

Council Questions to Cabinet Members
16 December 2008
Questions and Responses

Question 1**Councillor John Hart**

Would the Cabinet Member consider a discount on parking penalties for retired persons?

Answer by Councillor Andrew Harper

London Boroughs have no individual authority to set a blanket discount rate in the circumstances described. Any change in the levels of charges for penalty charge notices must be agreed by the London Councils Transport and Environment Committee, then approved by the Mayor.

Question 2**Councillor Jack Cohen**

The following is an extract from a posting on "where I live .com":

"Hi, I live in Westcroft Close NW2, and as many other residents I feel we are rather left behind. We, the residents live in the outskirts of the Borough of Barnet and when we walk locally we feel we are forgotten by the Council: Lichfield Road must be the only scruffy street in Barnet, with dislocated pedestrian pavements and holes which are often filled with mud. The road surface is worn out and full of dangerous holes; there are no Zebra crossings, but the one next to Hampstead school. The Millennium Green has not seen a proper children playground area since many years of his creation; walking down the bridge across Cricklewood rail bridge is a daily nightmare we have to face on our way to local shops. Avoiding to be hit by pigeon's excrement's still nesting under the bridge, escaping from the deafening traffic and smog, it's quotidian for us. With the wet weather there is a huge puddle at the bottom of the slope, and most of the time we miserably end up soaked wet splashed with dirty water. Unfortunately for us, there is no other way down. But in the scale of my neighbourhood needs, safety is the issue I would give priority."

Ward Councillors are constantly reporting some of these issues but nothing ever seems to get done. Why not?

Answer by Councillor Andrew Harper

Westcroft Close is a private road which is partly in the LB Camden.

Lichfield Road is also partly in Camden and the Barnet section, including the side roads to the east, last had works six years ago.

The Camden section has been resurfaced recently, and the Barnet section has recently been assessed and will be prioritised for footway reconstruction and carriageway resurfacing as part of the 2009/10 programme that will be an item at the March 2009 Finchley and Golders Green Area Environment Sub-Committee.

A407 Cricklewood Lane is a busy road which frequently experiences traffic congestion. However, there are proposals to improve the junction with Claremont Road / Litchfield Road as part of the first phase of the Brent Cross Cricklewood Regeneration scheme, together with the main A5 / A407 junction, which will reduce vehicle queues and improve road user safety.

The Millennium Green is not the responsibility of the Council. The nearest play areas to the Millennium Green are in Childs Hill Park, Basing Hill Park, Clitterhouse Playing Fields and Clarefield Park, all of which are within a 10 minute walk.

The rail bridge was pigeon proofed last year so as far as we were aware pigeons are no longer a problem. Cricklewood bridge was checked on 6 December and is definitely netted.

Question 3

Councillor Ansuya Sodha

Currently, 1.46% of the Barnet workforce declares that they have a disability. What is the Council doing to ensure that disabled people have equal access to employment with LB Barnet?

Answer by Councillor Mike Freer, Leader of the Council

General Comment

A major issue in determining the numbers of disabled employees is the reluctance to declare a disability. Steps have been made to improve data capture and for non schools based staff, 2.0% of this workforce has now declared a disability. Further work is required to improve the schools data, in particular from schools that do not buy in to the HR or Payroll service.

Recruitment

Barnet continues to use the two tick symbol disability symbol on our recruitment advertising. This is to demonstrate that we are positive about employing people with disabilities. The symbol is a recognition given by Jobcentre Plus to employers who have agreed to make certain positive commitments regarding the employment, retention, training and career development of disabled people. Some of the the commitments are:

- to interview all disabled applicants who meet the minimum criteria for a job vacancy and to consider them on their abilities
- to make every effort when employees become disabled to make sure they stay in employment, (e.g. using our *Employee Assistance Officer, return fast track appointments to Occupational Health, using the counselling service, People at Work*

Website

Improved features for users who are disabled (<http://www.barnet.gov.uk/website-accessibility>).

Partnership

We have set targets to increase the employment of disabled people within Barnet Council and other employers. In order to improve performance levels, dialogue was undertaken with national MENCAP who have received central government support to increase employment opportunities for people with learning disabilities in Councils, building on the WorkRight model . National MENCAP approached Barnet Council to enter into a partnership to increase employment opportunities. The partnership is based on adoption of the Workright model and the employment of a coordinator by MENCAP. This post holder works within HR to identify job vacancies, undertake job carving and match candidates to vacancies. After selection, each candidate has a training period (usually 4-6 weeks, depending on individual needs) to check their suitability. The candidate is then interviewed for the vacant post. The partnership began in June 2008.

Policy

Officers have formulated and agreed a proposed new work experience policy which will enable both able and disabled applicants to gain work experience with the Council. This policy will be presented to General Functions Committee in January for approval.

Question 4

Councillor John Hart

Would the Cabinet Member introduce into the training of traffic wardens an instruction to allow a grace period of, say, 5 minutes to allow a driver to reach a distant paying machine, or collect a prescription, etc. before imposing a penalty ticket?

Answer by Councillor Andrew Harper

It is felt that sufficient time is given to motorists to check signage and purchase a pay and display ticket. An enforcement officer already allows approximately 5 minutes before starting to issue a penalty as the driver may have gone to purchase a pay and display ticket.

If someone who had difficulty walking took longer to get a pay and display ticket, we might consider cancelling it under the mitigation procedure. Processes are in place to ensure fair and transparent enforcement and where justified a five minute grace period is already given to motorists.

