

**LONDON BOROUGH OF ISLINGTON**

**COUNCIL MEETING – 28<sup>TH</sup> OCTOBER 2003**

**MINUTES OF PROCEEDINGS**

At an **ORDINARY MEETING** of the Council held at the Town Hall, Upper Street, London N1 2UD on Tuesday, 28 OCTOBER 2003, at 7.30pm.

**Present:**

**The Mayor (Councillor Doreen Scott) in the Chair**

**Councillors:**

ALLAN George	FEATHERSTONE Ed	PULHAM Adrian
BARNES Dave	FOX Bridget	RAY Marisha
BERENT Anna	GIBBONS Arnie	SAWYER Derek
BLANCHARD James	GOWERS Emma	SHARP Keith
BONNER Daniel	GREENING Richard	SIDNELL Barbara
BROOK Angela	HAY SMITH Graham	SMITH Barbara
BURGESS Wally	HITCHINS Steve	SPALL Lisa
CAMERON Euan	JOHNSON Heather	TROTTER Joe
CREAGH Mary	KASPRZYK Stefan	VAJA Jyoti
DEARTH Jonathan	KEMPTON James	VALERY Dorrie
DUNLOP Fiona	NEAVE Bruce	WATT Lucy
DUNN Margot	O'SULLIVAN Michael	WEST Catherine
ECE Meral	POWELL Mary	WILLOUGHBY Laura
		WRIGHT Sylvia

**1. MINUTES (Item 1)**

**RESOLVED:**

That the minutes of the meeting held on 16 September 2003 be confirmed as a correct record and the Mayor be authorised to sign them.

## 2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST (Item 2)

Councillor Heather Johnson declared a personal interest in Item 10.1 (Conduct of Councillor Heather Johnson).

Councillors Jyoti Vaja, Michael O'Sullivan and Euan Cameron declared non-prejudicial interests in Item 10.4 (The Arms Length Management Organisation – a ballot for tenants) as Directors of the Shadow Board of the Arms Length Management Organisation.

## 3. MAYORAL ANNOUNCEMENTS (Item 3)

### (a) Apologies for Absence

Received from Councillors Boffa, Coupland, Heseltine, Carol Powell and Stacy.

### (b) Order of Business

The Mayor announced that the business would be taken in the order printed on the agenda. In addition, the Mayor announced that she had accepted an item of urgent business from the Majority Party regarding the burst water main in Islington High Street and transport matters. This would be taken as Item 11.

### (c) Declaration of Urgent Matters

The Mayor agreed to a request from Councillor Sawyer that Item 10.1 – Motion concerning Conduct of Councillor Heather Johnson) and Item 10.4 – Motion concerning the Arms Length Management Organisation – a ballot for tenants - be identified as urgent matters to be considered before 9.30 p.m.

### (d) Resignation of Councillor Sarah Teather

The Mayor announced the formal resignation of Councillor Sarah Teather from the Council on 23<sup>rd</sup> September 2003.

## 4. PETITIONS (Item 4)

Petitions were received as follows:

- (a) From Councillor Wally Burgess – requesting the Council to develop and implement a strategy to deal with litter, chewing gum on pavements, dumped rubbish, untidy and uneven footpaths, fly posting, dog fouling and cleaning up the Archway “triangle”, opposite the Methodist Church.
- (b) From Councillor Fiona Dunlop – requesting the Council to extend the Archway CPZ to include the full length of Fairbridge Road.
- (c) From Councillor Catherine West – requesting the Council to provide an adequate and effective sweeping service to Alexander and Landseer Roads, N19 and surrounding areas, including enforcement action against dog fouling.

**5. CHIEF WHIP'S REPORT (Item 5)**

The report of the Chief Whip was laid round.

The Chief Whip moved approval of the recommendation, subject to the following:

Moorfields Eye Hospital and UCLH– appointments to be subject to the decisions of the Executive on 6 November 2003

Joint Health Committee – appointments to be subject to agreement with other boroughs as to representation and proportionality.

**RESOLVED:**

That the following appointments be made for the remainder of the municipal year 2003/2004, or until such time as successors are appointed:

- (a) Subject to the decisions of the Executive meeting on 6 November 2003, Councillor Jyoti Vaja be appointed to the Board of Moorfields Eye Hospital and Councillor Marisha Ray to the Board of UCLH.
- (b) Subject to agreement with other boroughs as to representation and proportionality, Councillors Ed Featherstone and Keith Sharp be appointed to the serve on the Joint Health Committee, with Councillor Euan Cameron as a substitute.
- (c) Councillor George Allan be appointed to serve on the Board of ICSL, as a replacement for Councillor Sarah Teather.

**6. QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC (Item 6)****(a) Oliver Bretz to Councillor Bridget Fox, Executive Member for Sustainability**

In April 2002 this Council adopted a motion calling for the implementation of guidelines on planning issues for mobile telephone masts. I own a property in Calabria Road which is directly affected by the mobile telephony base-station at 1-3 Highbury Grove. A re-design proposal has now been submitted but to the best of my knowledge no guidelines have been published. Could Councillor Fox please explain the Council's current attitude to mobile telephone base-station planning and justify the total absence of guidelines 16 months after the original motion?

