

Nº 35

Free

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Credit Leila Davaud

## Council apologises to resident for 'distress' caused from giving him wrong advice

BY JOE IVES, LOCAL DEMOCRACY REPORTER

**A**n ombudsman has found Barnet Council at fault for causing a man "a considerable amount of distress" after giving him incorrect housing advice.

The local authority has apologised for its mistake and said it had "fallen short" of its standards in dealing with the matter.

The findings were recently published by the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman.

Their report describes how a man, referred to as 'Mr X', was incorrectly told by a council officer that he was eligible for financial support when moving home. As a result, the man relocated to a new

property and fell into debt.

The ombudsman's report details how Mr X approached the council for help in June 2024 after complaining his home was unsuitable because of a mould issue and due to his landlord increasing his rent. The council inspected the property and determined there were no 'category one' hazards – issues which may cause extreme harm or death and require a local authority to intervene.

Despite this, in January 2025 the man was told by a housing needs officer that the council would pay towards the deposit and first month's rent on a privately-rented property. This prompted Mr X to move into a new, more expensive home under the impression the

council would reimburse him.

It was only when he moved in and sent the required forms to the council for his reimbursement that the local authority told him he was ineligible for financial support.

This led to Mr X issuing a complaint to the ombudsman, arguing the council had supplied him incorrect information and was at fault for getting him into debt as a result of renting a property he could no longer afford.

In its report, the ombudsman noted the property Mr X moved into cost more than the maximum £800 he could have received in council support for his first month's rent and so would not have been eligible for the council's financial assistance scheme.

Nevertheless, in its findings, concluded in late December last year, the regulator said Barnet Council was still at fault for the misinformation it had given the man.

The ombudsman stated: "I am satisfied on balance that had the council not given Mr X incorrect advice about whether he qualified for financial assistance, he would not have signed the tenancy agreement for the private rented property he found and paid the deposit and first month's rent.

"As a result Mr X had to borrow money and use credit to pay these upfront costs and this has put him in a difficult financial situation."

It added: "The council's actions

Continued on Page-2



**ABOUT**

Barnet Post is the borough's free community newspaper: written by and for local people, giving you the chance to learn more about what is going on in your area and to read (and write) stories about what matters to you.

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Barnet Council is dealing with fly-tipping  
Credit: Barnet Council

# Council collects over £100k in fly-tipping fines

BY DAVID FLOYD

**B**arnet Council is celebrating the success of a “focused crackdown” on fly-tipping after income from fines during the current financial year passed £100,000.

The council said this landmark had been achieved as it completed a three-month focused crackdown in four “hotspot wards”: Burnt Oak, Hendon, West Hendon and Cricklewood.

Fines for fly-tipping in the borough increased this year from £300 to £500 for a first offence and £400 to £600 for second offences, although the

council points out that this remains below the government limit of £1,000.

The recent crackdown has included a promotional campaign to raise awareness of fines and how to dispose of waste correctly in the four hotspot wards, which has used the taglines “dump the dumpers” and “fly tippers: we will find you and fine you”.

Sara Conway, cabinet member for community safety, said: “The council’s proactive enforcement teams are working hard daily to ensure we find and fine people illegally dumping waste in Barnet, supported by our enhanced and expanded CCTV network. Fly-tipping

is a filthy crime and we are determined to keep improving how we tackle it.”

Alan Schneiderman, cabinet member for environment and climate change, added: “Passing £100,000 in fines is a really encouraging milestone, and shows that we are hitting back against environmental crime in the borough, but clearing waste such as fly-tips is still costing the council around £500,000 a year.

“We need residents to help us by reporting any information you have about fly-tips near you, including any foot-age or tip-offs that could help us track down the responsible parties.”

Continued from Page-1  
have caused Mr X a considerable amount of distress.”

The local authority was ordered to issue an apology “for the injustice caused” by its faults and to pay the Barnet resident £400 “to recognise the distress, frustration and inconvenience he suffered”.

These remedies were to be completed, with proof, by the council within one month of

the decision. A council spokesperson said: “Barnet Homes accepts the decision of the ombudsman and its recommendations in relation to this case.

“We strive to provide high standards of service to our customers but in this instance our we have fallen short of these standards. We have apologised to Mr X and provided a payment of £400.

“We take learning seriously and are always seeking to improve how we deliver our services. We will work with our teams to ensure that correct processes are followed, and the correct advice is given to customers.”

Barnet Homes, which manages the council’s housing stock, is part of The Barnet Group, a local authority trading company owned by Barnet Council.

## Ex-councillor’s sentencing date for child sex offences confirmed

BY JOE IVES, LOCAL DEMOCRACY REPORTER

**T**he date of a former Barnet councillor’s sentencing for child sex offences has now been confirmed. Liron Velleman, a 30-year-old former Labour representative for Whetstone ward, pleaded guilty in January to attempting multiple child sex offences.

He was due to be sentenced last month but the judge at Highbury Corner Magistrates Court decided Velleman’s offences, which include attempting to engage in sexual communication with a child, were too serious.

Sentencing was postponed and referred to Harrow Crown Court at an unspecified date. It has now been confirmed that Velleman, of Holdsworth Avenue, North Finchley, will be sentenced on Friday, 20th March.

As Harrow’s court building is currently closed the exact location will be confirmed closer to the date. Southwark Crown Court has been named as a potential location.

Explaining her decision to defer the matter at the hearing on Tuesday, 10th February, District Judge Ashwinder Kaur Gill noted that sentencing guidelines outline potential for an 18-month prison term, which is beyond the powers of a magistrates court.

Speaking on behalf of the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) before the decision, Zahid Hussain said: “There must be a deterrent sentence because paedophilia has reached epidemic proportions and is perpetrated by defendants like the one who sits before you.”

The court heard how, during a Metropolitan Police sting operation, which occurred between 3rd December and 10th December 2024, Velleman believed he was talking with a 13-year-old girl.

In this period he sent 21 pages of messages including multiple requests to see what he thought was an under-aged child in her bra and pyjamas. Velleman also sent images and a live video of his erect penis.

Defence barrister Ali Hussain accepted the decision to raise the sentencing to crown court but asked for reporting restrictions on some elements of the case because members of the Jewish community “have been the target of a certain level of discrimination in the past few months”.

However, these restrictions were denied, in part because the defence had failed to submit the necessary forms.

Velleman is currently on bail with conditions stipulating that he cannot be in the company of anyone under the age of 18 unless supervised by an adult aware of these measures. He is also now on the sex offenders’ register.



Liron Velleman

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# NEWS



Barnet Green councillor Linda Lusingu (left) with Baroness Jenny Jones Credit Sam Davis Photography

## ‘I know the Greens are a place where I can thrive,’ says party’s first Barnet councillor

BY DAVID FLOYD

**T**he Green Party is celebrating having their first-ever councillor in Barnet after an independent member announced last month that she had joined the party.

Linda Lusingu, who was elected for Labour in Friern Barnet ward in 2022, was suspended by the party in January 2023 and has since been sitting as an independent. She finally resigned from Labour in 2024 after withdrawing her legal action against the party.

Barnet Greens announced the move at an event in North Finchley on Thursday, 5th February where Cllr Lusingu was welcomed into the party by veteran Green parliamentarian Baroness Jenny Jones.

Cllr Lusingu said: “I stood to be a councillor for one reason only: to ensure that people who look like me, and people whose voices have been overlooked for far too long, have a seat around the table.

“True representation is about ensuring our council chambers reflect the communities they serve, from the grassroots up. When the people in the room don’t look like, live like, or understand the lived experiences of those they represent, we cannot call the system fair or progressive.”

She added: “That is why I have decided to join the Green Party and will now be sitting as a Green councillor in Barnet. Until now, I have served as an independent, but I know the Greens are a place where I can thrive, where my values, my commitment to justice, and my belief in genuine community

representation are truly aligned.”

Cllr Lusingu’s new colleagues in Barnet Greens joined Baroness Jones in welcoming her. Charli Thompson, Green Party candidate for Woodhouse, said: “This is a genuinely historic moment for Barnet. Having our first-ever Green councillor sends a powerful message that people are ready for a different kind of politics, one rooted in tackling inequality, community and care for the future.