Question 5

Councillor Jeremy Davies

How much interest is due on the Council's £27.4m invested in Icelandic banks?

Answer by Councillor Mike Freer, Leader of the Council

This financial year £1,513,463.

Question 6

Councillor Julie Johnson

What explanation can the Cabinet Member give for the 14% increase in the reported incidents of domestic violence? What is being done to increase the percentage of domestic violence offences that result in sanctioned detention?

Answer by Councillor Brian Coleman

The Police target for detections this year is 43%, this is an increase of 3% from last year. Barnet police are currently on target to achieve this detection rate, performance currently stands at 42.3%. This exceeds the target for an increase in the percentage of Sanctioned Detections as set out in the Local Area Agreement 2007/08 – 2009/10.

In order to achieve the above target a cradle to the grave review of police responses to domestic violence has taken place.

A needs review of Domestic Violence provision in the borough it currently being undertaken and will include looking at the experiences of survivors of domestic violence and their experiences of engaging with services. This will help us improve provision, which in turn will encourage more victims to come forward and report.

Question 7

Councillor Richard Weider

Can the Leader outline which MPs have submitted Freedom of Information requests, and how many to Barnet Council?

Answer by Councillor Mike Freer, Leader of the Council

FOI requests on behalf of MP's

Date	Name of MP	Details of request
Oct-06	Mark Prisk	Business Support Schemes
Nov-06	Nick Clegg	ASBO breaches
Apr-07	David Davies	Marriage Stats
Dec-07	Jo Swinson	Packaging
Mar-07	W Wearmouth	Biometrics in schools
Jan-08	Julia Goldsworthy	Telephone Access to council services
Feb-08	Grant Shapps	Homeless provisions
Feb-08	Jeremy Hunt	Lottery Funding
Feb-08	Nigel Fletcher	Building Schools for future programme

Jan-08	Norman Baker	Concessionary Bus fare scheme
Mar-08	Andrew Dismore	Leader's office postage costs etc.
Apr-08	Andrew Dismore	Minority Group events
May-08	Andrew Dismore	Hendon leader listens event
May-08	Andrew Dismore	Cost of events
May-08	Andrew Dismore	Hendon / Edgware events, notes and dates
Jun-08	Julia Goldsworthy	Waste Services
Sep-08	Lynn Featherstone	Youth Services
Oct-08	Andrew Dismore	Mayoral Diaries
Oct-08	Sarah Teather	Debit and Credit Card Usage
Nov-08	Julia Goldsworthy	Iceland Bank Investments
Nov-08	Paul Rowen	Asbestos
Nov-08	Chris Ruane	Out of borough placements

Question 8

Councillor Jeremy Davies

What is the impact of the recent fall in interest rates on the interest received on Council investments? In this year and 2009/2010?

Answer by Councillor Mike Freer, Leader of the Council

Based on current deposit balances the Council will lose around £780,000 for every 1% reduction in interest rates for the year 2008/09. Based on projected deposit balances for 2009/10 a 1% drop in interest rates will result in a drop of £1.8m in deposit interest.

Question 9

Councillor Claire Farrier

When will the Council re-open the play area in Silkstream Park that was closed due to vandalism?

Answer by Councillor Andrew Harper

Sadly, Silkstream Park has been subject to recurring vandalism following the installation of a new piece of equipment this summer. Within a day of the installation the safety surfacing in the play area had been ripped up and the playground closed for health and safety reasons. Following the repair of the safety surfacing this was again ripped up at a much greater scale and a piece of equipment burnt. Due to the on-going problems with vandalism the play area has remained closed.

In instances of recurring vandalism, repairs/replacement of equipment are left for a period of time, and in some cases a judgement is made that it won't be repaired / replaced at all, otherwise we simply waste money. However, the play ground at Silkstream is due to be repaired early December after which it will be re-opened.

Question 10

Councillor Tom Davey

Could the Cabinet Member please outline how Barnet can expect to benefit from Mayor Johnson's recently-announced transport plans for London?

Answer by Councillor Andrew Harper

Transport for London recently announced (20th November) the funding available to boroughs for the 2009/10 financial year. This funding allocation is based on scheme specific 'bids' with funding allocated only to those projects Transport for London are willing to support.

The attached spreadsheet details the allocation Barnet received, but it should be pointed out that this is only an initial allocation and additional funding is likely to be agreed in areas such as bridge maintenance and bus priority.

In summary, our total allocation is around £3.5m. Of this, nearly £1m is for principal road maintenance, £705k for local safety schemes, £556k for school travel plans and we also have £117k for cycle training.

This is likely to be the last year in which TfL make the decision on which schemes to fund. Work has been taking place between Transport for London and the boroughs to find a simpler and less bureaucratic way of allocating funding to boroughs for local transport projects. The current proposals include moving to a formula allocation which would mean funding is distributed according to need with Boroughs then allowed to determine local spending priorities.

