

REVISED VERSION

Council Questions to Cabinet Members 12 July 2011 Questions and Responses

Question 1

Councillor Susette Palmer

Could the relevant Cabinet Member please let us know when we are going to update Councillors outmoded windows 'internet explorer'?

Answer by Councillor Daniel Thomas

If any of the Councillors require the new browser then they should request this through the members support line and the Members Support Officer will action this request and provide any training and/or guidance that may be necessary.

Question 2

Councillor Andrew Strongolou

Does Barnet Council welcome the recommendations of the Munro report and how well-placed is it to respond to the recommendations if they are accepted in full by Government?

Answer by Councillor Andrew Harper

We do indeed welcome Eileen Munro's recommendations which put the focus on doing the right thing to safeguard children. We are supportive of the increased emphasis on the professional judgement of social workers and agree that national and local performance information should be used to help facilitate improvement and promote accountability, rather than as the sole measure of performance. It is vitally important that we continue to work closely with our partners to continually improve the way we safeguard Barnet's children, and we would welcome Government research into the impact of health reorganisation on protecting children.

It is a testament to the existing good practice in Barnet that many of the recommendations are already part of our everyday work. We are already investing in early intervention and prevention services, which Munro sees as crucial. We are also involved in the SCIE (Social Care Institute of Excellence) pilot for learning from serious case reviews that Munro recommends as a way to understand the underlying issues influencing practice. We look forward to Government's response later in the year.

Question 3

Councillor Alison Moore

Given that Barnet has missed its targets for reducing the attainment gap between children with SEN / on free school meals and their peers, would the Cabinet Member accept that education in Barnet is not serving all children to the same level?

Answer by Councillor Andrew Harper

Like other London boroughs, in Barnet there is a disparity between the attainment of those eligible for free school meals and those with SEN and their peers. Overall attainment is high in Barnet – with 66% achieving 5 A* to C GCSEs last year, compared with 55% nationally. Although there is an attainment gap, both children with SEN and those eligible for free school meals have significantly higher attainment than the national average. Last year 43% of Barnet's children on FSM and 31% of those with SEN achieved 5 A* to C GCSEs, compared with 31% and 23% nationally. Performance for both these groups has been improving over time.

Question 4

Councillor Susette Palmer

Could the Cabinet Member please tell me how many apprenticeships for young people(16 -18 and for people over 19) Barnet has created in the past year and how many we currently have and in which departments?

Answer by Councillor Andrew Harper

The Council has established an apprenticeship steering group that has been set up to increase both the supply of apprenticeships and to stimulate demand amongst young people. The plan produced by the group has a target to recruit an additional ten apprenticeships within the council by scrutinising vacancies as to their suitability, converting existing posts and replacing agency staff with apprenticeships where appropriate.

We currently have one 16-18 year old and eight 19-24 year olds in employment at Barnet under the apprenticeship scheme. Of these nine apprenticeships, five are directly employed by the council (created this academic year) and four are employed by our suppliers and contractors. Of the five that are employed by the council, two are based in libraries services, two are based in children centres and one is based in the leaving care team.

Question 5

Councillor Brian Salinger

At the Council meeting on 25th Jan, the then Cabinet member for Housing undertook to review the use made by the Council of the London Housing Consortium.

Can the Cabinet Member tell me if the Council was represented the last meeting of the LHC, what form the review took and what the outcome of the review was?

Answer by Councillor Tom Davey

The London Housing Consortium was set up about 20 years ago to provide a mechanism for local authorities to procure building work through framework agreements. Barnet Homes have used the London Housing Consortium to procure capital works to the Council's housing stock in the past, but not since 2008. We have not procured any work through the LHC since 2008.

We are still full members, and as such both in theory potentially liable for any deficits that the LHC may incur or a share in any surpluses generated. Members of the consortium will only benefit from surpluses if they have procured work through it during the financial year concerned, and there has never been a situation where members have been required to contribute to a deficit.

Barnet Homes do routinely consider using the LHC framework when procuring work to the Council's housing stock, although the opportunities for doing so were small whilst the Decent Homes contracts were in operation. In a recent example, Barnet Homes found that the LHC range did not include a range of suitable fire resistant block entrance doors needed as part of a fire safety programme, and in other instances LHC prices were found to be uncompetitive with those procured elsewhere.

Now that Barnet Homes have completed the Decent Homes programme, the Council has started work with the ALMO on developing a new investment strategy for council homes going forwards, and this could make further use of the LHC framework.

Barnet Council was not represented at the last meeting of the LHC.

Question 6

Councillor Geof Cooke

The special Internal Audit report on procurement of security services from MetPro exposed dreadful failings in the procurement function in Barnet including a lack of any central register of contracts but earlier routine reports on the central procurement team twice gave a verdict of 'Limited Assurance' rather than 'No Assurance'. Are there any plans to increase the staffing of Internal Audit?

