

## BARNET BINMEN SAY

# ‘Leave our service alone!’

THAT IS exactly what our UNISON members had to say on the picket line on Wednesday 7 October.

Our members are rightly concerned about the future of the service as they have been identified as another service to be outsourced.

Members revealed they have been concerned about the increasing reliance on agency drivers and loaders and the impact it is having on the quality of the service to residents. We still have some members who remembered the last time this service was privatised by the Conservative council; it was in chaos.

The refuse service has been repeatedly quoted as highly recommended by Barnet residents. Now all that hard work is at risk as consultants begin to take a look at it.

Our members are already the lowest paid workers in the council and they are all too well aware that outsourcing will mean lower pay and longer hours.

A large number of our members are also local residents too. They really care about the quality of the service they provide and that is why they are prepared to take more strike action if it is required.



Shadow Chancellor of the Exchequer, John McDonnell, on the picket line with UNISON Branch Secretary John Burgess.

## 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

## SOCIAL SERVICES

# What does a crisis look like?

IN EARLY September this year UNISON requested information on how many workers in both Adults’ and Children’s Services have left social services and how many have joined since December 2014.

We know that during the year from April 2014 to March 2015 53 qualified locum agency social workers for Adult Social Care and a further 50 for Children’s Social Care, were employed by London Borough of Barnet. However, we think this number may now be higher.

We believe the total number of social worker posts is some 115 for Adults Services and 200 for Children’s Services. This number also says nothing about the problems of recruiting and retaining occupational therapists, who are critical in terms of identifying aids, adaptations and techniques for people with physical

disabilities to enable them to live as independently as possible.

We are seeing large numbers of colleagues leaving for a variety of reasons. In fact almost no one with a senior leadership position in children’s social work three years ago is still here today. Once upon a time – and not so long ago – the one thing Barnet Social Services had going for it both in Children’s and Adults’ Services was a fairly stable workforce.

This meant that, despite all of the changes, experienced staff stayed and were able to ensure continuity with vulnerable people and their families as well as services linked to those people and families.

For a London setting this was refreshing and rare.

The worry is that we now have

the same difficulties as other London authorities. This is borne out by the fact that the latest figures shared with UNISON show that we have 20% vacancy rates across the two services – now comparable to other London authorities. This is bad enough, but demand for those services is rising at the same time as the colleagues doing that work are leaving.

UNISON has raised the social work crisis to the attention of the senior council officers. We are clear that this crisis is one of the unintended consequences of pursuing mass outsourcing ideology, our members are telling us why they are planning to leave and it is all about growing employment insecurity.

It is one thing to promote Commissioning Council as a solution to the financial crisis; it is irresponsible to

pursue a policy that is pushing the future of social services in Barnet over a cliff.

UNISON is very concerned staff and the community are being exposed to risks which do not need to be there. These services mean people live, die or thrive. Our members work hard to make sure people thrive.

Many now live with a constant fear that what they are doing is not enough and there will be a serious incident. It is the nightmare of any worker in Social Services. UNISON is extremely concerned about the effect on morale and safety for our members and the community.

One thing is clear: we will not stand by and allow our members to be scapegoated for systemic failings. Another is that we will continue to fight outsourcing and all the risks it brings to our members and community!

# Barnet Voice

BARNET UNISON COUNCIL WORKERS ON STRIKE 2015 ISSUE 2



## Why are we on strike?

SIX YEARS AGO Barnet Council introduced a policy known as Future Shape, a policy that later morphed into what has now been dubbed “easyCouncil”.\*

A series of tariffs were imposed 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.

However, this approach was quickly abandoned by the consultant-driven One Barnet Programme. That in turn led to the a huge swathe of council services being outsourced or privatised in the space of just three years (see right for details).

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 afield as Belfast, Carlisle, Coventry, Southampton and Darlington.

Now we are in the final phase for what remains of council services a phase Barnet has branded as the “Commissioning Council”.