Summary Report

		WBS Element	Initial Allocation
Borough		£	£
Barnet			3,419,000
BP			650,000
Bus Priority			650,000
1792	Golders Green Road junction with Finchley Road		50,000
1793	Route 221 – Whole route improvements		50,000
1794	Edgware Road approaching Capitol Way		50,000
1795	East Barnet Village		30,000
1796	Route 34 – Whole route improvements		40,000
1797	Routes 43/134 – Colney Hatch Lane		50,000
1801	Borough Administration		15,000
1802	Sector Administration		15,000
1803	Consultant Fees		350,000
LCN		115,000	
LCN		115,000	
4564	Link 5 – Entire length of link		115,000
Not assigned		2,654,000	
Local Area Accessibility		40,000	
13090	LAA Outline Work Programme		40,000
Bridge Assessment and Strengthening		98,000	
834	Park Road Culvert – 2 (Ref:5/1/10)		98,000
Bus Stop Accessibility		50,000	
683	H2/H3 Hampstead Garden Suburb		12,000
693	Bus stop clearway provision		12,000
699	Improving bus stop accessibility		26,000
Non-LCN+ Cycling Schemes		117,000	
161	Cycle training – Primary pupils		48,000
163	Cycle training – Secondary pupils		28,000

176	Cycle training – SEN pupils		9,000
177	Cycle training – adults		22,000
859	Cycle parking		10,000
Environment		0	
Local Safety Schemes		705,000	
65	Mass action – accidents in darkness		120,000
396	A5 / Station Road / Whitchurch Lane		160,000
446	Golders Green Gyrotory		160,000
548	Cricklewood Lane Thorverton-Gillingham Rd		25,000
631	A1000 Hadley Highstone / Dury Road		20,000
702	A1000 / Fortis Green Road		150,000
2250	Barnet Lane near opening Oaklands Road		50,000
2251	Osidge Lane junction with West Walk & East Walk		20,000
Principal Road Renewal		968,000	
320	2009-10 PRN A5 The Hyde NW9 Carriageway		409,000
321	2009-10 PRN A1000 High Road N2 Carriageway		111,000
322	2009-10 PRN A5 Cricklewood Broadway Carriageway		90,000
323	2009-10 PRN A1000 Pricklers Hill Carriageway		358,000
Regeneration Area Schemes		0	
School Travel Plans		556,000	
71	STA Post Assistant 1		40,000
73	STA Post Assistant 2		40,000
75	STP Coordinator		20,000
80	STP Development surveys and consultation		10,000
82	STP Development feasibility and design		20,000
84	STP Monitoring and review		40,000
85	STP Implementation – independent school grants		70,000
86	STP Implementation – supply cover		20,000
87	STP Implementation – theatre in education		20,000
88	STP Implementation – small grants		60,000
235	The Mount		80,000
397	WOW		60,000
399	Walk to school week		5,000
680	STP Promotion		1,000
13023	Transition up grade resource		70,000
Walking		120,000	
977	East Finchley – Urban footpaths		60,000
1047	Practical pedestrian training		35,000
2499	New Barnet Station walking access		25,000

Question 11**Councillor Jeremy Davies**

What is the impact of an interest rate reduction to 2.5pc on the Council's budgeted and actual income from interest payments?

Answer by Councillor Mike Freer, Leader of the Council

A reduction in rates from 5% (budgeted rate for this year) to 2.5% will result in a reduction in deposit interest of £1.9m for 2008/09.

Question 12**Councillor Alison Moore**

A press release issued by the Conservative Group in September, said that the Administration's response to the credit crunch was to extend its benefits take-up advice, with extra advertising, surgeries, and encouraging pensioner take-up of benefits, and provide Discretionary Housing Payments (DHPs) to claimants experiencing exceptional hardship. Would the Leader provide me with details of how much extra advertising has been undertaken, what benefits they promote, what surgeries or extra surgeries have been laid on, how pensioners have been encouraged to take-up benefits, and what the result of all of these initiatives has been? In addition, given that DHPs are solely Government funding, can the Leader say precisely what the Council is doing outside of and in addition to Government funded schemes to ameliorate the affects of the credit crunch other than through the welfare rights unit?

Answer by Councillor Mike Freer, Leader of the Council

Not surprisingly in the current economic climate the benefit caseload is rising at an increasing rate. Latest caseload figures are at the highest level since Council Tax was introduced in 1993. Caseloads at the end of the last recession (1993) were c25k, they dropped year on year to c20k in 2000/2001 and have basically been on a constant albeit slow rise ever since. Currently the caseload is c28k and rising at 1% per month over the past quarter (this percentage rise significantly up on averages prior to that). Action taken:

- 1) 1 Pensioner take-up – A joint exercise was recently undertaken with Welfare Rights in which 1931 letters were sent out inviting people to claim. Of these, 187 were returned of which 129 went into payment. The remainder were either not entitled or not liable. In order to find out why there was such a low take up in the first instance, a sample of 50 cases have been extracted and we have written to all to find out why they did not pursue their claims. These results are not yet available.
From January 2009, we will be providing a Pension Service surgery at Burnt Oak library.
- 2) Benefits take –up posters. We have run a series of posters around the borough, both on free standing columns in town centres and on bus stops. Further posters have been ordered and are due to be displayed in libraries, leisure centres, medical centres, village halls and Age Concern within the next 4 weeks.
- 3) We have arranged for Benefit take-up Stands to be set up on two shopping areas in January 2009. The Spires on 14.1.09 and The Broadwalk on 21.01.09. Staff will be available to provide advice and they will be given a bag containing an application form, pen, advice information etc. Details of every application form given will be taken so that we can judge the effectiveness of this type of take-up work.
- 4) We are continuing to advertise the Service in both the Hospital Radio Guide for Barnet Hospital and The Volunteer Magazine which is distributed to both Barnet and Chase Farm Hospitals.
- 5) We provide talks on benefit entitlement at the local JCP offices as requested and recently attended the Home Choice day at Barnet House to offer assistance to the public.