Answer by Councillor Daniel Thomas

Resource levels are kept under constant review and will be maintained at a level sufficient to maintain a robust internal audit service.

Following a review of internal audit by the external auditors, the external auditors submitted a report to the Audit Committee and noted in their conclusions that no significant issues were identified with

internal audit's work, the CIPFA Code had been applied in all significant respects and the work was produced to a satisfactory standard.

Question 7

Councillor Susette Palmer

Could the Cabinet Member please tell me how many children Barnet currently has entitled to free school meals and hence the pupil premium that Barnet is getting from the Coalition Government.

Answer by Councillor Andrew Harper

There are a total of 7,888 children in Barnet aged 5 to 16 (i.e. Reception to Year 11) who qualify for Free School Meals. This includes children who come from families where one parent is in the armed services (UK or other), looked after children, and those who are eligible due to their parents' financial circumstances.

Pupil premium funding from the DfE does not only include Free School Meals in its scope – it also includes funding for 'Service Children' and 'Looked After Children'. The total pupil premium funding consists of £3,422,400 of which £3,391,840 is contributed towards ensuring Free School Meals for the 7,888 children entitled.

It should be noted that the above arrangements and figures are likely to change in the near future as the number of schools converting to academies increases. Academies receive their funding, including pupil premiums, directly from central government, and the local authority has no oversight of the funding arrangements.

Question 8

Councillor Brian Salinger

At the Council meeting on 2nd November 2010 the Council unanimously approved a motion in my name in the following terms:

"This Council recognises the importance to all residents of Barnet of the need to safeguard our children. This Council welcomes and supports the decision of the government to confirm the roll-out across the country the measures that have become known as 'Sarah's Law' which will enable parents to request information on any adult with access to their children. They are required not to pass on this information to anyone else. Police will decide whether to pass on any information. The pilot schemes have been a success with fewer requests than expected and these 315 formal applications from parents and carers resulted in the disclosure of the background of 21 convicted child sex offenders. The Home Office says more than 60 children were protected from abuse in that period. Council calls on the Cabinet to ensure that they work in partnership with other relevant agencies to ensure full and appropriate publicity is given to the measure when it is rolled out in London"

The measure was rolled out in London in March 2011.

Can the Cabinet Member tell the Council what steps have been taken to implement the Council decision?

Answer by Councillor Andrew Harper

We recognise the importance of safeguarding our children and the role that measures such as Sarah's Law have to play. There is a range of communications from the Home office to publicise the Child Sex Offender Disclosure Scheme and we are posting these on our Barnet Safeguarding Children Board (BSCB) website. This type of information is also included in safeguarding training. Parent's Protect is the organisation nationally tasked with ensuring parents and local communities have information to help prevent sexual abuse. BSCB has invited Parent's Protect to speak at its annual conference in November and hopes to work with them to run awareness sessions for parents and the wider community.

Question 9

Councillor Alan Schneiderman

Why, years after millions of pounds was invested in collapsed Icelandic banks in contravention of the Council's Treasury Management policies, is Treasury Management still given only limited assurance by Internal Audit?

Answer by Councillor Daniel Thomas

The Internal Audit report on Treasury Management was given a limited assurance due to one high priority recommendation on the use of unencrypted laptops within the section that did not comply with the Council's data security policy. Other issues included formalizing scrutiny arrangements and keeping reconciliations up to date. There were no exceptions found in relation to compliance with the Council's Treasury Management Investment Strategy/Policy. The priority one recommendations has subsequently been resolved through IT and Treasury Management will be subject to another audit during 2011-12 where we would expect the assurance to improve given progress against the action plan.

Question 10

Councillor Susette Palmer

Has Property Services set a rent or price for Church Farmhouse? If not when?

Answer by Councillor Daniel Thomas

Property Services received an enquiry from the Library Service regarding the use of Church Farmhouse by a community group. The enquiry was regarding expected rental price for the property and was received in April 2011. Property Services responded directly to the Library Service on 18 April 2011 with the relevant information regarding the expected rental price, in line with market evidence and with a note that any rental agreement would be subject to lease negotiation. My understanding is that we have not heard back from the group concerned and a report regarding Church Farmhouse will be coming to the Cabinet Resources Committee in the near future.

Question 11

Councillor Brian Salinger

In the light of the changed method of allocating available council and housing association properties, can the Cabinet Member explain to the Council how any member of the Council or indeed any member of the public can be certain that any particular property that has been allocated, has gone to the family or the individual in greatest housing need?

Answer by Councillor Tom Davey

Applicants who fall into one of the priority bands under the new Allocations Scheme are offered a choice of suitable accommodation from a pool of properties that are available when they approach the Council for help. Priority is then determined by band and date of application where there is more than one suitable applicant.

Housing needs officers work hard to correctly identify the right properties for customers in priority bands but clients are expected to be realistic about what is likely to be available and can have their priority demoted if they refuse two reasonable offers of accommodation.

