COUNCILLORS’ QUESTIONS

Question 1 from Councillor Simon to Councillor Lavender, Deputy Leader of the Council and Cabinet Member for Finance and Corporate Resources:

“Is Councillor Lavender aware of the recently published figures in The Londoner showing Enfield has the third lowest proportion of registered voters in outer London and does he agree that this unsatisfactory?

Does he not further agree that the borough should be making fresh efforts to make sure that all residents who are qualified to vote can do so and what resources is he going to put into this service to make bring it up to an acceptable level of voter registration?”

RESPONSE from Councillor Lavender:

“The figure of 85.5% given by The Londoner is based on the Register publication date of December, 2007.

The Council's Electoral Services Office continues to chase up non-responding properties, as well as sending a confirmation letter to all responding properties, all aimed at ensuring a full and accurate Register. As a result of this work, the up-to-date percentage return as of now is approximately 95%.

Given the transient nature of some of those living in the borough we are satisfied with this performance and consider that current practices are working well. We do not see the need for any changes to current practices.”

Question 2 from Councillor Jukes to Councillor Lavender, Deputy Leader & Cabinet Member for Finance and Resources:

“Would the Cabinet Member for Finance and Resources inform the Council of the result of the recent LEXCEL Assessment of the Legal Team?”

Response from Councillor Lavender:

“Legal Services has maintained its accreditation to the Law Society's LEXCEL quality award, following a recent audit inspection.

The external auditor noted, "The service continues to maintain an extremely effective Quality Management System. There is not only a high level of compliance to the Lexcel Standard but also a very apparent philosophy of continuous development and improvement of systems and practices. The system is now well embedded in the department with a very high level of consistency across all areas".

It is encouraging to note that our Legal Services unit has received such a strong assessment in what is an exacting national practice management standard.”
Question 3 from Councillor Bond to Councillor Rye, Leader of the Council:

“Given that he and his colleagues have changed their minds about the closure of Post Offices in the borough since 1995 can he tell the Council whether he is going to follow the lead of other authorities in using reserves to keep some of these post offices open?”

Response from Councillor Rye:

“The council’s reserves and balances are set annually during the budget process and monitored throughout the year. Reserves are earmarked for specific purposes and their level is set based on best practice and the latest up to date information about the risks they are designed to cover. It is for this reason that the council does not use reserves to support ongoing revenue expenditure. That would be imprudent, would leave us exposed to an inappropriate level of risk and equally importantly, would not provide a sustainable solution to the problems that Post Offices are facing. The support of Post Offices is rightly a responsibility of central government, and it is central government that has badly let down Post Office users and those who make their livelihood from running these services.

I do, however, recognise the importance of these services to our borough and am sympathetic to the issues created by the government’s closure programme. I have therefore asked the Chief Executive to make the strongest possible representations to the Post Office and to demand a meeting to discuss the impact on our borough. I also want the Post Office to take their community responsibilities seriously, and therefore will want to know what actions they are taking to mitigate the effects of these closures. I will let Council know the outcome of those discussions and continue to press strongly for suitable service provision.”

Question 4 from Councillor E. Savva to Councillor Neville, Cabinet Member for Environment and Street Scene:

“Would the Cabinet Member for Environment and Street Scene confirm how many MPs and Members Enquiries Environment Street Scene and Parks received in 2007 and the response times achieved? “

Response from Councillor Neville:

“I am pleased to inform the Council of the excellent performance of Environment Street Scene and Parks as they received 3,053 Members Enquiries during 2007, of which 2,744 were responded to within 10 days, which equates to a percentage of 89.9% and with an average response time of 6.4 days.

I congratulate the officers concerned on this excellent achievement.”

Question 5 from Councillor Taylor to Councillor Rye, Leader of the Council:

“Would the Leader of the Council join with me in congratulating Haringey and Waltham Forest for their 3 star award under the CPA?

Would he also advise the Council what he and his colleagues are going to do to catch up Barnet who outperformed Enfield this year in its’ assessment?”

I have already congratulated the Leader of Barnet, Councillor Mike Freer, the Leader of Haringey Councillor George Meehan and the Leader of Waltham Forest, Councillor Clyde Loake on their four and three star awards under CPA.
As Councillor Taylor is well aware, Enfield was one area short of achieving four stars this year and we are confident that this will be achieved in next year’s assessment.

For his information I enclose a table comparing the scores of Barnet, Haringey and Waltham Forest which show Barnet achieved no 4s when Enfield achieved 2 and we now have the most 4s in North London

**CPA Scores (2007)**

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<th>Service</th>
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<td>Social Care (Adults)</td>
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<td>Corporate Assessment</td>
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**Question 6 from Councillor E. Hayward 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?”