- 6) We provide talks on benefit entitlement at the local JCP offices as requested and recently attended the Home Choice day at Barnet House to offer assistance to the public.
- 7) In addition to the advice service at Burnt Oak, we currently provide a surgery at Barnet House for 2.5 days per week and one morning at Finchley JCP office. This surgery will transfer to Hendon JCP office from 081208 at their request. Two officers will be available to provide advice on Benefits.
- 8) We have also recently issued a newsletter to Benefit claimants, providing updates on new legislation, how to apply for benefit etc. A second issue will be produced towards the end of the financial year which will be sent out with the mass recalculation letters.
- 9) We are planning to make use of the GIS system early next year to assist us in identifying areas within the borough where take-up of Benefit is considered to be low.
- 10) Our website is constantly being updated, with all leaflets and relevant information available to Barnet residents

Question 13

Councillor John Hart

Could the Cabinet Member please give me the number of planning applications received for Mill Hill ward during the first nine months of 2007 compared with the first nine months 2008; could he further indicate the number of applications, in both periods, that were recommend for acceptance by planning officers yet rejected by the Planning Committee; and the cost of such rejections occasioned by subsequent appeals to the inspectorate?

Answer by Councillor Melvin Cohen

2008 (first 9 months)

Applications Received: **268**

Total decided at Sub-Committee: **24**

Total refused at Sub-Committee where recommendation was to approve: **8**

Appeals – 5 current

– 2 decided with no award of costs

2007 (first 9 months)

Applications Received: **409**

Total decided at Sub-Committee: **11**

Total refused at Sub-Committee where recommendation was to approve: **2**

Appeals – 2 with no award of costs

On average it costs the Local Planning Authority approximately £250 in Officer time to deal with an appeal.

Question 14

Councillor Jeremy Davies

What is the interest rate and value of annual interest on the Council's borrowings?

Answer by Councillor Mike Freer, Leader of the Council

Annual interest on Council borrowings is £8.8m at an average rate of interest of 4.10%.

Question 15**Councillor Zakia Zubairi**

How much income does the Council generate every year from pest control services and how much does the service cost to run?

Answer by Councillor Brian Coleman

The Council introduced a Pest Treatment Service in April 2006. This service is a fee paying service for the treatment of pests broadly considered to be of public health significance. The service is required to operate at zero cost to the Council, and covers the full cost of operation, including the full cost of management.

There is a reduced fee for service users who are in receipt of means tested benefits.

It broke even in years one and two of operation, and is projected to make a small surplus of £5k this financial year.

Question 16**Councillor Dean Cohen**

Will the Cabinet Member please outline the Registry Office services available in Barnet to help those families whose faith requires prompt burial?

Answer by Councillor Richard Cornelius

We provide service on 363 days per year for the issue of burial certificates. The exceptions are Good Friday and Christmas Day which the faith communities entirely accept. There is a statutory right not to open our offices on those days. Service is provided on:

- Monday to Saturday 9-4
- Sunday on-call 9-11 – the Burial Societies do not bury after 12 noon so any longer opening is pointless.

The faith communities have always been happy with the service we provide.

Question 17**Councillor Duncan Macdonald**

Can Councillor Freer explain the role and function of the Cabinet Resources Committee?

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

Cabinet Committees may discharge the executive functions that fall within their terms of reference, whether or not they are also delegated to officers, except for matters specifically reserved to Cabinet. The Rules in Part 4 of the Constitution may reserve certain decisions to cabinet committees.

3.6 The Cabinet Committees are:

Resources Committee***Functions***

- Capital and revenue finance, forecasting, monitoring, borrowing and taxation.
- To consider reports on treasury management strategy and activity, including creating and maintaining a Treasury Management Policy Statement.
- Grants to voluntary organisations above £20,000.
- Monitor the trading position of appropriate council services, carry out debt analysis and look at income sources and charging policies.
- To write off debt.
- To determine external or cross-boundary trading limit.

- To agree exceptions to standing orders, all decisions relating to approved lists and agreed national registers, authorise post tender negotiations and accept tenders which are not the lowest.
- To agree externalisation contracts including any proposal to appoint external cash investment managers.
- Approval of schemes not in performance management plans but not outside the Council's budget or policy framework.
- All matters relating to land and buildings owned, rented or proposed to be acquired or disposed of by the Council.
- To develop and recommend to Cabinet for adoption an e-Government strategy and associated ICT policies and strategies.
- To submit to Cabinet each year detailed proposals for all council ICT expenditure in the coming year for consideration as part of the budget and forward plan process.
- To monitor the implementation of the e-Government and ICT strategies.
- To co-ordinate and decide priorities for the development of e-government and ICT systems and projects to achieve the council's modernisation objectives in accordance with the approved strategies.
- All matters relating to the purchase or leasing of ICT equipment and software, provided that it is in accordance with the approved e-Government and ICT strategies and the Council's budget and policy framework.
- To oversee the performance of the IT service and the balance between internal and external service provision.
- For ICT contracts, to agree exceptions to standing orders, all decisions relating to approved lists and agreed national registers, authorise post tender negotiations and accept tenders including those which are not the lowest.

Question 18

Councillor Ansuya Sodha

A report published by NUT and NCSL in November raises the issue of underachievement of white working class pupils in schools. Is the Cabinet Member aware of this report, does she believe that there is a problem of this nature in Barnet and if so what is being done to address it?