(CE's note: Oliver Bretz was not present at the meeting and has asked that his question be held over to the Council meeting in January 2004)

**(b) Stephen Steppens to Councillor Meral Ece, Executive Member for Health and Social Care**

The Council is proposing to withdraw its grant to the General Welfare of the Blind. What do you think the long term future will be for the disabled people who are helped by this grant, once it is cut?

**Reply:**

I'm very glad to be answering this question and trying to clarify some of the misconceptions that have been in the media recently. Islington Council approved a commissioning strategy for people with disabilities. It went through the Council and it was agreed as our strategy, that was for the years 2002 up to 2005. This set out our intentions to review and modernise employment support services currently being funded by the grant to the General Welfare for the Blind. This in turn was based on the outcome of a best value review and a recommendation by the joint review which took place in 2001, but there was the need to modernise the day opportunities for people with physical and sensory disability.

These reviews underlined the need for change so that more people, not fewer, were supported into open employment through service models which actively promoted independence and access to open employment opportunities. Social Services had undertaken overall work to consider how to move on from the current provision within supported employment and the current day service at St. John's.

The outcome of this work suggests that the current services tend to segregate people with a disability, only providing a service to a small number of people and appears to have provided a continuing dependence rather than independence.

As part of this work, consultation has taken place with the GWP senior management, ISTC union representative and with the employees and the advocates. Consultation has been undertaken with current service users at St. John's Day Service and local voluntary sector groups representing a wider range of people with disabilities regarding how we can modernise these services.

Islington Council currently supports 13 people in sheltered employment at the General Welfare for the Blind. The grant to GWB of approximately £158,000 i.e. if we break that down that works out to £12,000 per annum per employee. They are employed with employee rights under the 1996 Employment Rights Act at the GWB Kings Cross Bottling Plant and Mattress Factory.

GWB is a charity which specialises in providing sheltered employment and is registered as a private trading company. These employees have been employed for between 5 and 24 years by GWB, paid for by the grant by this Council and Workstep, the Government Employment Scheme. The aim of the service is to support people into open employment and I am afraid to say this has not occurred to date.

It is important to remember that GWB, as an employer, has responsibilities to its employees. Social Services has a responsibility to ensure a larger number of people with a disability receive support to move into training and open employment in line with best practice. It is proposed to withdraw the grant over a three year period to reinvest into the new resource centre and to enable GWB to make alternative arrangements with the following levels of support:

1. Social Services has appointed an employment consultant to work with GWB and its employees to identify alternative work to training opportunities.
2. Employees will also have access to a range of opportunities provided under the new deal for disabled people.

3. Job brokers to assist people with disabilities to find work.
4. Individuals will also have priority access to the range of job ready services already available at the new resource centre.

The Council is committed to supporting people with disabilities and we want to actively encourage them to become more independent of the Council and support them into open employment. Through extensive reviews, Islington Social Services recognises that it needs to improve its services supporting people with a disability into open employment.

The number of disabled people living in Islington is conservatively estimated to be in the region of 10,000. It is proposed that the re-investment of the GWB grant into the resource centre will be phased in over three years. The overall proposal of the resource centre will not only benefit the GWB employees, it will share resources across the service by supporting many more people with a disability to access education, training and work opportunities.

The aim of the resource centre will be to provide flexible sessions to support people with a disability to utilise community-based resources. Ultimately there will be a greater number of people using our services, moving through the service to lead more independent lifestyles. That is our aim and that is what we are committed to do.

There has been a lot of talk about us cutting this grant. Councillor Creagh was quoted as saying we have a cash crisis in Social Services and we are using this as a way of slashing services. That is not true, we are not cutting this grant, we are keeping the grant and we are using it to re-invest to get more people into employment and education and into training. We want to be able to fund more than 13 people, 2 of whom do not live in Islington. Sustaining the status quo is not really an option. We have been criticised by Government inspectors for not doing this.

Islington anticipates that this extended withdrawal period, phased over a 3 year period, will allow GWB sufficient time to accommodate the loss of grant and, if necessary, find alternative funding in order to avoid making any of its employees redundant. Support will be put in place throughout this period by the Council.

### **Supplementary:**

With all due respect, firstly I would like to say that all the workers at General Welfare for the Blind who are currently funded by Islington Council are completely independent. It is not a thing of dependence. Also I would like to say that two of these people have recently gone over to Haringey and they are no longer being funded by Islington.

What do you think the long term future will be for those employees who are currently supported by your grant to GWB, which we are grateful for – all my members have said they are grateful? For some of my members blindness is not their only disability, they also have learning disabilities – and to just expect them to go to the open market in such circumstances, may I say to the Councillor that is an impossible position to put them in and I would like to ask you what your long term plans for them will be. For me I see them as having a long term future on the dole.

**Reply:**

I hear what you are saying about independent and of course this is why this grant was made originally, it was never meant to be a subsidised place for up to 24 years which is what has happened in some instances and I understand that some of the employees are reaching retirement age. That is why we are phasing this. It is not going to be cut overnight. It will be phased out over a 3 year period. As I said in my original answer, we will be giving a lot of support to those individuals to try alternatives. GWB, as an employer, has responsibilities to their own employees to identify new funding streams or to incorporate existing workers into the mainstream. We will be working with the individuals. We are not going to just cut this grant.