**Response from Councillor Vince:**

“This is the fourth year that Enfield has participated in the PAN London Co-ordinated Admissions System. All London authorities and four shire 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, 3rd March 2008 and I am pleased to advise Councillor Hayward that almost 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 work undertaken to increase the number of school places in the borough has meant that every child living in Enfield has been offered a secondary school place for September.

I would like to thank Jo Fear and the Schools Admissions Team for all their hard work and for ensuring that all Enfield parents were advised on time”.

**Question 7 from Councillor Brett to Councillor Laban, Cabinet Member for Housing:**

“Is Councillor Laban aware that a number of stray cats were reported languishing close to starvation in Coverack Close estate and that in spite of the best efforts of caretaking staff the matter of removing them to safety could not be resolved for some time.”
Clear guidance is in place but for some reason has not been given to those members of staff who have to deal with the problem of stray animals. Given that this unfortunate incident has happened and no doubt with the recent increase in Enfield of abandoning animals (26%) can he advise the Council when was the last time training on this issue was offered to front line staff to deal with this?”

Response from Councillor Laban:

“I have been advised that our caretaking service has been dealing with problems of stray cats using a below ground garage compound on the estate. The area in question is a large space with several access points, therefore we have had to deal with a number of instances, including animal welfare, some fly tipping and misuse of garages. The garages have been closed to public use, however recently locks to the security door have been broken and it does appear that persons unknown have been entering – possibly providing food and thereby encouraging the space to be used.

The latest report was received last week and the caretaker in this instance followed the working instructions of the department and immediately reported the problem to his manager, who in turn is currently working with appropriate agencies to remove the animals and then re-secure the site. Contractors will be going into each garage and clearing any material within.

Front line officers in this service, are predominantly caretaking and cleaning staff, who are given training that relates to their daily tasks plus specialist programmes relating to working with customers and a range of courses for health and safety needs.

Staff training is specific in ensuring that any work related problem outside their core duties is referred to a senior manager, who then provides advice, guidance and assistance as appropriate.”

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

“Could the Cabinet Member for Environment and Street Scene report on the outcome of the Packaging Seminar recently held at the Civic Centre and its contribution to waste minimisation?”

Response from Councillor Neville:

Members will be aware that in recent years much focus has been placed on recycling and waste disposal, too little, in my view, has been given to the cause of much of the increased waste i.e. producer packaging for consumer goods. With that in mind, I asked officers to arrange a Packaging Seminar for local businesses which I was delighted to launch at the Civic Centre on 26 February, attended by over 30 delegates from high profile Enfield businesses, trade associations, officers from across North London and Councillors from neighbouring boroughs. The seminar platform was shared with partners from Middlesex University, Envirowise and London Trading Standards Authorities.

The council presented the reasons why the issue of reducing packaging had to be tackled – from rising landfill costs, increased costs to be passed onto residents and businesses and a legal obligation to minimise packaging. Envirowise offered businesses support and advice through its free Designtrack and Fasttrack visits. Middlesex University offered engineering design student placements as a means by which businesses could access innovation and design skills to address packaging issues.
We will make available the services of our own officers to assist businesses to comply with the law, provide advice and act as a link to other services. Grants are also available to make environmental improvements. The direct outcomes are that all businesses that attended the seminar will be visited by officers from the Trading Standards & Licensing team with support from other Environmental Protection & Regulation services covering commercial waste and recycling. Officers will advise on compliance with current regulations to minimise packaging.

An additional 6 businesses that were unable to attend requested information and will be contacted by officers this month. Officers from other boroughs are taking the same initiative forward and have been provided with information. Envirowise have been in contact with some of the businesses that attended and will make follow up calls. Middlesex University has joined with us in another campaign to reduce waste from plastic water bottles.

The attendance of significant businesses like Greggs of North London, who on leaving said “We will be in touch to take this forward”, demonstrates that we are supporting businesses in moving to reduce their environmental impact, reduce litter, reduce waste disposal costs and help the environment. I want the Environmental Protection & Regulation Service to take a condensed version of the seminar to other business groups or associations such as the local Chamber of Commerce and Business Link.

