

Our Barnet

January 2011 • news from Barnet Alliance for Public Services • <http://barnetalliance.org>

No to cuts!

Barnet council plans to make cuts of £54.4 million over the next three years. Coming alongside cuts by central government to benefits, housing, the NHS and education, the impact on council services will be devastating.

Barnet Alliance for Public Services gives this overview of the situation

The savings have largely been forced on Barnet by central government deciding to cut the money it gives to local government by 25%. So far, however, we see no signs of the Conservatives in Barnet having any misgivings about what they are doing.

Just before Christmas the council notified 818 staff that they are at risk of redundancy, meaning many council staff and their families endured an anxious time over the holiday period. When the consultation period is up, 350 staff could lose their jobs.

A report passed by the council Cabinet in December 2010 shows how they expect to find their £54.4 million savings:

- One Barnet £12.1m
- Efficiency projects £22.9m
- Increased income £4.2m
- Service reductions £15.2m

There is more detail on the mass privatisa-

tion project One Barnet in the other article on this page. This article provides a brief survey of the other aspects of the cuts and what we can do to stop them.

Cutting services

From April, many services provided free to residents will be charged for, including many social services. Many services will be reduced or cease altogether. The proposed cuts, passed at the council Cabinet meeting in December, are detailed in a spreadsheet available here: <http://committeepapers.barnet.gov.uk/democracy/reports/reportdetail.asp?ReportID=9898>.

They include such things as:

- closing the gardening project run by Barnet Learning Disability Service in order to save £85,000, putting two people out of work;
- withdrawing £194k of core funding to the

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Schools for the community not Companies House

by **Keith Nason**,
secretary, Barnet NUT

Barnet Council has a policy of encouraging all schools to become academies (i.e. private schools paid for by taxpayers' money).

Barnet council says it will be better for schools to be free of the local authority i.e. Barnet Council. It seems Barnet Council are being rather hard on themselves, as the schools in Barnet have been very successful being maintained by the Council.

Barnet Council and the governing bodies of schools seeking to be academies want

to take taxpayers' money but avoid accountability. Some councillors want to give away the freehold of the school land, instead of leasing it, to private schools.

If becoming an academy is so good why can't schools return to being a state school with the local authority if they choose? Why has no school that has either become an academy or has applied consulted with parents or staff prior to deciding to seek to become an academy? There has not been one ballot of either parents or staff.

If you believe schools should be publicly accountable and not run by companies then contact Barnet Anti Academies Alliance: barnet@antiacademies.org.uk.



"No to easyCouncil" – lobby of Hendon Town Hall, 2 Nov 2010

No to mass privatisation!

First it was called "Future Shape", then "easyCouncil". Currently known as "One Barnet", the council's mass privatisation plan still hasn't saved us any money, and carries great risks. **Vicki Morris** explains more

In order to achieve savings of £45 million over five years (2010-15), Barnet council plans to spend £9.2 million on an outsourcing project it calls One Barnet. For the first two years they expect to spend as much money on developing the programme as they expect to save. Savings don't outstrip the costs of the programme until 2012/13. That is, if they will appear at all. So far the One Barnet programme has only cost Barnet taxpayers – and much of our money has gone on consultants' fees.

The few reports on progress so far reveal an alarming degree of vagueness for a project that the council is so deeply committed to. One particularly colourful report on progress toward setting up a Customer Service Organisation (aka call centre) for Barnet said:

"I can't help noticing there is no busi-

ness case, a rudimentary project plan only, resourcing needs are not fully identified, the target operating model is emergent, benefits are expressed as trends rather than quantified, etc. ...Barnet may well feel this formal sketchiness is justified in the context of the change model it has adopted, of setting a strong direction, injecting pace, leveraging others' experience and expertise, filling in the legacy information gaps as you go, etc. The style has huge advantages, but some distinct risks for you to manage, notably in expectations." [available at <http://tinyurl.com/4673qf3>]

So progress has been slow. But would we want it to go any faster? Should residents' council tax be spent on delivering profits for private companies, which is what happens when public services are outsourced? Do we want to give up the democratic control that having services delivered direct by the council provides?