She added: “Linda has already shown herself to be a principled and hardworking councillor who stands up for marginalised communities and puts residents first. We’re proud that she has chosen to bring that experience and commitment into the Green Party.”

While it may be a step forward for the Greens to have their first representative at the town hall, their embrace of Cllr Lusingu also comes with risks. The former Labour councillor was suspended from her previous party following allegations of antisemitism, which she has always vehemently denied.

*Barnet Post* asked the Greens how they expected the move to affect the party’s reputation with Barnet’s Jewish community.

In response, a spokesperson for Barnet Greens said: “Cllr Lusingu has gone through the Green Party’s standard defecation and vetting process, in line with our code of conduct, as all incoming councillors do. The Green Party does not comment on the internal disciplinary processes of other parties, but we can confirm there is no ongoing investigation.

“We are unequivocally opposed to

antisemitism, as we are to all forms of racism and discrimination, and we are committed to building respectful and positive relationships with all communities in Barnet.

“Linda brings with her a strong track record as a councillor who has consistently stood up for local people, challenged inequality, and worked to make politics more inclusive and anti-racist. We are proud to welcome her to the Green Party and look forward to working with her to confront racism, discrimination, and social and economic injustice in all forms.”

The *Post* also asked Barnet Labour if they were able to clarify why Cllr Lusingu had originally been suspended from the Labour Party and also for their reaction to her decision to join the Greens.

In response, a Labour Party spokesperson said: “Cllr Lusingu has been an independent councillor for three years.”

They added: “Since 2022, Barnet Labour has focused on delivering on its mandate, including a £97million programme to fix roads and pavements across the borough, bringing community safety back into our streets with improved CCTV and targeted patrols, and supporting residents through the cost-of-living crisis by helping people into work and financial stability via council-backed employment and income support initiatives.

“We look forward to making our case in May that Labour in power locally, working with a Labour mayor and a Labour government, is the best offer for residents in Barnet.”

## Terminally ill Barnet residents may not pay council tax

BY DAVID FLOYD

**M**any terminally ill residents in Barnet will no longer have to pay council tax after Barnet Council decided to give them a new tax relief.

The new rules mean that residents who receive council tax support and have a life expectancy of twelve months or less are likely to qualify for a reduction as part of the council tax discretionary relief scheme.

The council says it will become one of the first in London to offer

this form of relief following similar decisions by Manchester City Council and Barnsley Metropolitan Borough Council.

They say the decision follows increasing attention on the financial pressures faced by people

who are terminally ill, particularly around housing costs and council tax bills.

Simon Radford, Barnet Council’s cabinet member for finance, said: “This policy change is about dignity, fairness and supporting people at the most difficult point in their lives.

“Charities say that removing or reducing council tax helps families who may be dealing with loss of income, increased care costs, and the emotional strain of end-of-life care. We want residents who are terminally ill to receive help quickly, without facing complicated processes or unnecessary stress.”

Toby North, head of public affairs at the charity Marie Curie, which has been campaigning for more support for terminally ill people, said: “We applaud Barnet Council for removing this burden from those with a terminal illness, and the councils who have already committed to providing council tax relief for dying people.

“These councils continue to set a powerful precedent for compassionate local governance, showing that practical policy change is possible.”



▲ Cabinet member for finance Simon Radford

# NEWS

## ‘Barnet will always mean a great deal to me,’ says Dan Thomas, Reform’s new leader in Wales

BY DAVID FLOYD

**R**eform UK’s new leader in Wales has thanked the people of Barnet for trusting him as he launches his bid to become first minister in the principality.

Dan Thomas, who led Barnet Council as a Conservative between 2019 and 2022, was unveiled last month by Reform leader Nigel Farage as his party’s candidate for the top job in Cardiff.

Thomas left the Tories to join Reform in June 2025 before quitting as a councillor in December in order to spend more time in Wales.

Farage told the BBC it was Thomas’s experience in Barnet that made him the right man for the job.

He said: “I had lots of other candidates but none with the battle-hardened experience of running big budgets which is exactly what he did when he ran Barnet Council.”

In a statement issued by Reform’s Barnet branch, Thomas reflected positively on his time in the borough. He said: “It’s a huge honour to lead Reform in Wales. Barnet and its people will always mean a great deal to me – they trusted me, and I hope that I managed to repay that trust during my time as leader of the council.

▶ Former Barnet Council leader Dan Thomas, who is now bidding to become first minister in Wales

“*I’ve come home to Wales to finish what I started*”

“I’ve come home to Wales to finish what I started: using every lesson learned in this great borough to smash the broken system here, take back control for our communities, and deliver the change Wales desperately needs.”

The party’s remaining councillor in Barnet, Mark Shooter, expressed the local party’s contentment at their former colleague’s new role. He told *Barnet Post*: “As a former leader and deputy leader of Barnet Council, and a member of the Barnet Reform UK group, Dan brings over 20 years of local government experience. His time in Barnet gave him first-hand insight into the structural weaknesses, waste, and complacency that became embedded under the old two-party system.

“While operating within that environment, Dan consistently pushed for restraint and discipline, helping to keep council tax down for years despite growing pressures.

“Dan embodies the values of Reform UK: responsibility with tax-



payers’ money, competence over ideology, and delivery over excuses. Those who worked with him in Barnet know his work ethic, integrity, and determination to do things differently when the old ways were no longer working.

“Barnet Reform UK is proud to see one of our own take this next step. Dan is well-placed to offer Wales serious, credible leadership.”

The new Welsh leader’s final depart-

ture from Barnet Council in December had prompted a war of words with his Conservative former colleagues.

At the time, Conservative group leader Peter Zinkin told the *Post*: “Dan Thomas, having defected to Reform UK just months ago amid much fanfare about their growing movement in Barnet, has moved out of the borough, making it impossible for him to properly represent local residents. His belated resignation only highlights the fleeting nature of Reform’s presence in Barnet.

“This is the end of Reform UK’s group on Barnet Council. We look forward to the former councillor refunding his councillor’s allowance paid to him during his prolonged absence from Barnet.”

These comments prompted an angry response from Thomas, who told the *Post*: “Cllr Zinkin’s comments are disingenuous and hypocritical: Their response is indicative of a dishonest, clapped-out party that is frightened of Reform, who I predict will do very well in May’s local elections.”

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Every successful business starts the same way — with an idea that someone believed in enough to act on. Now, Middlesex University and Global Talent Solution Hub (GTS) are joining forces to launch What's Your Big Idea: Pathway to Success, a programme designed to transform fresh ideas into investment-ready businesses.

If you've got an idea and don't know where to start, this programme was created for you. Backed by Barnet Council and Brent Cross Shopping Centre, it creates real opportunities for those who live, study or work in Barnet to turn their ideas into businesses that last.

Building on years of successful collaboration, the 2026 programme is an exciting step-change in support for local entrepreneurs. Middlesex has previously run initiatives such as MDXcelerator and the Entrepreneurial Barnet Competition. This new chapter brings together GTS's Entrepreneur Seed Incubator – Pathway to Success Programme, which has been supporting early-stage founders since 2024, with Middlesex's academic expertise and networks. The result is a clear, powerful route from idea to a business trading in the real-world.

This is a programme built for people who might not see themselves as entrepreneurs yet,

or those who've been on their journey for a short time already – including students, graduates, and people in the local community without access to high-quality business support. It's focused on removing barriers to entrepreneurship and building confidence and capability.

Over ten weeks, participants will participate in online and in-person sessions, practical workshops, mentoring, and competitive pitching opportunities. Experts will teach about essential themes including entrepreneurial mindset and habits, legal business formation for both profit and non-profit ventures, grants and government support, marketing and growth strategy, financial planning, business sustainability, and the practical use of AI. Tailored one-to-one mentoring runs throughout the programme, helping participants to refine their ideas.

The experience ends with semi-final and final pitch events where founders deliver a 5-minute pitch to a panel of judges and industry experts. Finalists will receive prize funding and a free pop-up stall at Brent Cross Shopping Centre, a valuable opportunity to test products and services with customers, as well as important recognition for their work.