I put it to you that we have a responsibility for the wider disabled community and we simply cannot sustain the status quo and address the needs of those people. We have so many now who have those needs, younger people who need support to get into education and training, become independent, to get off the dole and get into jobs. We simply cannot do this if we carrying on sustaining this level of grant for a fewer number of people. We need to use this grant well, we need to use it to help as many people as possible and I will give you my reassurances that we will be giving individuals the maximum support that we can. We are committed to doing that.

Ultimately we have a responsibility to a wider group of people, as I mentioned earlier, to 10,000 people. We are certainly not going to be able to help 10,000 but we are going to try to help a larger number of disabled people to get into jobs. If we carry on with the status quo we simply cannot help anybody else and that is the current situation.

We are not cutting the grant, the grant remains for disabled people.

**7. HEALTH SCRUTINY – STATUTORY GUIDANCE AND DIRECTIONS – APPOINTMENT OF JOINT COMMITTEE (Item 7)**

Councillor Ed Featherstone, seconded by Councillor Euan Cameron, moved the recommendations in the report.

Councillors Sawyer, Burgess, Hay Smith and Creagh contributed to a debate on this item.

Councillor Derek Sawyer requested to have it placed on record that he wished the rules of proportionality to apply to Islington's appointments to the Joint Committee.

**RESOLVED:**

(a) That approval be given to the establishment of a Joint Committee with the London Boroughs of Barnet, Camden, Enfield and Haringey under the powers conferred by the Health and Social Care Act 2001.

(b) That the Director of Law and Public Services be authorised to continue discussions on the constitution of the Joint Committee with the four other boroughs and report back.

**8. DELEGATION OF AUTHORITY TO THE CORPORATE SERVICES COMMITTEE (Item 8)**

Councillor Margot Dunn, seconded by Councillor Stefan Kasprzyk, moved the recommendation in the report.

Councillors Richard Greening and Arnie Gibbons contributed to a debate on the matter and, following a vote, it was

**RESOLVED:**

That the Council delegate authority to the Corporate Services Committee to agree adjustments to the final accounts for 2002/2003.

**9. NOTICE OF MOTION – THE ARMS LENGTH MANAGEMENT ORGANISATION – A BALLOT FOR TENANTS (Item 10.4)**

Councillor Michael O’Sullivan, seconded by Councillor Barbara Sidnell, moved the motion printed in his name.

Councillors Dave Barnes and Mary Creagh contributed to a debate on the matter.

Councillor Jyoti Vaja, seconded by Councillor Euan Cameron, proposed amendments to the motion as follows:

After point 2, insert a new point 3 and renumber “Council welcomes the fact that an ALMO would give tenants and leaseholders a greater say in the way their homes are managed whilst also ensuring that they continue to remain Council tenants, with the same rights and their rents set by the Council”.

Delete the words ‘and that this is regarded as best practice’ from point 3

Delete points 4 and 5.

Add new point 5 “Council recognises the fact that we will need the support of the residents to make these improvements a reality.”

Add point 6 “Council therefore welcomes the consultation with residents over the ALMO including two conferences held by the ALMO Shadow Board, show flats across the borough to give tenants a chance to see what improvements are on offer and appointing a Residents Advisor to give tenants independent advice about the ALMO.”

Add point 7 “Council notes that the Overview Committee has received notice of call-in from members of the Liberal Democrat Group on the most recent Executive decision about the ALMO”.

Add point 8 “Council expects the Executive Member for Housing and Community Safety to report in full on the Director’s plans for consultation and test of opinion amongst tenants and leaseholders.”

Following a vote, the amendment was agreed.

**RESOLVED:**

- (a) Council notes the proposals for an Arms Length Management Organisation (ALMO) to manage Council housing in Islington.
- (b) Council also notes that an ALMO could secure much needed funding to refurbish Islington's homes by 2010, in accordance with the Labour Government's Decent Homes Standard.
- (c) Council welcomes the fact that an ALMO would give tenants and leaseholders a greater say in the way their homes are managed whilst also ensuring that they continue to remain council tenants, with the same rights and their rents set by the Council.
- (d) Council further notes that some local authorities have allowed their tenants and leaseholders to vote on whether their Council housing should be managed by an ALMO.
- (e) Council recognises the fact that we will need the support of the residents to make these improvements a reality.
- (f) Council therefore welcomes the consultation with residents over the ALMO, including two conferences held by the ALMO Shadow Board, show flats across the borough to give tenants a chance to see what improvements are on offer and appointing a Residents Advisor to give tenants independent advice about the ALMO.
- (g) Council notes that the Overview Committee has received notice of call-in from members of the Liberal Democrat Group on the most recent Executive decision about the ALMO.
- (h) Council expects the Executive Member for Housing and Community Safety to report in full on the Director's plans for consultation and test of opinion amongst tenants and leaseholders.

