



# **Direct and Collateral Damage** to the Future of Barnet Libraries



**European Services  
Strategy Unit**

(Continuing the work of the Centre for Public Services)



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The **European Services Strategy Unit** is committed to social justice, by the provision of good quality public services by democratically accountable public bodies. The Unit continues the work of the Centre for Public Services, which began in 1973. Research and strategic advice for public bodies, trade unions and community organisations includes analysis of regional/city economies and public sector provision, jobs and employment strategies, impact assessment and the effects of marketisation, privatisation, public private partnerships and transformation.

# Contents

Executive summary	4
Context	6
Consultation – wide opposition to Library proposals	6
46% job loss and 70% cut in hours	9
Damage to Library Service	9
Flawed economics	10
Equalities	12
Risks	13
Alternative Delivery Model	13
Recommendations	14
References	16

# Executive summary

## Consultation – significant opposition to Library proposals

Public consultation 2014-15: The closure of libraries, reducing the size of libraries, technology to replace staffed hours and reduced staffed opening hours received only **4% - 18% support**. In contrast **95% supported** libraries being run directly by the Council and **80% supported** hiring out of library space.

Public consultation 2015-16: The locality model, technology-enabled opening, recruiting and training volunteers, partnership libraries, whether the Council had balanced factors and whether the proposals had a positive overall impact received less than 50% support. **Only the issue of co-locating libraries received majority support.**

### 46% job loss and 70% cut in hours

- 46% FTE job loss
- 70% loss of working hours
- Potential reduction in working hours and income for many retained staff.

### Damage to Library Service

The impact for library users includes:

- Less professional advice, information and support available to library users.
- Reduced study space.
- Reduced book stock.
- More restricted times to access libraries with staff available.
- Less space available for community reading projects and events.
- Loss of flexibility to provide new library services requested by users.

The impact for library staff includes:

- Large-scale redundancies
- Potential reduced working hours and loss of income for some staff.
- Reduced morale as the Council continues to search for another provider and employer.
- High dependency on use of volunteers to provide the service.
- More disputes over responsibilities and quality of advice.
- Reduced time to provide support to community reading projects and events.
- Threat of further job losses/reduced hours and greater use of volunteers if trading and rental income targets not achieved.

### Flawed economics

The reconfiguration costs are likely to **exceed** the estimated costs and the rental income is likely to be **less** than that forecast, causing serious a financial problem for Library services. The £6.7m cost is likely to rise to £7.25m if the Council continues the search for an alternative management provider. Only £0.400m has been spent on Phase 1, **leaving about £6.8m yet to be spent, which could be used to enhance Library services.**

A larger council tax increase from 2017/18 combined with a relatively small, short-term temporary use of reserves would provide an opportunity to implement an alternative publicly supported innovation and improvement plan for Barnet libraries.

## **Risks**

28 of the 39 risks identified in the risk register relate to technology-enabled opening risks.

## **Alternative Delivery Model**

The Council's case for an alternative provider of the Library Service such as "access new funding sources", "innovate and develop new services to generate income", "develop a more flexible staffing model" and "offer greater opportunities to engage more directly with customers, communities and partners" are false and disingenuous. Barnet Council working collaboratively with service users, community organisations, staff and trade unions could achieve these objectives.

## **Recommendations**

Barnet UNISON recommends that Barnet Council:

1. Terminates the search for an Alternative Delivery Model and retains the Library Service in-house as overwhelmingly demanded by the public and staff.
2. Agrees to prepare a Public Service Innovation and Improvement Plan for the Library Service in conjunction with library users, community organisations, staff and trade union representatives.
3. Draws down £2.162m spread over four years from the Council's reserves of £15m. The same amount would be paid into the reserves over three years 2017/18 – 2019/20 from the increased revenue from a council tax increase from 2017/18. The proposal would only reduce the reserves by a maximum of £1.156m in 2017/18.
4. Increases Council tax by the maximum of 4% (instead of the planned 2%) in 2017-2018 and successive years with a £0.720m contribution for the three years 2017/18 to 2019/20 to rebuild the reserves to the current level.
5. Encourages and coordinates cross-service discussion of the role and co-location opportunities for community hubs in service delivery.