So, what's your big idea?

## How to apply

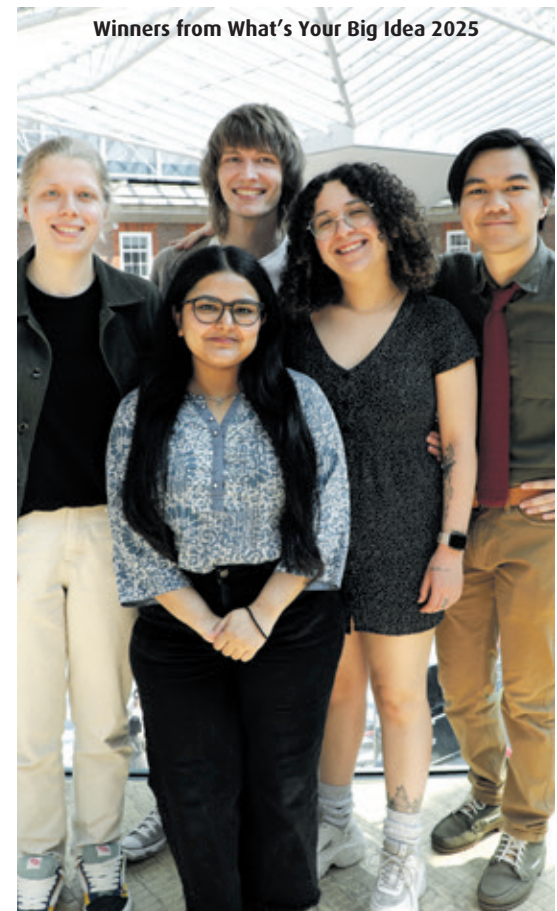
Applicants must be 18 or over, eligible to work in the UK, and meet at least one of the following: a current Middlesex student, a Middlesex graduate within the last 12 months, or a student, resident, or employee within the London Borough of Barnet. New ideas and early-stage businesses are both welcome, subject to the programme's 2026 terms and conditions.

**Applications close: 29 March**

**Selection period: 30 March – 10 April**

**For more details on how to apply:**  
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Winners from What's Your Big Idea 2025



# NEWS

## ‘Our homes were unlivable’: Holborough House residents on the impact of generator noise



BY LEILA DAVAUD

“**Y**ou could feel it through the walls, through the bed. You could even hear glasses in the cupboard, shaking.”

Rebecca Villa moved into her apartment at Holborough House in Colindale Gardens in 2021. At first glance, her home seems peaceful and comfortable. Then an engine-like noise hums in the background. She holds her phone and reveals a video sent by one of her neighbours. It was recorded in September 2025, she explains, when the combined heat and power unit (CHP) was turned on. “Four years of peace and quiet turned into anxiety and sleep deprivation,” she recalls.

“Technically, you could turn up the volume on the TV or wear earplugs if you were sensitive,” she explains. “But as soon as you were in contact with a surface, you could feel it. The building was making the noise. If you sat down on your couch, put your hand on the window, or even just have your feet touching the floor, you would feel vibrations... From 7am to 11pm, you couldn’t catch a break.”

Living on the second floor of the building, Rebecca is not the only resident affected. “We have a group chat with 17 members, all impacted by the CHP situated on the ground floor. We shared recordings and videos of how

it affected us. One resident had to move his bedroom into his living room as it is further away from the unit.”

According to Rebecca, the CHP was briefly switched on in 2021 before being turned off following noise complaints. When it restarted years later, she took matters into her own hands. “I contacted Peabody, our landlord, but I was told it was not their responsibility because they do not have access to the CHP.”

She then contacted Metropolitan, which operates the unit. “They said acoustic tests had been carried out and passed, and there is nothing wrong with the equipment. If there are vibrations, we are told

it falls under Redrow’s responsibility as the developer of the building.”

Frustrated by what she describes as responsibility being passed between organisations, Rebecca contacted Barnet Council, which she says reacted promptly.

“Officers came on 18th December and literally lay on the floor in my flat to feel the vibrations,” she recalls. “They also visited several neighbours and eventually recognised the impact of the CHP and told us it met the threshold for statutory nuisance. After that, the unit was turned off.”

The shutdown brings relief, but not closure. “I had to stay at my

dad’s for a few days just to catch up on sleep,” she explains. “I was chased out of my own home. We pay for the maintenance of the very CHP that disrupted our lives for months. We want assurances this will not happen again and we believe we should be compensated for what we went through.”

More recently, residents received correspondence from Metropolitan confirming the council’s involvement and stating Barnet Council would have taken legal action had the CHP remained operational.

A council spokesperson told *Barnet Post*: “We are committed to addressing residents’ concerns and have been investigating complaints raised by residents. Our environmental health team gathered evidence and consulted with Metropolitan, Redrow, and Peabody, as well as Barnet’s building control and planning enforcement teams. Following this, the combined heat and power system was switched off while mitigation works, scheduled for January 2026, were developed.

“Since then, responsible parties have been carrying out further tests and finalising remediation plans. We remain in regular contact with them to monitor progress and ensure the agreed corrective measures are implemented without delay.

“We will continue to review and assess the effectiveness of any corrective measures as they are introduced. We will keep residents updated.”

The correspondence from Metropolitan also states that “the developer of the building is responsible for completing the necessary remedial works”. Contacted by the *Post*, a spokesperson for Redrow said: “We are sorry for the noise complaints from the energy centre at Colindale Gardens and are working closely with Barnet Council and our acoustic consultants to resolve the issue.

“Following a joint inspection, a programme of works is being agreed and we will advise residents on its timings as soon as possible.”

Despite the system being switched off and the situation being handled, Rebecca says residents remain concerned about a possible restart and “won’t stop fighting”.

## ‘No significant outbreak’ of measles in Barnet but families urged to ensure they’re vaccinated

BY JOE IVES, LOCAL DEMOCRACY REPORTER

**M**ore than 60 suspected cases of measles have now been reported in North London as an outbreak which started in Enfield in January continues to spread.

An NHS care board meeting on Tuesday, 17th February confirmed the number of infections reported at local hospitals was continuing to increase, although Barnet Council at the time said the borough had recorded “no significant outbreaks or clusters” of measles, with no pupils being sent home from school.

A spokesperson said the council is “monitoring the situation closely” and liaising with Enfield and other neighbouring boroughs. They are encouraging take-up of the MMR vaccination for children and their parents.

North Central London Integrated Care Board (NCL ICB) is responsible for co-ordinating NHS services across Barnet, Enfield, Haringey, Camden and Islington. Dr Jo Sauvage, the ICB’s chief medical officer, said the measles outbreak is mainly affecting children in schools and nurseries, with the most severe cases – requiring hospital treatment – linked to unvaccinated patients.

She said North London’s uptake of the MMR vaccine is “below optimal levels” at 65%.

While Dr Sauvage said there is “no single cause” for the low vaccination rates, she

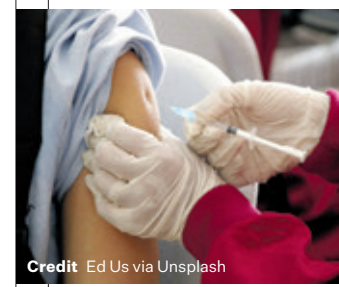
noted population mobility, the Covid-19 pandemic and practical barriers to appointments as all playing a part.

Enfield Council informed parents in January that it

may exclude unvaccinated pupils for 21 days if they are identified as being in close contact with an infected person. Barnet Council was asked by the Local Democracy Reporting Service (LDRS) if it had been considering a similar response.

The council spokesperson pointed to UKHSA advice that unvaccinated children who have been in contact with a measles case should stay away from school.

Last month, NHS England announced a new campaign to boost vaccine uptake in children. It said routine childhood immunisation prevents around 5,000 deaths and 228,000 hospital admissions every year in England.