**10. NOTICE OF MOTION – THE CONDUCT OF COUNCILLOR HEATHER JOHNSON (Item 10.4)**

Councillor Mary Creagh moved the motion printed in her name, highlighting two amendments:

Para 2 – line 2 – replace the word “is” with “was”

Para 3 – line 3 – add the following words after “Wales” and “who were now investigating the matter”.

Councillor Derek Sawyer seconded the amended motion.

Councillor Steve Hitchins, seconded by Councillor Stefan Kasprzyk, proposed an amendment to the motion as follows:

Para 1 - after ‘This Council notes’ insert “that Haringey Council’s enquiry into”. Delete the “s” from Johnson and delete “suspension from her position at Haringey Council” and insert “has ended”.



Para 2 - delete all after 'The Council also notes that' and replace with "- Heather Johnson has already apologised for any offence that her forwarding an email may have caused". Add at end "- Police investigations have been concluded and they will be taking no further action".

Para 3 - delete all after 'This Council further notes that' and replace with "members of the Liberal Democrat Group notified the Monitoring Officer as soon as the matter arose and in accordance with the correct procedures details of this matter were forwarded to the Standards Board".

Para 4 - delete all after 'This Council believes that' and replace with "it is inappropriate for the Council to pass judgement before the Standards Board has considered the matter".

Para 5 delete 'welcomes' and replace with "notes".

Delete all of point 6 and replace with "This Council calls on all councillors to focus on their electoral responsibility to make Islington better rather than attack individual colleagues".

The following Councillors contributed to a debate on the matter: Councillors Kasprzyk, Barnes, Dunlop, Pulham, Neave, Burgess, Sharp, Gibbons, Ece, Greening, Cameron, West, Brook, Trotter, Featherstone, Gowers, Dearth, Blanchard, Fox, Dunn, Allan, Vaja, Valery, Hay Smith, Watt, Berent, Willoughby, Johnson and Kempton.

Councillor Steve Hitchins called for a recorded vote on the amendment. A division was demanded which showed the following:

For the amendment to the motion: The Mayor, Councillors Allan, Berent, Blanchard, Brook, Cameron, Dearth, Dunlop, Dunn, Ece, Featherstone, Fox, Gibbons, Gowers, Hay Smith, Hitchins, Johnson, Kasprzyk, Kempton, Neave, Mary Powell, Sharp, Smith, Trotter, Vaja, Valery, Watt, Willoughby and Wright (29).

Against the amendment to the motion: Councillors Barnes, Bonner, Burgess, Creagh, Greening, O'Sullivan, Pulham, Sawyer, Sidnell, Spall and West (11).

The amendment was declared carried.

A recorded vote on the substantive motion was then held, showing –

For the amended motion: The Mayor, Councillors Allan, Berent, Blanchard, Brook, Cameron, Dearth, Dunlop, Dunn, Ece, Featherstone, Fox, Gibbons, Gowers, Hay Smith, Hitchins, Johnson, Kasprzyk, Kempton, Neave, Mary Powell, Sharp, Smith, Trotter, Vaja, Valery, Watt, Willoughby and Wright (29).

Against the amended motion: Councillors Barnes, Bonner, Burgess, Creagh, Greening, O'Sullivan, Pulham, Sawyer, Sidnell, Spall and West (11).

The amended motion was declared carried.

**RESOLVED:**

- (a) This Council notes that Haringey Council's enquiry into Councillor Johnson has ended.
- (b) This Council also notes that:
- Councillor Johnson has already apologised for any offence that her forwarding an email may have caused
  - Police investigations have been concluded and they will be taking no further action.
- (c) This Council further notes that members of the Liberal Democrat Group notified the Monitoring Officer as soon as the matter arose and in accordance with the correct procedures details of this matter were forwarded to the Standards Board.
- (d) This Council believes that it is inappropriate for the Council to pass judgement before the Standards Board has considered the matter.
- (e) This Council notes Councillor Johnson's resignation as a non-executive Director of the Camden and Islington Mental Health and Social Care Trust, for which she received remuneration of £5,295 per annum.
- (f) This Council calls on all councillors to focus on their electoral responsibility to make Islington better rather than attack individual colleagues .

**11. QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE COUNCIL (Item 9)****(a) Councillor Mary Creagh to the Mayor, Councillor Doreen Scott**

Can you comment on the unnecessarily partisan questions submitted by Liberal Democrat councillors at September's meeting of Council, and do you agree with Opposition councillors that such questions are more about scoring cheap political points, rather than scrutinising the running of the Council, and only serve to damage the reputation of the Council and of local democracy in Islington?

Reply:

I refer the Leader of the Opposition to the next question.

Supplementary:

The question congratulating Councillor Teather, that is an interesting question. The question condemning the Government's Council Tax proposals, the question condemning the Government for making Councils pay for bed-blocking and the questions supposedly about delivering pledges in Hillrise make an absolute mockery of the questions which are supposed to scrutinise these areas. Do you not agree that this is a waste of the time of members of the public and Councillors in asking these fatuous questions?

Reply:

My ruling is final as outlined in the Council's procedures.

**(b) Councillor Wally Burgess to Councillor Mary Creagh, Leader of the Opposition**

Does the Leader of the Opposition think that the administration is keeping its election promises to the people of Islington?