Very few people know what “commissioning” really means. But if you work for the council at the moment we all

know it means that very soon 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”. That is just jargon that means working for a different employer.



The council services now at risk of outsourcing include:

- Early Years – 13 Children’s Centres
- Library Services
- Adults’ and Communities Services
- Street Scene Services such as Waste and Recycling, Street Cleansing, Parks and Transport
- Education and Skills, and School Meals services

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 that will – by law – have to put shareholder profit before local residents’ needs.

Our members don’t want to work for an employer that uses zero hours contracts. Our members don’t want to work for an employer that will not pay the London Living Wage as a basic minimum.

Our members don’t want to work for an employer that won’t allow their colleagues to belong to their pension scheme. 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

\* easyCouncil is back: at a recent full council meeting on 14 April 2014 Conservative councillors decided to adopt an easyCouncil approach to Planning Services. If you have the money you can now fast track your planning request!

## Departments outsourced so far

Social Care for Adults with Disabilities **Housing Options**  
Parking Services **Revenues and Benefits** **IT HR and Payroll** **Pensions Health and Safety** **Finance Estates**  
Property Services **Procurement and Projects** **Environmental Health Planning** **Building Control Hendon Cemetery and Crematorium** **Highways Trading Standards and Licensing** **Registrars and Nationality Services** **CCTV Music Trust Public Health** **Mortuary Services**

### PETITIONS

Check out the 38 Degrees website for three of our petitions

Keep Barnet Council Services public  
bit.ly/1Pt8i5

Stop the ongoing destruction of services for adults with disabilities in Barnet  
bit.ly/1ONmKtK

Stop your mass outsourcing plans for council services  
chn.ge/1LzrJNn

### DONATIONS

Please send donations payable to Barnet UNISON Industrial Action Fund

### GET IN TOUCH!

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Published by Barnet UNISON  
www.barnetunison.me.uk  
Printed by MPC Print Solutions  
Unit 67 Lancaster Road Industrial Estate  
Lancaster Road, New Barnet  
Herts, EN4 8AS

## TIMELINE Outsourcing and cuts – the next steps

**Thursday 12 November**  
Adults and Safeguarding Committee  
Adults and Communities

**Wednesday 18 November**  
Children’s, Education, Libraries and Safeguarding Committee  
Education and Skills and School Meals  
Children’s Centres

**Tuesday 8 December**  
Full Council Meeting  
Education and School Meals  
Private contractor to be awarded contract

**Wednesday 16 December**  
BARNET COUNCIL TO ANNOUNCE CUTS BUDGET

**Tuesday 19 January**  
Adults and Safeguarding Committee  
Adults and Communities



# Save our libraries!



Barnet are on the front line of the savage cuts to local authority budgets that the Conservatives are forcing on local councils ... It is the most deprived communities in the country that are bearing the brunt of the government's economically flawed programme

Jeremy Corbyn MP  
8 July 2015

## BARNET UNISON Statement on the council's report 'Barnet future library service'

The council's proposal "Barnet future library service" is a plan to replace qualified, experienced staff who have a wide range of skills and knowledge with volunteers and machines, and to reduce the size and quality of libraries.

The people of Barnet, including our members, did not march, lobby, sign petitions and respond to the consultation in support of volunteer and machine operated libraries.

They were defending a service staffed by real library staff, libraries with enough space for people to study, use IT facilities and to house sufficient items for loan to meet the needs of their users.

If the proposal is adopted then Barnet libraries will no longer offer a service that meets the needs of the people of the borough and this will lead into a decline in use and a rationale for further cuts and closure.

- If the proposal is adopted 46% of library posts will be cut
  - Staffed hours at libraries will be reduced by 70.4%
  - 90% of the planned technology supported opening hours will have no staffing or volunteer support
  - Four partnership libraries will be run by volunteers and open only for a minimum of 15 hours per week
  - Libraries will be reduced in size, and only four will retain enough space to host events such as story times and authors' talk
- This proposal will not only lead to a decline in the quality and range of the Library Service but will be unjustifiably expensive to implement, costing £7.56m. This is 4.4 times as much as the cuts to be made in in the library service annual operational budget.

