefully considered and a revised Preferred Options AAP will be prepared ready for submission to the Planning Inspectorate. At that time there will be further public consultation leading up to the AAP Examination in Public, to be held in the latter part of 2009.