

COUNCILLORS' QUESTIONS

Question 1 from Councillor Andrew to Councillor Vince, Cabinet Member for Education and Children's Services:

"Will the Cabinet Member for Education and Children's Services update the Council on the position of secondary school transfers?"

Reply from Councillor Vince:

"This is the third year that Enfield has participated in the PAN London Co-ordinated Admissions System. 39 authorities exchanged information about applications to each other's schools and worked together to reduce the number of children receiving multiple offers.

Enfield Council, along with all of our partners worked hard to ensure parents in Enfield were sent their information on National Offer Day, 1st March 2007 and I am pleased to advise Councillor Andrew that over 94% of Enfield children have been offered a place at one of their preferred schools.

The impact of co-coordinating admissions across London and surrounding authorities, together with the increase in number of school places in the borough, has meant that, yet again, there are sufficient school places in Enfield for every child transferring from primary to secondary school this year.

I would like to extend my thanks and appreciation to the hard work which had been undertaken by Jo Fear and the Admissions Team to achieve these results."

Question 2 from Councillor Anolue to Councillor Rye, Leader of the Council:

"Does Councillor Rye support the action of the Leader of the Conservative Party, David Cameron MP, in dismissing Patrick Mercer MP, from the Opposition Front Bench for his remarks about soldiers from ethnic minorities?"

Reply from Councillor Rye:

" I always support the Leader of the Conservative Party nationally.

Given the large number of Labour MPs who failed to support the Leader of the Labour Party in the recent Commons vote on renewing Trident (our independent nuclear capability) I wonder whether she and her colleagues fully support their Leader?"

Question 3 from Councillor Kaye to Councillor Neville, Cabinet Member for Environment and Street Scene:

"Would Councillor Neville indicate the practical steps the Authority will be taking over the next 3 years to address climate change?"

Reply from Councillor Neville:

“Climate change is one of the biggest issues facing all of us which unless addressed will have disastrous consequences for generations to come. While it is for central government to take the national lead, local authorities have an important role to play in their communities and we in Enfield will play our part.

We have already advanced our rates of recycling from a very low base to one of the highest in London, but we must go further.

Much of what is needed to deal with climate change will of necessity be achieved through development and the planning system, and I remind council that Enfield took an early position on sustainable development in a climate change context that led to its winning the “Liverpool City Award” in 2005 – a first for any local authority – by insisting that new developments in the borough should include energy and water conservation measures, but again there is more to be done.

The Government has recently consulted on various policy documents that give guidance to Local Planning Authorities who are in the throes of writing climate change policies into their Local Development Framework. This is timely for us.

We will need to review our existing sustainable buildings policies in the light of the Government’s target of all new housing being “zero carbon” by 2016 – this is a major challenge for both Planning and Building Control Departments.

There is much that can be done within our operational activities and I have asked officers to explore the following:

Parks and open spaces

- Reviewing energy and water use in all buildings;
- Incorporating drought resistant planting to replace seasonal bedding and replacement trees and shrubs on an incremental basis over the next five years;
- Ensuring that all new buildings and major improvements incorporate sustainable design and construction;
- Achieving self sufficiency in compost for bedding in parks;
- Extending the use of bicycle transport for parks police and staff wherever practicable;
- Encouraging alternative sustainable transport for travel to events;
- Through ‘Enfield in Bloom’, encouraging sustainable planting in communities, schools, verges and highways;
- Introducing more cycle routes in parks.

To ensure that we keep this at the forefront of our consideration I have set up an Environment Project Board which I will Chair, comprising the Director of

Environment, Heads of the various services within Environment Street Scene and Parks and, together with a representative of Property Services, we will meet regularly to address and monitor these operations.

As a separate issue, the Environmental Protection & Regulation Division has begun a project that will see the whole division registered to the International Environmental Management Standard (ISO 14001) by the end of 2007/08. This will complement the division's existing quality registration. It will also ensure that the negative environmental impacts of services such as refuse, recycling, street scene and the Environmental Crime Unit are reduced year on year and the positive impacts are enhanced.

We are also proposing to participate in a Green Fleet review with the Energy Saving Trust; the review will cover all aspects of the fleet operation using best practice in fleet management techniques with environmental initiatives. The review will focus principally on ideas around the vehicle, the driver and the journey, i.e. can cleaner vehicles be encouraged, can they be driven more cleanly and can they actually be driven less? This would apply to not only the commercial fleet but also the 'grey' fleet. In addition the Council already uses 95% ULSD 5% bio diesel."