Barnet UNISON also have concerns regarding the safety of unstaffed libraries, particularly on how libraries will be evacuated in the event of an emergency, and how anti-social behaviour will be dealt with. These issues remain to be sufficiently addressed by the council.



### Barnet UNISON calls on the council to

- 1 Withdraw the proposal
  - 2 Retain direct provision of the Library Service
- Changes to the Library Service should only be made after the council:
- 3 Undertake a rigorous and comprehensive equality impact assessment of the potential effect of the technology-enabled opening hours
  - 4 Include the impact on staff in any equality analysis.
  - 5 Run a consultation process that prioritises the views of service users and groups and organisations that are potential users of library services and facilities.

Hugh Jordan, Branch Health and Safety Officer/Libraries Convenor, Barnet UNISON

### THE LIBRARY PROPOSAL: KEY FACTS

- 46%**  
The number of library posts that will be cut
- 70.4%**  
The amount that staffed hours will be reduced
- 90%**  
The amount of planned technology supported opening hours where there will be no staffing or volunteering support at all
- 4**  
The number of partnership libraries that will be run by volunteers open only for a minimum of 15 hours a week
- 4**  
The number of libraries that will retain enough space to host events such as story times and authors' talks after reductions in size

ON 2 OCTOBER 2015 Barnet Council announced catastrophic cuts to our library service. These include the loss of 46% of our library staff – 52 full time equivalent posts.

The void created by the loss of these skilled and valued public servants is apparently to be left unfilled in unstaffed libraries – opened and shut by computer – security by CCTV – a service now inaccessible to unaccompanied 10-15 year olds. Or, at four of our libraries, volunteers are expected to take charge.

Properly supported volunteers complementing paid staff are great. But putting the full responsibility for running what should be a public service onto the shoulders of volunteers will create an intolerable burden.

This is a cynical ploy to push the blame for future library closures onto the communities that need them most and need them to be properly funded from the money we pay in taxation.

The taxpayers of East Barnet deserve a publicly funded library just as much as the taxpayers of Golders Green. Why should a family in Childs Hill pay for a library elsewhere

I want to send a message of support to John Burgess and the Save Barnet Libraries campaign for their tireless and inspirational community campaign to protect their local library service ... I salute Barnet UNISON and the community campaign for their ongoing fight to defend public services

Jeremy Corbyn MP  
12 September 2015

in the borough AND be forced to donate their labour free if they want their own library? This is not fair and we should fight it.

Polly Napper  
East Finchley Library User Group

AS ONE OF Barnet's "Armchair Auditors" I spend a great deal of time scrutinising what the council spends. One of Barnet's largest contracts is with Capita and last year the council paid them over £55m.

In addition to their standard contract payments, Capita also benefit from a contract clause known as "Gainshare". This allows them to share any savings made when contracts are renegotiated or additional income is generated over pre-agreed targets.

While it may be fair to share some of the savings or additional income, the proportion Capita receives is very substantial: up to 40% of the savings on some contracts, not just for the first year but over the term of the contract. On one contract alone that payment is likely to exceed £1m and on a service where they have to meet income targets they got to keep all of the excess revenue which was more than £200,000.

I have also identified and challenged why a supplier was given a £1.5m interest free advance payment, something which is poor practice given that in 2013 Barnet Council lost a very substantial advance payment to a supplier who went bust.

Scrutiny is also vital to ensure that these financial incentives don't skew priorities to the point where actions are being taken simply because they generate a financial benefit but are not in the interest of local residents. While I continue to ask the right questions, Barnet rarely gives the right answers.

John Dix, aka Mr Reasonable  
Local resident

THE SAVE BARNET Libraries campaign has succeeded at least in saving any libraries from immediate closure or being shrunk to the size of a small corner shop. The campaign has been running since November 2014, when the council published its first plan for the future of the library network. It's not easy to sustain a single campaign for that long, and many of the activists are people who are doing it for the first time.