Answer by Councillor Fiona Bulmer

Barnet schools have a good record of achievement for pupils from all backgrounds. There is no accepted definition of 'white working class' pupils but one proxy is White British pupils eligible for Free School Meals. This group of pupils performs better in Barnet than similar pupils nationally. At Key stage 2, 72% of the cohort achieved level 4 or above in English in Barnet (2008) compared to 61% nationally (2007). At Key Stage 4, this group of pupils also out-perform similar pupils nationally, with 32.3% gaining 5 GCSEs at A*-C (including English and Maths) compared with 17.1% nationally.

The Local Authority will continue to work with Heads and governing bodies to improve standards even further for all pupils and to address any areas of underachievement.

Question 19

Councillor Daniel Thomas

Would the Leader comment on progress made when the Borough Treasurer attended creditor meetings in Iceland on behalf of Local Authorities?

Answer by Councillor Mike Freer, Leader of the Council

The meetings so far have largely been concerned with information gathering, e.g. what the book value of the assets and liabilities in the old banks looks like, where the council might rank in the order of creditor preference etc. The Borough Treasurer is bound by a confidentiality agreement but progress on securing the return of the Council's deposits is encouraging.

Question 20**Councillor Wayne Casey**

The Leader has echoed the Chancellor of the Exchequer in stating that he is only responsible for what he is responsible for. Could he state for the record what, precisely, he is responsible for?

Answer by Councillor Mike Freer, Leader of the Council

Specific individual responsibilities:

To lead on budget and policy formulation and implementation in relation to:

- resources (including billing, collection and recovery of local taxation)
- financial forward planning and budgeting
- risk management
- asset management policy
- major corporate contracts
- communications and marketing
- HR, equalities and diversity

The monitoring of the Council's budget and to instigate such interventions as necessary to ensure spending is kept within limits determined by Council. Risk and asset management would include agreeing policies and ensuring they were applied.

Question 21**Councillor Kath McGuirk**

What tonnage of residential waste is likely to be composted across Barnet in 2008/9?

Answer by Councillor Andrew Harper

The amount of residential waste that is composted has been increasing each year.

Our current projections are that approximately 19,000 tonnes of waste will be composted in 2008/09. This includes organic waste collected from houses on the green bin scheme including those properties taking part in the pilot kitchen caddy scheme, green waste collected from the Civic Amenity and Recycling Centre at Summers Lane and leaf fall collected for composting.

Question 22**Councillor Brian Gordon**

How has the latest edition to the recycling facilities, in particular the beautiful new blue boxes, been received by the public around the Borough?

Answer by Councillor Andrew Harper

The improved recycling service has been well received by the residents of Barnet, who have been taking full advantage of it.

The collection of plastic bottles and cardboard, using the new blue box, started on 17 November. In the first week of the new service we collected 225 tonnes more than the average before the new materials were introduced, while in the second week we collected 138 additional tonnes. It's clear that in the first couple of weeks, we've been collecting cardboard and plastic bottles that residents had stockpiled in anticipation of the start of the new service. Once this backlog has been cleared, and we have passed the very busy period after Christmas, we anticipate that we will continue to collect around an extra 100 tonnes of material for recycling a week.

As the contractor, May Gurney, have been collecting high tonnages since 17 November, they have been working longer days. As the initial extra tonnages reduce, while at the same time delivery of new collection vehicles is completed, the collectors should return to finishing times around 2pm.

Question 23**Councillor Wayne Casey**

The Community Strategy sets out a vision for the Borough where, by 2018, “*Barnet is known nationally and internationally as a successful city-suburb.*” What specific and measurable benefits are there for the Council Tax payers from Barnet having an *international* reputation?

Answer by Councillor Mike Freer, Leader of the Council

In this day and age many places have international reputations whether they like it or not. This certainly applies to Barnet with our high levels of diversity and many citizens who are exposed to the global economy. We need to actively manage this, or we are not serving our public. In particular:

- We need inward investment in Cricklewood;
- We need knowledge based workers – this is a key part of our LAA. Successful economies have always thrived on the benefits of bright immigration and our equalities policy emphasises that we value diversity because it brings economic success. Hence our support for Middlesex University which has a global reach – especially in the BRICs economies specifically India, China and Dubai. Barnet College is also developing links with China. Bright people coming to Barnet has also benefited the Council e.g. social workers.

Successful people coming to Barnet re-inforces the local economy – e.g. shopping, housing (Princess Park Manor is believed to be home to significant number of wealthy foreigners who are here for short stays for work reasons.

Many of our existing communities have global links already. Its important that they and their relatives see Barnet as a good place. This re-inforces the positive traffic.

We need to avoid also having a bad international reputation – for example one that criminals think they can exploit – gangs, fraud etc. This is easy to acquire. This is an area where we work positively with the police and where Corporate Governance have played a key role. Our work is reflected in that Barnet remains on the whole a safe place in comparison with many others with high levels of diversity.

Question 24**Councillor Ross Houston**

Will the Cabinet Member update me with the current figure for the number of empty homes in the Borough, and the number of empty homes the Council has returned to use this year to date?

