

COUNCIL QUESTIONS – 22 MARCH 2004:

ORAL QUESTIONS

Oral Question 1 – To the Leader of the Council from Councillor Hoban

If he is satisfied with the steps taken by the Council in relation to the restructuring of the Council's Press Office.

Oral Question 2 - To the Leader of the Council from Councillor Bull

Can the Leader give the figures for the number of Haringey residents who have benefited from the minimum wage since its introduction?

Oral Question 3 - To the Executive Member for Regeneration and Partnerships from Councillor Gilbert

If he will outline the steps he has taken to consult local residents groups in the area of Haringey Heartlands.

Oral Question 4 – To the Leader of the Council from Councillor Herbie Brown

Does the Leader of the Council believe that the results from the 2003 residents' survey further reinforce the notion that Haringey is on the road to real improvement?

Oral Question 5 - To the Leader of the Council from Councillor Williams

If he will confirm that the Council supports the current trial of the much-needed Muswell Hill to Swiss Cottage bus route.

Oral Question 6 – To the Executive Member for Environment from Councillor Bevan

Does he believe that the recent cross party Councillor meeting held with the Head of Area for Post Office Ltd, was a worthwhile and important exercise?

Oral Question 7 - To the Executive Member for Environment from Councillor Hare

If he will tell me the cost of ;
The current free annual bulky items clearance (community clearance);
The estimated cost of clearing up casually dumped bulky items in the borough;
The income from the £15 payment scheme for bulky item collection; and
The estimated cost of running a free bulky item collection.

Oral Question 8 – To the Executive Member for Finance from Councillor Quincy Prescott

Could he give me an indication of the success of 'Trade Local' and explain why he thinks this initiative is so worthwhile?

Oral Question 9 - To the Executive Member for Finance from Councillor Bloch

If he will make a statement on the Council's financial reserves.

Oral Question 10 – To the Executive Member for Finance from Councillor Bull

With reference to a report that recently appeared in the local press regarding unpaid council tax, can the Executive Member for Finance outline how he plans to continue the improvement in terms of the collection rate?

WRITTEN QUESTIONS

Written Question 1- To the Executive Member for Environment from Cllr Aitken

If he will confirm that the reason why for two months (beginning of December 2003 to beginning of February 2004) Members did not receive the weekly list of planning applications was due to the installation of new software. Why were members not informed that there would be no weekly lists for this period; will he also indicate whether the installation has been complete and successful and outline the cost of the system and the benefits compared to the old system that the new system will bring for applicants and the general public, Council Officers and elected Members.

Answer:

I confirm that the reason why Members did not receive the weekly press list between the beginning of December 2003 and the beginning of February 2004 was the conversion of the Planning IT Database.

The conversion was due to take place over 6 working days, which would have resulted in no disruption to the production of the weekly list. The conversion took much longer than anticipated by the IT providers and this resulted in the production of the weekly list being disrupted. It was not possible to warn Members in advance as the disruption was unplanned. I apologise for any inconvenience caused. When the conversion was complete all the applications received in this period appeared on subsequent weekly lists. I confirm that the installation is complete and successful.

The cost of the conversion is in the region of £70,000. The benefits are that the conversion provides an improved base system that will enable the development of e-planning which will mean that eventually Planning Applications will be able to be submitted on line.

Written Question 2- To the Executive Member for Finance from Cllr Beacham

Could he please confirm:

How many Haringey pensioners are eligible to claim council tax benefit?

How many Haringey pensioners who are entitled to claim council tax benefit are currently claiming it?

What action has been taken in the past, or what action is the Council taking, to ensure that all Haringey pensioners who are entitled to claim council tax benefit do so?

Answer

The 2001 census data by age range indicates that there are 28,992 pensioners living in the borough. Haringey Benefits and Local Taxation Division statistics indicate that 9,980 pensioner households currently receive Council Tax Benefit (CTB) - 34%. (this figure is calculated on CTB claims, not people, so it does not take account of Pensioner

couples). Current estimations of pensioner couples in the borough would increase the amount of actual pensioners benefiting from Council Tax Benefit to 12,553 - 43%.

