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Dear Prime Minister

RE: Future of Public Services in the London Borough of Barnet and throughout the UK

I am writing to you on behalf of my members working for Barnet Council in response to 'financial Armageddon scenario' not just for local government but for all public services over the next four years irrespective whether it is a Labour or Conservative Government.

Last June, our Council began a consultation with staff and other public sector bodies in our borough entitled 'Future Shape' just before the financial meltdown devastated economies globally.

One of the aims of 'Future Shape' was to look at outcomes and see if services/finances could be re-configured to achieve better outcomes for Barnet residents. All very laudable and ultimately not something we should object to in principle. However things are not that simple and issues such as poverty/ access to education/employment, to name but a few are all interconnected with what is happening globally. Understandably we were suspicious that this was been dressed up as another gimmick for mass privatisation. I know you have had talks with our General Secretary and will understand that our Union amongst many others has submitted endless reports on the damage privatisation has done to our public services.

One of the biggest drivers for what the Council is initiating is the need to make even more efficiencies, despite the fact that Barnet Council has made efficiency savings of **£80.9m** over 7 years, **£58.8m** in the last 5 years. You must appreciate there has been a lot of pain to achieve those savings, so the prospect of an even starker future for my members & residents is not going to be well received, especially at the ballot box. Only last week I joined over 200 sheltered housing residents who were protesting about the loss of their on site warden service. I understand this is a national initiative which is not going down well amongst those wanting this service <http://www.shelteredhousinguk.com/>

So, I read with interest the article in the Guardian last Saturday when you said in answer to this question.

"But won't everyone have to cut public spending, as governments are forced to tighten their belts to pay off debt built up during the recession?"

You replied

"No. It's a myth. Public spending will continue to rise. It's in our figures. We've costed it, and you're paying more in top rate tax to pay for it."

In a Times article (27 February 2009) Audit Commission, Chief Executive Steve Bundred said

"And at that scale of indebtedness, the Armageddon scenario most feared by the Treasury - that there will be insufficient lenders to match the planned level of borrowing - begins to look a distinct possibility."

That is why tax increases and spending cuts are inevitable immediately after the election, assuming that there are signs of economic recovery by then - and why any managers of a public service who are not planning now on the basis that they will have substantially less money to spend in two years time are living in cloud-cuckoo-land."

Clearly both of you can not be right?

The message for the millions of hard working public sector workers is that we are going to see more **services and job cuts** and it is clear whichever government gets in our Pensions Schemes are going to be cut.

You can understand the widespread anger and dissatisfaction towards the government and politicians in general as, almost on a daily basis, we are witnessing reports of the latest MP's expenses scandal. It is not just the claims which causes anger but as each MP is interviewed they still **'do not get it!'** It is not just about whether the claim was *'within the rules'*, but the items they are claiming, some of the expenses are more than a lot of our members earn in a year.

It can not have escaped your attention that our democratic process is at a crossroads. If the electorate decides none of the mainstream parties are to be trusted, we will see the increase in the chances of the BNP being elected. Something no one would want. The story about Roumanian families in Belfast is a stark message that despite the 'spin,' issues of poverty are even more relevant. It would hardly be rocket science to implement a national council housing building policy. Not just endless talking shops. Housing Associations and Private sector have failed to address housing need (BNP have exploited this), how can it be right that £Billions of public money being paid to private landlords via Housing Benefit (HB) on sub-standard accommodation when we could paying less (HB) for quality new build council housing?

I have just returned from UNISON conference and our concerns and fears in Barnet are the same across the country. Staff are angry that their livelihoods and their children's futures are going to be compromised because of actions of a few in the financial sector in the City. The electorate is wise to 'spin' and is demanding real, concrete answers that no mainstream politicians appear to want or are able to provide.

I am copying this letter to our members and on our website and will also publish your response to my concerns.

Best wishes



John Burgess
Branch Secretary