

**Council Questions to Cabinet Members
2 November 2010
Questions and Responses**

Question 1**Councillor Mark Shooter**

What does the Leader think of the Eric Pickles' proposals to abolish the Standards for England regime, create a new Criminal offence and letting councils decide how to organise themselves in the future?

Answer by Councillor Lynne Hillan, Leader of the Council

I am very pleased that the Secretary of State has recognised the negative impact of the constraints placed on local authorities by the former Labour Government and that he has placed his trust in local authorities to organize themselves and their affairs by affording them the General Power of Competence. The Standards Board for England has been a burden to many local authorities, often used for political posturing and mischief making. I am delighted that it is just one of the many initiatives the Secretary of State has identified for abolition in the Localism Bill that was announced in the Queen's Speech. The £7.8 million spent by the Standards Board can be spent to much better effect. Last year it dealt with 1,000 complaints at a cost of £7,800 per complaint. We do recognise and welcome the responsibility that is being devolved to us and work is already underway to amend the Council's Code of Conduct to ensure that the highest standards of behaviour are met. I am unclear as to what the new criminal offence you refer to might be. It seems logical that Councillors who behave illegally would be reported to the Police.

Question 2**Councillor Alison Moore**

Is it fair to give child benefit to a Barnet family with two parents jointly earning £80,000 a year whilst taking it away from a Barnet single mum earning £45,000 a year?

Answer by Councillor Daniel Thomas

My understanding of the anomaly you describe is that it is temporary, has been acknowledged and will be addressed. The Secretary of State has stated: "When we bring in the universal credit these sorts of things will no longer be issues or problems".

Question 3**Councillor David Longstaff**

Please could the Cabinet Member outline how successful the Pothole Elimination Programme has been?

Answer by Councillor Brian Coleman

The Pothole Elimination Programme has been a complete success, on time and under budget.

Phase 1 of PEP included the major road network. 14,253 metres squared of pothole repairs were completed in 168 roads during the month of July at a cost of £660K. Phase 2 of PEP included all of the remaining Borough roads. 44,488 metres squared of pothole repairs in at least 645 roads from 875 which have been revisited by inspectors are estimated to be completed by the end of October. At present, 42,988 metres squared has been completed and we are on programme to complete the programme by the end of October as planned. Phase 2 is estimated to cost £1.95Million. Around 230 roads were identified as not requiring work in terms of pothole elimination programme.

Question 4**Councillor Pauline Coakley Webb**

Will the Cabinet Member for Environment provide an updated list of all roads that have been completed for pot hole elimination? How many roads are outstanding and have they been completed by the end of October. For any roads not completed by end of October what is the timescale for elimination?

Answer by Councillor Brian Coleman

I refer the Member to the answer to question 3. I do not propose to provide a written list of over 1,000 roads.

Question 5**Councillor Barry Evangeli**

Can the Cabinet Member for Environment please state how many streets have been re-lit since the inception of the PFI scheme?

Answer by Councillor Brian Coleman

Another good news story for Barnet, since the Street Lighting PFI Contract Commencement, 1,325 streets have been relit and passed by the Independent Certifier (IC), as of 15/10/2010. This equates to a total of 11,691 old column removals. There are a further 95 roads which have been relit but, as yet, have not been through the final inspection process.

Question 6**Councillor Alan Schneiderman**

The back of the fag packet budget calculations that predicted Future Shape would result in £3m savings this year have now been confirmed by officers to be incorrect. Would the Cabinet Member now give a complete and detailed breakdown of the £1.4m savings that apparently will be made directly as a result of Future Shape this year?

Answer by Councillor Robert Rams

Work stream	Project	Total Savings	
Value for Money	Procurement		
	Agency	300,000	Entering into a new contract with the existing provider as part of the wider London Contract Supplies Group consortia arrangements.
	Utilities – excluding schools	220,000	Contract renewal and change of pricing structure as part of the LASER energy buying scheme.
	Cleaning – RPI	24,700	The cleaning contract has been renegotiated to reduce RPI increases.
	Mobile Phones	30,000	Renegotiation and realignment of tariffs of the corporate mobile phone contract.
	Stationery	30,000	The contract has changes to increase minimum order values and reduce invoices.
	Travel Management	25,000	A new contract which increases discounts available, and achieves economies of scale by consolidating travel requirements.
	Security	50,000	Savings are achieved via economies of scale and reduced tender and management costs by consolidating Council exiting security arrangements.
	Water	20,000	Achieved by undertaking billing audit and considering other water saving measures across Council estate.
	Video conferencing	25,000	External video conferencing services changed to in-house service provision.
	Transport contract	60,000	Renegotiations of the Corporate Transport contract.

