Barnet UNISON

Barnet's Future Library Service
Library Review No 2

European Services Strategy Unit
(Continuing the work of the Centre for Public Services)

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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.

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Executive summary

The Library Review proposes:

- Staffed hours at libraries will be reduced by 446.5 hours per week, a 70.4% reduction.
- 90% of the planned technology supported opening hours will have no staffing or volunteer support.
- The ten Core and Core Plus libraries will lose an average of 28.3 staffed hours per week.
- The four Partnership libraries will be run by volunteers and open only for a minimum of 15 hours per week.

The Library service currently employs 114 Full Time Equivalent staff or 155 jobs. The Library Review proposes a reduction of 52 FTE staff reducing the total library FTE from 114 to 62, a 46% reduction. However, assuming that support and development retains its current staffing level, particularly since it will have increased responsibilities under the new system, then the reduction in FTE and actual jobs will be borne entirely by frontline library workers – a decline of 71 jobs or 49%.

Four libraries, Childs Hill, East Barnet, Mill Hill and South Friern will be community run Partnership libraries operated by volunteers.

The proposals will require a total to 275-280 volunteer hours per week to cover the opening hours and cover for non-availability, illness, and holidays.

The cost of the three phases of the Library Review is expected to be about £3.15m, plus £4.41m to reduce the size of libraries and install technology enabled opening systems, a total cost of £7.56m. This is 4.4 times the projected annual savings in the library service operational budget.

The Equality Analysis should include an assessment of the Edgware technology-opening pilot including a socio-economic profile of users and their views. Nor does it include an equality impact of the proposals on staff, which is a serious omission.

Two important risks have been omitted from the risk register regarding technology failures and potential additional costs in Phase 3, plus the cost of building and the technology works exceed the estimates.

The scale of the cut in the Library budget is unprecedented and could result in permanent damage to the service, drastically reduce resident's use of the service and demotivate staff. The planned savings fall short of the target, so further cuts may be made in the Library budget.

Recommendations

Barnet UNISON strongly recommends:

1. The Council should commit to retaining direct provision of the Library Service, eliminate the need for Phase 3 and save the £500,000 costs.

2. Undertake a more rigorous and comprehensive equality impact assessment of the potential effect of the technology-enabled opening hours, drawing on the socio-economic profile of users in the Edgware pilot.

3. The equality impact of the proposals on staff must be included in the Equality Analysis.

4. The proposed additional risks should be included in the risk register.

5. The consultation process should prioritise the views of service users and groups and organisations that are potential users of library services and facilities.

Future of the Library Service

Barnet Council's Library Review in 2014 proposed three options for the future delivery of the service – outsourcing to an employee or community owned mutual, community trust or private contractor. In-house provision was excluded. The Review proposed increased opening hours through use of technology-only access and signiificant cuts in staffing levels (Barnet UNISON, 2014). The consultation process led to wide community and staff criticism of the proposals, hence the revised proposals in the 2015 Library Review.

Consultation findings

Summary of the consultation on the Library Review 2014 proposals carried out between November 2014 and February 2015 (Appendix E). It was based on a total of 3,853 quantitative and qualitative responses of which 3,001 were quantitative including a survey of the citizens panel and other questionaires all administered by the London Borough of Barnet. The 852 qualitative responses resulted from drop-in sessions in libraries, written submissions, focus groups and Council meetings with particular interest groups. There is a consistent difference between the views of panellists andthose of respondents. The Consultation report reported: *"It is also worth noting that panellists who identified themselves as current users of the library service tended to be less supportive of many of these proposals, compared with non-users"* (Appendix E).

- Only 3% of respondents and 6% of panellists supported closing six libraries and 8% and 25% respectively supported closing two libraries.
- Only 12% of respondents and 37% of panellists supported reducing the size of libraries.
- Only 13% of respondents and 37% of panellists supported using technology as a replacement for staffed opening hours.
- Only 12% of respondents supported reducuing staffed opening hours compared to 29% of panellists.
- 83% of staff respondents disagreed with the approach to extending opening times.
- 95% of respondents and 93% of panellists supported libraries being run directly by the Council.
- 79% of respondents and 82% of panellists support hiring out of library space.
- 15% of main questionnaire respondents and 20% of panellists said they would be interested in helping to run a community library.

