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By Tommy Rose



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Hendon Town Hall was lit up with red lighting after councillors voted in support of the Labour administration Credit Joe Ives/LDRS



Barnet stays red as Tories agree deal with Labour

BY JOE IVES, LOCAL DEMOCRACY REPORTER

Labour retained power at Barnet Council despite having no overall majority – after reaching a deal with Conservative councillors.

Incumbent leader Barry Rawlings was re-elected to run a new Labour minority administration last month, following a vote at the first full council meeting since the local elections held on Thursday, 7th May (see pages 9–12).

After the meeting concluded, Hendon Town Hall greeted the coming darkness with red lights

illuminating its façade. Whether this was a minor gesture of celebration from the Labour administration is unclear.

To passers-by, a message conveyed in LED shades of claret may even have come across as slightly menacing. From the outside, the same response may be assumed of Barnet Conservatives, who did not get the opportunity to take back control of the local authority after losing it in 2022.

That may still be the overall feeling. Nevertheless, the new administration has a significantly bluer hue than before, with the first details of the Labour-Conservative

agreement published by the local authority after the meeting.

The deal saw Labour hold on to every cabinet post, while conceding a number of avenues of influence at the council to the Tories.

This included the appointment of Conservative opposition leader Peter Zinkin as a non-executive member of the cabinet. It is a move, the council said, that will “allow opposition input into discussions”.

The only change to the cabinet itself is that Nagus Narenthira replaces new mayor Zahra Beg as member for equalities.

Labour members also agreed to give the Conservatives “enhanced

arrangements” which, the council said, will give the group “more meaningful opportunities to scrutinise decisions before they are taken”.

This included Conservative chairs for most overview and scrutiny sub-committees, as well as the creation of two sub-committees “to scrutinise finance and growth and environment matters”.

In addition, Tory councillors will also chair the governance, audit, risk management and standards committee and the pension fund committee. In exchange, Labour will cling on to its control of decision-

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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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Labour and Tories say 'policy differences' prevent deal with Green to secure council leadership

BY DAVID FLOYD

Barnet's two main political groups say that "policy differences" prevented them from discussing a deal with the borough's sole Green councillor to secure majority support for their candidate to lead the council.

Both Barnet Labour and Barnet Conservatives confirmed before last month's crucial vote that they were not seeking a deal with newly-elected Green councillor Charli Thompson to form an administration.

The two larger parties won 31 seats each at the election on 7th May, meaning that neither was in a position to form an administration without some kind of support from an opponent.

This deadlocked situation created the possibility that the borough may not have been able to elect a leader at all, before the two main parties reached an understanding

between each other.

The *Post* contacted all three parties before the vote in a bid to clarify their approach to negotiations.

A Barnet Labour spokesperson told us they were not seeking a deal with the Greens, because:



Labour leader Barry Rawlings

"There are significant policy differences which do not make this possible from the Labour group's point of view."

When asked to clarify the nature of the differences, they said: "The leader of the

Barnet Labour group gave an undertaking that he would not allow international conflict to be imported into the running of the council. Green Party positions are not consistent with that pledge."

A spokesperson for Barnet Conservatives told the *Post* that they were also not seeking a deal with the Green councillor, in their case

due to "unbridgeable differences in policy".

When asked to elaborate on what these differences were, the spokesperson said: "The parties' different stances on the matter of the war concerning Israel and Palestine, certain climate change matters and liberalisation of drug use but most of all, their party leader's response on the police actions following the Golders Green attack."

Asked about their approach to negotiations, a spokesperson for Barnet Greens said: "Barnet Greens' approach is to take



Conservative leader Peter Zinkin

things on a case-by-case basis and focus on what's best for Barnet residents.

"Over 47,000 people voted Green in this election, and we take that responsibility seriously. We were elected to push for greater

transparency, stronger community involvement, and a different way of doing local politics, and that's what we intend to do."

Continued from page-1

making committees such as planning and licensing.