Work stream	Project	Total Savings	
Value for Money (continued)	Transport contract	60,000	Renegotiations of the Corporate Transport contract.
	Information Services (IS)	80,000	Change of supply arrangements including direct deals with manufacturer and rationalisation of suppliers and re-tendering of specific IS categories.
New Relations with citizens	Revenue Income optimisation	339,500	Charging for services not previously charged, for example car parks.
Commissioning	Transport	70,800	Reviewing passenger routes, SEN home to School transport and the number of Staff receiving essential car user allowance.
People and Culture	Recruitment & Agency	160,000	Moving towards e-recruitment and reducing the staff advertising costs.
TOTAL		<u>1,435,000</u>	

Question 7

Councillor Andrew Strongolou

Given that Parking is often a contentious issue does the Cabinet Member have a long-term plan to improve the service?

Answer by Councillor Brian Coleman

The long-term plan for improving the service is being prepared and detailed proposals, which will include both options and a recommendation, will be presented to Cabinet in the next cycle. In the meantime, I have tasked officers with making immediate improvements to the service offered to residents, businesses, and visitors.

Question 8

Councillor Kath McGuirk

What is being done to ensure that Safer Neighbourhood Team officers are not being asked to perform duties outside the ward they are dedicated to?

Answer by Councillor Joanna Tambourides

The Borough Commander has responsibility for ensuring the effective and efficient deployment of Policing resources across the Borough. SNT's include officers who have specialist skills who from time to time are deployed to other areas because of this and the operational need. Such abstractions are kept to a minimum and the Police report that SNT officers are deployed within their wards 95% of the time.

Question 9

Councillor Hugh Rayner

Does the Council have enough grit in case we have another cold winter?

Answer by Councillor Brian Coleman

Yes. The Council's preparations for the next winter season, due to start on 1 November 2010, are well under way. All the Council's grit bins have been checked and filled with salt. The Council has recently changed its salt supplier and Cleveland Potash Ltd has been replaced by Salt Union. Currently, the Council has some 2280 tons of salt stored in the Council's depot at Mill Hill.

At the start of the previous winter season, 2 November 2009, the Council had some 2015 tons of salt in stock.

Question 10**Councillor Pauline Coakley Webb**

Will the Cabinet Member for Environment provide the latest update on the management of Council allotment sites:

How many allotments are there in each constituency (broken down by ward)? How many vacancies are there at each site (broken down by ward)? What is the waiting list for each site (broken down by ward)?

Answer by Councillor Brian Coleman

The allotments are detailed below. Please note that the vacancy and waiting list data was last compiled approx. 6 months ago. I also refer the member to the answer I have given to question 13 from Councillor Hart.

Chipping Barnet

Site Name	Ward	No vacant plots	Length of time on Waiting List	No. on Waiting List
Hatley Close	Coppetts	0	Up to 18 months	not available
Rathbone	Coppetts	0	1 – 2 years	4
The Crescent	Coppetts	0	Up to 18 months	not available
Cat Hill	East Barnet	0	1 – 2 years	6
Byng Road	High Barnet	0	At least a year	not available
Clifford Road	High Barnet	0	Up to 2 years	16
Tudor Road	High Barnet	0	Up to 2 years	16
Barfield	Oakleigh	0	4 – 5 years	12
Simmons Way	Oakleigh	0	4 years	5
Brook Farm North / South	Totteridge	0	12 – 18 months	4
Whetstone Stray	Totteridge	0	9 months plus	not available
Bells Hill	Underhill	0	3 – 6 months	not available
Brent Place, Barnet	Underhill	0	N/A	5
Dollis Valley	Underhill	0	9 months plus	not available
Stanhope Road	Underhill	0	2 years	1
Glebeland	Woodhouse	0	Up to 5 years	12
Woodhouse	Woodhouse	0	2 – 3 years	49

Finchley and Golders

Site Name	Ward	No vacant plots	Length of time on Waiting List	No. on Waiting List
Childs Hill	Childs Hill	0	Up to 5 years	60
Needham Terrace	Childs Hill	0	10 years	22
Thornfield Avenue	Church End	0	Up to 18 months	not available
Coppetts Road (Halliwick)	Coppetts	0	12 – 18 months	not available
East Finchley	East Finchley	0	approx 8 years	70
Finchley Charities Site – Fuel Land	East Finchley	0		
Vale Farm	East Finchley	0	Up to 2 years	not available
Cherry Tree Hill	Garden Suburb	0	3 years	not available
Finchley Manor	Garden Suburb	0	2 – 3 years	not available

