

What's going on in London?

I thought it would be a good idea if Barnet UNISON members had the opportunity to hear about what is going on in other London councils. It is important for members to get an understanding about what is happening and how the branches are responding. Over the next few months UNISON branch secretaries from across London will be answering a few questions from me
(John Burgess, Branch Secretary Barnet UNISON).

Tower Hamlets UNISON

What is your name?

John McLoughlin

What UNISON branch?

Tower Hamlets

What is your branch officer position?

Branch Secretary

Have any of your services been privatised? Please explain

Yes. Many of our big manual services - waste collection etc were privatised many years ago. More recently we have fought a long battle on Housing Stock transfer - winning many ballots - although the Council then established an ALMO with no vote. There is still pressure on many areas - Waste Education has just controversially been given to Veolia and our Tenancy Support Team is to be transferred to Look Ahead. We have also had successes however. When I was convenor of Benefits we stopped privatisation to ITNET, and big



campaigns also stopped the privatisation on all of our Home Care and School Meals.

Do you know if there are any plans to share services with other public sector organisations in your borough?

There has been an experiment in sharing senior HR management with the PCT but that has been deemed unsuccessful and is ending. No major plans yet - but we're all watching what happens in other Boroughs

Do you have any privatisation proposals in your borough?

Just the ones above at present

What do you think will be the big challenges for public services over the next four years?

All the major parties are trying to outdo each other in who can make the most savage cuts. Everything will be up for grabs - jobs, services, pensions, pay and conditions. Yet no one seems to ask one simple question. We were told that the trillions poured into the banks because of



the collapse caused by the reckless greed of the wealthiest in society would all be paid back. So why are low paid Public Sector workers expected to pay for the crisis?

What is your message to Barnet UNISON members

Our unions need to unite and stand up to these attacks. In 2005 when public sector unions started to come together we forced the government and employers back on pensions. We need to do that again- on a bigger scale. We have seen the possibilities at a local level. In Tower Hamlets College we have just succeeded in getting no compulsory redundancies after lecturers in UCU took all out strike action and won widespread solidarity.

Lambeth UNISON

What is your name?

Jon Rogers

What UNISON branch?

Lambeth local government

What is your branch officer position?

Joint Branch Secretary (jointly with Nick Venedi)

Have any of your services been privatised? Please explain?

Lambeth was scene of what was at the time the largest privatisation in the history of English local government in 1997 when almost all our then remaining in-house manual workforce was privatised to a "joint venture company" part-owned by the Council. This proved a failure and the contracts are now with a range of different private contractors.

We have had some successes in bringing privatised "white-collar" services (such as Housing Benefit and Legal Services) back in-house.

Do you know if there are any plans to share services with other public sector organisations in your borough?

We have not heard of any detailed proposals yet!



Do you have any privatisation proposals in your borough?

At the moment our ALMO (Lambeth Living) is proposing to privatise our emergency caretaking service, our Concierge service and the estate cleaning service (in those parts of the borough where it is still in-house). We have got the Council to agree to pay a consultant from the Association for Public Service Excellence (APSE) to work with us to try to respond to these proposals – and this work is underway right now.

What do you think will be the big challenges for public Services over the next four years?

We will face spending cuts and further privatisation proposals, as well as the shared services agenda. At the same time a future Tory Government will probably mount new attacks upon our trade unions for which we need to prepare.

What is your message to Barnet UNISON members?

Your branch is leading the way in showing how we should respond to the coming challenges and other branches can learn from this – but we cannot fight one borough at a time. We need to work together and to make the official structures of our trade union work for us as best we can. Right now I think we can make use of the national Union's Million

Voices for Change campaign to provide a coherent theme nationally for the fightback in local government and beyond. The Peoples Charter also provides a national framework, supported by the Trades Union Congress, for our local demands and campaigns.

Waltham Forest UNISON

What is your name?

Dave Knight

What UNISON branch?

Waltham Forest

What is your branch officer position?