Enfield businesses involved: Greggs, JJ Foods, Snowbird Foods, Paramount Panels, London Bread & Cake Company, Fiesta Crafts, Filobake, Fortuna Health, Gamma Foods, Angel Toys,

**Question 9 from Councillor Taylor to Councillor McCannah, Cabinet Member for Leisure, Culture and Olympics 2012:**

“The Council has not reported for some time on the situation since the liquidation of Enfield Leisure. Could Councillor McCannah report:

- The total sum paid to the liquidator since 3 September 2006 including any base management fee, enhanced management fee and liquidation fee.
- Progress to resolve the management of the service.
- When will a report be made on the reasons for the liquidation of the Trust?”

**Response from Councillor McCannah:**

Enfield Leisure Centres Limited (ELCL) was founded by the last Labour Council to avoid the payment of VAT and its creation was opposed by the Conservative Group in opposition.

ELCL was an Industrial and Provident Society, a type of company. It was entirely separate from the council, its accounts did not form part of our own and it made its own decisions.

One of those decisions was to go into liquidation. This was the company’s decision not that of the council. It was made following receipt of advice from licensed insolvency practitioners.

Enfield Council had no legal obligation to provide financial support to the failed company. However, if we had not all of the ELCL leisure facilities would have closed and the staff would not have been paid.

The original budget allocation management fee to the previous ELCL for 2007/2008 would have been £458k. However, that assumes that there would have been no ‘hidden’ liabilities such as emerged late in 2006 prior to liquidation and in the months that followed. Those liabilities eventually came to £700k in 2006/2007.
The fee paid to Vantis in 2007/2008 will not exceed £155k. Over recent months the monthly fee charged by Vantis has reduced to less than £9k per month.

Provision has been made in the 2007/2008 budget to cover the inherited liabilities from the ‘old’ (pre-liquidation) ELCL to the tune of c.£1m. However, this is off-set by the improving financial position of the Trust in liquidation as a result of the expert specialist management brought in by Vantis. For example, income in February 2008 is up by 80% on February 2007 with a forecast of income for the whole of 2007/2008 increasing by over £500k.

Q. The total sum paid to the liquidator since 3 September 2006 including any base management fee, enhanced management fee and liquidation fee.

A. The total sums paid to the liquidator since 3 September 2006 are £39,189 for the financial review undertaken in May/June 2006, £204,650 for base management fee, £1,853,616 for the enhanced management fee and £675,904 for underwriting ELCL’s losses.

Q. Progress to resolve the management of the service.

A. Officers have been working with a number of people to explore the most appropriate arrangements for the future - including support from District Audit who have used their good offices to look at a range of models that might be most beneficial to the running of our leisure centres. That work is coming to an end and will be presented to Cabinet shortly into the new Municipal Year.

Q. When will a report be made on the reasons for the liquidation of the Trust?

A. The process of liquidation is ultimately in the hands of the liquidators who, as officers of the court, have fiduciary and statutory duties that they must fulfil. Part of this is to ensure that the full extent of all claims against the previous Trust have been identified, scoped and accounted for before they can make a financial settlement and end the liquidation process. As soon as that happens, a report will be brought forward in line with previous commitments to Council.

Question 10 from Councillor Charalambous to Councillor Zinkin, Cabinet Member for Corporate Strategy and Communications:

“Can Councillor Zinkin inform me how often over the last twelve months a photograph and personally signed message by a Cabinet Member has been used to advertise any council service in the local press and what are the criteria for choosing which Councillor and what service to promote and what plans there are to continue using half page adverts in the Enfield Advertiser and Enfield Independent to this end. Can Councillor Zinkin also advise me of the individual cost of the most recent adverts featuring Councillor Laban in the two newspapers mentioned above in their 5 March 2008 editions as well as any other papers it may have appeared in.”

Response from Councillor Zinkin:

“The Council’s Communications protocol sets out the rules relating to publicity to ensure that it is used to support council policy, improve awareness of services and encourage participation in local democracy.

Agreed by full Council, it states that the council’s authorised spokespeople are:
The Leader of the Council and/or his Deputy
Executive Members within their portfolios
Chairmen of Overview and Scrutiny Committee, Scrutiny Panels, Standards Committee, Planning Applications Committee, Audit Committee and Licensing Committee
The Mayor and/or his Deputy

They will be quoted or featured in publicity where it relates to their responsibility on the council and ensures clarity about who is making decisions on policy.

The Chief Executive, Directors and senior council officers will also act as spokesmen on their area of expertise, ensuring any comment is based on factual information in line with council policy.

Many publications and consultation documents contain forewords from the relevant Cabinet Member and/or Mayor. This is standard practice across all organisations including national government departments and the Greater London Authority.

With the introduction of Our Enfield magazine the council has reduced the amount of advertising appearing in newspapers but they are still a useful resource, especially on time-related issues and will continue to be used.