Credit: Ed Us via Unsplash

“*If you sat down on your couch you would feel vibrations*”

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# FEATURES

# 10

## ‘You shouldn’t have to fight for yo

As the government announces major reforms to SEND provision at a national level, Maya Sall talks to parents in Barnet about their local experiences

**S**upport for children with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) is a national problem. So much so that the government unveiled a plan last month to attempt to clarify what support should be available and how this should be decided.

However, the specific experiences of seeking support for children with SEND vary greatly across different local areas. Here in Barnet, parents have accused the council of “life-threatening” failures in support for local children and young people.

Several parents, many with more than one child with SEND, have told *Barnet Post* that getting their children an education is a ‘constant fight’, despite them being academically able.

They chronicle a series of issues and failings, including tuition funding being denied without reason, unresponsive caseworkers and a failure to place their children in schools which can support their needs.

### Out of date assessments

“We used to live in Haringey, and we were supported,” said one parent from Finchley Central. “But it’s been a mess since we moved to Barnet two years ago.”

She explained that her son’s education, health and care plan (EHCP), an assessment which identifies the educational, health and social needs and additional support required for under 25s with SEND needs, has not been accurately updated since they relocated, despite her repeated requests. An EHCP is legally required to be updated annually.

“My caseworker told me that it has been updated, but what they sent me was his EHCP from when he was in Year 4,” the parent added.

Her son is now in year six and starting secondary school in the autumn. Without an accurate EHCP, the family is struggling to find a school that can support his needs, and their caseworker is slow to respond. “Sometimes we go months without hearing from them,” she said.

Barnet Council told the *Post* that 4,906 (3.40%) of under 25s in the borough have SEND needs and an EHCP. This is slightly under the London average of 3.44%. There are also a further 377 children with SEND but without EHCPs that are supported by schools in the borough.

Barnet employs 19 SEND caseworkers, meaning one caseworker for every 278 children and young people. That is above the London average, of one caseworker for every 300.

“We feel like chess pieces, always getting moved around. We’re always being told to speak to someone else or fill in another form,” the parent continued. “They just delay and delay taking any action, and this has real consequences. My son doesn’t go to school everyday, is not getting an education,



“*We’re always been told to speak to someone else or fill in another form*”

and his mental health is deteriorating.”

**“Insufficient evidence” to meet needs**  
Simply securing an EHCP has been difficult for one parent, Durim. His daughter has autism, and rarely speaks, “but the school is telling me there’s insufficient evidence to get an EHCP. She’s attended school for three years, how is that not enough time?”

Without an EHCP, Durim said his daughter is not receiving the educational support she needs.

“She needs one-to-one tuition. She’s never got that, so she’s fallen behind even though she loves learning and is really bright,” said Durim. “You shouldn’t have to fight for your child to get an education when they’re already in school.”

Durim has been told by a special educational needs coordinator (SENCO)

at the school that not every child is entitled to an EHCP. SENCOs work for their school, not the local authority, but councils have a legal duty to identify and support children with special educational needs.

The *Post* asked Barnet Council how they audit schools to ensure children with SEND’s needs are met. A spokesperson responded: “There is frequent training for SENCOs. The continual professional development training ensures that SENCOs, even those new to Barnet, know what support is in place.

“Many non-speaking children are well supported in schools and the expectation that every school employs a qualified SENCO means that they have a qualified SEND professional who has experience in implementing support for children speaking and non-speaking.

Credit RDNE

Barnet Council’s Colindale offices  
Credit Barnet Council



# FEATURES

# 11

## ur child to get an education'

"Schools have access to services through the local authority's services including the autism advisory team and educational psychology services."

Children and young people are eligible for government funded tuition, if it aligns with their EHCP plan, but accessing this funding has proven difficult for parents. Like many families, Durim has resorted to private tuition, and pays for a maths and english tutor.

### Unpredictable support

Keith is 18 and unable to attend college full-time because of his physical disabilities. Until he turns 19, however, he cannot attend college part-time. Despite being an academically able, and articulate, young person, his education has been plagued by issues. Twice he has been off-rolled from school (one mainstream, one autism specialist school). This, along with extended periods in hospital meant he was unable to take his GCSEs.

His physical disabilities mean he is unable to attend college full-time, and part-time study is not available to under-19s. As such, since leaving school at 16, he has relied on one-to-one tuition to study for his qualifications.

Keith took Japanese throughout secondary school, and wanted to continue. Despite being told he could study what he wanted, he was eventually told they could not find him a Japanese tutor.

"We found a tutor independently, and applied to the council for funding, but they told us that because it's not a core subject, they wouldn't give it to us," explains his mother, Saskia.

They are now paying for Japanese tuition privately. "I understand that there is no money. But we're only asking for two hours of funding, and we are covering the rest," said Saskia.

Saskia has twice taken Barnet Council to a tribunal, and won. "I could probably do that again, but that would take another year, by which time Keith can go to college."

Said Keith: "Since I was 16 I've been stuck in a limbo period. It's frustrating because I'm falling behind for no reason. Why did they take away my education?"

Keith is the oldest of Saskia's two children, and her youngest also has SEND. "We can't do this forever, we're going to run out of money. I know Barnet Council doesn't have a lot, there's been budget cuts since my son was seven, but we're made to feel like it's our fault."

Barnet receives £20,080 government funding per child with an EHCP. It's the fourth lowest in London, with the average around £23k. National government funding for Barnet Council increased 6.9% for the 2025/2026 financial year.

Last month, the government announced it will spend £5bn to pay off 90% of the debts English

councils have built up through supporting children and young people with SEND by the end of the financial year.

"What we really want is to be treated with a bit of dignity, and to be told the truth," said Saskia. "We understand the system, we know how to fight it. But there are parents and children out there who are falling through the cracks."

### "Barnet lies to us"

Over the past decade, the number of children and young people with an EHCP plan in Barnet has more than doubled, rising by 138%.

Another parent from Finchley, who did not want to be named, told the *Post* that last year she went to a meeting hosted by her MP, Sarah Sackman, with 35 other parents of children and young people with SEND needs.

"Everyone there told their story and it was heartbreaking," she said. "We were given a stack of post-it notes and put our concerns and problems on the wall, and the overwhelming response was 'they lie'. Barnet lies to us. They tell us we can have funding, and then next year, they take it away, or make it impossible to access altogether."

In response to questions from the *Post*, Pauline Coakley Webb, cabinet member for family friendly Barnet, said: "The council is committed to ensuring that as many children as possible receive mainstream education, and this includes for children with SEND. Barnet is nationally ranked the fourteenth best local authority for mainstream inclusion. Barnet is also one of a few local authorities to deliver 100% of EHCPs within the legal time limit of 20 weeks. The average delivery rate across England is 49.2%.

"However, the increasing complexity of needs among children with SEND is placing unprecedented pressure on the mainstream and specialist systems. Barnet saw a 49% increase in EHCPs between 2020 and 2024 and a 104% increase in requests for EHCPs over the same period. We are currently forecasting 5,500 EHCPs by 2028."

Credit RDNE



“  
They tell us we can have funding  
and then they take it away  
”

She added: "The data clearly demonstrate a growing cohort with highly complex autism, social emotional mental health, and multi-sensory needs who require specialist placements. Forecasts indicate that this demand will continue to rise over the next five years. We have invested significantly in strengthening mainstream inclusion through a well-developed local

inclusion support offer, targeted early intervention pathways, and specialised packages.

"We appreciate the frustration that some parents or carers are experiencing to secure the best educational support for their children. We are committed to working closely with families to ensure that needs are understood and met to achieve the best possible outcomes for every child."

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# FEATURES

# 12

## Tories say massive tax rises needed to tackle Barnet’s ‘jaw-dropping crisis’

**B**arnet Conservatives have called on the borough’s ruling Labour administration to come clean about its tax plans claiming the council’s current strategy represents “financial suicide on a breathtaking scale”.

The Conservatives say the council’s budget for the next financial year, which is due to be discussed by councillors at the budget meeting on Thursday, 5th March, fails to even begin to tackle a financial situation that will see the borough face ever growing deficits leading to massive cuts in services.