Site Name	Ward	No vacant plots	Length of time on Waiting List	No. on Waiting List
Hospital Fields West / East	Golders Green	0	3 month plus	not available
Brent Way	West Finchley	0	N/A	not available
Fursby Avenue	West Finchley	0	2 – 3 years	not available
Gordon Road	West Finchley	0	Up to 4 years	47
Nether Court Avenue	West Finchley	0	N/A	not available
Pointalls (Kaysland)	West Finchley	0	12 – 18 months	not available

Hendon

Site Name	Ward	No vacant plots	Length of time on Waiting List	No. on Waiting List
Abbots Road	Burnt Oak	0	6 – 12 months	not available
Montrose Avenue	Burnt Oak	0	1 year plus	5
Booth Road	Colindale	0	2 – 3 years	7
Sheaveshill Court	Colindale	0		
Meadfield	Edgware	0	Full	
Deans Lane	Hale	0	2 years	not available
Hendon Grove	Hendon	0	Two plus years	42
Archfields	Mill Hill	0	N/A	not available
Daws Lane	Mill Hill	0	1 year plus	not available
Frith Manor	Mill Hill	0	2 – 3 years	3
Lawrence Street	Mill Hill	0	6 month plus	not available
Mill Hill	Mill Hill	0	6 months plus	Not available
Sanders Lane	Mill Hill	0	2 – 3 years	11
Tretawn Gardens	Mill Hill	0	Full	not available
Wise Lane	Mill Hill		6 – 12 months	not available
Cool Oak Lane	West Hendon	0	6 months plus	not available

Question 11

Councillor Rowan Turner

Does the Cabinet Member welcome the Mayor of London's decision to scrap the targets for Gypsy and Traveller sites as part of his London Plan review?

Answer by Councillor Richard Cornelius

Yes. This decision reflects reality and allows us to assess genuine local need for these pitches and determine what to do about it.

Question 12

Councillor Ross Houston

At September's Cabinet Meeting a Council motion proposed and voted through by the Conservative Group welcoming the Government's Housing Benefit reforms was accepted, and the Cabinet Member for Policy and Performance was tasked to liaise with government to implement the policy in Barnet. Six weeks later, at October's Cabinet Meeting, the Leader of the Council published a letter from herself to Eric Pickles setting out her "concerns" about the Housing Benefit reforms and asked him to "carefully consider" them. What is the the explanation for the Leader's change of heart?

Answer by Councillor Lynne Hillan, Leader of the Council

I welcome the principle of the reforms to Housing Benefit arrangements. My letter to the Secretary of State set out some specific concerns around how the detailed arrangements for the housing benefit reforms would operate, and in particular the potential financial impact on Barnet of meeting our homelessness duties. It was in light of these issues that I asked the Secretary of State to consider a more flexible approach to his proposals, particularly in London. My position on supporting the overarching policy has not changed.

Question 13**Councillor John Hart**

Please could the Cabinet Member briefly outline plans to give self-management to allotments sites in Barnet?

Answer by Councillor Brian Coleman

The proposed new management arrangements will follow the Big Society and Localism and will mean that the management of the allotment service is devolved in its entirety to the extent permitted by legislation.

Under a new management arrangement it is intended that all responsibility for infrastructure, boundary fences, hard surfaces etc that currently rest with the Council will be transferred to the allotment mutual and the associated income. The community organisations will manage all aspects of the allotments.

Question 14**Councillor Pauline Coakley Webb**

Will the Cabinet Member for Environment provide details of what plans are in place to ensure a better response to gritting the roads this winter? How many operatives will be involved and which parts of the borough will not be gritted? What measures are in place to grit around sheltered housing areas?

Answer by Councillor Brian Coleman

The Council has updated its service plan following the success of last winter and the recent scrutiny report for the provision of the winter service for the next winter. The Council's salt barn has been filled with salt and further orders of salt have been placed. There are 9 gritting vehicles dedicated to winter gritting with loading facilities and three footway gritting machines. There are sufficient drivers to operate two shifts so that winter gritting can be carried out on a 24-hour basis, should weather conditions require. During severe weather conditions and snow, the Council has access to some 300 staff that can be deployed in snow clearing operations.