The adverts in question relate to the Cabinet Member’s portfolio of Housing and were aimed at encouraging people’s participation in a key consultation that will impact on many thousands of local people. All appeared before the designated ‘pre-election period’ of the GLA elections.

They appeared in four publications and the costs are below:
Enfield Independent - £664.69
Enfield Advertiser - £622.03
Londra Gazette - £330
Parikiaki - £350.

**Question 11 from Councillor Bond to Councillor Neville, Cabinet Member for Environment and Street Scene:**

“Can Councillor Neville explain the delay in releasing the results of the parking review and can he remind the Council which areas are affected by this delay?”

**Response from Councillor Neville:**

“A draft report was submitted in October 2007 however, I was not satisfied with the consultant’s draft report, which I felt was inadequate in terms of the brief given. I met with the consultants in November 2007 to express my dissatisfaction and discuss what is required to bring the report up to a satisfactory standard in terms of presentation and fully satisfying the requirements of the brief.

The revised draft report was submitted at the beginning of March 2008 and officers are currently reviewing its content to ensure it meets the requirement of the brief and addresses the concerns raised by myself. This draft report, when approved, will then be subject to statutory and non-statutory consultation process. The Parking Enforcement Plan forms part of the Council’s Local Implementation Plan which is a statutory document setting out how the council intends to improve transport and the environment in Enfield. The council has therefore a statutory requirement to consult various organisations including The Metropolitan Police, Transport for London, and neighbouring boroughs, on the outcome of this review. This statutory consultation will be carried out over the next three months and a final report detailing the outcome of the
review, and how to communicate the findings to residents, is hoped to be submitted to Cabinet for approval in summer 2008.

A further meeting of the Working Group is proposed prior to the report being considered by Cabinet to give Members of the Joint Scrutiny Panel an opportunity to discuss the comments made during the statutory consultation."

**Question 12 from Councillor Simon to Councillor Laban, Cabinet Member for Housing:**

“What impact assessments have been undertaken on the decision to allow a discount for tenants paying rent by direct debit?

Was this promulgated as a key decision subject to call-in?

What is the expected impact on (a) rents (b) the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) (c) the general fund?

Does he think that the rebate is fair to tenants (especially pensioners) who pay their rent on time and in cash?”

**Response from Councillor Laban:**

“The direct debit incentive scheme was introduced on 1st February 2008 in order to encourage tenants to pay their rent by direct debit, which is recognised by the Audit Commission as being the most efficient way to collect rent.

The scheme does not involve giving a discount to tenants who pay by direct debit; it entails giving a one-off incentive payment of £25 to tenants who switch to direct debit and pay their rent using this method for 12 months.

The cost for a direct debit payment is very cost effective at 3p per transaction.

A full value for money assessment was carried out by officers prior to introducing the scheme and the results confirmed that the scheme offers excellent value for money. An assessment was also carried out to assess the implications of the scheme on different sections of the community and the conclusion was firstly that the council should promote direct debit because it is a convenient method of payment for tenants. Secondly, we should continue to provide a wide range of payment methods for tenants who do not wish to pay by direct debit.

It was unnecessary to treat the introduction of the scheme as a key decision based on the current criteria. Financial and legal implications were identified by the Finance and Legal Departments and the report was agreed as a portfolio decision.

The promotion of direct debit and the introduction of the incentive scheme are expected to have a positive impact on the percentage of rent collected and this will benefit the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) and tenants. The scheme will have no impact on the General Fund.

I would like to stress that the direct debit incentive scheme is not a rebate; it is a one-off payment, which is self-financing to encourage tenants to pay by direct debit. All tenants will continue to have the option of paying their rent using other methods.

I would like to thank officers for introducing this innovative scheme.”

**Question 13 from Councillor Simon to Councillor Rye, Leader of the Council:**

“To ask the Leader of the Council whether he has studied the report "Women Not for Sale" (A report on advertising women in small ads in local newspapers, commissioned by the Minister for..."
Women and Equality); and whether he will withdraw council advertising from any local newspapers which carry such material, as they demean our local society and may relate to women who have been trafficked.”

**Response from Councillor Rye:**

“Unlike Councillor Simon, I do not spend any time studying small ads in local newspapers advertising the services he refers to.

I would however refer Councillor Simon to my previous answer given to Council on 23 January 2008.

The council only advertises in reputable newspapers and magazines with responsible editorial and advertising policies. Should the council become aware of any direct evidence that any media is supporting people trafficking or sexual exploitation, we will cease advertising in such publications.”