Question 4 from Councillor Goddard to Councillor Jackson, Cabinet Member for Sustainable Communities and Employment:

"As a result of the Council receiving £872,470 as part of the Local Authority Business Growth Incentive settlement, would Councillor Jackson inform Council of what proposals the Council is putting in place for the discussion and use of this additional income".

Reply from Councillor Jackson:

"Firstly, I am sure that all Council Members will join me in welcoming this good news. The borough has seen a long decline in employment in factories and offices and this is recognition of the hard work that we have put in with our partners in business to create wealth in the borough. As Members know, we are very keen to be at the forefront of the emerging Place Shaping agenda and this money could be a very useful kick-start to our efforts. We do however, have to be very cautious about spending it, it is a one-off resource and I do not want it frittered away. The Council has a thorough system for financial decision-making, and decisions will be made on the basis of a sound business case. I am very keen to support and develop economic activity in the borough, particularly in Edmonton. Economic activity is the best way out of deprivation, and I am particularly interested in developing a women's business centre. I have asked officers to develop proposals. The proposals will be consulted upon, and I particularly want the views of the people that stand to benefit from the proposals. I look forward to bringing costed and well thought-through proposals for decision."

Question 5 from Councillor Pearce to Councillor Neville, Cabinet Member for Environment and Street Scene:

“Would Councillor Neville confirm the amount of Capital Investment into Parks and Open Spaces in 2007/8 and later years?”

Reply from Councillor Neville:

“In 2006/7 we carried out Capital Works in the following parks:

Craig
Grovelands
Jubilee
Albany
Elsinge Green
Pymmes
Town
Durants
Tatum
Boundary playing fields

The works included Splash Parks, Multi-use Games areas, Children's Playgrounds and general improvements to the parks' infrastructure.

In 2007/8 we are committing the sum of £1.415m to Parks and Open Spaces improvements. This is the first year of a £4.715m investment over three years. These monies will be used to continue the type of major improvements commenced in 2006/7. A full detailed programme is currently being finalised.

We are also committed over and above this programme to providing a new park at Bury Lodge which will bring underutilised Metropolitan Open Land into public use. Our Capital Programme will also be boosted by the use of Section 106 Planning Gain where appropriate.

This will all add up over the next three years to a total capital investment between 2006/7 and 2009/10 of approximately £8m.

This is a major capital investment programme which will be appropriate to the needs of the community. It will also be carried out on a sustainable basis which will be appropriate to meeting the realities of climate change.

It is a programme which far exceeds any previous level of investment in our parks and open spaces and reaffirms this Administration's commitment to continuous improvement in all our services.”

Question 6 from Councillor Rodin to Councillor Rye, Leader of the Council:

“Will Councillor Rye inform Council of the number of staff redundancies for 2006/7 together with any related information regarding service restructuring”.

Reply from Councillor Rye:

“There were 48 redundancies in 06/07. The bulk of these redundancies arose as a result of the efficiency reviews of Parks & Housing Management Services, the

closure of the Young People's Resource Centre (when the last remaining client left) and the Government's decision to transfer responsibility for asylum seekers to the newly created National Asylum Seekers Service."

Question 7 from Councillor Adams to Councillor Neville, Cabinet Member for Environment and Street Scene:

"Will Councillor Neville confirm that Environment Street Scene and Parks have won an ENCAMS Award?"

Reply from Councillor Neville:

"I was never in any doubt that in creating the Enviro Crime Unit we would be at the forefront of multi agency working in a difficult area of enforcement and we must continue at the cutting edge of this kind of approach to solving environmental problems. I am therefore pleased to confirm that the Council won a major national award which was presented by Jonathan Porritt last week at the ENCAMS (Environmental Campaigns) conference in Nottingham. The award was for the SAFE (Street Action For Enfield) project for achieving efficiencies through partnership, improving local environmental quality and reducing antisocial behaviour.

I offer congratulations to all those involved in the project."

Question 8 from Councillor Bond to Councillor Neville, Cabinet Member for Environment and Street Scene:

"I have received a letter from Environment dated 17/01/07 which states 'Fitzpatrick has agreed to enter into an Admitted Body Status Agreement and this is currently being finalised between the authority (LBE) and contracts pension advisors'.

I have received a copy of a letter from Fitzpatrick's dated 11/02/07 where they state that after numerous requests to LBE they are yet to have had a meeting with them regarding the pensions issue.

Can the Cabinet Member for Environment tell the Council who is telling the truth?