The Council is confident that the new system is more effective at prioritising those in the highest need than previously, as under the Choice Based Lettings bidding system (CBL) , those applicants with the highest priority often failed to bid for suitable properties, allowing some applicants in low priority need to secure a property.

Cabinet has agreed that the policy will be fully evaluated once it has been in operation for 6 months, and this will include an assessment of the fairness of the new scheme.

Question 12

Councillor Pauline Coakley Webb

Will the Cabinet Member listen to the views of residents and not close Friern Barnet library?

Answer by Councillor Robert Rams

We have completed a major consultation exercise listening to views of library users and residents and using this information to propose a new library strategy. We have also completed a second phase of consultation to take to responses to the proposed strategy.

I am very grateful to Cllr. Kate Salinger, who organised a meeting with Friern Barnet residents so that I could hear their views and ideas. As with other activities, these responses will be considered

as part of the consultation.

Cabinet will consider a final report on the library strategy at the end of July.

Question 13

Councillor Jack Cohen

In relation to the April 2011 published "Expenditure by Supplier" please provide details of the services purchased for entry number 590 under Commercial Directorate paid on 27 April in the amount of £3514 .80 and marked "redacted -commercially sensitive"

Answer by Councillor Daniel Thomas

This related to expenditure incurred on external legal fees in respect of the Adults Social Care project in the One Barnet programme.

Questions 14

Councillor Brian Gordon

There is concern within the local SACRE (Standing Advisory Council for Religious Education) and indeed other SACRE bodies around the country about the low priority being given to religious education in non-faith secondary schools, pursuant to the omission of RE from the humanities list for the new English Baccalaureate. In view of the numerous people within Barnet with religious affiliations, could the Council take a pro active stance in monitoring the quality and quantity of religious education in our non faith schools?

Answer by Councillor Andrew Harper

SACRE has oversight for religious education in the borough and publish an agreed syllabus for non religious schools to follow. SACRE is in the process of organising visits to schools to monitor implementation of the syllabus. Findings from this will be published in its annual report.

Question 15

Councillor Pauline Coakley Webb

What plans does Council have for the Friern Barnet library building and surrounding green areas to each side?

Answer by Councillor Robert Rams

There has been a period of consultation to listen to the views of library users and residents. No actions have been taken at this stage. We have not developed any specific plans or proposals for the Friern Barnet library building and surrounding green areas.

Question 16

Councillor Jack Cohen

In relation to the April 2011 published "Expenditure by Supplier" please provide details of the equipment material etc purchased for entry number 473 under Environment and Regeneration paid on the 15 April in the amount of £4400.00 and marked "redacted personal information".

Answer by Councillor Daniel Thomas

This related to works carried out by a contractor working at Hendon Cemetery. The name of the supplier was redacted as this was personal information (they are a sole trader).

Question 17

Councillor Brian Gordon

Can the Cabinet Member confirm that no pressure is being or will be exerted one way or the other by the Council on Barnet's schools to elect for academy status, and that the choice will be left entirely to the schools themselves?

Answer by Councillor Andrew Harper

The Academies Act allows schools to apply to convert to academy status. It is the school's governing body that takes the decision on whether or not to apply for academy status, and the Local Authority does not input into the process. It is then the Department of Education that decides whether or not to grant academy status to a school.

Barnet is supportive of schools that have been granted an academy order and will continue to welcome their inclusion in the wider schools partnership. We are committed to maintaining strong relationships between all schools regardless of their status.

Question 18**Councillor Alison Moore**

No Cabinet Members attended the last meeting of Budget & Performance Scrutiny, including the Cabinet Member responsible for Resources, and the Cabinet Member responsible for the easyCouncil programme. Does the Leader think this is acceptable, when important reports on the management of resources (MetPro and others) and important reports on easyCouncil outsourcing projects were on the agenda, and does he think this damages Barnet's reputation on accountability?

Answer by Councillor Richard Cornelius, Leader of the Council

I regret that I was not able to be at the meeting and further regret that no Cabinet Member was available to be questioned or comment. However senior officers were there and able to answer. Clearly it would be much better for relevant Cabinet Members to be in attendance

Question 19**Councillor Jack Cohen**

In relation to the April 2011 published "Expenditure by Supplier" please tell me the number of pens purchased for entry 505 under Central Expenses paid on the 11 April in the amount of £4214.10 and marked "pens to retired employees".

Answer by Councillor Daniel Thomas

There was no expenditure incurred in respect of this item. A purchase order was goods receipted in error, and this was cancelled.

Question 20**Councillor Brian Gordon**

How did the day of so-called industrial action recently pursued by the Trade Unions against the Government's very necessary economic stringency, impact upon the work of the Council and the services we provide to the public?

Answer by Councillor Richard Cornelius, Leader of the Council

The Council was not affected but some parents were inconvenienced when schools closed.

Question 21**Councillor Geof Cooke**

What is being done to rectify the injustice of the scrapping of the proposed bus stop in Summers Lane N12 near Sunny Way in which the lack of response to a 'consultation' letter giving the impression it was going ahead anyway has apparently been taken, completely wrongly, to indicate a lack of support for the proposal?