At the full council meeting on Tuesday, 19th May the agreement meant the Conservatives abstained from the vote on Cllr Rawlings' re-appointment as council leader, effectively conceding to Labour, who gave him 31 votes in favour.

Cllr Zinkin himself was performatively nominated by his Conservative colleagues, who gave him their unanimous support. Labour members and the newly-elected Green councillor for Woodhouse ward, Charli Thompson, voted against.

Cllr Thompson also voted against Rawlings' appointment – the only councillor to do so.

Less controversial was the mayoral appointment of Zahra Beg, who will take over from Danny Rich as the borough's civic mayor to serve the 2026/27 term.

In the statement released after the meeting, Cllr Rawlings said he was "honoured to be reappointed to serve as leader of the council".

Labour councillors, he said, "will work constructively with the opposition to govern in the best interests of residents and deliver the improvements Barnet residents need and deserve".

Even before the meeting it was clear any new iteration of the Labour administration would differ significantly from one that preceded it. Going into the elections last month Labour held a historic 40-seat majority. The Conservatives had 19 councillors. The Greens and Reform UK, meanwhile, held one seat each.

Both Labour and the Conservatives won 31 seats at the poll on 7th May. Both, therefore, were one short of a majority. Despite this, neither group was willing to form a deal with Cllr Thompson, the single Green councillor for Woodhouse ward (see opposite).

Barnet Labour blamed "significant policy differences" preventing negotiations with the Greens. Their Tory counterparts, meanwhile, kept the door firmly closed, citing "unbridgeable" differences on policy issues.

The new administration may, then, be its own case of "the enemy of my enemy is my friend". Or, perhaps, agreeing to disagree – that is, at the very least, until disagreements arrive.

With hugely differing opinions on how to solve the major issues facing the local authority, including its spiraling financial deficit, last month's resolution represents more of a semi-colon than a full stop – an untested treaty formed after nearly two weeks of back-and-forth discussions and political intrigue.

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NEWS

Contract extension for social enterprise offering smoking cessation services

BY JOE IVES, LOCAL DEMOCRACY REPORTER

Barnet Council has awarded a new six-figure contract to deliver smoking cessation services in the borough.

The decision was formally made last month by Dawn Wake-ling, the local authority's executive director for communities, adults and health.

The £400,943 deal will pay for a one-year contract extension to Barnet Federated GPs Community Interest Company (CIC).

The social enterprise already provides smoking cessation services in the borough, including the management of NHS health checks and GP smoking cessation services.

The extension is backdated to the start of April for the CIC's own service provision, and runs until April 2027. The management contract for the NHS portion of its work comes into effect from the



start of July and expires the same month next year.

The NHS health checks are for adults in England, aged 40 to 74 years, who do not have a pre-existing diagnosis of cardiovascular disease.

They're designed to detect early signs of stroke, kidney disease, heart disease, type two diabetes,

or dementia.

Authorities like Barnet Council have a legal obligation to offer these checks to eligible residents every five years.

Local stop smoking services were established in 1999 as part of a government policy to help smokers quit. According to a council report these services "have been

incredibly successful to date".

It's difficult to measure the effectiveness of the local authority's work specifically. Figures from the Department of Health and Social Care show smoking rates in Barnet have fallen from 17.4% in 2011 to 8.5% in 2024.

But the data also shows the number of smokers across England fell from one-in-five to one-in-ten during the same period.

In 2024 the Labour government announced it was investing an additional £70million to support councils to provide their smoking cessation services, through a support grant.

As a result, Barnet Council received £333,217 for 2024/25 and £346,923 in the following financial year. This funding has now become part of the ring-fenced smoking cessation spending within the public health grant.

Information and stop smoking services can be found on the council's website:

Visit barnet.gov.uk/health-and-well-being/adults-health/get-support-stop-smoking

Whetstone High Road
Credit Google Street View



Man charged with causing death by dangerous driving following fatal collision in Whetstone

BY DAVID FLOYD

A man has been charged with causing death by dangerous driving following a fatal collision in Whetstone last month.