Answer by Councillor Lynne Hillan

As a snapshot, there are 3725 empty properties across all tenures, of which 2231 have been empty for more than six months

A total of 369 have been brought back into use this year which can be summarised as follows:

Number of Non Local authority owned vacant dwellings returned to occupation or demolished (ex-BVPI 64 definition) 1 April-30 September 2008	Method
300	Private Sector Tenancies
1	Owner Occupied
12	Private Rented
14	Private Sector Leases
42	Home Lets
369	Total

The Council has also approved Compulsory Purchase Order action for seven properties, two of which are already being brought back into use voluntarily.

Question 25

Councillor Joan Scannell

What can the Council do to assist local businesses weather what is likely to be a deep and long recession?

Answer by Councillor Mike Freer, Leader of the Council

We are supporting our residents as highlighted in an earlier question which can assist in ensuring our residents remain as economically active as possible which can assist in helping local traders. We have also announced a drastic discount on parking charges for the main Christmas trading period. In addition in January I will be facilitating an event for local businesses which will provide practical advice on how to bid for Council contracts and London Development Agency Contracts. It is expected that Middlesex University and Business Link will be present.

Question 26

Councillor Wayne Casey

Do you now know where the Council has deposits of money?

Answer by Councillor Mike Freer, Leader of the Council

The Borough Treasurer published a list of counter-parties on the 1/12/8 detailing where money was deposited.

Question 27

Councillor Ansuya Sodha

One of the commitments that is made to Barnet residents in the Equality Scheme is that 'every resident and service user has equal access to high quality services that meet their needs....' How does the Council know that they are achieving equal access for every single resident and service user?

Answer by Councillor Mike Freer, Leader of the Council

The Council's Equality Scheme is ambitious. It wants to build on our success as a high performing local authority and we know that our diversity is a significant contribution to our role as a global city suburb.

Our resident satisfaction has increased consistently over time – currently standing at 72% but we want to ensure this satisfaction and sense of well-being is shared across all our communities.

Therefore we are monitoring our equalities performance through our existing performance management systems by testing the equality impact of our key corporate priorities using a range of performance monitoring tools including:

- Financial Performance Reviews
- The Equality Standard for Local Government
- Self-assessment against Barnet's Race Equality Scheme (as part of our statutory duty)
- Measuring trends in resident satisfaction rates

The Equality Delivery Plan which accompanies the Annual Report of the Equality Scheme was approved by Cabinet on 3 December and sets out our approach to measuring the equality impact of our corporate targets.

Additionally, the Council's performance against the Race Equality Scheme, which is measured annually shows an improvement in the Council's promotion of race equality from 74% in 2006/07 to 84% in 2007/08 due to the widening ethnic profile of service users and increased satisfaction rates among service users from different ethnic groups as measured through the Annual Residents' Survey.

Question 28

Councillor Brian Gordon

Certain faith schools were recently caught out for non-compliance with Government requirements on their Admissions Code. Were the breaches a matter of practical significance or were they really little more than cases of technical wording incorrectness?

Answer by Councillor Fiona Bulmer

The overwhelming majority of breaches of the code identified by the School's Adjudicator were minor issues relating to the wording of admissions arrangements.

Question 29

Councillor Wayne Casey

If the money deposited by Barnet in Icelandic institutions is not lost, what is the Acting Director of Resources in negotiation with the Icelandic authorities for?

Answer by Councillor Mike Freer, Leader of the Council

No money is lost. The process of administration of the Icelandic banks is ongoing. It is normal practice for creditors of any company to attend meetings convened by the administrators, and for creditors to make comments and suggestions at those meetings about what is in their best interests.

Question 30

Councillor Ross Houston

What is the Council's response to Boris Johnson's initial affordable housing targets for Barnet?

Answer by Councillor Lynne Hillan

We support the ambitious housing targets which have been set in the London Plan for the period 2016-17, including the delivery of appropriate levels of affordable housing. As an Opportunity Borough, with an ambitious growth agenda, we are grateful for continued GLA support for our approach to the delivery of high quality city-suburbs through our Three Strands Approach of protection, enhancement and growth.

As Barnet has been proactive in identifying opportunities for substantial levels of new housing, our housing delivery targets are the highest in London outside the Thames Gateway with the targets for our neighbouring boroughs of Enfield and Harrow only one fifth of those for Barnet. Although we are confident of delivery over the London Plan timeframe we are aware that the next three years will be particularly difficult ones across all areas of London. Given the worsening of the economic downturn it is unlikely that Barnet will meet its targets for the provision of new affordable homes.

Barnet does not receive the same levels of government financial support for housing delivery as the Olympic and Thames Gateway Boroughs. In order to be able to continue to deliver affordable housing through the economic downturn the Borough will require significant investment and more generous government grants. We have therefore discussed revising the figures to a more realistic and achievable target.

The GLA recognise that these figures are challenging without additional funding from the HCA London Board.

Question 31**Councillor Brian Gordon**

Could the Leader outline how the Unions and other staff groups are being involved in the Future Shape of the Council project?

Answer by Councillor Mike Freer, Leader of the Council

The trade unions and staff groups have been extensively involved in the future shape of the Council project since it's inception, both in terms of providing information and developing proposals. The most notable engagement has been as follows:

- The programme team have met with the trade unions weekly since June to share latest developments and next steps;
- The programme budget pays the backfill for the Unison representative to give his full-time energy to Future Shape work;
- The programme budget has funded the trade unions for research support;
- A number of workshops with staff have taken place on a range of issues, including the programme as a whole and the strategic role of the Council;
- The Chief Executive met depot staff for face-to-face discussion about the programme;
- The programme team have had a number of one-to-one meetings with staff who have requested meetings about a range of issues;
- The programme team holds a weekly 'meet us' session in North London Business Park that all staff can participate in; and
- We have set up the future shape website to publicise activity and outcomes from discussions, and invite feedback, comment and challenge. This is a completely unfettered and transparent discussion of the issues of concern to staff.