Answer by Councillor Brian Coleman

It was decided not to proceed with the scheme on the grounds of

- 1) loss of parking space
- 2) increased congestion in Summers Lane
- 3) no need for an additional bus stop
- 4) grass area to be paved over with loss of amenity
- 5) unnecessary expenditure on a non priority matter in times of shortage of public money

Question 22**Councillor Jack Cohen**

I refer the Cabinet Member to planning application f/05021/10 779 -783 Finchley Road NW11 reported to the Finchley and Golders Green Area Planning sub Committee on the 4 May 2011 and in particular the addendum report. Will the cabinet member confirm that the amounts set out to be paid by the developer to the Local Authority by way of section 106 have (as reported at the committee) been now been paid. Will the cabinet member confirm that the amounts for Highways Improvement (local to the site) in the amount of £60,000.00 and open spaces (ward level in the sum of £119,500.00 have both been paid in full. If so will the cabinet member tell me whether the monies have been spent for the purposes set out in the section 106 agreement.

Answer by Councillor Joanna Tambourides

I refer the Cabinet Member to planning application f/05021/10 779 -783 Finchley Road NW11 reported to the Finchley and Golders Green Area Planning sub Committee on the 4 May 2011 and in particular the addendum report. Will the cabinet member confirm that the amounts set out to be paid by the developer to the Local Authority by way of section 106 have (as reported at the committee) been now been paid. Will the cabinet member confirm that the amounts for Highways Improvement (local to the site) in the amount of £60,000.00 and open spaces (ward level in the sum of £119,500.00 have both been paid in full. If so will the cabinet member tell me whether the monies have been spent for the purposes set out in the section 106 agreement.

- 1.1 The most recent planning permission relating to the site was permission reference F/05021/10 which was for an amendment to planning application C02856P/04 dated 7th April 2005; the council has previously received money relating to this application which is shown in the table below (fig 1).
- 1.2 The permission F/05021/10 granted was subject to the satisfactory completion of a Section 106 legal agreement which to my knowledge has still not been completed.
- 1.3 The £60,000 payment relating to Highways improvements has been paid and partially spent in accordance with the section 106 agreement relating to permission C02856P/04. £13,140 has been spent towards footway improvements outside Matilda marks school and £3,000 has been spent towards the improvements to the junction of The Ridgeway/ Hodford Road/ The Vale and Rodborough Road.
- 1.4 The amount of £104,336 has been received towards the £119,500 Open spaces contribution. None of the received funds have been spent.
- 1.5 Figure 1 highlights the payments due, the payments which have been received and how the payments have been applied.

Figure 1

Planning Obligation	Amounts required	Amounts received Under Previous S106 Agreements	Amount Spent
<u>Affordable Housing (financial)</u> A contribution towards the provision of Affordable Housing within the London Borough of Barnet. (Current application).	£127,452.00	£0	£0
<u>Education Facilities (excl. libraries)</u> A contribution towards the provision of Education Facilities in the borough. (Combination of current application and the that carried over from application C02856P/04 dated 07/04/2005.)	£83,316.55	£60,515.00	£60,515- Spent towards improvements to Fairway/ Northway School
<u>Libraries (financial)</u> A contribution towards Library Facilities and	£452.00	£0	£0

Resources in the borough. (Current application).			
<u>Health</u> A contribution towards Health Facilities and Resources in the borough. (Current application).	£4,050.00	£0	£0
<u>Highways Improvement (local to the site)</u> A contribution towards local highway improvements within the vicinity of the development. Carried over from application C02856P/04 dated 07/04/2005.	£60,000.00	£68,821.33	£13,140 - Spent towards footway improvements outside Matilda marks School £3,000 – Spent towards improvements to the junction of The Ridgeway/Hodford Rd/The Vale/Rodborough Rd
Open Spaces (ward level) A contribution towards the improvement of open spaces in Childs Hill ward. Carried over from application C02856P/04 dated 07/04/2005.	£119,500.00	£104,336	£0
Monitoring of the Agreement Contribution towards the Council's costs in monitoring the obligations of the agreement. (Current application).	£2,838.00	£0	£0

Question 23

Councillor Barry Rawlings

Will the Leader reiterate his support (as stated at the April BMOSSC meeting) for the view that the Pinkham Way planning application should go to the Planning & Environment Committee for comment?

Answer by Councillor Richard Cornelius, Leader of the Council

Yes

Question 24

Councillor Geof Cooke

What is your assessment of the risk of progressing with a major expansion of outsourcing under 'Easy Barnet' before the Council's procurement operation has demonstrated over a sustained period the capacity, organisation and competence to support current outsourcing?

Answer by Councillor Daniel Thomas

I believe that risks are being mitigated against now that a Procurement Action Plan is in place and that the Council will be working with an implementation partner when outsourcing.