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Barnet march Sunday 30th January

Assemble: 11.30am, Finchley Central. Indoor rally from 1pm, Arts Depot, north Finchley

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Young people fight for a future

Last November, **Alex Clayman**, a 16-year-old pupil at Finchley Catholic High School/Woodhouse College, organised a march from the Arts Depot to the party headquarters of Mike Freer, Conservative MP for Finchley and Golders Green. About 200 young people and their supporters attended, with pupils coming from many local schools, to protest against government policies:

- Cuts in the university teaching budget and education capital spending;
- Abolition of Education Maintenance Allowance (EMA);
- Raising the cap on university tuition fees to £9,000 a year.

Alex told us why he organised the march: “As soon as news came that they were actually going to raise tuition fees – triple them – school students were shocked. They’d heard warnings and whispers, but the release of the Browne Report on Higher Education on 3 October proved it for many.

“So as soon as I suggested doing a protest in Barnet, enthusiasm reigned. This isn’t a political issue for most people, but some-



thing which is going to affect their lives. And they knew it.

“People realised there were other issues, such as the general education cuts, and the EMA. I included these issues in the protest petition, and gained support as a result.

“I visited Directgov’s website and was confronted with ‘EMA has now closed to new applicants’. The repercussions of this will be that poorer students will have to struggle more. Perhaps they won’t afford to buy their textbooks and to travel to college – but it is compulsory. How will they manage? I don’t know; they don’t know.

“Everyone should work together, attend each other’s protests, sign each other’s petitions. It is far more powerful, spectacular and effective.”

“I receive EMA. Without it I wouldn’t be able to afford to buy lunch, textbooks, stationery or clothes. It’s the only money I get and half the time it doesn’t even stretch. People seem to think 30 quid a week is a lot but when that’s the only money you receive, because your parents can’t afford to support you, and with everything being so expensive, it’s really not.”

– Jennifer

Many school and college students from Barnet have taken part in the recent student demonstrations. Why are they so angry? We spoke to 18-year-old **Sara Craig** from Friern Barnet. Sara is a pupil at St Michael’s Catholic Grammar School.



Why did you join the march in Finchley?

It’s unfair that as a generation we now have higher uni fees, we have to cut down on electricity, etc, to prevent global warming, and we had to go through a recession which hits students particularly hard. We as a generation cannot be blamed for any of these issues, yet we have to put up with the consequences of them!

What do you think will be the impact of the tuition fee rises?

Apparently not many people who are just old enough to vote do. People ask why: because they don’t trust the government? Because the government will make them

promises they can’t/won’t/just plain don’t keep?

Many people are depressed as a result of being in debt, and now they want a whole generation depressed?

I know it sounds idiotic but some people will seriously come out of uni and go for a dead-end job – a waste of money, time and a brain!

Also, why are they trying to reduce the amount of people going to uni? Why can’t they allow us to have that chance? First, they bring in A*s, which from next year will be in most of the offers, and this will greatly reduce uni places. But now they’re using money to stop us from going. Who cares how much money you have – why can’t we all have a chance?

Has the government thought about those people who may have, say, three children at uni at the same time? How can you say to your kid, “sorry, your brother went to uni but we don’t have enough money to send you there?”

We cannot let them push this under the table, it’s not in the media very much anymore and so they think that we’ve let it go.

No to cuts!

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Arts Depot each year, resulting in a “significant risk to the viability of the Arts Depot given that this core funding from the council levers in wider resources from e.g. the Arts Council”.

- cutting expenditure on children’s centres by £285,000 (further cuts are likely as a result of smaller Sure Start and Early Years grants).

- “Building Schools for the Future has been discontinued so the budget to support this programme can be deleted”, saving £250k. (Never mind that dilapidated school buildings will not now be replaced!)

- “Remove school crossing/and road safety officers” to save £117k – that’s all the borough’s lollipop men and women gone in one fell swoop!

Abolishing youth services

Services for young people in Barnet are particularly hard hit. Proposed cuts include:

- in year 1 (2011/12) “reshape and reduce youth support services”, saving £1.4 million;

- “cease youth services at two premises”, saving £50,000;

- in year 2 (2012/13) “further cut financial support for youth related services”, saving £500,000. The proposals paper admits: “This is a significant risk to performance - youth services will have been radically reshaped in Year 1 (2011/12) and removing a further £500k will further reduce the support and provision for vulnerable young people. This will reduce our capacity to enable voluntary sector and other groups to provide youth activities.” So much for the Big Society!