Reply:

One of the pledges was to get Islington off the bottom of the education league tables and yet we see the second worse results in London after Hackney. So I think they have failed on that one.

They promised new toilets. Well we got them with the Angel N1 Centre but now we have lost them again.

What is the Council's response to this? Put some revenue towards having a toilet attendant there – no. Sell off the freehold of the N1 Centre so that we can squander the money.

They promised and campaigned against library closures and they say the Liberal Democrat Group will continue the campaign to save our libraries by sending out pyramid petitions. It is a pyramid of something else, because we all know that Arthur Simpson Library is closing at the end of this year, so I think they failed on that one.

Let us look at more recent promises and the local by-election record. No school closures in Bunhill, but then we have Councillor Boffa nine months later writing to the Gazette saying 'I feel I should explain why we are taking this decision'. Where were your Councillors when they were on the governing body?

Let's look at what they didn't promise – they didn't promise the largest Council Tax rise ever of £180. They didn't promise that they would sell their own Council houses to their own Councillors instead of rehousing homeless families.

They didn't promise to close Angel School. They didn't promise to try and close Hargrave Park School. They didn't promise to quit their seats after a year in office to fight seats elsewhere, forcing three by-elections in four months.

They promised so much that they did not deliver and yet they have done so much that they didn't promise.

Supplementary:

I think there are a few things that I think you might have missed – for instance one of them is about recycling. Could you comment on the recycling rate and why it is still half of the national average?

What about ALMO and putting the decision to the people?

Reply:

We get a recycling record that has been stuck at 6% for the last four years. It is still 6% and the dangers over the Arsenal waste transfer station not going ahead means that they are in danger of not meeting their recycling targets.

I do not know why they are so afraid of having the ALMO ballot. I think it's because they may not be able to control the way that people vote and they are worried about getting a result that they are scared of. All I can say is that they have been found to have among the worst services in the country. We have consistently tried to expose their weakness. They are soft on crime, three ASBOs in four years where next door Camden have issued 47. The fact that they have appointed one of their party officials to be the Chief Executive. These are the sort of things that really put people off politics. We will see on Thursday just how put off the people of Hillrise are.

**(c) Councillor Barbara Sidnell to Councillor Jyoti Vaja, Executive Member for Housing and Community Safety**

How many long-term (more than six months) vacant, private sector properties are there in Islington, and what is the Council doing to make them available for re-letting?

Reply:

Council Tax figures estimate there are about 1800 empty private properties in the Borough. We are no longer collecting separate figures for properties vacant over six months. The best value performance indicator was changed because the Government is more interested in the total number of empty properties.

Islington Council has a dedicated Empty Properties Officer (EPO) to set up and co-ordinate initiatives around the Borough to help fill these properties. We give empty property grants of up to £45,000 to bring homes back into use and, if necessary, we use our compulsory purchase powers. In the future, we will also be working with Management Orders, often called compulsory leasing, which are currently under consultation with ODPM, which allow Councils to influence owners rather than the hard line enforcement action by the Compulsory Purchase Orders.

We link our empty property activity to a wider objective to ensure a supply of affordable housing. Landlords are put in touch with housing associations that can manage the properties and our empty property grants are conditional on the Council having nomination rights to the property after the works have been done.

There is joint work between departments and with external partners. We work very closely with the Government Office for London, the National Homes Agency, Customs and Excise, Housing Associations and other Councils.

Eyes for Islington also help identify empty homes. Regular fora are held to exchange information, these include the Islington Landlord Forum, the Islington Empty Property Solution Group and the Empty Homes Agency Forum.

There is a lot of publicity in Islington on empty homes including press releases, internal newsletters, lamp-post advertising, the Council website and Council Tax mailouts. We have a special empty property information pack for owners of empty homes and give advice on selling empty homes in our general landlord information pack.

Many Councillors will have seen the publicity in Council offices and around the Borough for the London Week of Action from the 13<sup>th</sup> to 17<sup>th</sup> October using balloons, pens and posters to get our message across. We are always looking at new ways of promoting and implementing our strategy. For example, we are currently negotiating with the Royal Mail to agree to use their delivery staff to identify empty homes. Next year we will use joint work with the fire brigade on houses in multiple occupation to identify any empty homes.

Our empty homes strategy has recently been re-written and will be formally re-launched to the public at 5.00pm on November 17<sup>th</sup> in the Town Hall. All Councillors will be welcome, but I specifically invite Councillor Sidnell to attend.

Supplementary:

What you haven't given me is statistics or actual dates on anything. You've said it is going to happen, it will be happening.

You also stated, and this is a question, I would like statistics and dates of when these so called futuristic ideas are happening, but you stated that in Council offices that these are now actually being displayed. Can I say that I was in the Isledon Road Neighbourhood Office this morning and there was no noticeable display there and as far as I am aware I haven't seen it in three of the other neighbourhood offices I've visited over the last 48 hours. What you are saying in words is wonderful, but it actually isn't happening, as usual.

Reply:

We have got about 1800 empty properties and I do not have statistics here to hand with regard to dates.

I did actually say that there was publicity around on the London Week of Action from 13<sup>th</sup> – 17<sup>th</sup> October and I certainly saw these because I was in a number of neighbourhood offices. I will endeavour to get you those statistics.