Question 25

Councillor Alan Schneiderman

Since the breach of Treasury Management policies that resulted in investments being made in failed Icelandic banks, how many internal audits have been carried out on the Council's Treasury Management and what was the outcome of each one?

Answer by Councillor Daniel Thomas

An independent investigation was carried out for the Scrutiny Committee in 2008/09 and a detailed report was made with recommendations. A full system review was carried out in 2009/10 and No

assurance was given. A full system review was carried out in 2010/11 and Limited assurance was given. No assurance to limited assurance is an improvement albeit limited assurance is not satisfactory. My response to a previous question on this issue demonstrates that issues highlighted are being addressed.

Question 26

Councillor Alison Moore

What is Barnet Council doing to prevent lone parents and single mothers from becoming the "shock absorbers" in the system as a result of the Conservative-led coalition government cuts?

Answer by Councillor Andrew Harper

In response to the economic situation Barnet Council has targeted its services towards those families in greater need. Our Children's Service received an additional funding of £2.5m within the base budget. These additional funds are being used to further improve early identification of families requiring support and providing that support directly with them. These services will enable families to move away from long term dependency on services and empower them to take full responsibility for their children and for themselves. We are continuing to work closely with partners to ensure that parents, including lone parents, are aware of services available to them in Barnet.

Question 27

Councillor Geof Cooke

Are you comfortable that 6 members of the Conservative Group, including Cabinet members Cllr Brian Coleman and Cllr Sachin Rajput, have opted not to allow their declarations of personal interests to be viewable on the Internet so that residents wishing to check whether executive decisions have been unduly influenced have to attend a Council office to view a paper copy during working hours?

Answer by Councillor Richard Cornelius, Leader of the Council

The information is available to the public and if Members do not wish to show their interests online, that is a matter of personal preference with which I am comfortable.

Question 28

Councillor Alan Schneiderman

Does the Cabinet Member now accept that it is not acceptable to have a target of reviewing only half of the contracts held by the Council and if so what will the target be raised to?

Answer by Councillor Daniel Thomas

I believe that it is appropriate for the council to agree a performance indicator for 2011/12 to review 100% of contracts held by the council in excess of £25,000.

Question 29

Councillor Barry Rawlings

Given the fall in the percentage of waste recycled, and the fact that the target for reducing general waste is actually higher this year than last, why have successive Conservative lead members failed to make progress?

Answer by Councillor Brian Coleman

A report on future waste collection options is being prepared for consideration by Cabinet in September 2011. The report will set out the cost and potential performance of a number of options.

Question 30

Councillor Geof Cooke

Regarding the Localism Bill, do you agree that 'elements of stealth centralism in the bill will add vast administration costs to local authorities at a time when they are looking to focus spending on delivering frontline services'?

Answer by Councillor Richard Cornelius, Leader of the Council

It will be up to us to make sure that any stealth centralism is resisted and I welcome the Members implied support in avoiding vast administration costs as we cope with the National and Local funding situation.

Question 31**Councillor Alan Schneiderman**

What were the projected savings from the easyCouncil One Barnet project for the 2011/12 - 2013/14 period at the time the 2011/12 budget was set and what is the latest projected level of savings achieved for the same period?

Answer by Councillor Robert Rams

The One Barnet programme is expected to make baseline budget savings of £4.7m in 2011/12, £4.1m in 2012/13 and £3.3m in 2013/14 as set out in the February budget. The 2011/12 savings are on track to be delivered. A series of business cases for projects have been approved recently – Development and Regulatory Services (DRS), Local Authority Trading Company (LATC), New Support and Customer Services Organisation (NSCSO), and Parking. These have all indicated that lower savings will be realised in 2012/13 than originally anticipated, but greater savings will be realised in 2013/14 and in future years. These projects are only at the business case stage, and work is ongoing to enable these savings targets to be met in full.

Question 32**Councillor Alison Moore**

Just under half of the Council's performance targets were missed last year, and, according to the recent Residents' Perception Survey, only half of residents are satisfied with the way the Council is running things. Is the Leader satisfied with only half measures, and, if not, what is he going to do to improve performance and increase satisfaction ratings?

Answer by Councillor Richard Cornelius, Leader of the Council

Missed targets are a disappointment. The target regime needs to be focused on where it is of importance. Barnet's targets as a high performing council are challenging. Half measures are usually unsuccessful and it will be important to maintain the drive for efficiency and economy that will lead to resident satisfaction.

Question 33**Councillor Geof Cooke**

The outdoor gym equipment at Oakhill Park has proved to be robust and popular with both children and adults. Are there any plans to introduce similar facilities elsewhere in the borough?

Answer by Councillor Brian Coleman

No. At a time when there is no spare public money due to profligacy of the last Labour Government, Outdoor Gym equipment is hardly a priority.

Question 34**Councillor Pauline Coakley Webb**

The festival in Victoria Park Finchley has had to be cancelled this year due to Council asking an exorbitant figure from the volunteers to 'rent' the park for this event. What steps are being taken to ensure that the work of such worthy volunteers is not curtailed by Council asking for sums of money which are impossible to achieve?