## Context

An earlier Barnet Council report on the future of the Library Service in October 2014 – set out three options for the future of the library service, but excluded in-house provision (London Borough of Barnet, 2014). A further report in October 2015 proposed closures, large job cuts and reduced staffed hours and recommended further consultation with service users and the public (London Borough of Barnet, 2015). Barnet UNISON produced a critical assessment of the proposals and made a series of recommendations (Barnet UNISON 2014 and 2015).

The Library Service received a 97% user satisfaction rating in 2015.

The planned reconfiguration of libraries, closures, opening hours, staffed hours and job losses is exactly the same as the October 2015 report to the Children, Education, Libraries and Safeguarding Committee. The Council intends to “...continue to explore the opportunity to develop an alternative model for the management of library services” (para 1.23.2).

The main proposals are:

- Reduce total library floor space by 49.4% with 45,500 sq.ft. potentially rented for income generation.
- Outsource 4 libraries to community organisations to provide a minimum 15 hours opening per week – in effect their partial closure.
- Reduce staffed hours from 634.5 to 188 hours per week.
- Library opening hours will be increased by 270 hours per week to 904 hours, but 72% of these hours will be unstaffed technology-enabled access with only 10% of the hours being volunteer supported.
- Technology-enabled opening restricted to unaccompanied registered users aged 15 years and older.
- No access to toilets in unstaffed hours despite libraries being public buildings.
- 46% job losses.
- 70% reduction in working hours.
- Recruit at least 100 volunteers to operate libraries.
- Adult fines will increase from 20p to 25p per day, there will be a new fine of 5p per day for children and teens and the cap increased from £10.40 to £15 per item.
- Digital library service and the home and mobile library services will continue.
- Phase 3 will seek *alternative management arrangements* for the Library Service.
- Planned expenditure of £6.7m on library reconfiguration, redundancies, technology-enabling opening, consultants, excluding the potential additional cost of transfer or procurement.

## Consultation – opposition to Library proposals

The Council has a duty under Section 7 of the Public Libraries and Museums Act 1964 “...to provide a comprehensive and efficient library service for the borrowing of books and other materials. The duty is owed to all persons desiring to make use of the service whose residence or place of work is within the borough and those who are undergoing full time education within the borough. As well as this duty there is a

power to make these facilities available to any person (Committee Report para 5.7.1). The duty is explained further in paras. 5.7.2 to 5.7.5.

The Committee report sets out four principles that must be met to ensure consultation is lawful (para 5.7.6):

- *“Consultation must be carried out at a formative stage in the decision*
- *Consulters must be provided with sufficient reasons for the proposal to allow them to understand the impact and provide an informed response*
- *Consultees should have sufficient time to respond to the consultation. The timing and length of consultation should take account of the nature of the decision and the method of consultation.*
- *Consultation responses must be conscientiously taken into account by the decision maker.”*

The Council commissioned two different consultants to produce reports of two consultation processes undertaken for the Library Service (Appendices E and I).

The two reports provide a wide range of quantitative and qualitative analysis from the different types of consultation used – a total of 359 pages.

**Both consultation processes provide detailed evidence of wide and sustained opposition to Barnet Council’s proposed changes to the Library Service.**

The following analysis focuses on the Citizens Panel and the Open/Main Questionnaire, which featured in both consultation processes. Other questionnaires such as the easy to read, staff, young people, children’s and user groups have been excluded from the analysis.

We recognise that different methods were used in the Citizens Panel and the Open/Main Questionnaires and **they are not strictly comparable**. However, assessing the percentages and number of respondents provides an **indicative overview** rather than examining each element of each consultation separately. The analysis was restricted by the limited time we had available to prepare this report. Table 1 summarises the results of the 2015 consultation and Table 2 the 2015/16 consultation.

**Public consultation 2014-15 (November 2014-February 2015)**

The closure of libraries, reducing the size of libraries, technology to replace staffed hours and reduced staffed opening hours received only **4% - 18% support**.