(CE's note: The time allowed for members' questions having expired, written answers were sent in respect of questions (d) to (m) as set out below:)

**(d) Councillor Richard Heseltine to Councillor Steve Hitchins, Leader of the Council**

How do you justify the dramatic rise in LBI's Publicity Expenditure from £1,084,000 in 2000/01 to £1,291,000 in 2001/02 to £1,975,000 in 2002/03?

Reply :

Approximately £¼ million of this is not any increase since it represents the transfer of the consultation function from another budget head and area. Approximately £½ million of the additional expenditure is attributable to increased recruitment advertising and activity. I don't think I have to justify it. These payments were all made within the Council's Constitution.

**(e) Councillor Catherine West to Councillor Meral Ece, Executive Member for Health and Social Care**

Is the trend upward for the last three months of figures for both looked after children and children receiving statutory visits from their named social worker?

Reply:

The number of looked after children has gone down by eight over the past three months. It was 456 in July and 448 at the end of September. We do not collect aggregate information on the number of visits to looked after children but with regard to the percentage of children on the child protection register this has fluctuated across the three month period from 84% down to 74% rising again to 77% a significant improvement on the 2002/03 figure of 57%.

**(f) Councillor Catherine West to Councillor Meral Ece, Executive Member for Health and Social Care**

Have the rates of recruitment and retention of children and family social workers improved in the last three months?

Reply:

We have been recently recruiting from Canada, New Zealand and Australia which has been very successful:

- we have approx. 15 social workers. from North America to start in Oct/Nov 2003
- by Jan 2004 we expect approx. 20 social workers from NZ / Australia
- we have also updated our recruitment material and will be advertising in the UK at the end of October 2003.

**(g) Councillor Michael O'Sullivan to Councillor Jyoti Vaja, Executive Member for Housing and Community Safety**

Do you regard it an example of best practice to implement an ALMO without having held a full tenants' ballot?

Reply:

Firstly could I welcome the interest that Councillor O'Sullivan, as an ALMO Shadow Board Director, is showing in the work needed to create and set up Islington's ALMO.

As Councillor O'Sullivan will know from his position as a Shadow Board Director, if not as a Councillor, the government requires bids for ALMOs to show "support from tenants" and that this can be based around a "Test of Opinion", or a ballot, or a combination of the two.

So far, out of six ALMOs in London, four, Westminster, Brent, Kensington & Chelsea and Hillingdon have used a survey to give a Test of Opinion. Two, Hounslow and Waltham Forest, have used a ballot. Elsewhere in the country there have been similarly mixed arrangements with eight ballots and seven surveys. The Council carried out its Test of Opinion last week and I am delighted to inform Members that of the residents who expressed an opinion 91.3% indicated that they were in favour of an ALMO, and the additional £156.82m it brings to the borough, and only 8.7% were against.

This overwhelming level of support for the ALMO reinforces the messages we have been receiving from our residents. The survey work carried out in 2002 showed overwhelming support for an ALMO. Residents who have inspected our showflats have shown overwhelming support for an ALMO. This latest Test of Opinion only confirms what we already knew which is that ALMO is good news for Islington and, more importantly, good news for our residents.

**(h) Councillor James Blanchard to Councillor Steve Hitchins, Leader of the Council**

Will the Leader of the Council join me in congratulating my former colleague, Councillor Sarah Teather, in being elected to Parliament in a spectacular by-election victory for the Liberal Democrats, demolishing an extremely large Labour majority? Does he agree that Sarah's victory shows that it is not just in Islington that "people are nervous about voting Labour" (as Councillor Creagh put it) but that across London and the country, the public have lost trust in a Labour government which promised much on public services, but have delivered little, and which took the country to war with Iraq on the strength of a con trick?

Reply:

Yes and yes. It's a great honour for one of our colleagues to be elected to Parliament. I am confident that Sarah will be the first of many to be elected from the Liberal Democrat side of this Chamber to the House of Commons.

**(i) From Councillor Keith Sharp to Councillor Arnie Gibbons, Executive Member for Resources**

Effectively it is the Government who has decided that council tax should have large rises in all councils. Do you think it is unfair that the Labour Government are blaming councils for these increases, when the Government's own spending plans ask councils for tax rises of over three times inflation? Is this not yet another example of Government buck passing which flies in the face of their so-called plans to hand back more power and trust to local government, something which the Liberal Democrats have continued to call for?

Reply:

As you are aware councils across London levied substantial increases in the council tax last year. Notwithstanding the large increase in Islington this year, our council tax remains below the London average - a dramatic contrast to the days when Councillor Sawyer and his colleagues levied the highest council tax in London.

Not only does the Government assume above inflation rises in its own spending plans, but it fails to adequately fund the additional demands it places upon councils. As a consequence, every single council in London increased council tax by more than the Government's own forecast this year. Having promised to abolish council tax capping the Government are once again threatening to re-introduce capping, further undermining the principle of local decision making.

The result is that the inequities inherent in the tax are becoming more and more apparent. In response to this, the Government has launched the 'Balance of Funding Review' to which this council made a submission.