Answer by Councillor Brian Coleman

The Member is misinformed. I am delighted that the Finchley Carnival (to give it its correct and historic name) took place last weekend (facilitated by Barnet Council) as a free event for residents which included the restoration of the traditional Firework Display. I am grateful to those who have been involved over the years and I have been approached by a number of people keen to come on board and restore this event to its traditional prominence after the sad decline over the last four or five years. I note that Councillor Pauline Coakley Webb plays a prominent part in the successful East Barnet Festival (generously grant aided by Barnet Council) and perhaps she might wish to offer her expertise to rebuild the Finchley Carnival.

Question 35**Councillor Zakia Zubairi**

Moss Hall Junior School, Moss Hall Infants School and Morasha Jewish Primary School are all located near a busy junction of three roads - Nether Street, Moss Hall Grove and Essex Garden Road. Now that the school crossing patrol has been removed by the Council, will the Cabinet Member support some sort of traffic calming and/or parking enforcement to improve the safety of children attending these schools?

Answer by Councillor Brian Coleman

I assume the Member means Essex Park ? As a resident of the area I am unaware of a road called "Essex Garden Road". I would be very happy for parking enforcement to take place around this area.

Question 36

Councillor Alison Moore

Does the Cabinet Member support encouraging more residents of Barnet to cycle? And if so can he explain why a high profile cycling event in the Borough was refused a modest £700 grant this year?

Answer by Councillor Brian Coleman

I support all modes of transport. Matters of grants should be referred to my colleague Councillor Robert Rams.

Question 37

Councillor Ansuya Sodha

Parkfield School no longer has a school crossing patrol to help children cross the road. There is speeding traffic and a dangerous bend near the school making the visibility of oncoming traffic difficult. Has the Cabinet Member considered the emotional cost to the family if a child is injured and the suffering of the child?

Answer by Councillor Brian Coleman

Councillor Sodha can refer such matters as this to the Hendon Area Environment Committee.

Question 38

Councillor Alan Schneiderman

How much has been spent on external security for Council meetings in 2009, 2010 and for each month so far in 2011?

Answer by Councillor Daniel Thomas

Security Guard Charges for Full Council Meetings from April 2009 to June 2011-07-06

Month	Company	Cost (Excluding VAT)
April 2009	Metpro	£144.50
May 2009	Metpro	£306.00
June 2009	No Meeting	
July 2009	Metpro	£ 85.00
August 2009	No Meeting	
September 2009	Metpro	£306.00
October 2009	No Meeting	
November 2009	Metpro	£136.00
December 2009	Metpro	£136.00
January 2010	Metpro	£136.00
February 2010	No Meeting	
March 2010	Metpro	£221.00
April 2010	Metpro	£170.00
May 2010	Metpro	£221.00
June 2010	No Meeting	
July 2010	Metpro	£144.50
August 2010	No Meeting	
September 2010	Metpro	£255.00

October 2010	No Meeting	
November 2010	Metpro	£110.50
December 2010	Metpro	£255.00
January 2011	Metpro	Nil Charged
February 2011	No Meeting	
March 2011	Metpro	£360.00
April 2011	Blue9	£435.00
May 2011	Blue9	£812.00
June 2011	No Meeting	

Question 39

Councillor Pauline Coakley Webb

The youth club in East Barnet, run by the YMCA and supported by the local police is faced with possible closure due to a huge hike in their rental. Could the Cabinet Member update Members on the rent increase that is being asked and what efforts are being made to keep the youth club open?

Answer by Councillor Daniel Thomas

Terms for a new lease have been quoted at £28,000 per annum. The previous lease which expired in May 2011 was £21,360 per annum. Officers are working with the YMCA to agree an interim solution and last met with the YMCA on 5th July.

Question 40

Councillor Geof Cooke

It is a British tradition for local authorities to introduce lasting physical enhancements to their areas to mark significant royal events. What is the Council doing to mark the Queen's Diamond Jubilee in February 2012, only the second diamond jubilee in our country's history?

Answer by Councillor David Longstaff

Preparations for the Diamond Jubilee have been underway since early 2011. A Diamond Jubilee Preparations Steering Group (chaired by Barnet's Deputy Lieutenant, Martin Russell) held its third meeting on Monday, 4th July.

Plans in place so far include a civic service to be held in February 2012, to mark the Queen's accession to the throne; a tree planting scheme in which schools will be offered the opportunity to plant a tree to mark the occasion; a series of beacons to be lit across the borough; a 'family fun day' to be held over the Diamond Jubilee weekend; and a range of other celebratory ideas still in the early planning stages.

The Council will also plant a single Black Poplar (Her Majesty's favourite tree) in a suitable location in the borough, which is being donated by the Lieutenancy. Barnet is also involved with London-wide preparations and is among the most advanced boroughs in terms of planning of events and ways in which to mark the occasion.