In contrast **95% supported** libraries being run directly by the Council and **80% supported** hiring out of library space.

Table 1: Consultation 2014/2015

Support for:	Citizen Panel		Main Questionnaire		% of total = 2,793 respondents
	%	Number of respondents	%	Number of respondents	
Closing 6 libraries	6	36	3	66	4
Closing 2 libraries	25	150	8	175	12
Reducing size of libraries	37	223	12	263	17
Technology to replace staffed opening hours	37	223	13	285	18
Reduced staffed opening hours	29	175	12	263	16
Libraries run directly by the Council	93	560	95	2,081	95
Hiring out library space	82	494	79	1,731	80
Help run a community library	20	120	15	329	16

Source: Appendix E: Full Consultation Report. Citizens Panel = 602, Main Questionnaire = 2,191

The Committee Report, March 2016, outlines how the Council responded to the original library proposals (para 5.10.7). It has withdrawn the planned library closures and the proposal to reduce the size of libraries to only 540 sq.ft. The report tries to understate the strength of user and community views with the claim that “*some residents raised concerns*” about unstaffed libraries and volunteer-run libraries. Both consultations reveal very substantial opposition to these proposals.

**Public consultation 2015/16** (October 2015-January 2016)

The locality model, technology-enabled opening, recruiting and training volunteers, partnership libraries, whether the Council had balanced factors and whether the proposals had a positive overall impact received less than 50% support. **Only the issue of co-locating libraries received majority support.**

Table 2: Consultation 2015/16

Five elements of revised proposal & overall views	Citizen Panel		Open Questionnaire		% of total = 1,216 respondents
	%	Number of respondents	%	Number of respondents	
Locality model	68	322	24	178	41
Technology-enabled opening	39	184	21	156	28
Recruiting and training volunteers	78	369	32	238	50
Co-locating libraries	72	341	53	394	60
Partnership libraries	73	345	25	186	44
Council had balanced factors	67	317	34	253	47
Positive overall impact	29	137	7	52	16

Source: Appendix I: Consultation Report 2015/16. Note: Citizens Panel = 473 responses, Open Questionnaire = 743 responses, figures rounded to nearest whole number.

The evidence in Table 2 indicates there is no majority support for proposals except for the collocation of libraries.

## 46% job loss and 70% cuts in hours

The employment impact of the Library Service proposals is the same as that outlined in the October 2015 report:

- 46% FTE job loss
- 70% loss of staff hours
- Potential reduction in working hours and income for many retained staff.

The scale of the planned job losses and reduction in working hours will have a very significant negative impact on the council's ability to provide a comprehensive and effective library service. The proposed changes are outlined in Table 3.

Table 3: Impact on jobs and working hours

<b>Current</b>	<b>Full Time Equivalent Jobs</b>	<b>Reduction in staffed hours</b>
Service delivery	98.5	
Support & Development	15.5	
<b>Total</b>	<b>114.0</b>	<b>634.5</b>
<b>Planned changes</b>	<b>-52.0</b>	<b>-446.5</b>
<b>Proposed staffing &amp; hours</b>	<b>62.0</b>	<b>188.0</b>
<b>% reduction</b>	<b>-46%</b>	<b>-70%</b>

Source: Barnet's future Library Service, March, 2016.

### The number of volunteers has been under-estimated

A group of 100 volunteers will be required (25 per locality) to deliver the proposed weekly 6 hours per site of volunteer supported technology enabled opening, which is expected to include cover and planned/unplanned absence of volunteers (para 1.15.20).

But additional volunteers will also be needed to operate the four 'partnership' libraries if they are to be open a minimum of 15 hours per week. Whilst the plan is for these libraries to be operated by community organisations they will be dependent on a further 20 volunteers to provide the minimum service.

Barnet UNISON estimated a total of 275-280 volunteer hours per week would be needed assuming more than one volunteer per location and to cover for non-availability (Barnet UNISON, 2015).