The police were called at around 11.30pm on Thursday, 14th May following a collision between a Volkswagen Golf and Nissan Qashqai at the junction between Whetstone High Road and Chandos Avenue.

Both ambulance and air ambulance services attended, however the front passenger of the Volkswagen, a man in his 20s, a man in his 20s, named as Sheikh Ayyub Sultan Luchmum, was sadly pronounced dead at the scene. The police say his next of kin continue to receive support from specialist officers.

Two rear passengers in the same car, a man and a woman in their 20s, were taken to hospital with potentially life-threatening and life-changing injuries. They remain in hospital.

The driver of the Volkswagen received treatment for non-life threatening injuries.

The driver of the Nissan, a woman in her 20s, was also taken to hospital before being discharged.

Hasan Hussain, 20 of Tyndall Road, Leyton, was charged on Monday, 18th May with one count of causing death by dangerous driving and two counts of causing serious injury by dangerous driving.

He appeared at Highbury Magistrates' Court on 19th May where he was bailed to appear at Harrow Crown Court on Tuesday, 16th June.



Credit Met police

Man assaulted in Golders Green

BY DAVID FLOYD

Police are calling for witnesses to come forward after a man was assaulted in Golders Green last month in an incident being treated as an antisemitic hate crime.

The man, in his 20s, was assaulted by a group of men outside a property in The Grove shortly after 2am on Monday, 18th May.

Police say they attended soon after the incident and spoke to the victim, who was later treated in hospital for injuries to his face

and back.

No arrests have been made so far and police enquiries continue.

The police are asking anyone with information to contact them on 101, quoting *CAD 542/18MAY*.

This is the latest in a series of racist attacks on members of the Jewish community in North London including the stabbing of two men in Golders Green at the end of April.

At last month's election count, Barnet Conservative leader Peter Zinkin talked about the local impact of the recent rise in antisemitism (see page 9).

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NEWS

Steep rise in NHS mental health advocacy costs for North London boroughs

BY JOE IVES,
LOCAL DEMOCRACY REPORTER

Providing NHS and mental health advocacy services in three North London boroughs is set to cost each council an extra £250,000 per year.

Barnet, Enfield and Haringey councils have all decided to renew a tri-borough contract for their mental health and NHS advocacy services – despite their existing provider hiking its fees.

Advocacy services help protect the rights of residents in NHS care as well as those under mental health orders, for their own safety. All ‘upper tier’ local authorities, including all London borough councils, are legally obligated to provide them.

A decision to extend the ‘joint advocacy’ contract with current provider POhWER to the end of March 2028 came into effect last month after being formally approved by Enfield Council’s director of health and adult social care, Doug Wilson.

The three boroughs have a policy, dating back over a decade, of signing joint contracts with a provider. They also have an agreed policy of “taking a turn” at procuring the next contract for these services when the previous

one is set to end.

In 2023, Barnet procured a three-year contract with advocacy charity POhWER, which expired at the end of March this year. It was then Enfield Council’s turn to make arrangements for the new deal.

As documented in a recently-published council report, POhWER, which provides these services for all three boroughs, is increasing its fees in a move that could cost each borough an additional £250,000 per year. Exact details about this and the value of contract with POhWER are not publically available.

Nevertheless, the three local authorities wish to carry on – and improve – the service offered by their current provider.

The report states: “The tri-boroughs have been working with the provider to ensure that hours per case are sufficient and appropriate to deliver advocacy, and to eliminate, as much as possible, non-contact time.”

The document also states that each of the councils in Barnet, Enfield and Haringey wish to make sure advocacy visits to people happen over a

focused, “clustered” period of time.

They also want to ensure telephone follow-ups with service users and their families “where appropriate”, as well as investment in artificial intelligence.

The advocacy contract includes services that protect and support people suffering with severe mental health issues, including those sectioned under The Mental Health Act and Deprivation of Liberty (DOL) orders.