Proposed new consultation

The Library Review report recommends that the Children's, Education, Libraries and Safeguarding Committee commences a 12-week public consultation on the reviews proposals with a further report to the Committee reporting the results of the consultation *"...with the recommendation for a final decision".*

It is essential that the public consultation is made aware of the scope and meaning of the 'final decision'. As it stands, it is a final decision on Phase 2 regarding how the library service will be delivered. A potential Phase 3 would "…consider future delivery vehicles" (para 5.7.1) and make a 'final decision' on who delivers the service.

Barnet UNISON is concerned that there may be some confusion over the specific purpose of the planned public consultation being that it would be limited to commenting on the method of service delivery. Equally, the public will need assurance that the Council will carry out a full public consultation in Phase 3 to select a service provider if this phase proceeds. They will also want a commitment, given the responses to the first consultation, that this phase will include a forward-looking in-house bid. These assurances are vital given the criticism of the scope and quality of the Council's public consultation in One Barnet transfer/outsourcing processes.

The public consultation process should prioritise the views of service users and groups or organisations that are potential users of library services and facilities, because the consultation

will be essentially be about how the library service is delivered.

The new approach to resident and staff consultation is welcomed and Barnet UNISON looks forward to the same process for children's centres, adults and community services and street scene.

A real test of the proposals

Barnet Council consulted residents on four proposed objectives for the library service:

> 1. A library service that provides children and adults with reading, literacy and learning opportunities.
>
> 2. A library service that engages with communities.
>
> 3. A library service that makes knowledge and information easily accessible.
>
> 4. A library service that can withstand current and future financial challenges and safeguard services for vulnerable people.

However, the description for each of the objectives (para 1.11.2) covers the current situation and/or assumes the fulfilment of current objectives. They are basically aspirational statements, but do not test how the current proposals will affect whether the objectives will be achieved sustained.

The new consultation process should be based on rigorous analysis of the proposals under each objective. Below we identify some of the key issues that should be examined during the new consultation process:

> **A library service that provides children and adults with reading, literacy and learning opportunities.**
>
> The proposals may provide 95% resident access to a local public library, but the access and quality of service will change significantly due to the switch to technology-only access. A key question is how these changes will affect outreach and development strategic partnerships to those most in need?
>
> The consultation process should examine in detail how the proposed changes will affect 'access to reading, literacy and learning opportunities for children and adults'. It is also important to determine whether Partnership libraries are included in this analysis.
>
> **A library service that engages with communities.**
>
> How can library buildings remain focal points of community activity when normal opening hours are being drastically reduced? Technology enabled opening provides access only to core library services and does not provide hall hire, third party events or un-facilitated education visits.
>
> Opportunities for increased volunteering do not necessarily increase opportunities for residents to shape library services. Social media and new technology does enable wider exchange of 'reading recommendations, advice and support', but this does not mean that the library service 'engages with communities'.
>
> **A library service that makes knowledge and information easily accessible.**
>
> Planned improvements to Wi-Fi services in libraries together with online library services accessible 24:7 will clearly improve accessibility to those who are IT competent.
>
> The statements in this section of the report focus on library users being IT competent. There is a real danger that the austerity and cuts agenda is driving acceptance of a narrow vision of IT competence and the exclusion of many Barnet residents who are not, and may never be, IT competent in order to reconfigure the library service to a financial agenda.
>
> **A library service that can withstand current and future financial challenges and**

safeguard services for vulnerable people.

The statements under this objective assume that income generation and increased volunteering support will be achieved, both of which are important risks borne by the Council (see below).

What will be the impact if one or more of the planned Partnership libraries do not become operational and/or cannot meet the requirement of the minimum 15 opening hours?

Library service provider

The report makes only a brief reference to future management of the library service (para 1.22.1 and 1.22.2). The options considered in the 2014 Committee report ranged from retaining in-house provision to and educational partnership, staff or community owned mutual, outsourcing to a private contractor or charitable organisation, or a shared service with another authority (London Borough of Barnet, 2014a).