## Damage to the Library Service

The impact for library users includes:

- Less professional advice, information and support available to library users.
- Reduced study space.
- Reduced book stock.
- More restricted times to access libraries with staff available.
- Less space available for community reading projects and events.

- Loss of flexibility to provide new library services requested by users.

The impact for library staff includes:

- Large-scale redundancies
- Potential reduced working hours and loss of income for some staff.
- Further de-skilling of the Library Service.
- Reduced morale as the Council continues to search for another provider and employer.
- High dependency on use of volunteers to provide the service.
- More disputes over responsibilities and quality of advice.
- Reduced time to provide support to community reading projects and events.
- Threat of further job losses/reduced hours and greater use of volunteers if trading and rental income targets not achieved.

The 'partnership' model will lead to the partial closure of four libraries. Although they will be required to open for a minimum of 15 hours per week, which is equivalent to 2.5 hours per day based on opening six days per week. But it is highly questionable whether this minimum level of opening:

- Provides an acceptable level of access for library users.
- Is a cost effective use of council premises.
- Provides an effective and efficient level of service.
- Enables community use of libraries.
- The proposed £35,000 grant for year followed by £28,000 and £25,000 thereafter is hardly takes account of additional initial costs when community organisation will have to repay a loan of up to £8k out of these payments if they seek to be formally constituted (para 1.13.10).

## Flawed economics

### Revenue savings and capital expenditure forecasts

The Library proposals are claimed to produce operational savings of £1.616m and income from property rentals of £0.546m by 2019/20. Critically, it assumes the trading income of £0.505m in 2015/16 will continue despite the 46% job losses and 70% reduction in working hours.

These projected revenues are based on a number of assumptions set out in para 5.2.6, but how realistic are the assumptions on saving and income and are the saving and income figures achievable?

The recent failure of the Vubis library information system on 3 March 2016 and its subsequent non-availability has operational and financial repercussions:

*"The extended opening hours at Edgware library are suspended as the entry system requires a check with the Vubis database" (para 11, Appendix L).*

*"In the event of a future whole system data failure, a core library service at Core and Core Plus libraries would be maintained through the deployment of additional staff at an estimated cost of £75k per month. This would be a mix of temporary agency staff and security staff with extra hours and overtime for permanent staff. It is assumed that it would take 1-3 weeks to secure the services of, and train, additional staff." (para 17, Appendix L).*

The estimates for capital investment for the reconfiguration of libraries are stated as “at around £3m” (para 5.3.3) and the technology-enabled opening “is estimated to be £1.41m” (para 5.3.4) – see Table 5.

Table 5: **Estimated cost of the Library Service project**

<b>Cost of changes</b>	<b>£m</b>
Reconfiguration of libraries (para 5.3.3)	3.000
Technology enabled opening (para 5.3.4)	1.410
Redundancy costs (para 5.5.5)	1.500
Phase 1 (para 5.7.3, Oct 2015 report)	0.400
Phase 2 (para 5.6.2)	0.375
Phase 3 no estimate provided	?
<b>Total</b>	<b>6.685</b>

Source: Barnet’s future Library Service, March, 2016.

Key questions on the cost of capital investment:

- What are the implications of these capital costs on future Library’s revenue budget?
- Has the effect of these capital costs on future Library’s revenue budget been factored in?
- Will there be a need for further cuts in the Library budget in the future to accommodate the implications of capital costs on future Library’s revenue budget?

Provisional estimates are provided of potential rental annual income assumed for modelling purposes to 2019/20 (para 5.4.3). The figures are heavily qualified by the use of the terms ‘provisional’, ‘potential’, ‘assumed’ and prefixed with ‘about’, which means they are very vague. This raises the following questions:

- How realistic are the rental income figures?
- Are the rents per square foot consistent with prevailing rates for the respective areas?
- How was the rental demand for each area established?
- Will there be a need for a planning permission for the relevant commercial and non-commercial activity/use?
- How will compatibility with the Library Service be implemented?

In practice, the reconfiguration costs are likely to **exceed** the estimated costs and the rental income is likely to be **less** than that forecast, causing serious a financial problem for Library services.