Unfortunately, the records would not provide information to identify the number of Haringey pensioners who are eligible for benefit and have not applied. However, Haringey Benefits and Local Taxation Division is committed and has been active in promoting take up of benefits for pensioners. We have sent a Council Tax Benefit promotional flyer with every Council Tax Bill this year, as part of the Annual Bill pack and the response has so far been encouraging. The Annual Billing Information Booklet has a section dedicated to the take up of Council Tax Benefit, Tax Credit and Pension Credit. We are also working closely in partnership with the Pensions Service to assist in a joint benefit take up campaign for pensioners.

We are now joining the Department for Work and Pensions national campaign for CTB take up and have ordered and received their standard promotional material for use in Haringey. We will be focussing take up efforts on Haringey pensioners by

- Distributing these leaflets and posters in our Customer Service Centres,
- approaching the Elders Service on how best to reach Pensioners in Haringey
- arranging a Benefits surgery/stand in Wood Green Shopping City
- talking to our partners in the Health Service in order to distribute leaflets in Doctors Surgeries in the borough.
- advertising in Haringey People and in local press.

Written Question 3 to the Chair of the Alexandra Palace and Park Board from Cllr Bloch

To set out why the signed statements from him in the annual Charity Commission returns indicate that he had received no financial or in-kind benefits from any source in his role as trustee, when as chair of the board he received a special responsibility allowance.

Answer-

This question refers to a matter being considered by the District Audit Service after a formal objection to the accounts. It would be inappropriate to comment until the District Auditor has concluded and reported on the outcome of his investigation.

Written Question 4 to the Executive Member for Environment from Cllr Davies

To confirm that all Haringey residents pay council tax on the same scale but that some receive a reduced waste service (specifically no provision of waste receptacles) while paying the same as those who receive a full service.

Answer

Household waste collection is a universal service provided to all residents. The level of service is based on the need of the Council to fulfil its obligations as set out in the Environment Protection Act 1990. Therefore, the household that requires 13 collections per week (flats above shops) pays no more than the household that receives one collection per week. Payment for the service is by means of the council tax, the level of which is determined by the council tax band of each household property.

The same principle of a universal service also applies to the method of collection, a household with a wheeled bin service will not be charged any more than a household with a sack collection service. Rather, the basis for deciding the type of service is on whether or not there is adequate, safe and accessible off-street storage space for a wheeled bin.

The only circumstance in which residents maybe charged directly is for the hire of bulk refuse containers or where the Council is entitled to make a charge for collection virtue of the Controlled Waste Regulations 1992 (clinical waste, garden waste, bulky waste etc.).

In all cases the Council's performance will be measured on its ability to collect household waste, not on the methodology employed in its collection.

Written Question 5 to the Executive Member for Environment from Cllr Edge

When will the Council fulfil its promise to replace the tree outside 31 Ridge Road which they have promised to do time and time again.

Answer

Ten sites, including Ridge Road, that have previously been identified for replacement tree planting have encountered problems beneath the footpath. These sites have been issued for further works and Ridge Road will be attended to on Wednesday 17th March, access permitting. The tree will then be planted on Thursday 18th March (Norway Maple). On occasion it is necessary to revisit sites where problems have been encountered, and operationally works are normally organised in batches rather than individually.

Written Question 6 to the Executive Member for Environment from Cllr Engert

What plans he has to introduce home-collection of plastic waste for recycling purposes, for example by providing recycling "sacks" for plastic waste as is now the practice in the London Borough of Lambeth.