In a statement issued before last month’s cabinet meeting, where cabinet member for finance Simon Radford presented his plans to his Labour colleagues, the opposition group claimed: “Barnet Labour’s final budget has exposed a jaw-dropping crisis in Barnet, one so dire that the north London borough is staring at deficits topping £200million a year, more than a quarter of its entire core income by the end of the plan period.”

In the papers for the cabinet meeting, Cllr Radford confirmed that the council will seek £79.3m in exceptional financial support (EFS) in order to balance its budget for 2026/27. EFS means that the government would allow the council to borrow money or use income from asset sales to plug its income gap. Last year, the council required £55.7m of EFS to balance its budget for the current financial year.

However, Barnet Conservatives believe that Labour is not being open about the full scale of the problem facing the council. They say that while central government policies on council funding suggest that the council may be expected to increase council tax by 30% over the next three years, even this would not be enough to stabilise the situation.

They add: “The bombshell medium term financial strategy, buried in the budget council papers, lays bare the horrifying truth: escalating shortfalls year after year, with no improvement in any year and no end in sight.

“Even with savage cuts to non-statutory services and that massive tax bombshell, the black hole still wouldn’t fully close.

Referring to the news the council is making its second request for “exceptional” support in two years and for an increased amount compared to last year, they continue: “If the government pulls the plug on emergency borrowing, Barnet’s finance chief, the Section 151



Labour says spending is “under control” but admits it will be “very challenging” to get to a position where it doesn’t require further borrowing reports David Floyd

▲  
Hendon  
Town Hall

officer, would have no choice but to issue a Section 114 notice, the nuclear option that forces a council to stop all non-essential spending by law. Libraries, leisure centres, street cleaning, children centres— everything non-statutory would be slashed.

“The impact on local families would be devastating.”

*Barnet Post* contacted Barnet Labour for a response to the Conservatives’ claims, focusing particularly on the claim that it would be necessary to raise council tax above the 5% per year that is allowed without either holding a local referendum or receiving special permission from the government.

Asked whether they had any plans to increase council tax by more than 5% in any year over

the next five years, a Barnet Labour spokesperson said: “Our budget report for cabinet has below 5% increases factored into the medium term financial strategy over the next five years. Barnet Labour has also kept council tax increases below the 5% maximum legal level allowed for the last three years.”

Asked how, without a major increase in council tax, Barnet Labour planned to bring the council’s spending under control, the spokesperson responded: “The council’s current in-year spending is under control. Barnet’s Labour council has worked extremely hard to counter the damage caused to the council’s finances after decades of austerity under the Conservatives which left the

cupboard bare, and the disastrous Liz Truss mini budget that sent inflation, interest rates and demand for services skyrocketing in September 2022.

“We have gone from a £23m overspend in 2023 following the mini budget to keeping within budget in 2025/26. Our transformation programme has brought adult social care – the largest spending department in the council and a service that has overspent every year for decades – from a £20m overspend two years ago, to within budget this year.

“Going forward the council’s problem is not in-year spending, but future demand pressures in statutory services. Our plan to tackle this includes work to improve forecasting of demand pressures, a council-wide systematic approach to prevention, a focus on innovation – particularly in the area of digital, AI and technology, and continued efforts to implement new efficiencies. This work is set out in detail in the cabinet report.”

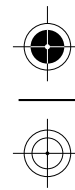
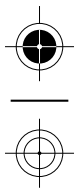
Asked in what year Barnet Labour envisages that the council will no longer require exception financial support, the spokesperson said: “This is difficult to predict as it depends on so many variables including the economy, future demand for services the council has a legal duty to provide, and our funding from government beyond the current three-year settlement – the first multi-year settlement for local government in decades.

“However, positive signs that we are moving in the right direction include our success at bringing in-year spending under control, inflation and interest rates have been coming down, and we had a further £2m uplift to our funding from government to add to the additional £37m announced in December.

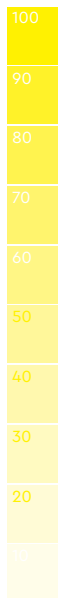
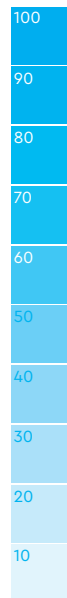
“What we can say is that ‘exceptional financial support’ in local government terms is no longer ‘exceptional’ as even more councils are having to request it. This year 35 councils have been granted EFS, up from around 29 last year.

“This is evidence that the problem is structural across the sector, and the government recognises this in their EFS announcement this week. Nevertheless, we believe we need a goal to work towards, so our innovation approach sets out a high-level aim to reach financial sustainability within three years, with a balanced budget that is not reliant on EFS. This is a very challenging goal, but we are now working towards it.”

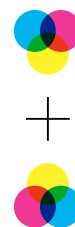
“*Even with savage cuts the black hole won’t fully close*”



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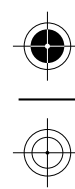
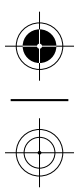
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# FEATURES

Credit Jason Leung



Credit Marco



Credit Phil Hearing



## Vulnerable residents lose lifeline as Citizens Advice Barnet is forced to cut services

**“W**e do our best to protect the community,” insists Daniel Bamford, CEO of Citizens Advice Barnet. Somberly, he sounds the alarm to the very people the charity was built for: “Right now, we are at risk of disappearing. If it were to happen, it would be incredibly difficult to rebuild. We need help.”

This is the hard truth everyone at the local charity has been facing for months. David Rommer, its lawyer and caseworker, explains: “Trust For London has funded a number of our services since 2014, until last year, when they announced they were no longer able to help us.”

The organisation provides free advice and support to meet the needs of vulnerable people who are falling through the cracks in the system. Every week, the staff welcome individuals who can’t afford a law firm to represent and defend them.

“We see people in all walks of life,” explains Susan Deal, a trained solicitor and caseworker for the benefits service that closed at the end of January. She joined Citizens Advice after the Barnet Law Centre closed due to financial constraints.

She adds: “Benefits are supposed to be a basic right but they are a tricky thing to navigate. Sometimes, it is the difference between having food on the table and starvation. It can happen to every single one of us out of nowhere and I don’t know where our clients are going to go now that this service has ended.”

Volunteers are still able to give advice “but there is only so much they

*A month after Citizens Advice Barnet ended its welfare benefits service due to funding constraints, the charity warns that two more services will soon close or halve their capacity, Leïla Davaud reports*

can do without a law degree,” says Susan. Previously, her legal knowledge and hard work helped a mother keep her home.

She says: “I assisted a client who was juggling work and childcare while on Universal Credit. She struggled for 21 months to cover her housing costs, partly because the system was confusing and partly because Universal Credit made errors. Things got so bad that bailiffs showed up at her door while her son was there.

“When I helped her apply for the benefits she was owed, they initially refused to pay because of a misunderstanding. But after fighting for her case, she finally received £17,500. That money saved her from homelessness. This case illustrates exactly why the benefit service at Citizens Advice is necessary.”

Heading for the same fate, the employment service issues a cry for help. David Rommer provides Citizens Advice’s legal support in Barnet, including representing

community members with employment issues in court, if required.

“Thankfully, we sometimes manage to resolve the matter before it gets to that point but it does happen,” he explains. “We deal with a certain number of complex cases related to national minimum wage or working time regulation not being respected, unfair dismissal, insolvency, sudden business closure, etc.”

To the lawyer’s bewilderment, discrimination cases around pregnancy have tremendously increased in the last five years in Barnet. “Most of the time, employers claim the use of sick days related to the employee’s pregnancy as a deal breaker. Some pretend that the business isn’t good and they can’t afford their contract while proceeding to advertise the open position shortly after.”

According to David: “The victims of such behaviour are often from Eastern Europe or African countries.”

His role is to ensure they are fairly represented at no cost.

“I currently work with a client who was dismissed when she disclosed her pregnancy to her employer. The bigger issue is that her visa depends on her job, and the problem with her employer being resolved. She works for a care agency, and unfortunately, it is not an unusual type of case in this line of work.”

David had to break the news to her: the service is set to close by the end of March. “She cried. There is nothing I can do at this time. If we don’t find a solution, she will have to try and find a low-cost law firm and probably face bills she can’t afford.”

