

# Hey, Barnet councillors come and join our strike!

**BARNET COUNCIL'S FINANCIAL situation is undoubtedly dire. In a June 2014 committee meeting a senior officer said that by 2020 the council would not have enough money to be able to fulfill their statutory duties if, as expected, austerity cuts were to carry on.**

The autumn statement in 2014 confirmed further serious cuts to council funding.

The future for local government is stark if councils continue to implement austerity policies.

In the north of England a number of councils have clubbed together to produce a video on YouTube called "Game of Cuts – winter is coming for councils" to show the dramatic reduction in central Government funding to local authorities. Take a look when you get a chance!

Each council is looking at how to cope with the funding cuts and some, like Barnet, claim to have found the "magic bullet" that justifies embarking on the mass commissioning of services instead of in-house delivery. Bromley and Northamptonshire County Council are now also in the race to outsource the workforce to be the first to claim the title of "Commissioning Council".

**Our members want to remain council employees, and have questioned why**

**the council is embarking on what they rightly see is an attack on their terms and conditions and the services they want to deliver.**

Earlier this year the Office for Budget Responsibility (OBR), in its report accompanying the chancellor's statement, said public spending would fall from £5,650 per head in 2009-10 to £3,880 in 2019-20. Day to day public services spending as a share of GDP would be at a level not seen since the late 1930s.<sup>2</sup>

So, what we have is an ideological war against public services. There is an agenda to reduce the public sector to levels not yet seen in our country's history. The implications for our members as well as service users and residents are ever diminishing levels of service.

## The race to the end of council funding

Let us be clear: councillors do have some power over decisions which impact on the communities they have been elected to serve. For example, they could choose to raise council tax by 1.99%; in the case of Barnet if councillors had done this when

austerity policies began in 2010 and carried on increasing by that amount until 2020 they would have generated £100 million. However politicians shy away from raising council tax and because of how council finances are organised this has a negative impact on the pool of money available to deliver services.

Which is why it is interesting to read this headline: Council tax freeze "costs services £2.8bn".

According to the Local Government Executive website:<sup>3</sup>

"The Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy said that council tax for an average band D property will increase by just under £16 in 2015-16, from £1,467.94 to £1,483.92, illustrating the effect of the government's grant freeze and a 2% referendum cap on local authorities' setting of rates."

This reveals that councils had, and still have, choices and that buying time might prove a more prudent as well as a more humane strategy than the "slash and burn" policies that are increasing inequality for both the workforce and our communities.

But eventually, even this option will not be enough so to all councillors I pose this question:

**When do you draw a line in the sand and say enough is enough?**

So, we are asking our councillors to put aside their politics and come out in support of public services by refusing to implement austerity budgets.

Don't be intimidated by threats from central government. If central government dare to send in commissioners then you will have the trade union movement and residents standing shoulder to shoulder with you to protect our local services and the communities which use them.

The proposed budget savings here in Barnet have set the scene for our "line in the sand".

Our members have had enough, which is why 87% voted **YES** for strike action.<sup>4</sup>

It's not too late for Barnet Council to join UNISON at the negotiating table, if not the picket line.

### Notes

1. Animation: "The Disappearing Council" [bit.ly/1DumWUY](http://bit.ly/1DumWUY)
2. Office for Budget Responsibility: Economic and fiscal outlook, December 2014 [bit.ly/1FMvvQf](http://bit.ly/1FMvvQf)
3. [www.localgovernmentexecutive.co.uk](http://www.localgovernmentexecutive.co.uk): <http://bit.ly/1DUoBde>
4. A total of 87% of UNISON members working for Barnet "easyCouncil" vote YES to strike action: [bit.ly/1JyAGZc](http://bit.ly/1JyAGZc)

# It's your choice, Barnet: don't get fooled again



Illustration: Tim Sanders

For those who live and work in Barnet, their local affairs are now handled remotely by people hundreds of miles away, who know nothing about them or the area

**Aditya Chakraborty**  
**The Guardian 15.12.14**

ELEVEN DAYS OF strike action against a 9.5% wage cut, an inadequate Care Quality Commission inspection rating, a £1m loan from Barnet Homes which is unlikely to be paid back, a loss of nearly one third of the workforce through downgradings.

Your Choice Barnet was not supposed to be like this... that is, if you believed the council reports. UNISON did not and submitted its reports as we did on so many other occasions. Just like on the other occasions our report was ignored and we are now saying "We told you so!"

This is no comfort to the service users and staff who have to bear the brunt of the consequences which led to the decision to outsource the adults services providing

care and support to adults with a learning disability and physical disability.

This model was based on an assumption of growth, something which is written into many of the new proposals. The key word here is "assumption", a word plucked from the air which, properly translated means "pie in the sky". It's a word we often see in reports favouring outsourcing, yet it does not stand up to scrutiny or in practice. In the end the only assumptions we can make are those based on experience – outsourcing means cuts to terms and conditions, redundancies – or both, and an inferior service to residents without making any savings!