All public roads in the Borough have been prioritised in three categories for salt gritting:

- ❖ Priority 1: Principal roads, class 1 district roads which are used as main commuter routes and bus routes. A total of some 238 kms of roads (or 35% of the Council's network) are included in Priority 1 and these roads are split into 8 gritting routes.
- ❖ Priority 2: Roads in the vicinity of shopping centres, Railway stations, Hospitals, public buildings and schools, roads with steep gradients. A total of some 168 kms of roads (or 24% of the Council's network) are included in Priority 2 and these roads are split into 22 gritting routes.
- ❖ Priority 3: The rest of the Borough roads.

Priority 2 and 3 are normally post treated to deal with snow accumulation. Priority 2 roads will only be treated after priority 1 roads have been treated and found to be safe and running.

No housing areas are gritted by the Highway service as these are not part of the public highway.

Question 15**Councillor John Hart**

Please could the Cabinet Member outline why a review of the services our libraries offer is necessary?

Answer by Councillor Robert Rams

There are two key reasons that I believe a strategic review of libraries is required. Firstly, to make sure that library services are relevant, high-quality and meet the needs of our residents. Secondly, in a difficult financial environment, we must consider ways to make services more effective, efficient, and lower cost.

The Council is facing significant financial pressures over coming years, as local government funding is expected to reduce by around 27% over four years. Against a challenging financial backdrop, we must make sure that we continue to provide excellent services.

A recent report showed that the numbers who go to a library every week has dropped by a third in five years, and adult book issues have also decreased by close to 10% over five years. We need to make sure that our library service is relevant, meets the changing needs of our residents, attracts new users and supports those who are disconnected from library services. It must also provide value for money in this extremely tight financial climate.

I have requested a strategic review of libraries so that we have an opportunity to involve residents in shaping services for the next few years, investigate options to reduce back office costs, consider ways to get more value from our assets – for example, by sharing buildings with other public services, build better relationships with other local partners, and meet the needs of our residents. I believe that public services are best protected and enhanced by making sure that meet the needs of residents, match changes in social trends, targeting our resources where they are most needed, and seeking efficiency in how we deliver services.

It may be that we consider the opportunities to share buildings with other Council services or public service partners, as we are doing successfully in the rebuilt Burnt Oak Library and Customer Service Centre, and five Library Children Centres. We will look at some of these options to see whether they would complement and support the library service, give good community space, make sense for customers, and provide further efficiency. In addition, we could investigate more innovative ways of working with other local library authorities to share services, develop, and reduce costs.

Our library service has been successful because it has adapted and innovated to meet needs, from offering a 24/7 online reference service and ebooks, providing book club resources, to launching early literacy projects in community settings. In times of financial constraint, this review is required to consider how we can continue to adapt and to improve service with less money.

Question 16**Councillor Jim Tierney**

The Cabinet Member for Children has been quoted saying that he is "totally converted to the Big Society". Can he explain how Barnet's voluntary sector will be able to grow and sustain itself if his Administration's proposals to cut £505,000 from voluntary sector grants goes ahead?

Answer by Councillor Andrew Harper

Knowing that severe constraints on public funding are on the way, Barnet's voluntary sector will no doubt have already worked hard and should continue to work hard to consolidate what it delivers and who delivers it in Barnet. The Council recognises the important role the sector plays in serving the community, and will continue to support the voluntary sector in a number of ways, including:

- The funding to maintain volunteer brokerage in some form is likely to be continued;

- Local infrastructure support for the voluntary sector [currently supplied by Community Barnet] will be re-commissioned;
- The Council will put aside a substantial sum to start a three-year Big Society Innovation Fund which will prime new activity; and
- Enabling the voluntary sector to further expand the range of services provided for children and young people, by providing advice, training and expertise to organisations.

In addition, Barnet is arguing for most of the London Councils grants budget – our contribution is over £1m – to be ‘repatriated’ to Barnet. We are currently a net contributor to this fund. Repatriation will allow us to retain use a proportion of the funds for buying services from the voluntary sector.

Question 17

Councillor Brian Gordon

Are we anticipating more homelessness within Barnet or a greater strain on our social housing resources as a consequence of the reduction of Housing Benefit being applied by the coalition Government?

Answer by Councillor Andrew Cornelius

A number of changes to Housing Benefit are proposed, the most significant of which are the introduction of caps to local housing allowance (LHA) levels from April 2011 and a shift from calculating LHA based on the 50th percentile of rents in an area to the 30th percentile from October 2011. (This means that LHA will only cover the full rent on 30% of properties available in the private sector). The full impact of the changes will be offset to some extent by an increase in the total amount of discretionary payments that can be paid by local authorities to £40 million in 2011/12 (a 300% increase on 2009/10).