Branch Secretary



Have any of your services been privatised? Please explain?

A number of our services have been privatized. Our refuse collection has gone out to a company called Verdant, our street cleaning and grounds maintenance to Kier Street Services, our street lighting to May, Gurney, Cartledge, our highways to Rineys. Our education authority function is with VT and our Careers Service is with VT Enterprise. Our housing is with Ascham Homes (an ALMO). We have Outlook running some adult residential unit and a lot of our Home Care is now out with organizations like Leonard Cheshire (the firm featured on the Panorama programme). Our building Consultancy has gone out to NPS.

There are a whole host of procurements for individual projects as well. We have Trust schools. We have Academy schools. And it feels to me that many of our councillors – we are a hung Council led by a Lib-Lab coalition. Locally we continue to argue against every privatisation. Our observation is that privatization does not work, it serves merely to deflect our taxes that should go directly into supporting public services, into private pockets. It is tempting for

businesses and councillors to enter into corrupt arrangements and it is amazing how naïve the politicians are in believing that these entrepreneurs have our communities at heart. As far as I can see all they want is our money.

We have fought with some success at times. Three elderly persons homes and our Revenues and Benefits teams have been brought back in house after being outsourced. We fight by being part of our trade council, organizing demos and lobbying politicians. We also ensure that failings get publicized in the local rag.

Do you know if there are any plans to share services with other public sector organisations in your borough?

We believe that there are some plans to consider shared services. Our in house cleaning team and our call centre are two services where we think management might be planning something.

Do you have any privatisation proposals in your borough?

Privatisation Proposals are pretty common. We have one that has just started which is to offer up our Children with Disabilities Respite unit for a tendering exercise

What do you think will be the big challenges for public Services over the next four years?

Over the next four years I think we will have massive challenges. If the Tories win the next election I am pretty sure they will come after our jobs, our pay and our pensions. They may even move towards scrapping local authorities.

And I don't see the Labour agenda being much different. What has to change, if we are to stand a chance, is the attitude of our trade unions. We need to transform into campaigning unions willing to support members who want to fight back.

What is your message to Barnet UNISON members?

So we would send a message of solidarity to our colleagues in Barnet that basically says "Keep fighting – Justice must win out in the end for public sector services"

BRINGING BACK SERVICES IN HOUSE

On 29th September **Southwark Council** Executive Committee voted to bring Revs& Bens back in house.

Some quotes from the report:

"Lack of direct control on the part of the Council, leading to slow and reluctant responses to Council-led initiatives to improve the service for the people of Southwark."

"The main benefits of bringing the service in-house are:

"the authority can directly implement new initiatives and methods of working for service im-

provement quickly and without the need for contract variation.

"the authority is able to build more robust relationships with key departments and external stakeholders.

"Bringing the service back in-house will eliminate a major 3rd party interface."

"the authority can have direct day to day management of the service and speed of making decisions and implementing change will be quicker."

Hillingdon Council have agreed to bring their ALMO back in house. There are some significant comments made in the report which members and residents may be interested to read. With Future Shape very much in everyone's minds the following makes interesting reading.

"There would also be significant financial benefits to tenants by returning to the council."

"Maintaining the ALMO as a stand alone vehicle involves a strong duplication of effort in a number of areas, most significantly, governance, strategic direction, performance management and communication functions."

"In the absence of an ALMO, the council will have complete control over the in-house housing management service and will be able to introduce an improvement programme to meet the council's corporate standards and ultimately further develop services to residents."

"Financial considerations are also a driver in testing resident opinion for the return of the landlord service to the council. Significant savings are likely to arise which can be used to fund service improvements. Potential savings from the costs of governance of the ALMO are likely to be in excess of £300k per year"

Barnet UNISON Contact details

If you have a work problem or query, get in touch with your UNISON workplace representative. Alternatively, you can ring: UNISONdirect on 0845 355 0845 If you have a membership or any other query, please contact the Barnet UNISON office at:

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