**Helen Davies**  
**UNISON Branch Chair**



Read Aditya Chakraborty on Barnet Council in The Guardian: **Outsourced and unaccountable: this is the future of local government** [bit.ly/1uSp9JU](http://bit.ly/1uSp9JU)

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### PETITIONS

Check out the 38 Degrees website for two of our petitions  
**Keep Barnet Council Services public** [bit.ly/1Ptf8i5](http://bit.ly/1Ptf8i5)  
**Stop the ongoing destruction of services for adults with disabilities in Barnet** [bit.ly/1ONmKtK](http://bit.ly/1ONmKtK)

### DONATIONS

Please send donations payable to  
**Barnet UNISON Industrial Action Fund**

### GET IN TOUCH!

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# Barnet Voice

**BARNET UNISON COUNCIL WORKERS ON STRIKE 30 APRIL – 1 MAY**



**LIBRARY WORKERS** are taking strike action to defend their jobs and the library service. Barnet Council plan to privatise our libraries, or to hand them over to a "mutual", or in some cases have them run by "community groups".

Some libraries may be closed, and most will be reduced to a space just 50 square metres in size. Libraries will be unstaffed for two thirds of their opening hours, with under-16 year olds being denied access without an adult during these times. Even when they are staffed, numbers will be reduced by as much as one third.

Libraries will become little more than book collection points. The choice of items to borrow or view will be reduced as libraries are shrunk. Study areas, meeting places, events and activities such as story times for toddlers will be cut due to lack of space and staff.

Advice and help from experienced and qualified library staff will be limited as they are replaced by volunteers and self-service machines. Unstaffed libraries may deter many people from visiting, as there will be no one to deal with emergencies or anti-social behaviour.

Library and other council staff are only taking strike action after the employers have failed to seriously negotiate with us on the future of council services. We ask for your support as we defend our and your libraries.

Hugh Jordan, UNISON Convenor for Library Services

# LIBRARIES Striking to save a precious service!





# Why are we on strike?

## UNISON poll of members still working for Barnet

In the wake of Barnet "Commissioning" Council's plans to outsource 81% of the current workforce Barnet UNISON organised a poll of its members in December 2014. These are the results:

**87%**

The percentage of our members that want to remain employees of the London Borough of Barnet

**61%**

The percentage of our members that said they are seriously looking for employment elsewhere because they know they could be outsourced

**96%**

The percentage of our members expressing concern about being outsourced

**81%**

The percentage of our members that said morale was bad in their section

### KEY FACTS

Staff working in the council's main offices at North London Business Park

**57%**

are still Barnet Council employees

**43%**

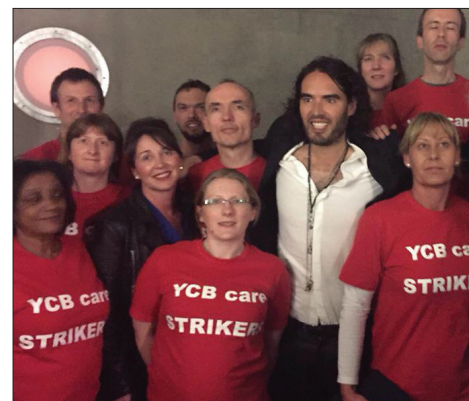
are not Barnet Council employees

**35%**

are now Capita employees



Care workers on strike outside the Rosa Morrisson Day Centre



Russell Brand publicly supporting our care workers at the launch of his film "The Emperor's New Clothes."



Care workers lobbying the council outside Hendon Town Hall

SIX YEARS AGO Barnet Council introduced a policy known as Future Shape which morphed into "easyCouncil"\*. This imposed a series of tariffs on residents wishing to access a range of services. A basic service would be offered to residents at a fixed price, but "fast track" services might be available if you paid extra.

This approach was quickly abandoned by the consultant-driven One Barnet Programme, which led to the following council services being outsourced/privatised in the space of three years:

- Social Care for Adults with disabilities to Your Choice Barnet
- Housing Options to Barnet Homes
- Parking Services to NSL
- Revenues and Benefits, IT, HR and Payroll, Pensions, Health and Safety, Finance, Estates, Property Services, Procurement, Projects all now part of Capita CSG
- Environmental Health, Planning, Building Control, Hendon Cemetery and Crematorium, Highways, Trading Standards and Licensing all now Capita RE
- Legal Services
- Registrars and Nationality Services
- CCTV
- Music Trust
- Public Health
- Mortuary Services

Over the past three years our members have seen hundreds of colleagues transferred to other employers. This has often meant redundancy as the new employer has moved jobs out of the borough and Greater London to places as far away as Belfast, Carlisle, Coventry, Southampton and Darlington.

Now we are in the final phase for what remains of council services. Barnet has branded this final phase as the "Commissioning Council". Very few people know what commissioning really means, but if you work for the council we all know it means that we will no longer be working for the council.

On 3 March 2015 Barnet Council agreed its next five commissioning plans, all of which



are looking at "Alternative Delivery Models", jargon for working for a different employer. The council services now at risk of outsourcing are:

- Early Years – 13 children's centres
- Library Services
- Adults and Communities services
- Street Scene Services (e.g. Waste and Recycling), Street Cleansing, Parks and Transport
- Education and Skills, and School Meals services.