Meanwhile, the immigration and asylum service faces its own crisis. The charity says that casework capacity will soon be cut in half, significantly limiting the number of clients who can receive support navigating, for example, level three Immigration Advice Authority (IAA) matters.

The service helps with online immigration applications, nationality, citizenship and ‘indefinite leave to remain’ applications. A report from Citizens Advice Barnet states that between 2020/21 and 2024/25, the number of immigration problems the charity helped residents with “has more than doubled”. It also indicates that “despite the increasing demands for casework, its funding is in jeopardy”.

As Daniel Bamford states: “There is no perfect solution at the moment”.

While Citizens Advice Barnet looks for stable funding, the CEO is asking the community for help. He says: “People can get in touch [[fundraising@barnetcab.org.uk](mailto:fundraising@barnetcab.org.uk)] if they can support us, whether that’s themselves or through an introduction to someone or an organisation they’re part of.”

“*There is no perfect solution at the moment*”

# FEATURES

# 15

The free bookshop at The Spires  
Credit: Leila Davaud



## Barnet's free bookshop: 'the place to be' for avid readers on low budgets

After a fourth move within The Spires shopping centre, regulars have found their way back to the volunteer-led free bookshop run by the Global Education Trust, reports Leila Davaud

Once the door shuts behind Jenny, the noise of The Spires fades into a library-style silence. It is a weekday morning and the carer is "exactly where she wants to be"; browsing Barnet's free bookshop in search of her next read.

"There is rarely a day when I'm not working and don't stop by," Jenny explains quietly. "I have a big pile of books waiting for me at home but I like to come in and browse. You never know what will catch your eye. I love the surprise!"

Like any other day, she is allowed to take three books with her. The shelves are stocked entirely by donations from the local community. "It's not a proper shop – I don't keep track of what is available," explains Mark, a volunteer for the day. "There is a quick turnover, and I think that's the strength of this place."

Jenny pauses in front of a historical tome. "I usually like classics, but there aren't many today. I'll try my luck with fiction or history and stay away from horror – it's not for me."

As she leaves, three more visitors step inside. Among them is Linda, who smiles at the growing stacks of donations. "I come three times a week on average," she says. "I take books home, then bring back others

I've read and don't want to keep. It's the place to be for avid readers."

Mark says children's books are among the most sought-after. "They're expensive, and children grow so fast," he explains. "Crime and fiction are the other two most popular genres." Between 12th and 31st January, 2,203 books were donated, while 2,045 were taken home. In an hour, twelve had already found their new home.

"People come here as if they're going to find a treasure," Mark says. "They leave happy and thank us repeatedly, even though all we do is keep an eye on the books. It just shows how important it is to have access to knowledge and to stories."

Mark has been volunteering for 15 months and has experienced four moves. "I'm retired, and it allows me to meet people who love reading as much as I do," he says. "It's great!"

The free bookshop exists thanks to landlords allowing the Global Education Trust to use empty retail units free of charge. It moves as a new business rents the space. "It is good for the community, I believe everyone should have easy access to books," Mark adds.

Barnet's free bookshop is open Monday to Saturday, from 10am to 4pm. Donations are always welcome.

## Short story: *The Walkway in Twilight*

Touré Gordon embarks on an emotional journey as darkness falls

Feeling the texture of the ground changing beneath her, as the wheels of her skateboard glide across concrete, she feels tense. Releasing the unease inside her she slaps her feet against the ground. Gaining speed with each slap, her music's increasing volume, there's nothing to stop the feeling of being unbound.

Abruptly, it comes to a stop. She snaps out of her trance. She loses her clasp, feeling the weight of her body tumble to the softness of the grass. The air falls silent as amusement fills her eyes. Letting out her emotions, she giggles and cries. Raising up, feeling flush, she looks for the board that seemed lost and out of sight.

Confused yet unbothered, she wants to see where this path goes, not caring about the delicate wind as it whistles and groans. Her feet move beneath her, carrying her deeper. She looks around seeing the beauty at last.

The coldness of metal against her fingertips. Watching effortlessly as her eyes glaze over. The free spirit of the smoke getting whisked into the air.

Inhale the good vibes.

Exhale the problem.

Repeating this process until there is nothing left. Then she is back to reality; emotions undressed. That brief moment or reflection that leaves you bare. It's time to disappear.

Fight or flight. Her eyes are shut. She sees no light. The winds now harsh and dominate as it's she who groans and cries.

Abnormal, feeling estranged, knowing what's out there didn't come to play. It's mean, it's aggressive, it doesn't have a face. She's trapped and there is no escape.

Silence surrounds her – only aware of the sound of her feet banging against the ground and the sharpness of her breath, as the wind cuts across her face.

Realisation paves the way. She finds herself running away. Deception is pain, nothing you can decorate. Yet trust in nature is something to celebrate.

Bittersweet the feeling it radiates.

*This story was originally published by the youth communications charity Exposure: [www.exposure.org.uk](http://www.exposure.org.uk)*

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## WHETSTONE

## Warning issued after electric blanket fire

BY DAVID FLOYD

LONDON FIRE BRIGADE HAS issued a warning to users of electric blankets following a fire in a flat in Whetstone last month.

Half of a ground floor flat in Oakleigh Park South was damaged by the blaze which firefighters believe

was started by an electric blanket.

The fire brigade was called shortly after 4.30am on Saturday, 7th February and the fire was under control before 6am. It is being treated as accidental and there are no reported injuries.

Warning of the potential dangers from electric blankets, a London

Fire Brigade spokesperson said:

"The occupant was sleeping when they are thought to have heard a crackling sound from their electric blanket, which quickly woke them up along with the smoke alarm. They were then able to escape before the fire ignited the bedding and spread, avoiding serious harm to themselves, however a significant part of the flat was unfortunately damaged.

"This incident highlights the importance of using electric blankets safely. Make sure to unplug your them before you get into bed, unless it has a thermostat control for safe all-night use. You should also remember to check regularly for wear and tear and replace an electric blanket at least every 10 years. Make sure to always take care and follow the manufacturers instructions."

They added: "We would also like to remind people of the importance of smoke alarms as these give the earliest possible warning when a fire starts. We urge everyone to make sure they have one fitted in every room where a fire can start except kitchens or bathrooms where heat alarms are more appropriate."



The fire damaged flat in Oakleigh Park South  
Credit: London Fire Brigade

## GOLDERS GREEN

## Consultation on change of route for 310 bus

BY DAVID FLOYD

TfL HAS OPENED A consultation into the future route of the 310 bus.

The 310, which runs from Stamford Hill to Golders Green, was launched on a trial basis in September 2024 following a commitment by the Mayor of London to provide a service connecting the two neighbourhoods.

This decision followed longstanding requests from residents, particularly in the Jewish community.

The consultation, which runs until 6th March, proposes changing the bus's route between Finsbury Park and Archway to go via Holloway, Nag's Head rather than the current route via Stroud Green Road.

Explaining the reasoning behind the plans, TfL says: "Re-routing the 310 via Holloway, Nag's Head would create new connections to Holloway

Road, Seven Sisters Road, Tollington Road and Isledon Road, increasing the number of people who could benefit from the new links.

"It's also expected that journey times would be faster for passengers

already using the service between Stamford Hill and Golders Green."

To find out more and have your say on the proposals go to: [haveyoursay.tfl.gov.uk/310-holloway-nags-head](https://haveyoursay.tfl.gov.uk/310-holloway-nags-head)

Credit TfL



## HIGH BARNET

## Optician celebrates five years at store

BY DAVID FLOYD

AN OPTICIAN HAS BEEN praised for her dedication after she celebrated five years working at a High Barnet outlet.

Ophthalmic director, Sabirah Peera, has worked at Specsavers Barnet in Barnet High Street since 2020.

Sabirah, who lives locally, said she has seen many changes over the past five years and particularly



Sabirah Peera at Specsavers Barnet  
Credit: Specsavers Barnet

remembers the experience of working in the store during the Covid-19 pandemic. Reflecting on this, she said: "It was unlike anything I had experienced before. The entire high street was closed, and the whole team was at home except for the directors and store manager. "It was challenging but also a real reminder of how important our care is to the community."