- in year 3 (2013/14) “cease all remaining activity to support young people through youth services”, saving £960k. The paper warns:

“With over 800 staff being given protected notice of redundancy, this has obviously impacted on morale, but the full effect of these proposed cuts has not been felt yet. In particular, the attack on Youth and Children’s Services, those facing the biggest cuts, will continue to impact on the citizens of Barnet for many years.”

– Paul Coles, GMB Convenor, Barnet

“High risk to performance with significant political and community sensitivity. The cessation of residual local authority youth support for vulnerable young people and all activity focussed on the most vulnerable and disadvantaged young people will cease. It will lead to higher number of young people not in education, employment and training, young offenders, teenage pregnancy etc. It will mean the closure of all centres, the ending of local authority co-ordinated Duke of Edinburgh and outreach work.”

“Optimising revenue income” aka fleecing the motorist

Proposals include “charging for parking in the borough’s seven remaining free car parks”. The council’s recent move to increase the cost of residential parking permits from £40 to £100 for a first car and £75 to £125 for a second has already enraged many residents.

We must fight these cuts!

Across the borough people are setting up campaigns to defend services. Not everyone who will be affected is aware of what is planned yet. The aim of this newspaper is to alert people to the dangers and mobilise them to resist.

There is a danger that the council will succeed in setting service users in competition with one another. The council’s consultations on its budget plans invite people to choose between cuts, a bit like a balloon debate!

Our answer must be to fight all the council’s current plans. Things might always be done more efficiently, and they should be. But what is proposed in these cuts is severe damage to frontline services, mass redundancies, and erosion of our democratic control of our community.

Barnet Alliance for Public Services was set up to publicise and help campaigns to defend public services in the borough – it’s your alliance! Please join the march on Sunday 30 January, get in touch if you want any advice, and let us know about any campaign you are involved in. Email: barnetalliance4publicservices@gmail.com.

Public spending myths examined

The government says we are in the grip of a debt crisis caused by a “bloated” public sector. Here, we challenge some of the myths used to justify cuts to jobs and public services

(Originally published by public service union UNISON)

Was the crisis caused by too much public spending?

- The UK spends less (21% of GDP) on public services and social security than France (29%), Germany (27%), Italy (25%), or Sweden (29%).

- Before the crisis, total UK public debt was less than 40% of GDP – lower than other comparable economies and lower than it was in 1997.

- Irresponsible borrowing and lending in the private sector caused the crisis. Public deficits are now rising fast because the government has had to take on the private sector’s bad debts and counteract the damage to the economy.

Are public services a waste of money?

- There are examples of waste, such as PFI or management consultants, but most of the money spent goes to help people in need or improve everyone’s quality of life.

National student protest, Saturday 29 January 2011, central London. Backed by Unite, GMB and UCU – the lecturers’ union

No to privatisation!

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Are we prepared to risk the lower standards that can accompany outsourcing?

There have been many examples recently of local authorities taking outsourced services back in-house as the expected benefits of privatisation have not materialised.

The risks to our services involved in implementing the One Barnet programme are substantial. And those who deliver the services, council workers, are not happy to be transferred out of public sector employment. If One Barnet succeeds, they will face lower pay and worse conditions of service.

There have already been examples of this in the borough, for example, workers in elderly care transferred to Fremantle, a not-for-profit organisation, had their wages cut by a third. The cleaners in council buildings, privatised four years ago, now earn as little as £5.83 an hour, less than they were on before transfer! Maintenance workers previously transferred to Connaught from the council feared for their jobs when the company folded last autumn.

Bundles

The council is already “bundling up” services into packages for privatisation to attract bidders. The first bundle includes:

- Building control and structures (including street naming and numbering)
- Planning
- Regeneration
- Land charges
- Environmental health
- Hendon cemetery and crematorium
- Registration of births, marriages and deaths
- Trading standards and licensing
- Highways management and strategy
- Transport and regeneration

The council Cabinet meeting in November 2010 also agreed to outsource the management of parking facilities in the borough. Future “bundles” could involve the vast bulk of the services currently delivered by the council, including much of social services.

The privatisation drive comes alongside pressure on residents to make them more “independent”. This could be through developing a Customer Service Organisation aka call-centre to deal with enquiries, making residents do more online, and, of course, simply cutting services so that residents and groups of residents have to do things for themselves or do without.