The first, most important, action of all campaigns is to make people aware of the issue and what it really means. We



UNISON Asst General Secretary Roger McKenzie and Sonya Howard, National Executive Council member join Labour Party leader Jeremy Corbyn on the 8 July picket line.



distributed thousands of leaflets, marched from library to library, urged people to write to their councillors and to the press, and did so ourselves. Gathering signatures on a petition was never easier, as library users of all ages and political persuasions rushed to sign.

The result was that the residents overwhelmingly rejected all the council's options. Yes, the council's new plan has many flaws, and there are jobs to be saved, so we will continue our campaign, strengthened by public support and the knowledge that we forced the council to hear us then and can do so again.

Barbara Jacobson  
Resident

I MUST LIKE Barnet. I have now spoken at two library marches, including the amazing Children's March for Libraries on 12 October 2015, one library campaign meeting and a Barnet Question Time. So what got me to make these regular trips from my Liverpool home to this particular corner of north London?

Quite simply, it was the threat to public services in general and libraries in particular.

Public services and a great public service devoted to the democratic right of every citizen to read, and be able to do it for free, are at the heart of my world view. I grew up listening to my grandmother telling people what this country was like before the post war Labour government and the establishment of the Welfare State, the terror of getting ill, the wretched state of the railways, the lack of a social safety net if you lost your job.

In comparison to my old gran, I was fortunate to grow up in a relatively benign society. If I fell ill, the NHS treated me. When my dad shattered his leg in an industrial accident, benefits supported us while he recovered. When I wanted to read my way to university, the local library was there to help.

Yes, that is what we are trying to defend against the ideological assault of mass outsourcing and volunteerism, public services that enable all to live a decent life. One of those great services, ushered in by a Tory, yes a Tory, government, is the public library service. For decades it has helped level the aspirational playing field, allowing the less well off to have just as much culture and information as their "betters".

This is what is at stake in Barnet, universal access to decent public services. This is why I support Barnet Unison's campaign against an outsourcing gamble that may cost local people dear.

Alan Gibbons  
Writer, founder of National Libraries Day

THE FINAL PHASE of the privatisation of Barnet Council services is planned between October 2015 and January 2016. It includes Libraries, Education & Skills and School Meals, Children's Centres, Adult Social Care and Street Scene Services.

What began as Future Shape later became One Barnet, (otherwise known as Easy Council), then the Commissioning Council and will culminate in Barnet Council becoming the UK's Contract Capital.

The council has adhered to neoliberal ideology, irrespective of residents and community needs and views. Options appraisals limited the in-house to "business as usual", which meant this option was designed to fail. The council persistently refused to consider best practice alternative approaches proposed by Barnet UNISON and Barnet Alliance organisations. Community consultation has been a sham.

The council even refused to increase council tax, which would have at least reduced the scale of spending cuts.

The council's "transformation for privatisation programme" has resulted in substantial job losses and cuts in terms and conditions. This increased unemployment and resulted in economic loss to the Barnet local economy. Council staffing levels will have declined from over 4,000 to a few hundred in 2016 (excluding school staff).

Inequality widened, as the council's approach was little more than a tick box exercise and showed a disregard for rigorous equality impact assessments.

The privatisation programme has been costly, with £20m spent on consultants and procurement since 2008-09.

The risks that Barnet Council ignored or brushed under the carpet are likely to re-emerge; contract crises may develop as the quality of services declines and savings targets are missed; additional resources will have to be redirected into the monitoring



I have been a long term supporter of John Burgess and Barnet UNISON and the community campaign that has shown remarkable fighting spirit in the face of a relentless attack from the hard right in control of Barnet Council. Under Jeremy, people can see that there is a real alternative to austerity which is why I am fully behind Barnet UNISON members taking strike action on 7 October

John McDonnell MP, 6 October 2015