Other members of the Specsavers Barnet team praised Sabirah's contribution at the store. Retail director, Pragna Raghvani, said: "Working alongside Sabirah over the past five years has been an absolute pleasure. Her dedication to our customers and commitment to delivering exceptional clinical care have played a huge part in shaping the store into what it is today.

"We're incredibly proud to celebrate this milestone with her, and I'm looking forward to many more achievements together in the years ahead."

## NEW BARNET

## Pub supports charity with dog calendar

BY DAVID FLOYD

A BARNET PUB HAS raised nearly £2,000 for charity after creating a calendar featuring some of its four-legged visitors.

The Lord Kitchener, a dog friendly pub in New Barnet, raised £1,980 for Woodgreen Pets Charity after producing the 2026 calendar featuring shots of some of the dogs who come into the pub with their owners in search of treats.

Kelly Betts, who lives above the pub which is run by her husband, Jamie, came up with the idea for the calendar, which was professionally designed with copies sold for £10 each.

With printing costs covered privately, 100% of the proceeds were donated to the charity and were boosted by match funding from Kelly's employer, Barclays.

Kelly and Jamie visited the charity recently to present a symbolic cheque and meet a dog awaiting adoption.

Kelly said: "It's been such good fun to put together and the local community has loved seeing their dogs featured in the calendar. I'm so grateful to everyone who supported it, especially to Abby [Piper's mum... Miss January], who volunteered her time to design the calendar."



Kelly and Jamie present a cheque for £1,980 to Woodgreen Pets Charity

# SPORT

## Bees' play off push in doubt

*Nick Sandamas on a tough month for promotion-chasing Barnet FC*



Barnet will visit MK Dons in March  
Credit: Richard Humphrey via Wikimedia Commons

**A**s we enter March, Barnet are still very much in the play off picture as we head into the final eleven games of the regular season, but recent results have suggested otherwise.

One challenge is that boss Dean Brennan is currently viewing proceedings from the stands as he is in the middle of a nine match touchline ban for alleged comments he made to a female referee during the match against Shrewsbury last September.

After last minute wins over both Oldham and Tranmere and a draw at Shrewsbury Town at the end of January, February began with a home draw against another play off chaser in Crewe Alexandra.

Despite January signing Kabongo

Tshimanga scoring early, the Bees failed to capitalise and had to settle for a point.

Then a trip to Walsall in their next game produced a great win, 3-1.

Adam Senior and Idris Kanu put Barnet two ahead and, despite Daniel Kanu pulling a goal back, Tshimanga made sure of the win with 20 minutes left.

A drab goalless home draw against Cheltenham was followed by a 2-1 home loss against promotion-chasing Swindon.

Senior opened the scoring early on but the Robins hit back with two second half strikes from Ollie Clarke to take all the points back to Wiltshire and leave the Bees in eleventh place.

A trip to Colchester followed, with an awful performance seeing Barnet swept aside 4-1.

Despite Nnamdi Oforborh equalising on the stroke of half time, Jack Payne's fine second half hat-trick swept the Bees into oblivion.

A Tuesday night trip to Accrington Stanley provided the opportunity to bounce back quickly with a 1-0 win so, as we go to press, Barnet are in a healthy position as we move towards the business end of the season with still plenty to play for. However, the absence of the gaffer from the dug-out till the Cambridge match at the end of March is a bit worrying.

Hopefully the last game of the month against Chesterfield will yield a good result as March arrives with all fixtures this month being against teams chasing promotion/play offs or fighting to stay up.

That's promotion-chasing Salford City, MK Dons and Cambridge United to come, whilst at the other end of the table the Bees come up against both Newport County and Crawley Town.

A testing month for the black and amber coming up with coaches Connor Smith and Jerome Akimo continuing to shout instructions from touchline whilst Brennan watches from the stands.

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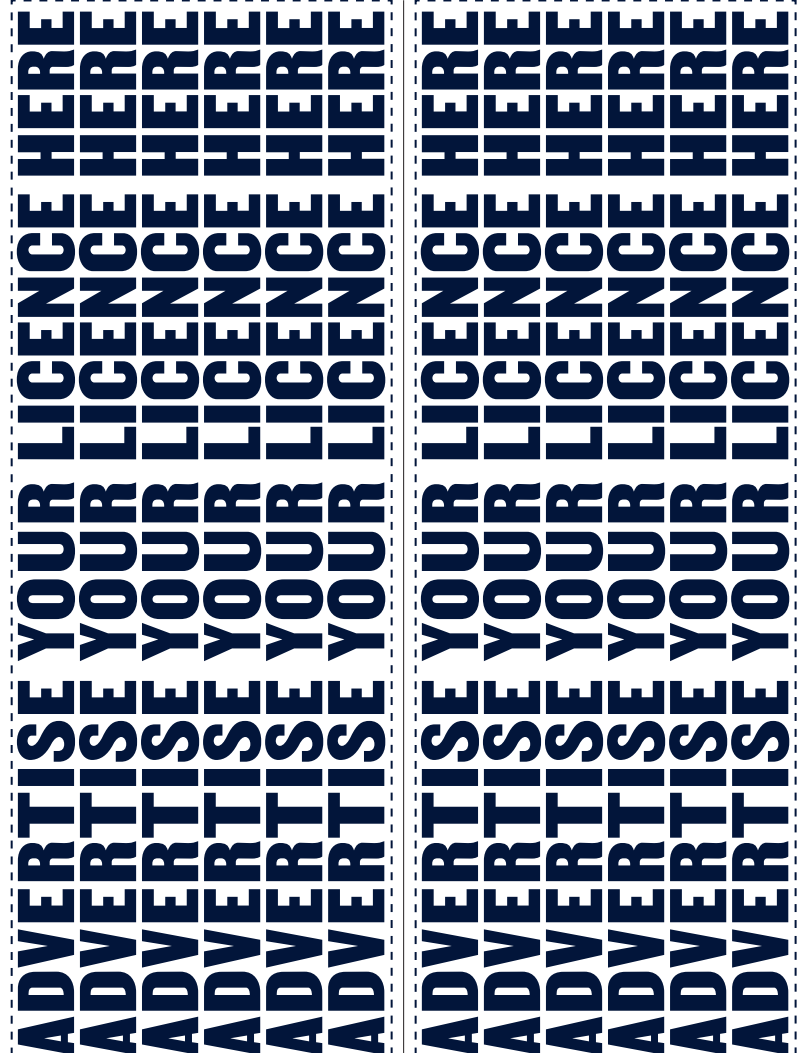
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# FEATURES



## Cadets of 120 Squadron return to Hendon over 60 years after life-changing training

**H**istory surrounds curious souls wandering the vast hangar of the RAF Museum. A little girl stares wide-eyed at the iconic Mk Vb Spitfire's belly and asks if she can buy it from the shop. "This one, but a little. It's too enormous for my shelf," she tells her mother, who can't hold back her smile.

Behind them, a few silver heads make their way towards Hendon Kitchen, the museum's cafeteria. Suits on, pins in place, they chatter away. Moments later, they are bent over black-and-white photographs.

"You've never been good at cards. You were a born loser," states Peter Torre to one of his friends, provoking a fit of laughter from a few comrades. He organised this long-overdue reunion.

"We all met as cadets in the 120 Squadron, right here, in the late 50s." Emotion clouds his eyes as he looks over the dozen participants. "Some of us haven't met in 30 or 40 years. The fact that we are reunited today shows how being a cadet here was the experience of a lifetime."

The squadron's roots go back to May 1939, when it was established as part of the civilian-run Air Defence Cadet Corps on Brent Street, Hendon. Two years into the war, in February 1941, it was brought under RAF administration by Royal Warrant, becoming part of the Air Training Corps.