Question 32**Councillor Wayne Casey**

On average, how much money did local authorities in the United Kingdom have deposited in Icelandic banks?

Answer by Councillor Mike Freer, Leader of the Council

We don't have all the data but an average is £7.5m which is depressed by the number of district councils with small budgets. However a more accurate comparator would be deposits per head of population. Barnet being one of the largest authorities in the UK would have more cash to place on deposits.

Council	Population	Deposits	Deposits/Head
Haringey	224,700	37,000,000	164.66
Cheltenham	112,300	11,000,000	97.95
Scottish Borders	111,400	10,000,000	89.77
Barnet	329,700	27,4000	83.11
Hillingdon	250,7000	20,000,000	79.78
Cambridge	120,000	9,000,000	75.00
Ceredigion	77,800	5,500,000	70.69
Brent	270,000	15,000,000	55.56
NE Lincolnshire	158,400	7,000,000	44.19
Ipswich	121,000	5,000,000	41.32
Exeter	122,400	5,000,000	40.85
Restormel	103,000	4,000,000	38.83
Sutton	185,900	5,500,000	29.59
Somerset	905,700	25,000,000	27.60

Council	Population	Deposits	Deposits/Head
Colchester	175,500	4,000,000	22.79
Lewes	94,500	1,000,000	10.58
Cornwall	531,600	5,000,000	9.41
Vale of White Horse	117,000	1,000,000	8.55

Question 33

Councillor Alan Schneiderman

How much debt has been written off in each of the last 5 years broken down into council tax, business rates, benefit overpayments and other debts?

Answer by Councillor Mike Freer, Leader of the Council

Total written off by year written off in £000					
Debt Type	2007/8	2006/7	2005/6	2004/5	2003/4
CTAX	1,508	1,393	990	994	1,014
NNDR	1,470	181	1,597	0	0
Income	1,003	843	94	pre SAP data not readily available	
HB o.pmts	131		still compiling data		

Question 34

Councillor Barry Rawlings

How will all the services currently at the Mill Hill depot be accommodated between leaving the site in 2010 and a new depot being available in 2013 – could he list any services not expected to be accommodated in the new depot?

Answer by Councillor Andrew Harper

The services based at Mill Hill are currently being reviewed as not all will relocate to the new depot. Other Council owned property and satellite locations are being considered to provide the most effective delivery. Those expected not to move to the new depot include the highways service, the green spaces team, parking enforcement and the street cleansing operations. Existing tenants of the Mill Hill depot like Connaught's (Barnet Homes maintenance provider) and the Skills Training Centre will also have to find alternative accommodation.

The new depot facility will be primarily for the refuse and recycling operations, vehicle maintenance, winter maintenance fleet and additional parking for passenger transport vehicles. Temporary accommodation close to the existing Mill Hill site has been identified as possibly being suitable while the new depot is being constructed and a feasibility study is underway.

Question 35

Councillor Anne Hutton

Could the Cabinet Member give the Council an estimate of the expected Building Schools for the Future money the Government will be giving Barnet?

Answer by Councillor Matthew Offord

The Government will not be 'giving' any money to Barnet, as it does not have any money of its own. However, it will be allocating tax payers money.

As part of the BSF process Barnet, along with all local authorities not yet in the BSF programme, recently submitted a revised BSF Expression of Interest to the DCSF. In line with Government guidance, Barnet's secondary schools were packaged into 3 projects: one priority project with a capital value of around £80m, and two follow-on projects with capital value of around £100m-£120m each. We await the departmental decision on the allocation of funding with interest.

Question 36

Councillor Alan Schneiderman

Can the Cabinet Member explain the need for the Council to print at a level of 8 million copies per year from NLBP alone?

Answer by Councillor Mike Freer, Leader of the Council

A recent report to Resources Committee about replacing MFDs at NLBP provides possible solutions to reducing levels of printing in the Council. Barnet is upgrading software that has the ability to use rules as a way of controlling print volume. We are able to limit volumes and re-direct work to the Document Centre. These initiatives will help in the bid to reduce print and reduce costs as it is cheaper printing through the Document Centre than via MFDs and individual printers. The 8 million is spread between nearly 2000 staff, which works at 16 pages per day. When broken down this level of print seems much more reasonable especially as this printing will provide support for Councillor and Public Committee papers, planning applications and consultations, CPZ consultations, formal responses to Government returns and target monitoring to name a few.

Question 37

Councillor Barry Rawlings

Could the Leader explain what he means when he says in one of his reports that the failure to let the new removals and storage contract was "due to the failure of the Housing Service and Strategic Procurement Team to work effectively" – doesn't this squabbling show a failure of leadership?

Answer by Councillor Mike Freer, Leader of the Council

This is not a case of squabbling or an indicator of leadership failure. It is a statement of fact and was included to explain the causal circumstances of the failure to renew the contract in the original extension period. Both the Housing Service and Strategic Procurement Team were in a process of major change, this disrupted communications and information flow. Officers felt that a true representation of the failure to renew was required and stated the facts accordingly.