Conservative fears

It is not only trade unions in the borough, representing council workers, and many residents who are worried about One Barnet.

■ Public service productivity has been improving since 2003 – for every pound put in, we get more and better services in return.

■ Investing in public services helps local jobs and businesses – for every pound spent, 64p goes back into the local economy.

What do I get in return for my taxes?

■ The average UK household relies on benefits and public services worth more than £10,000 every year – more than they contribute in direct or indirect tax.

■ Those in greater need, such as the elderly, people with disabilities or children in poverty, rely on public spending even more and would be hardest hit by cuts.

Are we paying for lots of ‘non-jobs’ in public services?

■ Some job titles sound odd if you don’t know what they mean but on investigation they usually turn out to be valuable.

■ The public sector employs fewer managers per worker than the private sector, and fewer administrators per worker than the private financial services sector. The real problem is staff *shortages* – midwives, youth workers, planners, social workers, carers.

Do public service workers have it easy?

■ 31% of local government workers and 52% of NHS work-

The council has had a large amount of adverse press attention, and many within the ruling Conservative group are also worried. There was a strong challenge to Lynne Hillan’s leadership of the Conservative group – and, therefore, of the council – last September from councillor Mark Shooter, who laid out his objections to many aspects of council policy, with Future Shape (One Barnet) prominent among them. Shooter told a Conservative blog:

“I do not believe Soviet bureaucratic initiatives like One Public Sector, Labour’s Total Place (and Barnet’s Future Shape/Easy Council) ideas are not [sic] the way forward. Having a board of, almost exclusively, unelected public sector technocrats writing jargon laden reports with only two of Barnet’s 63 Councillors allowed in the room and the public thrown out is a scandal and a direct challenge to David Cameron’s Big Society and whole drive for local government. Just as Labour’s bloated PFI schemes are going to end up cost [sic] many times the original cost I can easily see Councillors in years to come moaning and complaining at how much more the complicated Future Shape contracts ended up costing.

“I ...will look at canceling payments to expensive consultants on Future Shape projects...”

The Conservatives quickly closed ranks in September after Hillan held onto her position, but when many of even the governing party think like this, why is One Barnet still going ahead?

Save our wardens!

Barnet council is making another attempt to attack services to older people in the borough. In 2009 it was stopped from its attempt to withdraw the wardens from all the sheltered housing schemes following a legal challenge on grounds of discrimination against disabled people. The High Court ruling was a welcome victory for a broad public campaign, supported by many in the borough.

Now the council is proposing more changes, including the effective withdrawal of council funded wardens from Barnet Homes’ sheltered housing schemes and charging older people for services.

In its consultation (ending 27/1/2011), the council promises that the care and support services for older people will be good quality and affordable; however, in the consultation papers the council admits they “have yet to develop” the menu of charged services. In effect Barnet older citizens are asked to vote in favour of the privilege to pay for an unknown list of services and unknown charges... Get ready to do battle again.

ers regularly work overtime without receiving any extra pay or time off in lieu. Public service workers take no more sickness absence than workers of the same age and gender employed in the private sector.

Are public service workers over-paid?

■ The majority of public service workers earn less than £22,000 a year, and 20% of them – more than 1.5 million people – earn less than £7 an hour.

■ Since 1997 public sector pay has risen less than private sector pay, and for the past few years public sector pay deals have been below-inflation.

■ The average pension for a local government worker is about £4,000 a year, or £1,600 for women. The average NHS pension is about £7,000 a year, or £5,000 for women – the figure includes higher paid doctors.

■ The richest 1% of the UK population take home more money every year than the total pay bill for the NHS, schools and local government put together.

Does the recession mean public services have to be cut?

■ Cutting benefits or services would make the recession longer and harder.

■ Billions could be raised by ensuring big companies and the super-rich pay a fairer share of tax.

Save our libraries!



by “Barnet Eye”
blogger
Roger Tichborne

In September, I read that Barnet Council had started a strategic review of libraries, aimed at saving over £1 million, and a strategic review of properties. Although it was claimed these two reviews were independent, from the wording it soon became clear that they were joined at the hip.