## Speaking to the council

Over the past six years Barnet UNISON has made numerous, well-documented attempts to speak to the council. However, expensive consultants who appear to have been running the council for all this time have drowned out our voice.

We exhausted the internal procedures to try and avoid having to register a dispute. We finally declared a formal dispute with the council on 4 December 2014.



Despite this on 12 January 2015 Barnet Council made a decision to put Education and Skills and School Meals services out for sale.

Three big multinational contractors are now bidding to win a contract valued at almost £1bn.

We are still waiting for the council to return to the negotiating table but time is marching on.

**Our members want to work for the council! They want to be directly accountable to the residents of Barnet!**

• Our members **DON'T** want to work for an employer which will have to place the shareholders' legal demands before local residents' needs!

• Our members **DON'T** want to work for an employer which uses zero hours contracts!

• Our members **DON'T** want to work for an employer which will not pay the London Living Wage as a basic minimum!

• Our members **DON'T** want to work for an employer which won't allow their colleagues to belong to their pension scheme, and

• Our members **DON'T** want to work for an employer that will take jobs out of the borough!

**That's why 87% of our members working for the council voted YES to taking strike action!**

**John Burgess**  
Branch Secretary, Barnet UNISON

## Local libraries are so important!

I'VE BEEN CAMPAIGNING for East Finchley Library for just over ten years now. Local libraries are a fantastically important resource, but very poorly protected by legislation and so very vulnerable to cuts when money is tight. This is despite the enormous value culturally and economically of what they provide: for young children learning to read, for students studying, for older people who need a warm, companionable space and for jobseekers who need a computer to apply for work.

The fact is that local libraries provide exceptional value often in council-owned buildings (so no rent) and run on an absolute shoestring both in terms of the stock and the staff (how I wish more money was spent!). Even so, they are constantly under attack. It's enormously important that local people stand up and make their feelings known.

Politicians are there to listen and they will listen if the opposition to cuts is strong enough – say nothing and they'll cut with impunity. Make a great big fuss and they might, just might, think about the constituents they represent and reconsider.

**Polly Napper**  
East Finchley Library Users Group

## Why campaign?

I CAMPAIGN TO protect and improve our public services because I know how important each of them is, from adult social care to libraries, from housing to waste collection and recycling. I have seen that, as predicted, privatisation has led to reductions in staff and lower quality of some services, with the council seeming less in control and responsible, and information being kept secret because it is "commercially sensitive".

I used to think that we pay our council tax and in return the council delivers public services. When I learned about the Conservative administration's plan for privatisation, I realised that no one had voted for or had been consulted about it. That's undemocratic.

Campaigning is the only way to provide information to other residents and thus raise awareness of what is happening. If we don't speak up, the councillors claim that we agree with their policies or don't care. They can't make those claims when our questions and comments become a part of the record, and our views and activities are reported in the media. A colleague told me "We might not win our battles, but we will certainly lose if we don't fight at all."

Everyone can take part in a campaign by signing a petition, writing to their councillors and to the press, and delivering leaflets to their neighbours. Working together we, and our democracy, are stronger.

**Barbara Jacobson**  
Barnet Alliance for Public Services

## Barnet – a warning from Staffordshire

LESS THAN TWO years into a twenty year, £1.7bn joint venture contract between Capita Group plc and Staffordshire County Council, 1,000 jobs are to be subcontracted to a catering firm.

Originally 3,800 education support staff transferred to a joint venture, "Entrust", in April 2013. Now school meals staff will be transferred again to Chartwells, the school and college catering arm of the Compass Group plc, an international catering and hospitality business.

There can be only two reasons for this decision so early in the contract.

Firstly, Capita realised that it did not have the catering skills and experience to deliver the required range and quality of school meals in over 400 schools.

Secondly, Capita realised that its bid had under-estimated the financial resources required. The subcontracting "solution" means that savings could be sought by cutting jobs, terms and conditions. The quality of the school meals could be reduced, but this would take more time to avoid a backlash from pupils, parents and teachers.

Or it could be a combination of these reasons.

Since school meals will no longer be delivered by the Entrust joint venture, "transformation" and change will be the responsibility of the new contractor. Capita and the County Council can now play the blame game and try to distance themselves from any negative consequences.

**Dexter Whitfield**  
Director, European Services  
Strategy Unit

Since Capita was appointed in 2013 it has billed Barnet over £110m yet trying to find out precisely what that was spent on is almost impossible and often covered by contractual confidentiality clauses. If the council were still running these services they would be obliged by law to provide the details, but as a private company Capita does not have the same obligation.

That is a step backwards for transparency and something about which we should all be concerned.

**John Dix**  
Barnet resident

The really big change is that the new-model commissioning council is no longer a local arm of government but an agglomeration of mostly privately provided services

Aditya Chakraborty, The Guardian 15.12.14

\* easyCouncil is back! At a recent full council meeting on 14 April Conservative councillors decided to adopt an easyCouncil approach to Planning Services. If you have the money you can fast track your request!