

One Barnet: a resident's view

From front page

source a single service, if it goes wrong it is usually straightforward to change contractor. That is not the case with One Barnet. Due to the scale and complexity of the One Barnet contract there are very few companies who could step into the role and it would take months to do so. The fact that Barnet has been negotiating with potential providers of this contract for more than a year illustrates just how difficult it will be if that provider has to be replaced. The Council is also letting these contracts for 10 years with an option to extend for a further five years. Should circumstances change or the performance of the contractor fall, escaping from such lengthy contracts will prove both very difficult and incredibly expensive.

- **Higher charges:** A number of the services that are being outsourced levy charges on the general public. These include planning applications, building control, and cemeteries and crematoria. The business case is predicated on increased income from the services which means that Barnet residents will end up paying more. Saving money for some council tax payers will be at the expense of others.

- **Lack of scrutiny, and conflicts of interest:** Currently, there is a reasonable degree of transparency over council services. If you are unhappy with a service, you can speak to your councillor. Council officers appear at Scrutiny and Audit Committee meetings and Residents Forums. In future, with private companies running so many of the Council's services, there is no guarantee that residents will be able to challenge how services are provided. Is there a requirement for the outsourcing company to send staff along to these meetings? I asked the question but never received a reply. If the outsource provider has their staff located in India, how easy will it be to get responsible staff to turn up at meetings?

There is also a significant risk of conflicts of interest. When a private company is responsible for regeneration

strategy, the financial outcomes can be massive. Just look at some of the larger residential schemes in Barnet and consider whether you would be happy with one part of a private company making decisions on schemes that could have significant commercial value to another part of the same company.

- **Impact on the community:** When One Barnet was first discussed, some councillors said that the only thing that would change for staff would be the company name on the payslip. However, they have subsequently retracted those statements and, following the outsourcing of the parking contract, it is clear that staff could end up being made redundant. The New Support and Customer Services Organisation contract is valued at £750 million and one way that contractors can save money is to move jobs away from Barnet. One of the bidding companies, Capita, has a significant number of outsourcing offices outside, with several located in India. Some residents might not care where the jobs of council staff are located but the impact on Barnet of making hundreds of staff redundant will be very significant. All of those staff who are made redundant will cut their spending in local shops and with local tradespeople. That affects everyone. It might cut costs locally but, if jobs are exported overseas, it ends up costing every single tax payer money in unemployment benefits and lost tax revenues.

If there were a good track record of large scale outsourcing elsewhere in the country, there might be a more persuasive case for doing so in Barnet. However, experience of some other outsourcing projects I have come across suggest that in practice they can be hugely problematic. In Somerset, three organisations — Somerset County Council, Taunton Dene Borough Council, and Avon and Somerset Police — outsourced a number of their back office functions to Southwest One, a company whose largest shareholder is IBM. The 10-year contract began in late 2007 but since then there have been many problems. Last April Councillor Ken Maddocks, Leader of Somerset County Council, said that by tearing up the contract they have with Southwest One they could save £58 million. Earlier this year Mr Maddocks reiterated his dissatisfaction with their outsourcing partner, after they ran up losses of £31 million.

One Barnet is a massive and untested experiment that has a budgeted cost of £9.2 million, much of which has already been spent on expensive consultants and lawyers. If it goes wrong, it could end up costing council tax payers tens of millions of pounds.

The Council needs to call a halt to this scheme right now. Management need to focus instead on day-to-day running of services for the benefit of local residents.

- **John Dix** lives in New Barnet and writes the "Mr Reasonable" blog: <http://reasonablenewbarnet.blogspot.co.uk/>

"One Barnet"-style strategic partnerships: high failure rate

Strategic partnership contracts, such as Barnet's planned Development and Regulatory Services and New Support and Customer Services Organisation, have a poor performance record. Nationally, 25% of 44 such contracts have either been terminated, reduced in scope, with services and staff returned in-house, or experienced major problems.

(Source: European Services Strategy Unit)

FILM: A Tale of Two Barnets

Throughout the spring, Barnet residents have been enjoying the film "A Tale of Two Barnets" which reflects the experiences of Barnet residents.

Vicki Morris reports

The film "A Tale of Two Barnets" was directed by Charles Honderick, a Floridan whose mother hails from Barnet. The producer was Roger Tichborne, who writes the "Barnet Eye" blog.

The film runs for about half an hour and features residents of Barnet reflecting on their experience of council services in a period when budgets are being squeezed and the council is embarking on a massive privatisation programme. The world renowned film director Ken Loach provided an introduction.

On the film website, Honderick explained his motivations:

"I have been involved in film production for several years, making short films and music videos. I was looking for a new project and an opportunity arose to make a film about the people of Barnet, a suburb on the edge of London, in the year of the Olympics 2012.

"My mother's family are from Barnet and I'd spent a lot of time growing up there, so in a way this film was a labour of love. I wasn't quite sure what direction the film was going to take when it began, but as I interviewed people a story emerged. I wanted to give the people of Barnet a platform to talk about important local issues and put on record what life is like in this part of London in a year when the eyes of the world are on the great city of London.

"Although it's only a small film, I hope it makes a difference and helps effect change for the better."

The film includes interviews with Barnet council leader Richard Cornelius and chief executive Nick Walkley, as well as Barnet bloggers, users of adult social services, John and Susan Sullivan, David Attfield of Barnet CPZ Action, and North Finchley traders representative Helen Michael.

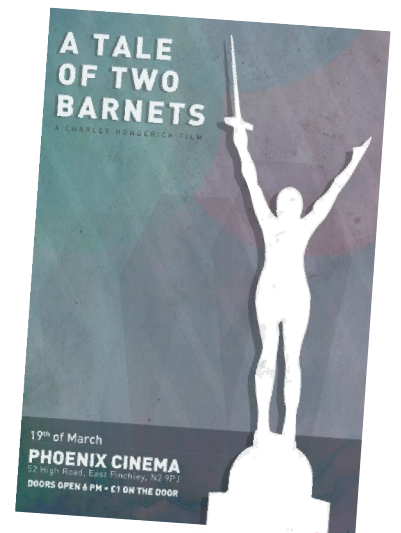
The film premiered to a packed and appreciative audience at the Phoenix Cinema in East Finchley on 19 March. Extracts of the film have been used in an ITV "Tonight" programme called "How much is your council charging you?"

The film showed in Parliament on 18 April, and will be shown at the national conference of trade union Unison and at Congress House, the headquarters of the TUC.

Barnet Alliance for Public Services (BAPS) adopted the film as their own and have now organised more than 20 community film showings around the borough. The film is also available to buy on DVD.

- **For more details contact Roger Tichborne, Mill Hill Music Complex, 110 Bunns Lane, London NW7 2AJ; tel. 07754 910425.**

To arrange a screening, email BAPS: barnetalliance4publicservices@gmail.com



Film website: <http://ataleoftwobarnets.yolasite.com/>



WHO WE ARE: Barnet Alliance for Public Services (BAPS) is a coalition of residents, campaign groups and trade unions in the London Borough of Barnet. We welcome involvement from groups and individuals defending public services.

Website: <http://barnetalliance.org>
Email: barnetalliance@gmail.com
Twitter: [@barnetalliance](https://twitter.com/barnetalliance)