

How to ask public questions in council meetings and council-run residents forums

Questions should be linked directly to the agenda reports (in council meetings) or to issues local to the relevant forum (Residents Forums). So, to get your questions on the agenda, find references in the reports and use them as hooks to highlight how council policies and changes in service provision impact on an aspect of residents' lives. **Don't accept 'No' as an answer: Send the questions as early as possible to allow enough time for a response in case it is disallowed, follow it up immediately with a phone call to the officer (their tel. Numbers are published on the website, see below), and if your question is not allowed – challenge the decision by email and by phone! Let us know if this happens.**

EXAMPLES:

Question to Cabinet and Cabinet Resource Committee (where agenda-reports are published on the [council's website](http://barnet.moderngov.co.uk/mgCalendarMonthView.aspx?GL=1&bcr=1) (<http://barnet.moderngov.co.uk/mgCalendarMonthView.aspx?GL=1&bcr=1>) 5 working days prior to the meetings):

Questions That Were Allowed:

The questions all relate to agenda item 7 - Arrangements for Commissioning New Schools

Regarding paragraph 3.3 - How is the statement "Barnet is supportive of schools that wish to convert to academy status" (which is a statement about existing schools) relevant to a report on commissioning new schools? Is Barnet also supportive of schools that wish to stay with the Local Education Authority and benefit from the support and services provided by Barnet's employees? Why indicate support for the former but not for the latter?

Regarding paragraph 3.3 and also the local process 9.5 to 9.10 - Given the widespread concern about a move to academies and free schools meaning that school governance will involve fewer mechanisms of democratic accountability than existing local authority schools (for example, in the requirements for governors to be elected), will Barnet give a commitment to include criteria of open and democratic local community involvement in the running of a school (including seeking a commitment to have elected parent and staff governors - at least to the same extent as local authority schools - as well as a democratic voice for the school's students) when making a decision about a preferred proposer?

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Regarding Item 8 on the agenda, FINCHLEY CHURCH END - DRAFT FINAL TOWN CENTRE STRATEGY FOR ADOPTION, please answer the following questions:

1. In the strategy plan for Finchley Church End there is no reference to cyclists path, and very little considerations for cyclists in general, contrary to the progress made by other boroughs e.g. Hackney & Islington, Camden and Harrow. Will the council re-consider its plan, and allocate space for cycling routes in this area?
2. Who will be responsible for deciding on and implementing such issues as cycling and green spaces if and when One Barnet Program goes ahead?

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Will the Council, as the largest employer in Barnet with the NHS, ensure that its **Employment and Enterprise Action Plan to encourage unemployed 16 to 24-year-olds back into employment**, is not jeopardised by the One-Barnet programme of outsourcing 70% of Council employees to employers in the private sector, many of whom are outside the borough?

Questions That Were Not Allowed

1. Since Environment and Planning are part of OneBarnet's sell off to private companies, who in the Council will monitor it to avoid another Aerodrome Way scandal?
2. After One Barnet implementation, how will the complaint procedures work?

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Questions to council-run residents forum

Questions That Were Not Allowed:

1. Which of our councillors have attended the briefings on the report by the Association of Public Service Excellence (APSE) on the risks of the One Barnet plan or read the report, and what are their reactions to the many issues raised in it?
2. Re the One Barnet plan: Given the lack of evidence in Barnet or elsewhere in the UK of a good track record of large-scale outsourcing, what guarantees can our councillors give that putting our core services in the hands of one giant corporation that might operate from anywhere in the world will provide high-quality services cost-effectively?

The officer's reply:

Only matters that relate to 'Public Works' as defined in the Council's Constitution - Article 10 - Area Committee and Forums and Local Strategic Partnership, can be considered at Residents Forums

Public Works items are defined as relating to: Parks and Greenspaces ; Trees ; Allotments; Highways ; Pavements ; Traffic/Transport ; Parking ; Utility issues ; Refuse/Recycling ; Street cleaning ; Local crime

As One Barnet does not fall within the above remit, I unfortunately can not accept your questions for inclusion on the agenda for the Chipping Barnet Residents Forum.

Questions That Were Allowed:

- How many fun fairs have there been in Victoria Park in the last 12 months?
- What is the criteria for allowing the use of public resources (parks, libraries, open spaces etc) by community groups?
- Are there different criteria for the use of community resources by community groups than by commercial bodies?

(These questions were asked in the context of the cancellation of a local community festival and as preparation to challenge the policy of Private Hire of Parks, part of the One Barnet privatisation approach; the latter policy affects parks across the borough, but was hooked to the park local to the specific Residents Forum).