DOLs are interventions used to protect people who could be a danger to themselves. This safeguard can only be used if the person is to be placed in a care home or hospital.

The advocacy services also include support for vulnerable people to understand their rights under the Care Act and to be involved in local authority actions such as assessments, care reviews and care and support planning.

In addition, they also enable residents to access the Independent Health Complaints Advocacy Service (IHCAS) to raise complaints about NHS care they or someone they know has received.

“Advocacy services help protect the rights of those in NHS care”



Bus route 310 connects Golders Green with Stamford Hill Credit TfL



Bus route connecting Jewish communities in North London made permanent – but with different route

BY JAMES CRACKNELL

A new bus service connecting two of North London’s biggest Jewish communities will now become permanent, Transport for London (TfL) has confirmed.

A twelve-month consultation on the 310 bus route between Golders Green and Stamford Hill, via Archway and Finsbury Park, was launched in September 2024.

A second consultation on a proposal to then reroute the 310 via Holloway, instead of via Hornsey Rise and Stroud Green Road, ran between January and March this year, with 367 responses submitted to TfL.

TfL has now published a report which confirms that the alternative route via Holloway will become the new permanent route starting this September, despite some people in Stroud Green objecting to the move.

The TfL report said: “Following analysis of the responses we received to the recent consultation, we have decided to go ahead with re-routting the 310 via Holloway, Nag’s Head. We can also now confirm that route 310 will be retained on a permanent basis and we are going to extend operating hours to midnight on all days and extend the service to Stamford Hill, Rookwood Road. We expect these changes to

be introduced as part of the new contract on 5 September 2026.”

It continues: “We recognise that some people are not supportive of this rerouting and we will keep the route under review. Our analysis shows that routeing the 310 via Holloway Nags Head will generate more new trips (approximately 470 new daily trips on weekdays, including approximately 365 new links). Also, journey times for through-customers are expected to decrease by an average of two minutes, resulting in quicker journey times between Stamford Hill and Golders Green.”

“The new routeing via Holloway Nags Head also allows us to serve bus stops R and S on Seven Sisters Road, improving access to Finsbury Park Station.”

When the bus service was first introduced, it was hailed by local leaders from the Jewish community.

Andrew Gilbert and Adrian Cohen, co-chairs of the London Jewish Forum, said: “In a period where our community is encountering unprecedented antisemitism, any measure that bolsters the confidence of Jewish individuals in using public transport is immensely valued.”

It was the first time that the two areas had ever been connected by a direct bus service.

FEATURES

‘We believe in us’: bringing communities together after the Golders Green stabbings



The peace walk

Lindsay Simmonds and Julie Siddiqi walked down the street in Golders Green in silence – they don’t intend to back down against violence: here they share their stories with Leïla Davaud

A split screen. On one side, Lindsay Simmonds, a Jewish scholar. On the other, Julie Siddiqi, a Muslim activist. Two women, two faiths, one goal: “Peace between our communities.”

Lindsay and Julie have been friends for 14 years. They both participated in a leadership scheme linked to the Cambridge Interfaith Programme.

“We knew we had found a soulmate in each other. The two of us, navigating faith and patriarchal religious institutions.”

For years, their friendship fed directly into their work. Lindsay is a research fellow at the London School of Jewish Studies, a scholar of women in Biblical narrative and Jewish law, and co-chair of the Jewish-Muslim women’s network Nisa-Nashim.

Julie co-founded that network and co-chairs the UK Muslim Network. Between them they spent decades building the kind of bridges some want to burn down. Following the attacks against Israel on 7th October

2023, the importance of this work increased.

“After the Hamas attack, we had a deep conversation,” says Julie. “We were able to talk about the events without fear of being judged by the other.” The violence did not produce the division many would expect. “We’ve always been active,” says Lindsay, “but what happened then and everything since has propelled us to do more”.

This need for action led them to Westminster Abbey. Lindsay and Julie gathered a room full of women from different faiths, or none, each carrying different kinds of influence, to reflect on how to respond to an inflamed world.