The estimated cost of £6.7m is likely to be £7.25m if the Council continues the search for an alternative management provider. Only £0.400m has been spent on Phase 1, **leaving about £6.8m yet to be spent, which could be used to enhance Library services.**

### **Limited and short-term use of Council reserves**

The recent Government Spending Review gave local authorities “...the flexibility to increase Council Tax by up to 4% a year in total until 2020, with up to 2% available for spending on general local services and up to 2% available exclusively for spending on adult social care. In Barnet, if the council were to increase Council Tax by the full 4%, this would generate up to £6m in additional income in 2016/17, half of which would need to be spent exclusively on adult social care” (London Borough of Barnet, 2015b).

The Council is faced with a wide range of competing demands. However, the process of considering the Alternative Delivery Model for the Library Service has reached a critical point after two recent Committee reports (2014 and 2015) and two public consultations.

Firstly, Barnet UNISON recommends increasing Council tax by the maximum of 4% in 2017-2018 and successive years inclusive 2019-2020 with a portion of the increased resources used to rebuild the level of reserves. A number of Conservative controlled local authorities in the south-east were planning to increase council tax in 2016-2017 by 3.99% (Financial Times, 2016). Research by the Local Government Chronicle revealed 44 out of 70 upper tier councils wanted to increase council tax by 3.99% or more in 2016/17 (Daily Telegraph, 2016).

Secondly, the Council draws down £2.162m spread over four years from the Council's reserves of £15m – see Table 4. The same amount would be paid into the reserves over three years 2017/18 – 2019/20 from the increased revenue from a council tax increase from 2017/18. This proposal would only reduce the reserves by a maximum of £1.156m to £13.844m in 2017/18.

A larger council tax increase from 2017/18 combined with a relatively small, short-term temporary use of reserves would provide an opportunity to implement an alternative publicly supported innovation and improvement plan for Barnet libraries.

Table 4: **Proposal for a temporary draw down from Council reserves (£m)**

	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	Total
Proposed operational savings	0.041	1.510	0.053	0.012	1.616
Proposed rental income	0.029	0.366	0.0	0.151	0.546
<b>Total</b>	<b>0.070</b>	<b>1.876</b>	<b>0.053</b>	<b>0.163</b>	<b>2.162</b>
Drawdown from Council Reserves	0.070	1.876	0.053	0.163	2.162
Payment into Reserves from planned council tax increase	0	0.720	0.720	0.720	2.160
4% (£6.0m) Council tax increase available for other services including £3.0m p.a. for adult social care	0	5.28	5.28	5.28	15.84

Sources: Barnet's future Library Service, Report to Children, Education, Libraries and Safeguarding Committee, March 2016 and Barnet's general budget consultation 2016/17, 18 December – 12 February 2016.

## Equalities

We have not had the time to undertake an analysis of the Equality Analysis (Appendix Di). The Employee Equality Impact Assessment (Appendix Dii) records 149 staff - 70% are female and 30% male. 24% of staff are in the 40-49 age group with 42% in the 50-64 age group. 58% of the library workforce is white, 12% mixed race, 15% Asian and Asian British and 15% Chinese or other ethnic group. It contains no assessment of the equalities impact for staff.

## Risks

It is very revealing that 28 of the 39 risks identified in the risk register are related to technology-enabled opening risks (Appendix K). Eleven are programme risks, but 4 of those are related to technology-enabled opening. This inevitably follows difficulties with the technology-enabling opening pilot project at Edgware Library.

The risk register is a significant improvement on the very limited number of risks identified in the 2015 Committee report (para 5.9). However, it does not take account of the risks likely to arise from the planned large-scale redundancies and reduction in working hours and the potential operational and equalities issues that could arise.