Answer:

The Council has rolled out both kerbside & estates recycling schemes across the Borough within the last 8 months. The purpose of this is to enable the Council to meet its statutory recycling target of 10% for 2003/04. These targets are tonnage based, therefore the Council has focused its energies in collecting heavier materials, such as, paper and glass. Conversely the problem with plastics is that it is a light material that occupies a large volume. Therefore the space that it would occupy on vehicles would not deliver the same tonnage outputs as paper/glass. Also, unless compacted, transportation can be expensive and environmentally unfriendly. However, the Council is open to new ideas and will review the 'Lambeth Scheme' in more detail together with developing joint schemes with its partner authorities in the North London Waste Authority as part of the continuing process in the development of the Joint Waste Strategy.

Written Question 7 to the Executive Member for Lifelong Learning from Cllr Fabian

If she will provide a breakdown of the number of childcare places provided by the Council in under-five centres, neighbourhood nurseries, and early excellence centres, as well as the nine proposed children's hubs, by electoral ward.

Answer-

The 9 hubs of Children's Centres identified for the first phase of implementation include all 3 Early Excellence Centres, all 4 Under 5s Centres and 2 Neighbourhood Nursery schemes.

The number of places currently provided is as follows:

Provision	Type	Ward	No of FTE Places	Operational Date
Rowland Hill	EEC/NNI	White Hart Lane	88	Open
Pembury House	EEC/NNI	Tottenham Hale	84	Open
Woodlands Park	EEC	St Ann's	80	Open
White Hart Lane Under 5s Centre	U5C	Woodside	44	Open
Stonecroft Under 5s Centre	U5C	Muswell Hill	55	Open
Plevna Under 5s Centre	U5C	Seven Sisters	55	Open
Park Lane Family Learning Centre	U5C	Northumberland Park	59	Open
Broadwater Farm	NNI	West Green	104	Sept 2005
Noel Park Daycentre	NNI	Noel Park	40	Autumn 2004

**Key: EEC- Early Excellence Centre
NNI- Supported by Neighbourhood Nursery Initiative funding
U5C- Under 5s Centre**

The ward identified is the location of the building. The centres will cover a wider catchment area than a single ward.

In addition, there is a NNI scheme planned for Down Lane Pavilion Nursery which will expand that voluntary sector provision to 38 FTE places.

Haringey has been set the target of increasing the number of childcare places in the most deprived wards by 505 by 2006 as part of the Children's Centre programme. These do not have to be in these "hubs".

Written Question 8 to the Executive Member for the Environment from Cllr Featherstone

Given recent promises by the Labour party in the Muswell Hill by-election if he will initiate moves towards the introduction of a 20mph zone for Wood Vale N10 and Cranley Gardens N10.

Answer:

The Council supports 20mph zones and seek to introduce them where justification and relevant criterion is met, ie where there are significant levels of accidents and around schools through the Government's TSG allocation for local safety schemes and safer routes to school programmes.

The Highways works programme for 2004/5 has been approved and unfortunately this area is not included. However, wherever we have the opportunity we will continue to review alternative funding streams throughout the year and if this area becomes a priority consideration will be given to a 20mph zone.

I will also ensure officers consider this area when putting together bids through the Borough Spending Plan for 2005/06 through the Capital funding stream of Local Safety Schemes and Safer Routes to School.

Written Question 9 to the Executive Member for Social Services and Health from Cllr Floyd

If he will publish a table covering the last ten years detailing the proportion of local residents registered with an NHS dentist.

Answer

In 1994 there were only 240 dental contractors serving the Borough compared to December 2003, when this increased to 302 dental contractors.

As at December 2003, 152 were based in Enfield and 150 in Haringey. The PCT state that a number of Haringey residents use dental practices in the Enfield area.

The best comparative information we have about the position in March 1994 to date is:

Registration rates for population		
	1994	2004
Children Under 18	55%	63%
Adults	54%	53%

Written Question 10 to the Executive Member for the Environment from Cllr Gilbert

How many complaints have been made in relation to the planning department since May 2002?

Answer

The Council's Planning Service has received a total of 63 complaints from 1st May 2002 until 15th March 2004. During this period approximately 3,000 planning applications were determined.