The current report refers to a soft market test and conclusion that 'additional clarity' is needed regarding the future of the service and will be the focus of Phase 3. However, residents and staff are entitled to know whether the in-house and or any of the four outsourcing, transfer or shared service options are still being considered. If some options have been abandoned, what were the reasons? The report describes Phase 3 as a *"potential phase to consider future delivery vehicles"* which could suggest that the Council is considering continuing in-house provision.

On the other hand, the Council may be hoping that community, voluntary, charitable bodies and/or local authority employees "express an interest" under the Localism Act 2011 to provide or assist in providing the library service. *"If an expression of interest is made in time by an appropriate body, it must be considered by the local authority when making decisions about the future provision of library services"* (para 5.8.7).

Types of libraries

The Library Review proposes four types of libraries:

Core Libraries (6) providing high demand items and a range of other library related activities (Burnt Oak, East Finchley, Golders Green, Hendon, North Finchley and Osidge).

Core Plus Libraries (4) will provide a wide range of stock, more study spaces, community use and longer opening hours (Chipping Barnet, Church End, Grahame Park and Edgware).

Partnership Libraries (4) will be community-run by volunteers (Childs Hill, East Barnet, Mill Hill and South Friern). They will receive centralised support, annual training package and annual grant of £25,000 and will operate with a service level agreement under the London Borough of Barnet Library branding. However, Appendix G provides more details of this model no information is provided about the process by which they will be established and whether there has been any expression of interest by community organisations.

Locality model (4): The Core, Core Plus and Partnership libraries are grouped into four areas - West, East, North and Central zones, and supported by the home and mobile service and improved digital library.

Opening hours

The number of staffed hours at all ten Core and Core Plus libraries ranges between 18% - 25% with the exception of Burnt Oak, which is 30% (see Table 1). Analysis of the proposed opening and staffed hours reveals:

- Staffed hours at libraries will be reduced by 446.5 hours, a 70.4% reduction.
- 90% of the planned technology supported opening hours will have no staffing or volunteer support.
- The ten Core libraries will lose an average of 28.3 staffed hours.

- The four Partnership libraries will be run by volunteers and open only for a minimum of 15 hours per week.

Table 1: **Proposed opening hours and loss of staffing hours per week**

	Current LBB staff hours	Staffed hours	Technology enabled hours		Total opening hours	% hours staffed	loss of staff hours
			Technology Only	Volunteer supported			
Locality Central							
Church End	50.5	23.5	62.5	6	92	**25.5**	**27.0**
North Finchley	43.0	15.5	63.5	6	85	**18.2**	**27.5**
East Finchley	40.0	16.0	63.0	6	85	**18.8**	**24.0**
South Friern	35.0	An initial minimum requirement of 15 hours			15	**nil**	**35.0**
Locality West							
Grahame Park	35.0	23.5	62.5	6	92	**25.5**	**11.5**
Golders Green	46.0	15.5	63.5	6	85	**18.2**	**30.5**
Hendon	56.5	16.0	63.0	6	85	**18.8**	**40.5**
Childs Hill	35.0	An initial minimum requirement of 15 hours			15	**nil**	**35.0**
Locality East							
Chipping Barnet	56.5	23.5	62.5	6	92	**25.5**	**33.0**
Osidge	39.0	15.5	63.5	6	85	**18.2**	**23.5**
East Barnet	50.5	An initial minimum requirement of 15 hours			15	**nil**	**50.5**
Locality North							
Edgware	53.5	23.5	62.5	6	92	**25.5**	**30.0**
Burnt Oak	51.0	15.5	29.5	6	51	**30.4**	**35.5**
Mill Hill	43.0	An initial minimum requirement of 15 hours			15	**nil**	**43.0**
Total	**634.5**	**188.0**	**596**	**60**	**964**		**446.5**

Source: London Borough of Barnet, 2015a.