Estimates from the DWP and London Councils suggest that between 440 and 680 private rented sector households in Barnet will see Housing Benefit shortfalls of between £33 and £128 a week in their benefit due to the caps. A further 7,120 households will be affected by the percentile changes from October 2011, with average reductions of between £8 and £36 a week on top of the April changes. Households in larger accommodation will see the biggest reductions in their housing benefit. The financial impact on Barnet is not yet fully understood, mainly because we do not know how the market will respond to the changes, and how many landlords will be prepared to reduce the rents they currently charge.

The private rented sector has played an important role in helping to reduce homelessness in Barnet, providing more homes for housing applicants than the social housing sector for the last two years. Clearly, the changes could make it more difficult for households on housing benefit to access the private rented sector, whilst existing households may find their tenancy becomes unsustainable. This could lead to an increase in homelessness, and to mitigate against this the Council has identified the following actions:

- Seek agreement with other London Boroughs to limit incentives paid to private landlords to those paid by the host Borough;
- Work with local landlords through the Barnet Landlord Forum to encourage them to adjust their rents rather than seek removal of existing tenants;
- Develop a communications strategy to provide information for tenants affected by the changes;
- Target additional discretionary payments to minimise the impact of the changes on vulnerable households in the Borough; and
- Ongoing assessment of the impact of the changes.

Question 18**Councillor Anne Hutton**

The Cabinet Member has said that no decisions on cuts to libraries will be made until after the Strategic Libraries Review has completed. Why is he suggesting over £1.3m of cuts to libraries in the October published budget headlines?

Answer by Councillor Robert Rams

As a result of the Comprehensive Spending Review, local government funding is expected to reduce by approximately 27 per cent over four years. In this challenging financial climate, it is imperative that the Council develops options, targets, and projects to find ways to provide effective services with less money.

The Council has been planning for this scenario for some time, and developed a series of budget proposals to consider how we can address this challenge. All Council services have been tasked to consider options to reduce spending by 20%. In some cases, clear proposals have been developed to demonstrate how this can be achieved.

As the Strategic Library Review will report early 2011, no detailed proposals can be made at this stage. No options have been proposed. They will be developed following a major consultation programme.

To aid Council budget planning for the next few years, a high-level target has been provided. The Libraries, Museums, and Local Studies service will be asked to consider how to make savings of £1.3m, around 20% of the current service budget. Until the Strategic Library Review reports in early 2011, this remains a target and no estimated level of specific proposals or savings can be provided at this stage.

Question 19**Councillor Brian Gordon**

Would the Cabinet Member please assist by keeping a watchful eye on the progress of the installation of play equipment at the end of Farm Road which has now been agreed to by the Council, through the Councillors in Hale?

Answer by Councillor Brian Coleman

Following confirmation that the scheme has been approved, Officers are progressing with the necessary authorisations and instructions to Contractors to facilitate the installation on the site as soon as possible. I am sure Hale ward residents will appreciate their Ward Councillors efforts on this matter.

Question 20**Councillor Ansuya Sodha**

Will the Cabinet Member explain how the suggested £165k saving in the mobile library service would be realised?

Answer by Councillor Robert Rams

The Libraries, Museums, and Local Studies service will be asked to consider how to make savings of around 20% of the current service budget. A review of the mobile and home library is planned, to help us to provide a better library service for vulnerable residents in this tight financial environment.

This review process aims to identify ways to reach a greater proportion of people who are housebound, and to support and extend access to library services for other vulnerable residents. No options have been proposed at this stage, and preferred options – indicating costs, savings, and benefits – will be developed over coming months.

A range of options could be considered, including: updating the routes of both services to better support voluntary, community, and social care infrastructure; using new delivery models to reach new groups and increase take up of the service; making improvements to hours of service, routes, stock management to improve efficiency; and updating vehicles to improve access to the service and improve efficiency.

At this stage, we have a savings target applied (£125,000 reduction in budget after three years) rather than a proposed option. Key decision-making criteria to be applied in this project will include: the ability to reach a greater proportion of those who are supported to live at home; ensuring the service is very well targeted for our most vulnerable residents; building closer links with community and voluntary groups, and social services infrastructure; and improving and extending our range of services.

Question 21

Councillor Brian Salinger

Can the appropriate Cabinet Member please advise the Council what steps are being taken to ensure that all FOI requests are fully answered within the timescale laid down by the legislation?