The key parts of our submission were:

- council tax is broken beyond repair - replace it with local income tax
- return the business rate to local control; and
- thirdly if the Government is unwilling to consider the replacement of council tax it needs to incorporate a regional model for rebanding when the council tax base is reviewed, otherwise there would be a massive transfer of resources out of London or huge increases in council tax across London.

The welcome news this week is that, having reviewed the evidence received, the review group has decided to proceed on the basis that no options are ruled out, thus leaving a local income tax under consideration as a viable alternative option. A local income tax would meet Councillor Sharp's aspirations for a system with more power and trust placed in the hands of local government as well as producing a tax that was fair, based on ability to pay and less complex than the present arrangement - and it is something that as Liberal Democrats we will continue calling for.

**(j) Councillor Graham Hay Smith to Councillor Meral Ece, Executive Member for Health and Social Care**

The Labour Government's plans to make councils pay if there are delays in discharging elderly people from hospitals come into force this month. Can the



Executive Member for Health and Social Care give me a rough estimate on how much this will cost taxpayers - money which should instead be being invested into elderly care? Would the Executive Member also agree with me that fining already very over-stretched social services will not address the cause of the problem and it is more about shifting the blame for what is actually a Labour government failure?

Reply:

The new legislation introducing the Community Care Delayed Discharge Act comes into force in full in January 2004. The period October to December is the pilot period. The new Act introduces fines when Social Services Departments fail to make arrangements to discharge people within set timescales.

In Islington we are negotiating a pooled fund with both the Whittington Hospital and the Primary Care Trust for Intermediate Care services. The pooled fund would include the grant we have received from the Government to help implement the new Act as well as funding for other intermediate care services. This would mean that we could avoid paying fines to the hospital and that the new money from the Government could be spent on improving services for older people and people with disabilities. We hope that this will avoid pointless paperwork and improve services to local people. The Whittington Hospital Board has agreed this approach.

The number of people experiencing a delay in leaving hospital has been reducing steadily since the summer. This is as a result of a rigorous review of processes and procedures within both the Hospital and Social Services. This is being monitored weekly.

**(k) Councillor Fiona Dunlop to Councillor Bridget Fox, Executive Member for Sustainability**

I've read in the Council's award winning residents' magazine that work has begun on replacing street lighting across Islington, another Liberal Democrat pledge which we have delivered. Are there any streets in Hillrise which will have their lighting replaced in the next year?

Reply:

There are a number of streets in Hillrise that are programmed for relighting in Year 1. Sussex Way and Courtauld Road will have their lighting completed by the end of next month.

In the first part of 2004, work will be done in Ashbrook Road, Duncombe Road, and Calverley Grove. These are locations that have been prioritised because of poor lighting stock, high crime or high levels of traffic accidents. Of course, this is just the start.

The whole of Hillrise - in common with the rest of Islington - will have its street lighting brought up to standard over the next five years.

I hope you agree with me that this is good news for Hillrise.

**(l) Councillor Anna Berent to Councillor Meral Ece, Executive Member for Health and Social Care**

Local authorities across the country are having serious problems recruiting and keeping enough social workers. What particularly interesting initiatives are we taking to address this problem and what progress are we making?"

Reply:

We have been recently recruiting from Canada, New Zealand and Australia which has been very successful:

- we have approx. 15 social workers from North America to start in Oct/Nov 2003
- by Jan 2004 we expect approx. 20 social worker's from New Zealand / Australia
- we have also updated our recruitment material and will be advertising in the UK at the end of October 2003.

**(m) Councillor Richard Heseltine to Councillor Arnie Gibbons, Executive Member for Resources**

In recent years there has been a dramatic increase in LBI's fixed asset sales (i.e. property disposals) which have generated impressive and much needed cash inflows, amounting (according to LBI's annual accounts) to:

1996/97	£9.8m
1997/98	£13.9m
1998/99	£26.7m
1999/00	£39.3m
2000/01	£53.0m
2001/02	£73.0m
2002/03	£116.3m

What is your current best estimate of what the equivalent figure will be for the cash inflow derived from the Council's property sales for the current financial year 2003/04?

Reply:

I thank Councillor Heseltine for his question and his continued interest in matters relating to property. While I would not endorse every single suggestion he makes, there is no doubt that his contributions are more constructive than all the rest of the Opposition put together - by an order of magnitude.

The basic answer is £57m, of which £30m was set aside for debt redemption.

This breaks down as: £15m - general fund corporate receipts  
£40m - right to buy sales; and  
£2m - other HRA disposals which are to be re-invested in affordable housing.

**12. NOTE: BALANCE OF MOTIONS**

At 10.30 pm, in accordance with the Constitution, the following motions were deemed formally moved and seconded, and were put to the vote, including any amendments which had been previously laid round, without debate.