Volunteer dependent

The ten Core/Core Plus libraries will operate with volunteers for 6 hours per week in the technology-enabled hours. In addition, the four Partnership libraries are intended to operate for a minimum of 15 hours per week using volunteers. Thus the library service will be dependent on 120 volunteer hours per week. This translates into at least 240 volunteer hours because more than one volunteer is needed at each location for operational, health and safety and personal reasons. In addition, a bank of at least a further 35-40 volunteer hours will be needed to cover for non-availability, illness, and holidays, bring the total to 275-280 volunteer hours.

Of course some volunteers may wish to be engaged at more than one library, which would reduce the overall number of volunteers required.

The high degree of dependency on volunteers imposes requirements on the volunteers and on their management. The consequences of non-attendance means that that libraries will not be open and has a direct and immediate impact on residents.

Technology Pilot at Edgware and implications

A full analysis of the pilot project at Edgware library was not available at the time of writing this report. The five page summary report of the project (Appendix F) did not include a breakdown of the gender, age, race and other socio-economic data of the 513 users registered to use the library between 15 June and 31 August 2015. Nor did it include feedback from users. (Appendix F includes one customer feedback comment and this refers to a member of staff being *"very helpful and informative."* And to *"very pleasant staff"*. It does not include any reference in praise of the staff less library technology or operation itself).

Equality issues

The Council should undertake a more rigorous and comprehensive equality impact assessment of the potential effect of the technology-enabled opening hours, drawing on the socio-economic profile of users in the Edgware pilot.

It is essential that the new consultation process makes clear how the technology-only opening

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hours will operate, the services available and the limited access to facilities including the lack of access to public toilets.

The Equality Analysis does not address the equality impact of the proposals on staff. This is a serious omission.

Reduce size of libraries

The original plan to reduce the size of the four community-run libraries to 540 sq. ft. has been abandoned. The proposed library footprint now ranges from 1,991 sq.ft. for each of the four proposed Partnership community-run libraries and between 2,153 to 15,069 sq.ft. for the Core and Core Plus Libraries.

There is a need for a balance between provision of library related and community activities and income generation. The report states *"Opportunities for lettings in non-library spaces will be sought by Property Services in order to maximise commercial revenue and community provision"* (para 5.5.5). However, there is a danger that 'maximising commercial revenue' takes priority, particularly if the library savings target is not achieved.

Income generation from released space or relocation

The space released for income generation totals 45,500 sq. ft. The estimated total income is £546,000 over four years by 2019-2020, or an average of £136,500 per annum.

Creating the spaces for rent and securing sustaining tenants are quite different things. The government's austerity programme is planned to continue until 2019-2020, so potential tenants are likely to be other downsizing public services or projects. In the circumstances there are likely to be few, if any, community projects seeking new facilities.

It appears that the income generation proposals are at an early stage of development, hence the income generation targets may be over-optimistic.

New fees and charges

There are basically three parts to the proposed new fees and charges – small increases to book fines for late returns and replacement library cards but the abolition of reservation fees for Barnet stock. Training course fees per delegate, organisation or per session are planned to increase by 33% and more. Changes to the charging system for music sets and scores are proposed (Appendix H). No estimate is provided of the overall financial impact of the proposed changes.

Revenue savings target

The Council's Commissioning Plan set a target to save £2.85m – 67% of the operational Library service budget by 2019-2020. The Library Review proposes four-year savings of totalling £1.731m between 2016-2017 and 2019-2020 together with income from commercial/community use of £546,000 over the same period.

The scale of the cut in the Library budget is unprecedented and could result in permanent damage to the service, drastically reduce resident's use of the service and demotivate staff.

The review of savings concludes: *"The amount and the pace of savings fall short of the target set out in the council's Medium Term Financial Strategy. The CELS Committee and the Council's Policy and Resources Committee will need to consider how to address the shortfall in savings within the Council's business planning cycle for 2016/17 and beyond"* (para 5.2.8).

This could lead to further cuts in the Library budget.

Staffing - Large scale redundancies and staffing implications

The Library service currently employs 114 Full Time Equivalent staff or 155 jobs. The Library Review proposes a reduction of 52 FTE staff reducing the total library FTE from 114 to 62, a 46% reduction.