Further updates and information on how the public can become involved closer to the occasion will be publicised on the council's website.

Question 41

Councillor Alison Moore

The number of families in temporary accommodation has hardly reduced over the last two Conservative administrations. Why?

Answer by Councillor Tom Davey

Since April 2008, the number of households in temporary accommodation has reduced from 2457 to 2139 in March 2011.

The main reason that the reduction has not been faster is because the Council has used empty properties on the regeneration estates as temporary accommodation, which has provided affordably priced accommodation for homeless families often for a number of years.

Whilst the number of people in temporary regeneration homes has increased from 873 to 968 during the same period, the number in other types of temporary accommodation has fallen significantly by 25% from 1551 to 1171

Question 42

Councillor Pauline Coakley Webb

What is the update on the future of Barnet Museum and what annual rental figure are you asking the volunteers to pay in order to keep the museum open?

Answer by Councillor Robert Rams

Barnet Museum has submitted a proposal to operate the Museum independently. This is proposal is currently being reviewed by officers

Question 43

Councillor Agnes Slocombe

Which local authority was 105 Dallas Rd sold to, and what financial benefit did Barnet receive for it? Residents want to know as they are now denied access to this open space when it was previously open to use by all?

Answer by Councillor Brian Coleman

The land adjacent to 105 Dallas Road was formerly known as 107 and 109 Dallas Road, this was acquired by Department for Transport (DfT) probably sometime in the late 1960's or early 1970's for the construction of the M1 i.e. for highway purposes. After the construction of the M1 the land was transferred to LBB to maintain as highway land as the local highway authority but the freehold ownership of the land was not transferred to LBB.

From Land Registry records and titles it appears that DfT, in 2009 have sold off this land to the owners of 105 Dallas Road. LBB had been maintaining the land despite never owning it ,until this time but it now appears to be in private ownership.

Question 44

Councillor Alan Schneiderman

Is it acceptable to have residents sitting in the Town Hall for over three hours before they are able to speak on a planning application?

Answer by Councillor Richard Cornelius, Leader of the Council

Chairmen try to accommodate speakers as early as possible in the agenda but during a busy meeting the last item will be at the end of proceedings. The timescale may be regrettable but is acceptable.

Question 45

Councillor Ansuya Sodha

What is the Cabinet Member doing to tackle the problem of depression amongst elderly residents who feel isolated and alone given the cuts to day centre grants?

Answer by Councillor Sachin Rajput

The Council and its partners are addressing the causes of depression among Barnet's residents, including older people, through its programmes to tackle the causes of ill-health and to promote Barnet as a safe and prosperous place to live.

Shared opportunities and responsibilities are at the heart of our strategy. Barnet is a strong civic society in which people do things for themselves and more Barnet residents contribute their time and effort through volunteering than any other London borough. We will continue to support Barnet's Volunteer Centre and the work of organisations such as Barnet's Retired and Senior Volunteer Programme, winner of the Times' award for its innovative work in setting up telephone

book clubs for Barnet's elderly people, helping older people to lead active and useful lives through participation in volunteering as well as receiving support.

We will shortly open consultation on future direction for day opportunities services for older people provided at present through voluntary sector organisations. These include day services for those people at risk of needing statutory services, lunch clubs for ethnic minority elders, care and repair to help people stay in their own homes through to health promotion activities such as exercise classes. We believe that it is right to continue to invest in support for people across the whole spectrum of need in order to give the right support at the right time, helping those with social care needs to stay as independent as possible and those with lesser needs to stay healthy and safe. Our recent review of the voluntary sector has identified that the day centres serve relatively few people and do not necessarily represent the preferred choice of those who would most benefit from support nor best value for public sector investment. Our forthcoming consultation on day opportunities services will seek the views of all those with an interest in shaping our plans

Question 46

Councillor Alan Schneiderman

How many years does it take to develop a town centre strategy for North Finchley?

Answer by Councillor Richard Cornelius, Leader of the Council

Whilst plans and strategies have their place it is important that North Finchley continues to thrive and we should all welcome the new Library plans that when realised will be an important attraction. Strategies may take years to create.

Question 47

Councillor Zakia Zubairi

The lawns in Rushgrove Park are uneven and look untended. What is the Cabinet Member doing to ensure that our parks and green spaces are all kept to the same standard?

Answer by Councillor Brian Coleman

I understand the park was mowed on July 4th

Question 48

Councillor Alan Schneiderman

How many cars have parked in Lodge Lane car park in each of the following months: April 2011, May 2011 and June 2011?

Answer by Councillor Brian Coleman

The number of cars parking in Lodge Lane Car Park during the controlled hours and either purchasing a ticket or paying by phone is as follows:

April	4,916
May	6,585
June	5,994

Question 49

Councillor Ansuya Sodha

I was in Gadsbury Close in my ward recently and in the short time that I was there, I saw three huge rats on the street. The residents of sheltered accommodation told me that they cannot sit on the bench because of rats. What is the Council doing to deal with the rat problem in Barnet?