Answer by Councillor Melvin Cohen

The following steps have been taken to help improve the Council's performance in giving full responses to FOI requests within the statutory timescales:

- Link Officers are already established in all of the Council's Services to oversee the response to requests made under the Freedom of Information Act 2000 (FOI).
- Earlier this year steps were taken to strengthen the role of the Link Officers network and raise the profile of their work.
- A support framework has been set up to assist Link Officers (including regular forum meetings, external training, regular FOI news updates, FOI casework surgeries and intranet guidance).
- Work flow processes and templates have been created for responding to FOI requests, subject access requests (SAR) under the Data Protection Act and Environmental Information Regulations (EIR) requests.
- Designated officers within the Corporate Governance Directorate act as a point of contact for the information Commissioner's Office (ICO) and lead on communications between the Council and the ICO.
- They also provide a central point of contact for all FOI (and SAR) related legal and procedural advice requested by Link Officers.
- Development of the skills base of Officers dealing with FOI requests.
- We have been updating and expanding the Publication Scheme (exceeding the Corporate Plan Quarter 2 target of 20% expansion).
- There are regular reviews to monitor progress on responding to FOI requests.

FOI Requests received by the Council

Calendar Years

- Jan 2009 to Dec 2009 – 641.
- Jan 2010 to Sept 2010 – 832 (3 months of the year remaining) – projected year end total of 1109.

Financial Years

- April 2009 to March 2010 – 798
- April 2010 to Sept 2010 – 547 (6 months of the year remaining) – projected year end total of 1094.

Question 22**Councillor Anne Hutton**

The Strategic Libraries Review envisages 25% of cuts to the Libraries Service. Is it really possible to cut a quarter of the services' budget without closing any libraries?

Answer by Councillor Robert Rams

I am committed to providing an excellent library service in Barnet. That is why a strategic review of libraries has been set up to respond to two key challenges. Firstly, to make sure that library services are relevant, high-quality, and meet the needs of those who live, work or study in Barnet now and in the future. Secondly, to investigate options to ensure these services provide excellent value for money.

The bare facts about all Councils' finances are that we will have significantly less money over coming years. Barnet is expecting to have to make savings of around 20 per cent over the next three years. To achieve a 20% reduction in Libraries, Museums, and Local Studies spending, £1.3m savings would be required. We are committed to reducing our back office costs as far as possible, and will look at a range of options to achieve this.

We cannot pretend there won't have to be savings to some frontline services, or changes to how services are provided. The challenge is to explore how providing services in a different way can bridge any funding gap, and ensure that our services are as efficient and innovative as they can be.

It may be that we consider the opportunities to share buildings with other Council services or public service partners, as we are doing successfully in the rebuilt Burnt Oak Library and Customer Service Centre, and five Library Children Centres. We will look at some of these options to see whether they would complement and support the library service, make sense for customers, and provide further efficiency. I am keen to stress that simply to view the service as a collection of buildings is to sell it short, it is so much more than that.

Our library service has been successful because it has adapted and innovated to meet needs, from offering a 24/7 online reference service and ebooks, to providing book club resources. In times of financial constraint, we need to consider how we can continue to adapt and to improve service with less money.

Question 23**Councillor Brian Salinger**

Can the Cabinet Member for Housing tell the Council how many of the properties that have been let and are anticipated to be let this year would have been let to people attracting additional points within the new proposed banding attributable to voluntary work or employment, had the proposed system been in place?

Answer by Councillor Richard Cornelius

Although applicants are asked what their income is and whether they are working, employment and volunteering are not a feature of the current housing assessment and as such are not recorded on the Council's housing database. This means it is not possible to provide the information requested.

Officers are in the process of working through a sample of higher pointed cases to test them against the proposed new bands in preparation for the transition to the new system, which is due to be implemented early in 2011 subject to Cabinet approval.

Question 24**Councillor Alex Brodwin**

Is it really right to pay a Special Responsibility Allowance of over £15k per annum to anyone for Chairing a Committee that meets only twice a year?

Answer by Councillor Lynne Hillan, Leader of the Council

It is simplistic to suggest that £15,000 is being paid for chairing two meetings a year. Members should know that there is a substantial amount of work that takes place above and beyond these two public meetings, involving Officers and Members and other meetings.

Question 25

Councillor Anne Hutton

How can the Cabinet Member justify suggesting cuts of over £9m to the Children's Services budget when the coalition Government has agreed to ring fence the education budget?

Answer by Councillor Andrew Harper

The Government's ring fencing announcement refers only to the Schools budget; this is funding delegated directly to schools or 'passported' via the Council.

The Schools budget is not included in the Children's Service base budget. The potential savings to the Children's Service budget relate to the non-schools element, where significant reductions in Government funding are expected. This budget includes some services provided to schools by the Council, but not funding directly delegated to schools.