Since Barnet Council owns the freehold of the library buildings, they are an asset. The person responsible for the review, Councillor Robert Rams, had identified that this asset could be sold off to raise money to plug gaps in the borough’s finances, caused by such disasters as the loss of £27 million in Icelandic banks.

He launched a consultation, but shaped the questions to give the answers he wanted. He told the local press that libraries were a “lifestyle choice”. He suggested that “people could order books online and collect them from the supermarket” and, perhaps most ominously, that the library service could operate out of Starbucks. Having lived in Mill Hill all of my life, I realised that his words meant our library was under threat.

As children, all of my brothers and sisters were raised with a weekly trip to the library. After my mother had a stroke and was left virtually housebound, her one remaining pleasure was to read books from the large print section. Taking her on the weekly trip for replenishment brought home to me the importance of the resource.

It isn’t only very young children and pensioners who need libraries. Many students with no “quiet space” at home use libraries for private study. Mature students use the facilities for research and study. The range of services at Barnet libraries has also massively expanded, with many people also using the internet facilities and other services. As we approach a time of economic austerity, people need the opportunity to retrain – libraries are an integral part of this process.

As to the proposals to sell them off. At the moment, libraries are an asset, once they are sold off, they become a cost. Selling the freeholds and leasing back will encumber future generations with costs and debts. There are hidden costs, which have not made it into the analysis, such as the legal fees and costs of future disputes with landlords. What if a landlord chooses to triple the rent?

I realised that a cross-borough campaign had to be launched. I started with a petition and a stall in Mill Hill Broadway. We were inundated with offers to help. Initially I set a target of 500 signatures. Now, we have nearly 5,000. Councillor Rams is rattled by the campaign; he banned local libraries from displaying the petition, despite promising a full and open consultation.

So where do we go from here? It is vital that we get as many signatures as possible before the council cabinet meeting on 29 March which will discuss the options for the library service. We need people writing to the local paper, to councillors and to MPs to show the strength of feeling. If they think they might lose their seats and their allowances if they shut libraries, they will think again.

The council will claim that there is no alternative to cutting the library service. There is, they could cut their allowances and cut the number of consultants, who have been paid many times the amount the libraries cost to run and have not delivered a single saving to date.

Sign the “Save Barnet’s libraries” petition

- <http://www.gopetition.com/petition/39319/sign.html>
- For paper copies, email: barnetalliance4publicservices@gmail.com

Our Barnet

News from Barnet Alliance for Public Services • <http://barnetalliance.org>

Barnet Alliance for Public Services is a coalition of residents, campaign groups and trade unions in the London Borough of Barnet. Our public launch meeting took place in September 2010 at North London Business Park, with more than 200 attending.

We encourage involvement from groups and individuals defending public services. For more details please email: barnetalliance4publicservices@gmail.com

Barnet needs art and history!

The cuts planned by Barnet council threaten to close forever three vital institutions that preserve art and history across the borough. These bodies need our support to survive, and we need them to lend colour and meaning to our borough!

Church Farmhouse Museum in Hendon could have its funding withdrawn completely. Visit the website of the Friends www.churchfarmhousemuseum.co.uk to find out more and www.gopetition.com/petition/41478.html to sign their petition.

The Arts Depot in Finchley will be harmed, perhaps fatally, if the council goes ahead with withdrawing the funding they give it. Visit their website at www.artsdepot.co.uk/news/index.php?articleid=326 to find out more.

The collection at Barnet Museum could be broken up and dispersed if the council cuts its funding and sells the building. Visit their website www.barnetmuseum.co.uk to find out more and www.gopetition.com/petition/41281.html to sign their petition.

BA4PS / Rock Against the Cuts

No to cuts - No to privatisation No to easy Council!

Sunday 30th January

Assemble: 11.30am, Finchley Central tube, for a **MARCH** to the Arts Depot, north Finchley.

Indoor rally from 1pm. Speakers include:

Tariq Ali, Frances O'Grady (TUC)

and local campaigns + Bands: The Foundations, Boz Boorer, The Hamptons, 13 Riots, The False Dots...

Free entry. Free refreshments. <http://barnetalliance.org>

TUC demonstration Saturday 26 March

March for jobs - growth - justice. Travel on the coach from Barnet - email for details: barnetalliance4publicservices@gmail.com

Assemble: 11am, Victoria Embankment. March to rally in Hyde Park