By 1949, with the post-war armed forces scaling back, it had absorbed two neighbouring units, 1154 (Mill Hill) and 410 (Edgware), emerging larger

*Having met in the late 1950s, former RAF Air Training Corps cadets reunite at the RAF Museum in Hendon to revisit their roots and remember lost friends. They tell Leila Davaud how their squadron shaped their lives*

and firmly replanted in four huts around a tarmac square on the corner of Hendon airfield.

"It was there that opportunities began to open up for us cadets. We could fly aboard RAF aircraft," explains Peter Torre. He points at a photograph. "That's me...With more hair, of course."

As he sets the frame down, the Rolls-Royce specialist shuffles away, climbs onto a cafeteria table and asks for everyone's attention. A "Don't break your hip, Torre," is sent his way.

If they have lived a whole life since they first met, the banter remains intact. "You don't get a connection like ours anywhere else. It's like in sports, we'll always be a team," confides Keith Reid. Among his former cadet classmates, he falls silent as Peter Torre lists those they have lost.

Trays of food slowly weave among the memorabilia. Anecdotes fire around the table. Eventually, the

cafeteria travels back in time, when the group were "untamed teenagers," as Roger Williams puts it.

"I was thirteen and a half when I joined, and I stayed for twelve years. In the early days, we were petrified of one of the officers. Eventually, we learned he was a great man." He smiles. "I was in the band and that was, without question, one of the high points of my life."

A few seats away, Brian Collo, who joined the event with his brother, confesses: "The US Navy would be based on the airfield so the guys could fly from here to Berlin. But while they would get drunk, we'd steal their fuel. We were 16 years old, they can't do anything to us anymore, thankfully..." A smirk plastered on, he leaves the table to order a cup of tea.

Sitting down in his place, Brian Cable states: "Scandals aside, the best of my education was

here, not at school. I learnt to fly gliders, a bit of electronics, and some aircraft engineering. I was a city boy and I knew nothing about the wilderness. Suddenly, I was sent on an outward bound course. I was going up and down mountains, falling off canoes. It gave me confidence. It inspired me." He pauses. "I left during my A-levels, joined the RAF, and didn't look back for thirty-three years."

Having decided to make his training a career as well, Keith Reid shares: "I joined at 14, in 1958, and there are only a dozen or so of us left from that era. There's a sense of commemoration about today as much as celebration."

He leans forward, nostalgia kicking in. "Imagine being 14, 15, 16 and towing gliders, driving trucks, working alongside the RAF. At that age, it was unbelievable. It gave us independence; it gave us responsibility. We couldn't just be devil-may-care teenagers. People relied upon you. It made me a better man, for sure."

He went on to join the army, trained as a helicopter pilot, and served across numerous postings. The experience, he says, never left him. "We want to tell young people how it was, what we gained from it. Give them a taster."

At the end of the day, they disperse to return home and to their personal lives. Peter Torre murmurs: "It may be the last time we see each other. I'm trying not to think about it, but we are not youngsters anymore. I'm thankful for my time here and the people I've met. Always."

Imagine being 14, 15, 16 and towing gliders, driving trucks, working alongside the RAF

## SPORT

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Cockfosters FC beat FA Vase holders Whitstable Town en route to the quarter-finals  
Credit @els\_photo\_graphy



## Cockfosters FC just two wins from Wembley as remarkable cup run continues

*The Spartan South Midlands League Premier Division minnows beat the FA Vase trophy holders to reach the quarter-finals, writes club committee member Tommy Rose*

Cockfosters FC's remarkable FA Vase campaign continued following two dramatic victories – putting the Chalk Lane club into the quarter-finals and just two wins from Wembley.

The cup run, already the best in the club's history, gathered further momentum on 17th January when Cockfosters edged Crawley Down Gatwick 2–1 at Chalk Lane in a tense fourth-round tie. Leading 1–0 through a first-half Terry Offeh goal, the hosts were given a significant lift when goalkeeper Connor Sansom saved a penalty to preserve their advantage.

Crawley Down later equalised, setting up a nervy finish, but the decisive moment arrived in stoppage time as Conrad Holland struck an injury-time winner to send Cockfosters through.

That victory set up a daunting last-16 trip to Whitstable Town for Gavin Kelsey's side on 7th February, when a crowd of more than 1,500 packed into the Primcura Healthcare Stadium.

Facing the reigning FA Vase holders on their own ground represented undoubtedly the toughest assignment of the season so far.

But Cockfosters responded impressively. After a tense first half, Kendall Gyamfi opened the scoring for the visitors after 51 minutes, finishing confidently after being coolly set up by George Lutaaya. Whitstable fought back to level the tie, and the contest immediately shifted again when Cockfosters captain Jay Lovell was shown a second yellow card with 20 minutes remaining.

Whitstable were awarded a penalty shortly afterwards, but Sansom produced another outstanding save to keep the scores level at 1–1.

With no extra time in the FA Vase, the tie went straight to penalties at full time. For the fourth time in this season's competition, Cockfosters were required to settle matters from the spot — and for the fourth time they prevailed, winning

the shootout 5–4 to secure a notable victory over the holders.

At the heart of the performance was player of the match Jandir Da Cruz, who was a commanding presence at the back throughout and helped his side withstand sustained pressure, particularly after being reduced to ten men.

The reward was a quarter-final trip to play Droylesden FC on 28th February after the *Post* went to press. Victory there would send Cockfosters into the semi-finals, just one step away from an historic Wembley final.

Significantly, the cup run has been matched by strong league form. Cockfosters remain in the play-off positions and are pushing for promotion to step four of the non-league pyramid for the first time in the club's history, ensuring that the closing months of the season promise to be among the most important the club has experienced.

Huge credit must go to manager Gavin Kelsey and his coaching team.

## Glebelands Indoor Bowls Club celebrates 35 years at the heart of the community

*Tessa Wire on an important milestone for Finchley bowls fans*

**A** Finchley bowls club has marked a major milestone with a birthday celebration attended by the mayor of Barnet.

Glebelands Indoor Bowls club welcomed Danny Rich to a celebration on Monday, 2nd February, 35 years to the day that it was officially opened.

The club was built in 1990 with a 50-year lease from Barnet Council and was officially opened in 1991 by the then mayor, Roy Shutz.

Three-and-a-half decades on, Glebelands remains a thriving hub for sport, friendship and community. Cllr Rich was warmly welcomed by club founder Don Knight, who is still bowling after 35 years, alongside chairman Howard Norden, president Michael Hart and ten inaugural members including veteran club champions, all proudly wearing their club blazers.

Never one to stand on ceremony, the mayor got stuck in on the green, bowling in his socks in line with the club's strict rule of clean, flat-soled footwear only — even for the mayor! He received a lesson from club coach Rhys Lewis, who neatly summed up the game: bowls takes minutes to learn, but a lifetime to master.

As part of the celebrations, the club held a president v chairman match featuring 60 current members. It proved to be a closely fought contest, with the president's team

narrowly taking the win. In a generous gesture, the winning side donated the day's green fees to North London Hospice, one of the club's chosen charities.

In a moving speech, the mayor spoke about the vital role clubs like Glebelands play in the local community. He highlighted how the club is far more than a sporting venue, offering warmth, companionship and support. For members struggling financially, the heating is always on and a hot meal is available.

Several members told the mayor how the club has given them friendship and a place to go over many years. One 95-year-old member explained that since his wife died a few years ago, he comes to the club every day to meet friends and enjoy a freshly cooked lunch.

The mayor also met the club's oldest member, Solly Ohayon, who is 99 years young, and its youngest, 18-year-old Andrew Heneaghan — a powerful reminder of the club's appeal across generations.

Over 130 members enjoyed a free birthday lunch, with Cllr Rich helping to serve the meal and cut the birthday cake as the whole club joined in singing 'Happy Birthday'. His relaxed and approachable manner helped everyone feel at ease.

Today, Glebelands Indoor Bowls Club boasts over 400 members, with regular roll-ups and opportunities to compete in competitions, men's, ladies' and mixed leagues, accessible sessions for adults with disabilities and matches against other nearby indoor bowls clubs.

After 35 years, the club is still 'on a roll' at the heart of Finchley!



Members of Glebelands Indoors Bowls Club celebrate their 35th birthday with mayor of Barnet Danny Rich



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