From 01 May 2002 until 15 March 2004, the Planning Service received :
63 complaints (including complaints against policy) at stage 1;
22 complaints were progressed to stage 2;
10 complaints went to stage 3;
8 complaints went to the Local Government Ombudsman of which 1 resulted in a maladministration report. This report was in relation to an application that was dealt with almost five years ago.

Written Question 11 to the Executive Member for Environment from Cllr Hare

On Colney Hatch Lane and at the entrance to Hornsey Waterworks there has been significant damage to trees ignoring standard tree protection rules and tree officer recommendations and in the latter case breaking an agreement made at a meeting between several local organisations and the assistant director that damaging works would be halted. Can he explain the apparent complete lack of liaison between Highways/Streetworks and Tree Protection.

Answer

Firstly with regards to Colney Hatch Lane.

Prior to any works being carried out the Highways Service liaised with the Arboricultural Officer both before and after the start of the works. Additionally, Haringey Council's external tree surgeon contractor (IMS Tree Surgeons) were also consulted, and consequently carried out the necessary tree root and branch pruning in order to preserve the trees. Although the Highway works were close to the trees (more than originally agreed), this was however immediately rectified by IMS and they have assured us that the trees have suffered no long-term damage. Highways in liaison with IMS have agreed the construction details for the proposed granite kerb planters around the tree pits to ensure that vehicles cannot park too close to the trees negating any long term damage to the trees.

In terms of Hornsey Waterworks, works had commenced on this project over a year ago. The initial planning permission was for a Sainsbury's superstore; within this proposal permission had been granted for the trees to be removed to enable a new junction to be created. A further planning permission was granted for the housing development currently under construction this permission also included the same junctions but the details were reserved and are currently under consideration. The Assistant Director met with local organisations to discuss the details of the proposed junction and whether the trees could be saved on 27th February. I am not aware of any further highways works being carried out since then.

Written Question 12 to the Executive Member for Environment from Cllr Hoban

Could he please clarify:

What is this council's policy regarding requests from mobile phone companies to install mobile phone masts in Haringey?

What criteria is used by the council to decide on whether such applications will be accepted?

How many such applications have been made in each of the last 3 years?

How many such applications have been approved by the council in each of the last 3 years?

Answer

The Council is guided by Government advice in PPG8 (Telecommunications), which is that the growth of new and existing telecommunications systems is to be facilitated whilst keeping the environmental impact to a minimum. PPG8 gives detailed advice on issues such as siting, mast sharing, health considerations, and design, as well as procedures. It also specifies those types of telecommunications equipment, which can include mobile phone masts up to a certain height and outside of Conservation Areas, which benefit from permitted development rights. A Prior Notification procedure is in place for these, on which the Council has limited scope for raising objection.

The Council criteria are based on the need for mobile phone masts not to be detrimental to visual amenity, and to avoid clutter, and not to be of poor design (e.g. slim mono-poles or lamp-post replacements, are preferred to wide lattice-masts). Mast sharing is also encouraged. (Policies set out in full in Policy DES 9.1 in the current Adopted UDP, and at UDI3 (page 47) of the First Deposit Consultation of the Revised UDP.

Mobile phone operators have to provide a certificate stating that the levels of radio wave emissions comply with guidelines of the International Commission on Non-Ionising Radiation Protection. The Government advice is that "it is not for the local planning authority to seek to replicate through the planning system, controls under the health and safety regime."

As regards the number of applications submitted to and approved by the Council in the last three years;

- in 2001 there were 22 applications or Prior Notifications (of which 12 were approved or not objected to),
- in 2002 there were 19 applications/PNs (of which 13 were approved or not objected to),
- in 2003 there were 10 applications/PNs (of which 7 were approved or not objected to).