Can he further advise the Council why, in his rush to privatise this work out to contractors, this was not sorted out before the selling off of this service? Given that this loyal workforce who grit the roads in the dead of night and maintain the highways, for in some cases over twenty years, are not the best paid and the pension is a concern to them.

Finally, can he advise the Council what extra cost is this pension fiasco going to cost LBE, whether that be from the pension fund or other budgets, and how does that affect the alleged saving selling off this service?"

Reply from Councillor Neville:

“Firstly, I am pleased to be able to confirm that Fitzpatrick has signed the Admitted Body Agreement. To answer your question, both parties are telling the truth, but as we are all aware pensions issues are complicated and there was a need to ensure due diligence with regard to the Admission Agreement.

The Fitzpatrick tender limited their liability to a maximum pension contribution of 15%. Therefore it has been necessary to agree with the actuaries the method to be used to make up the remaining 3.6% of contribution and this has been the reason for the delay.

I do not accept your comment that the council has rushed into privatising the Highways work service; in fact this Administration has been in power for nearly five years prior to the contract commencing and during that period I have considered a range of service delivery options prior to proceeding with the current contract. Perhaps I can tell Council that not only will the contract achieve savings of £70k per annum but it will also deliver a far higher level of service than that historically provided by the in-house workforce. Historically the in-house workforce treated on average, approximately 950 defects per month. Fitzpatrick have undertaken to treat 1400 defects per month which if done under the in-house team would have cost the Council an additional £680k per annum.

I have always been first to acknowledge the good work of the Highways team particularly with regard to the provision of the winter gritting service, however I have a duty to ensure that residents are receiving high quality, value for money services, which this contract is now delivering. I also remain committed to protecting the staff, who have been fully protected in terms of a TUPE (Transfer of Undertakings Protection of Employment Regulations) transfer, and officers have confirmed that even during the negotiation of the admission agreement with Fitzpatrick, individuals who continued to contribute to the scheme would have their benefits honoured.

I can confirm that there was a substantial difference between the Fitzpatrick and the bid submitted by the second lowest tender, so that even taking account of the need to fund the balance of the pension contributions, the Fitzpatrick bid was the most cost effective tender received by the Council for this contract. You will appreciate however, due to the commercial nature of the information I am unable to provide the actual figures in this answer but Councillor Bond, as well any other member, will have access to the original Cabinet paper.

The Admission Agreement between the Council and Fitzpatrick will ensure that there is no adverse impact on the pension fund.”

Question 9 from Councillor Pipe to Councillor Lavender, Cabinet Member for Finance and Resources:

“Will Councillor Lavender inform the Council of how Enfield's council tax increase relates to other London Boroughs?”

Reply from Councillor Lavender:

“Enfield’s council tax compares well to the other boroughs. As we promised, our rise in council tax was kept below Retail Price Inflation, protecting pensioners and other taxpayers on fixed incomes. For the second year running we are the 6th lowest council tax in outer London, and our rise of 3.45% was also the 6th lowest out of 20. I must congratulate the London Borough of Hounslow on setting a zero % rise in their council tax. Although of course it should be noted that Hounslow is in West London. The Government has of course decided that Enfield is in East London and this penalises our borough significantly. As Members are also aware the Government refuse to calculate our population with any accuracy, refusing even to respond when we employ a learned Professor to prove that our confirmed population is over 3,000 higher. And as Members will also recall the Government have subjected their grant formulae to “damping”. The combined effect is that the Council is underfunded by a figure in the order of magnitude of £20 million. You can imagine that the scope to deliver further good news on the level of council tax would be significant could the Government ever be persuaded to be more fair in its funding regime.”

Question 10 from Councillor E Savva to Councillor Neville, Cabinet Member for Environment and Street Scene:

“Would Councillor Neville inform the Council what is being done about introducing energy saving equipment on the roads?”

Reply from Councillor Neville:

“As part of our initiative of climate change, I am very pleased to advise the Council that we are currently seeking the approval of the Department of Transport to introduce a revolutionary new solar powered LED bollard to be used on roads across the borough. If approved, it is proposed that as part of the PFI contract the Council will replace the majority of its current stock of bollards over the next four years. By the end of the programme it is estimated that the introduction of the bollards will save the Council £50k per annum in energy costs. I have also asked Highways officers to review the number of street bollards that we currently have, which generally seems to be higher than in other London boroughs, and to only replace the bare minimum necessary for road safety purposes. This will lead to a significant reduction of the total number.”