Answer by Councillor David Longstaff

This particular instance was passed to the Environmental Health service to investigate.

The investigation found the area of Gadsbury Close to be the responsibility of Barnet Homes. Barnet Homes have confirmed that on 20th June 2011 they initiated the process of obtaining a quote from their contractor for both the treatment and proofing for rats in the area where the rats were seen. Barnet Homes reference X3737F11.

The Council deals with complaints about rats on a site specific basis. All rat complaints that involve privately owned land are investigated by the Environmental Health service to ensure that all

infestations are treated. Legislative powers are used in accordance with the Prevention of Damage by Pests Act 1949.

Question 50

Councillor Alan Schneiderman

What is being done to improve residents' satisfaction with the opportunities for participation in decision making in Barnet?

Answer by Councillor David Longstaff

The Council encourages residents to participate in decision-making through a number of channels. These include the conducting of formal consultations on specific issues, the provision to speak and ask questions at Cabinet and Committee meetings, the outward-focused engagement work of Overview and Scrutiny Task and Finish Groups and in empowering members of the public to raise street-based issues at Residents' Forums. The new Forum arrangements allow for issues to be formally referred to an Area Environment Sub-Committee meeting, held that evening in the same venue, for decision, thus increasing democratic accountability and transparency.

The most recent Residents Survey shows 48% of residents are satisfied with opportunities for participation in local decision making provided by the Council, compared to 31% who are not satisfied and 21% neither satisfied nor dissatisfied.

In terms of future plans, the Corporate Plan 2011/12 – 2013/14 contains the strategic objective of increasing levels of democratic engagement and creating an open Council. This objective includes the target to implement at least three new initiatives to improve opportunities for democratic engagement this municipal year, for which proposals will be forthcoming in due course.

Question 51

Councillor Agnes Slocombe

What is the reason for the non-replacement of printer ink cartridges in Libraries. Is this the effects of the policy of more for less – please will the Cabinet Member assure me cartridges will be replaced – complaint from residents.

Answer by Councillor Robert Rams

Printing is a valuable service to library customers and there is no intent to reduce the service.

In April, the Council moved from using a dedicated engineer to supply new ink cartridges, to using a pool of engineers. There were some teething problems with allocation of engineers which resulted in some requests not being fulfilled in a timely manner. This situation has now been rectified. In addition, as older printers reach the end of their life they are being replaced by more efficient standard printers and providing the facility to remotely monitor the ink levels to prevent this issue in the future.

Question 52

Councillor Alan Schneiderman

What action is being taken in the short term to reverse the large drop in the number of telephone calls to the Council being answered within the target time and in particular within the parking service where only 12% of calls are meeting the target?

Answer by Councillor Robert Rams

The drop in the proportion of calls being answered within the target time in quarter 4 last year was mainly related to the Housing Benefits system replacement and a seasonal increase in demand for Council Tax services.

Housing Benefits and Council Tax telephony performance fell significantly in March and April in the period when the information system supporting the services was being replaced. The transition between IT systems created a backlog of cases, which generated a higher than average volume of calls at a busy time of year. Staff activities were prioritised to clear the backlog and to deal with high volume of calls. The implementation of the new system has now been completed and

performance has significantly improved in May and June. I expect performance to improve further in the coming months.

The Parking Contact Centre moved to Customer Services in April and an improvement plan is being implemented to tackle recurring issues that generate repeat calls. Information on the website is being updated to encourage customers to see this as the first port of call for contact. Additional work is ongoing to relieve pressure on the service from the volume of scanned paperwork received by the parking service. Performance has improved by ten percentage points in June.

Question 53

Councillor Alan Schneiderman

Will the Cabinet Member accept the recommendation of the Budget and Performance Overview and Scrutiny Committee that weekly refuse and recycling collections should be maintained?

Answer by Councillor Brian Coleman

I am delighted that the Budget and Performance Overview and Scrutiny Committee agrees with the Conservative Party manifesto for the Barnet Council elections in May 2010 which clearly states that weekly refuse collections for domestic waste will be maintained. Whilst this Borough is Conservative this will not change.

Question 54

Councillor Zakia Zubairi

The play equipment in the playground at Colindale Park is in need of replacement. What is the schedule for repairs and refurbishments of our play areas in Barnet and when will the one in Colindale Park be upgraded?

Answer by Councillor Brian Coleman

There are no proposals to replace and upgrade the play equipment in Colindale Park. Priorities are centered on maintaining the infrastructure and facilities in the parks.

The Greenspaces team has been successfully working with a number of resident groups over the last 12 months to secure external funding to carry out such works. This has seen one group at Lyttleton playing fields secure £50k and there is another group at Mill Hill who are currently awaiting the results of their bid for £50k. There are many sources of external grant funds that can be tapped into by resident groups and the Council can work with them to increase their chances of success.