However, assuming that support and development retains its current staffing level, particularly

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since it will have increased responsibilities under the new system then the reduction in FTE and actual jobs will be borne entirely by frontline library workers – a decline of 71 jobs or 49% (see Table 2). Table 1 shows a 70.4% reduction in staffed hours in libraries, which indicates that remaining staff could face a reduction in working hours, and thus their weekly income.

Table 2: **Impact on jobs**

Current	FTE	Jobs
Service delivery	98.49	139
(weekend/eve assistants)	(7.78)	(35)
Support & Development	15.50	16
Total	**114.0**	**155**
Planned changes	**62.0**	**84**
Support & Development	15.50	16
Service delivery	**46.5**	**68**
Total change		
% reduction in service delivery jobs	**-46%**	**-49%**

Source: London Borough of Barnet, 2015a.

Cost of the process

The cost of the three phases of the Library Review is expected to be about £3.15m. The cost of reducing the size of libraries and installing technology enabled opening systems is estimated to be £4.41m. The total cost is estimated to be £7.56m, which is 4.4 times the projected annual savings in the library service operational budget. This does not take account of potential additional income of an average of £136,500 per annum over the next four years, which should be regarded as an aspirational target at this stage.

Table 3: **Cost of the Library Review and implementation**

Library review process	Cost (£)
1. Planning and consultation (paras 5.7.3 to 5.7.6)	400,000
2. Implementation and delivery	750,000
3. Potential phase to consider future delivery vehicles	*500,000
4. Redundancy costs (para 5.6.6)	1,500,000
Sub-total	**3,150,000**
Capital works	
Reducing the size of libraries (estimate - para 5.3.3)	2,000,000
Technology enabled opening arrangements (para 5.3.4)	2,410,000
Sub total	**4,410,000**
Total	**7,560,000**

Source: London Borough of Barnet, 2015a. * estimate based on cost of transfer or procurement

Risks

Only six significant risks are identified in the 2015 Library report. Table 4 contains the six significant risks with comments, plus additional risks that should be included. Risk No. 6 could be virtually eliminated by a Council decision to retain direct provision of the Library Service.

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Table 4: **Risk assessment**

No	Significant Risks	Comment
1	Residents could prove reluctant to use technology enabled opening sessions due to unfamiliarity with technology, concerns about safeguarding or health and safety.	Risk of equalities issues regarding the gender, age, race and socio-economic profile of those accessing the technology-only hours. The lack of access to public toilets for 90% of the technology only opening hours is another significant barrier.
2	Building constraints delay the implementation of the use of technology enabled opening at some sites.	
3	If the Council is unable to commercially rent sites, then savings will not be achieved and further proposals for change will be required.	
4	There may be insufficient community capacity to support the libraries within the indicated timeline and Partnership libraries may prove unsustainable.	The proposal place a high level of dependency on the supply of suitable trained volunteers may be inadequate or not sustainable. There is a distinction between volunteering in library activities and events and being responsible for running a library.
5	Staff may become demotivated and disengaged throughout the consultation and implementation process, leading to a potentially negative impact on the long-term success of the programme.	Staff are more likely to decide that their skills and career lie in providing direct frontline library services elsewhere.
6	Implementation of any agreed option is delayed by legal challenge	A risk that the Needs Assessment and/or the Equality Impact Assessment are not rigorous enough and are thus open to challenge.
Additional risks		
7	**Technology failures and service interruptions both in access to and within unstaffed libraries could lead to reduced use.**	
8	**There is a risk that the process to privatize the Library service incurs additional costs in Phase 3, plus actual costs of the building and the technology works exceed the estimates, leading to further cuts in the service and its viability and sustainability.**	

Recommendations

Barnet UNISON strongly recommends:

6. The Council should commit to retaining direct provision of the Library Service, eliminate the need for Phase 3 and save the £500,000 costs.

7. Undertake a more rigorous and comprehensive equality impact assessment of the potential effect of the technology-enabled opening hours, drawing on the socio-economic profile of users in the Edgware pilot.

8. The equality impact of the proposals on staff must be included in the Equality Analysis.

9. The proposed additional risks should be included in the risk register.

10. The consultation process should prioritise the views of service users and groups and organisations that are potential users of library services and facilities.

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