**10.2 PEDESTRIAN SAFETY OUTSIDE ANGEL TUBE STATION**

(Proposed by Councillor Bridget Fox, seconded by Councillor Joan Coupland)

**RESOLVED:**

- (a) That Council welcomes the facts
- that Angel Town Centre continues to be the major retail leisure and employment centre in the south of Islington
  - that the Council is consulting local businesses and residents on the Angel Town Centre Strategy
  - that one of the draft objectives in this Strategy is to consider additional measures to give pedestrians priority over traffic especially in the shopping areas
- (b) Council however notes that the Angel is also a major transport interchange marking the start of the congestion charging zone, a busy Tube station and a large number of bus routes.
- (c) Council notes with concern that there are a number of unresolved issues around the safety of pedestrians at the intersection outside Angel Tube Station, which lies within the jurisdiction of Transport for London. These include:
- the length of time pedestrians have to wait before they are able to cross
  - the small size of the pedestrian island in the middle of the crossing which can put pedestrians in danger
  - the lack of clear signage around the junction for pedestrians
- (d) Council recognises the need to keep traffic and particularly buses moving through this interchange, however firmly believes that the Town Centre should be made safer and more accessible for pedestrians.
- (e) Council further notes that 46,000 people exit Angel Tube Station on a typical weekday and that this is the main pedestrian crossing between the Town Centre's major shopping area such as Camden Passage, Chapel Market and the N1 Centre.
- (f) Council therefore calls on Transport for London to review this junction as soon as possible to make this a safer crossing for pedestrians to use.

**10.3 PENSION CREDIT CAMPAIGN**

(Proposed by Councillor Laura Willoughby, seconded by Councillor Margot Dunn)

**RESOLVED:**

- (a) That Council notes that Pension Credit is a new entitlement for people aged over 60 and that this is being introduced from October 2003.
- (b) That Council welcomes the fact that pensioners can apply now to start in October 2003 and that if pensioners apply before October 2004 the money owed to them will be backdated.
- (c) That Council however notes with concern that:
- The Labour Government is only planning to write to 1 in 5 pensioners before October 2003 to let them know about the Pension Credit.
  - The Government are only expecting 2.8 million out of the 3.8 million eligible pensioners to have received the credit by 2004, and that this means they will judge it to be a success even if a million pensioners miss out.
  - There is therefore a real risk that hundreds of the poorest pensioners in Islington will never hear about the Pension Credit, fail to apply and miss out on the cash that is owed to them.
- (d) That
- officers be asked to look into how best the Council can help to increase awareness and encourage take-up of the Pension Credit.
  - The Council write to the Pensions Minister urging the Government to undertake a vigorous advertising campaign to raise take-up.

**10.4 POST OFFICES**

(Proposed by Councillor Bridget Fox, seconded by Councillor Laura Willoughby)

**RESOLVED:**

- (a) That Council believes that post offices are a vital part of urban communities, both for the services they directly provide, and as a focus for the community, and that the Council has consistently supported them, for example in the UDP and by allowing Council tenants to pay their rent through post offices and
- is concerned that following the closure of post offices including Old Street and Westbourne Road, the Post Office is now proposing a further wave of closures, based around 'area plans' on a constituency basis, that they will be consulting over Islington North in November and December, and Islington South and Finsbury in April and May next year, and regrets that they are not dealing with both together rather considering Islington as a whole, as users do.

- is concerned that local Councils are not being consulted earlier in the process, and that by the time area plans are published it will too late really to influence them.

(b) Council therefore calls for:

- (i) the Post Office to consider the future of post offices in the whole of Islington together, and to consult the Council as early as possible in the process
- (ii) the Government and the Mayor of London to take concrete action to support local post offices
- (iii) the Overview Committee to set up a scrutiny inquiry into the future of local post offices as soon as possible.

### 13. **EMERGENCY MOTION – TRANSPORT AND WATER SERVICES IN ISLINGTON (Item 11)**

#### **RESOLVED:**

(a) That Council reaffirms its belief that Islington residents want safe quiet residential streets with efficient traffic on our main roads and a decent public transport system.

(b) That Council notes with concern that in the past week transport and water services in Islington have been severely disrupted which have caused massive problems for those that live or work in the Borough.

These problems include:

- the closure of parts of Upper Street which caused serious delays for traffic and local bus services after a burst water main at the Angel
- traffic light problems on the A1, that resulted in tailbacks and congestion along Upper Street, Highbury Corner and Holloway Road
- severe disruption on the Northern Line services affecting Angel, Tufnell Park and Archway following a derailment and that despite reassurances that it would be up and running by Monday of this week it is still closed
- problems on the Victoria Line last week which led to disruption at Highbury & Islington and Finsbury Park
- ongoing disruptions to Thameslink and tube services at King's Cross St. Pancras due to CTRL works.

(c) That Council notes that Transport for London are responsible for keeping the traffic flowing freely on major trunk routes such as the A1 and ensuring that buses and tubes are running properly.

(d) That Council believes that both TfL and Thames Water have a responsibility to ensure that these essential services are properly maintained and run smoothly.

- (e) That Council welcomes the fact that the Executive Member for Sustainability, Bridget Fox, has already written to Transport for London expressing these concerns.
- (f) That Council believes that such disruptions are unacceptable and damaging to the borough.
- (g) That Council therefore calls on the Executive Member for Sustainability and the Executive Member for Communities to write to Bob Kiley, Commissioner of TfL and the Chief Executive of Thames Water expressing these concerns and asking them to take urgent action to ensure that such problems do not happen again.

The meeting closed at 10.32 pm.

**THE MAYOR**