Question 26

Councillor Kath McGuirk

Will the Cabinet Member give me an assurance that the artsdepot grant will not be cut?

Answer by Councillor Robert Rams

"The budget savings proposals agreed for consultation by Cabinet last month included an option to reduce our corporate grants programme by over 40%. The grant to artsdepot constitutes a large proportion – nearly a fifth – of this budget. Therefore, I cannot guarantee that artsdepot's grant will not be cut. Indeed, I think this is very likely.

In the current financial climate, we cannot any longer sustain all of our services and we must consider to what extent we continue to fund arts provision in the Borough. We have been very clear with artsdepot that it is time to consider how they can – in the future – operate independently of the Council. To this end, we have been working closely with artsdepot to explore how they can move forward on a sound financial footing.

Question 27

Councillor Barry Rawlings

What are the lower priority services that would cease in the Supporting People and Voluntary Sector section of the Adults budget proposals?

Answer by Councillor Sachin Rajput

Current budgetary provision for prevention services commissioned by Adult Social Services (AdSS) comprises £2.8M in respect of voluntary sector services and £4.7M in respect of Supporting People services. Reductions in expenditure on both programmes are specified in the Medium Term Financial Strategy.

The Council's priorities for its investment in prevention services are clearly set out in *Looking after Yourself – A prevention framework for Barnet*. The Council and voluntary sector providers worked together earlier this year to complete a review of the work of the sector. The intention was then to fulfil the Prevention Framework's commitment to publish a timetable for procurement to replace most existing provision in order to bring the sector into line with the Framework's priorities. This work is now concerned with scenario-planning based on different levels of funding reduction and will be finalised following the Council's budget decisions.

Question 28

Councillor Barry Rawlings

What is the reduction in block contract of floating support preventative services as listed in the Adults budget proposals and how will this impact on the proposal to offer floating support to a wider client base?

Answer by Councillor Sachin Rajput

All areas of Adult Social Services expenditure including the Supporting People (SP) programme have been examined in order to inform budget proposals. The SP programme comprises services commissioned by Childrens and Housing although most are commissioned by Adult Social Services.

‘Floating support’ is one of the main types of SP service, and simply refers to support delivered mainly through home visits by support workers and available to anyone in Barnet who would benefit from support irrespective of where they are living. Funding for this type of service represents roughly half of current expenditure on SP provision. It includes one large contract worth £1.4M pa that supports all customer groups and several smaller specialist contracts that work mainly with specific types of need.

SP is a fully inclusive programme that provides support to a very wide customer base, including homeless people, women at risk of domestic violence, older people and people with disabilities. The Council has not identified any need to widen the customer base and has no plan to do so. If budget reductions are agreed, the Council will work with providers to ensure that support continues to be prioritised for people who would receive most benefit, in accordance with the policy directions set out in the Prevention Framework.

Question 29**Councillor Anne Hutton**

What will be left of the Youth Service if the suggested £3.259m savings to that service go ahead?

Answer by Councillor Andrew Harper

The figure of £3.259m represents the sum of all potential budget savings to the Youth Service over 3 years; these remain options at this stage.

If it is decided to make this level of savings, a core targeted youth service would remain to meet statutory requirements to provide Information, Advice and Guidance, advice and assessment for young people with Learning Difficulties and/or Disabilities, and access to positive activities for vulnerable young people. The voluntary sector will help to provide more universal services to young people.

Question 30**Councillor Agnes Slocombe**

What are the "less deprived areas" suggested for making cuts to teaching resources in children's centres in the budget headlines?

Answer by Councillor Andrew Harper

A project is currently underway to evaluate potential operating models for the delivery of Children's Centre services in light of a likely reduction in Sure Start funding.

The LA makes decisions around deprivation through a national dataset known as the 'Indices of Multiple Deprivation' (IMD), which are measured at a small area level known as lower super output areas (with an average population 1500). The index takes into account several variables including income, employment, health deprivation, education, housing, crime and living environment.

Barnet has 210 super output areas, of these 44 lower super output areas (LSOA) fall within the 30% most deprived areas nationally, which are predominantly located in the west of the Borough. The 30% indicator is used to describe the most deprived areas when reviewing the most needy centres.

Question 31**Councillor Alan Schneiderman**

Why are there no proposals in the budget headlines for making savings on consultants, and what has been the spend on consultants so far this year?

Answer by Councillor Lynne Hillan, Leader of the Council

As part of the proposals in the budget headlines, savings in consultancy spend have not been specifically identified, but form part of the detailed proposals that have been put together at individual service level. For example, there are a number of budget proposals around re-organising staffing arrangements, reduction of spending on supplies and services, LEAN reviews, changes to working practices and other efficiency measures. All of these proposals involving services will involve reducing the costs of consultancy where this is the most cost effective way of running these services.