Written Question 13 to the Chair of the Alexandra Palace and Park Board from Cllr Oatway

In Alexandra Park, at public meetings the Council was asked several times over a period of many months that interested community organisation representatives should be taken on a walking tour to visit the proposed works in Alexandra Park including tree thinning and removal and relandscaping. Why was this request was never actioned prior to the works starting.

Answer:

The Council has not given any undertaking on a walking tour of the park. This idea was put forward by members of the Advisory Committee. The board of charity trustees has, in considering the recommendations contained in the minutes of the Advisory Committee also extended an invitation to members of the Consultative Committee. Both Committees agreed that a tour prior to a meeting in the spring, in the lighter evenings, would be more appropriate subject to available resources. The agreement to the walking tour was not subject to a caveat of "prior to the works starting". The works have been agreed with the Heritage Lottery Fund following the public consultation and prior to the award of grant. A detailed bill of quantities supports the grant itself and that bill of quantities apportions the grant aid to the various component parts of the overall plan. These works cannot simply be changed at whim and the bodies with whom the charity consults understand this. All the works are carried out subject to the constraints placed by the various consents

necessary including planning and listed building consent together with those from the Tree Officer.

Written Question 14 to the Executive Member for Environment from Cllr Simpson

Following his answer to written question 8 at the last full Council meeting, given the disruption caused in Hornsey Lane Gardens N6 and Langdon Park Road N6, the Council did not take steps to persuade Transco to delay the gas mains works given the Archway Bridge works, and why can it not move its own works into the car park at Tudor Close N6.

Answer

I can confirm that the council did try to persuade Transco to postpone the works until a later date. Transco's response to this was that these works are part of major replacement of gas mains in Archway Road.

They also stated with that the works couldn't commence in Archway Road area prior to completion of the works in Langdon Park Road area. They also said that thousands customers would be without gas for an unacceptable period of time. We therefore found that we had no choice but to allow Transco to carry out their emergency works.

Written Question 15 to the Executive Member for Community Involvement from Cllr Williams

To explain why he was quoted in the local press in December 2003 stating that: "the size of Haringey's PR team was in line with that of other boroughs" when his draft report "Restructuring the Press Office – The Way Forward" issued in January 2004 states that: "the number of the staff [in the team] is high, and that the service does not provide "value for money."

Answer

A survey in PR Week magazine last year showed Haringey's PR team to be larger than it actually is. This was because the survey included Media and PR, Translation and Interpretation, Design, Print, Publicity and Web Communications in the PR team. The number of staff working on media and PR was not disproportionate when compared with other councils in the survey.

The council also decided to carry out a review of the effectiveness of its communications unit last year. Draft proposals for a communications unit for the forthcoming period and to incorporate methods and skills to deal with the requirements of the 21st century were drawn up. A plan for the first phase of a restructured unit was presented to myself and other Executive Members in January 2004.

The report showed that the number of staff in the Media and PR team was high in relation to the volume of work being undertaken and when compared with other similar councils.

As a result, it was decided to reduce the number of posts in the team from eight to five.

Written Question 16 to the Executive Member for Environment from Cllr Winskill

What criteria will be used to judge the success or otherwise of the Farmers' Market proposed for Crouch End at the end of the six month trial and what weight will be given to the concerns of local shopkeepers, particularly the independent food sector?

Answer

It is not possible to judge the success or otherwise of the proposed Farmer's Market as it is not operating. If and when the proposal is implemented criteria to judge the success of the Farmer's Market in planning terms will be; the effect on local residents in terms of any noise, disturbance or attraction of vehicles; provision of satisfactory off-street parking for traders vehicles; and the effective management of the Market, on which the views of the Council's Street Trading Control Officers will be sought.

Government planning advice in Planning Policy Guidance Note 6 (Town Centres and Retail Development), has as its first objective to maintain the vitality and viability of town centres, and ensure the availability of a wide range of shops, this relates to town centres in general. However, PPG6 also states very clearly (para. 1.1) that "It is not the role of the planning system to restrict competition, preserve existing commercial interests or to prevent innovation.