## Alternative Delivery Model

The following paragraph from the 2016 Committee report contains a number myths and misleading statements, followed by comments:

*“There are an increasing number of examples across the country where alternative management arrangements have been developed for library services including staff mutual, charitable trusts, etc. Some of the reasons for the increasing popularity of these new models of delivery are that they offer an opportunity to access new funding sources, increase the freedom to innovate and develop new services to generate income, develop a more flexible staffing model and through closer or direct involvement of local communities, can offer greater opportunities to engage more directly with customers, communities and partners.”* (para 1.23.1)

**“Access new funding sources”**: There is no evidence of significant new sources of finance to run public libraries, other than relatively small one-off grants or funding for a specific purpose. The same claim was made for leisure trusts and they remain highly dependent on local authority funding.

**“Innovate and develop new services to generate income”**: As the long-term provider of the library service the Council is in the strongest position to innovate and develop new services. This is another myth that innovation and improvement can only be found in social enterprises or the private sector. If the Council were to commit to long-term in-house provision and engage with service users and staff in drawing up a Public Service Innovation and Improvement Plan for the Library Service, then a wide range of innovative ideas and proposals would be forthcoming.

**“Develop a more flexible staffing model”**: Changes in social needs, the provision of services and in patterns of employment can lead to more flexible staffing arrangements within the public sector whilst maintaining employment standards.

Many trusts have unilaterally cuts jobs and reduced terms and conditions, which led to poor performance, recruitment and staffing problems and in some case to their closure.

**“Offer greater opportunities to engage more directly with customers, communities and partners”**: There is nothing to prevent the Council engaging more directly with service users, community organisations and staff as many local authorities have achieved. Many community organisations and trade unions in Barnet have been seeking this for some time. It is disingenuous to claim that a mutual or trust model can only achieve service user and community engagement.

The Council plans to

*“...continue to explore the opportunity to develop an alternative model for the management of library services. However, following soft market testing as part of the options appraisal, it is felt that additional clarity regarding the future service offer is required before this option can be progressed. Therefore alternative management arrangements will be considered further once the future model for the service has been agreed by the Council and will feature as the focus of Phase III (Future Delivery Model)” (para 1.23.2)*

Firstly, there is no staff support for a mutual or social enterprise option despite being one of the Council’s key options.

Secondly, the soft market test, not surprisingly, appeared to rule out outsourcing to a private contractor. Once the Council has made 46% of the library workforce redundant and cut 70% of the working hours a private contractor would be running a skeletal service. A private contractor would likely find that volunteers were much more reluctant to support a profit-making contract than volunteer for a publicly run library. In these circumstances, a private contractor is likely to seek to close libraries and impose further cuts in staffing levels and working hours. An outsourcing contract could turn out to be a poisoned chalice.

### **Terminate the ADM approach**

The Council should accept that it is damaging to staff and service users’ morale to maintain this degree of uncertainty and should make a clear commitment to retain the service in-house.

### **More opportunities for co-location of libraries**

Children’s centres and Adult services have been discussing community hubs and Libraries could be an obvious convergence point (space permitting). However, the Committee Report and the Needs Assessment (Appendix A) only make reference to co-locating ‘partnership’ libraries in Mill Hill and East Barnet and the Hendon Library with Middlesex University. There appears to be a lack of joined-up thinking on community hubs, which should be remedied immediately.

## **Recommendations**

Barnet UNISON recommends that Barnet Council:

1. Terminates the search for an Alternative Delivery Model and retains the Library Service in-house as overwhelmingly demanded by the public and staff.
2. Agrees to prepare a Public Service Innovation and Improvement Plan for the Library Service in conjunction with library users, community organisations, staff and trade union representatives.
3. Draws down £2.162m spread over four years from the Council’s reserves of £15m. The same amount would be paid into the reserves over three years 2017/18 – 2019/20 from the increased revenue from a council tax increase from 2017/18. The proposal would only reduce the reserves by a maximum of £1.156m in 2017/18.

4. Increases Council tax by the maximum of 4% (instead of the planned 2%) in 2017-2018 and successive years with a £0.720m contribution for the three years 2017/18 to 2019/20 to rebuild the reserves to the current level.
5. Encourages and coordinates cross-service discussion of the role and co-location opportunities for community hubs in service delivery.

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