In terms of the current spend on consultancy for 2010/11, this information is not immediately available as these costs are spread across all Council departments. I will verbally update you at Council.

Question 32**Councillor Alison Moore**

In light of the expectation that residents will have to grit their own streets, will the Administration be significantly increasing the number of on-street grit bins across the Borough?

Answer by Councillor Brian Coleman

The Council currently has some 295 grit bins throughout the Borough. These have already been checked and filled with salt, ready for the start of the new season. In addition there are some 38 grit bins in the town centres that are operated by the town centre keepers. The Council's provision of grit bins is amongst the highest in London and I would welcome suggestions from Ward Councillors for additional bins (budget allowing) in the Borough. I have recently scrapped the rather bureaucratic "rules" on siting grit bins and all requests will be considered on their merits.

The Winter Maintenance Task and Finish Group considered the Council's response to the cold weather and snowfall in December 2009/January 2010. The Group's recommendations, which were agreed by Cabinet on 20 October, included a pilot scheme on the concept of 'Community Keepers' of grit/salt and I am considering this.

Question 33**Councillor Alison Moore**

Can the Cabinet Member tell me how many on street parking meters were out of service for more than 1 day during 2010? What percentage does this represent and which Town Centres are worst affected?

Answer by Councillor Brian Coleman

423 on street parking meters were reported out of service for more than 1 day during 2010.

95% of the faults reported daily were dealt with the following working day.

The Town Centres worst affected are Barnet, Hendon and Golders Green.

Question 34**Councillor Alison Moore**

Can the Cabinet Member assure Council that there are no quotas for issuing PCNs by Barnet's traffic wardens?

Answer by Councillor Brian Coleman

The Council does not have any Traffic Wardens, such officers being only employed by the Metropolitan Police Service and deployed entirely on the Transport for London Road Network and not Borough roads. The Council does, however, employ Civil Enforcement Officers (CEO) and these are tasked with patrolling those streets for which the Council is responsible and ensuring that motorists comply with the regulations. There are no individual quotas for Penalty Charge Notices and a CEO's performance is assessed within the Council's overall framework which takes account of aspects such as attendance, customer feedback, and diligence in carrying out a range of duties.

Question 35**Councillor Alison Moore**

Would the Cabinet Member advise why Councillors surgery details and contact phone numbers have been left off the Councillors details in Barnet First in the last edition?

Answer by Councillor Lynne Hillan, Leader of the Council

Barnet First currently consists of 16 pages and has traditionally devoted two of these pages to listing details of all members in every issue which is 12.5 per cent of the information we send to residents.

Typically other Council magazines only list all Council Members immediately after elections. They do not publish a list at any other time. I am keen that we provide full information about Councillors and their activities and we have proposals to revise our website to do just that. I think this is an appropriate balance in how we use scarce resources at this time. I will also ensure that guidance is included on the Councillors' information page for residents to access the details of their individual Councillors either by calling the Council or via the Council website.

Question 36**Councillor Geof Cooke**

The Council's street lighting PFI contractor customarily blocks the pavement while replacing lamp columns. On average per lamp column, for how long do pedestrians have to walk in the road and what is done by the Council to minimise that time?

Answer by Councillor Brian Coleman

It is not possible to provide a definitive timescale per lamp column, as the works required at each location may vary depending on site circumstances and underground obstructions. It is not customary to block the whole of the pavement while replacing lamp columns. However, on those rare occasions where the whole of the footway on one side of the road is closed due to an excavation the opposite side is, whenever possible, left unobstructed at that point and signage is installed to guide pedestrians to that effect. Therefore, one would expect the general public to cross the road and use the unobstructed footway. Unfortunately, it is not possible to prevent those pedestrians who seem to prefer to walk along the road to pass the guarded excavation from doing so.

If Councillor Cooke wishes to report such cases I am sure Officers will deal with them.

Question 37**Councillor Geof Cooke**

When notified by a utility of a need to dig up the road for a non-urgent purpose e.g. to fix a significant but not catastrophic water leak, what is the average delay between the Council receiving the request and the permitted date for the work to be done?

Answer by Councillor Brian Coleman

Most of these works take less than 3 days to complete and are classified as Minor Works. The notice we require (from us receiving a permit request to works starting) is 3 working days. If the works duration is between 3 and 10 days then the notice we require is 10 days. There is also the ability to shorten this time by early start request from the utility.