Question 38

Councillor Barry Rawlings

Could the Cabinet Member for Resources explain why, despite being told of this before, that in the Monitoring 2008/9 projected variations analysis he still does not know the difference between £thousands and £millions?

Answer by Councillor Mike Freer, Leader of the Council

This was a simple typing error.

Question 39

Councillor Barry Rawlings

Is BT in the frame as the strategic partner for the Council's proposed SPV?

Answer by Councillor Mike Freer, Leader of the Council

Cabinet has decided that further detailed assessments should be carried out as regards the Future Shape Programme. No decision has been taken that there will be either an SPV or a strategic partner.

Question 40**Councillor Barry Rawlings**

Will the Leader confirm that the Chief Executive attended the same BT Vital Vision Conference at the same time as he did? And if so, why does the DPR agreeing the Leader's attendance say that "opportunities of this quality for leadership development are rare and were the Leader unable to participate then a valuable development resource funded by the private sector would have been foregone" – does the Administration not class the Chief Executive's attendance as "valuable"?

Answer by Councillor Mike Freer, Leader of the Council

The Chief Executive did not attend the BT Vital Vision programme at the same time as I did. He attended a separate program.

Question 41**Councillor Gill Sargeant**

Could the Cabinet Member update me on youth provision in the Colindale Area Action programme?

Answer by Councillor Melvin Cohen

The Colindale Area Action Plan has reached draft preferred options stage following extensive local consultation recently. The emerging plan identifies the need for a range of new and improved youth facilities including sports and recreational provision and accommodation to serve youth based activities. The action plan fully recognises the importance of catering for the needs of younger people in this area to enhance community opportunity and engagement.

The delivery of such improvements will depend to a large extent on the major developments sites identified coming forward including the former hospital site and Barnet College. The Council is working very closely with its key stakeholders from the development industry and Local Strategic Partnership to ensure the right conditions are created to encourage high quality, sustainable and locally responsive development during this challenging economic period. In addition Council Officers continue to liaise with key community groups and representatives to identify and prioritise youth provision and funding streams.

A thorough review of the representations received following public consultation is currently being undertaken and the Area Action Plan will then be revised and taken forward to final draft preferred options ready for submission to the Planning Inspectorate in Spring / Summer of next year.

Question 42**Councillor Alison Moore**

What is the percentage breakdown, by polling district, of electoral registration in the Borough?

Answer by Councillor Mike Freer, Leader of the Council

Hendon	
Ward/Polling District	2008
Hale	
HOA	75.10%
HOB	78.38%
HOC	73.66%
HOD	81.32%
HOE	76.44%
Sub total	76.29%

Mill Hill	
HPA	83.95%
HPB	81.12%
HPC	70.26%
HPD	75.79%
HPE	95.91%
Sub total	78.75%

Hendon	
HQA	63.91%
HQB	75.35%
HQC	63.63%
HQD	64.28%
Sub total	67.63%

West Hendon	
HRA	64.99%
HRB	74.19%
HRC	66.47%
HRD	59.02%
HRE	64.85%
Sub total	64.93%

Colindale	
HSA	98.28%
HSB	62.16%
HSC	70.73%
Sub total	72.11%

Burnt Oak	
HTA	65.80%
HTB	64.18%
HTC	87.66%
HTD	92.66%
Sub total	75.88%

Edgware	
HUA	83.81%
HUB	78.11%
HUC	72.45%
Sub total	78.60%

Finchley and Golders Green	
Ward/Polling District	2008
Woodhouse	
FHA	92.67%
FHB	73.94%
FHC	68.96%
FHD	72.86%
Sub total	78.51%

East Finchley	
FIA	68.21%
FIB	72.85%
FIC	73.71%
FID	76.21%
Sub total	72.86%

Garden Suburb	
FJA	75.55%
FJB	77.99%
FJC	76.96%
FJD	85.50%
FJE	70.04%
FJF	77.12%
Sub total	77.16%

Childs Hill	
FKA	90.83%
FKB	92.43%
FKC	87.70%
FKD	85.83%
Sub total	89.94%

Golders Green	
FLA	70.93%
FLB	71.62%
FLC	66.97%
Sub total	69.80%

Finchley Church End	
FMA	75.90%
FMB	92.29%
FMC	69.51%
FMD	77.08%
FME	77.34%
Sub total	77.78%

West Finchley	
FNA	89.71%
FNB	69.67%
FND	72.22%
Sub total	76.23%

Chipping Barnet	
Ward/Polling District	2008
High Barnet	
CAA	84.42%
CAB	79.13%
CAC	87.40%
CAD	88.97%
CAE	81.47%
Sub total	81.32%

East Barnet	
CBA	75.55%
CBB	85.04%
CBC	85.07%
CBD	79.22%
CBE	93.24%
Sub total	84.77%

Brunswick Park	
CCA	85.27%
CCB	80.18%
CCC	75.05%
CCD	80.40%
Sub total	79.81%

Coppetts	
CDA	74.34%
CDB	85.28%
CDC	79.17%
CDD	75.34%
Sub total	79.05%

Oakleigh	
CEA	80.31%
CEB	79.73%
CEC	80.96%
CED	76.08%
Sub total	79.05%

Totteridge	
CFA	88.59%
CFB	88.70%
CFC	70.73%
CFD	83.59%
CFE	83.99%
Sub total	81.37%

Underhill	
CGA	82.02%
CGB	76.87%
CGC	76.38%
CGD	86.44%
CGE	72.09%
Sub total	77.69%