“It was supposed to last one hour,” Lindsay recalls. “But nobody wanted to leave. We are women of faith in peace building. Conflicts travel but peace can do just the same. So we asked ourselves: What can we do as ordinary women to show up and do our part?”

On 29th April 2026, two Jewish men were stabbed in a terror attack in Golders Green

Road. The suspect, a Somali-born British national who had previously been referred to Prevent, was arrested on suspicion of attempted murder. Lindsay and Julie immediately called each other.

“After the attack in Golders Green, I wanted to be intentional,” says Julie. “To go there, to see it, and to be seen.”

So they decided to walk down the main street of Golders Green, one of the most Jewish neighbourhoods in London, and then have lunch, in peace.

They mentioned it to a few friends, in case anyone else felt the same impulse. Within 24 hours the message had spread further than either of them expected. On 30th April, around 150 women gathered at Golders Green Station and walked together in silence.

“It was quiet, gentle, peaceful,” says Julie. They were there to stand against hatred and division. “There is something about walking in the street side by side, coming from different life paths,” Julie adds. “That is how the world really is.”

“It was not a march,” says Lindsay. “It was a walk. It was boring in an exceptional way.”

The distinction matters to her. There was no noise, no demands, no chanting. People stopped and asked what was happening. Conversations started.

For Julie, the response confirmed something she had sensed was shifting. “Lots of



Gathering after the walk

the women said they wanted to do more. Muslims showed up. Mosques have been attacked too. None of this is acceptable. I feel scared of what will happen to both our communities. But in the last few weeks there has been a shift, and the walk is proof of that.”

Afterwards, the two women slipped away for lunch at a restaurant. “Julie was the only Muslim there,” says Lindsay, “but she was welcomed by everyone”.

Both women are clear that what they do is not political positioning. “We do this because we believe in us. I study our texts and I embrace our values. One of the religious imperatives is to love each other.” Lindsay also acknowledges the backlash. “It comes, and it is not comfortable. But we won’t be silenced. We will continue to show compassion. No matter what.”

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FEATURES

Bringing people together in tough

Amid a shocking rise in antisemitism, David Floyd talks to the chief executive of Jewish community centre JW3 about promoting joy and understanding while paying a huge security bill

It's a year of celebration for JW3, the groundbreaking Jewish community centre which opened its doors in 2013 just over the borough border in Camden. Chief executive Raymond Simonson, who has led the organisation throughout that time, explains that on reaching the age of 13, the centre decided to hold a Bar Mitzvah.

He tells me: "It's this coming of age and this big celebration and we thought that was a really appropriate thing for us to mark as a milestone.

"It's been a particularly tough few years. What people need is a bit of joy, a little bit of joy in their lives. So we wanted to celebrate."

This special programme of activities includes: "JW3's Barmy Mitzvah, which is a live performance piece with acrobatics."

This stark contrast between the centre's joyful mission and the painful situation facing Britain's Jews is a recurring theme as Simonson takes me on a brief tour of the building, excitedly describing its diverse, positive activities before sitting down to discuss the past, present and future of JW3.

After hearing about and, in some cases witnessing, its huge range of activities from cinema to theatre, a foodbank to a nursery, a museum to martial arts classes, I ask Simonson about the centre's mission.

He says: "We've always said we want to create open, welcoming, Jewishly-infused spaces that bring different kinds of people together, that help strengthen people's identities and that build community – and we think that we can do all of those things through the medium of arts and culture, through education and importantly through social action as well.

"One thing I've often said to people as a sort of a shorthand is that we exist to increase the quality, the variety and the volume of Jewish conversation."

A Jewish perspective

"Often we focus a lot in the Jewish community on issues around the Holocaust, antisemitism and around Israel."

While Simonson says this is understandable, he emphasises: "There is a Jewish perspective on everything from the environmental crisis to the plight of refugees to art and music and poetry and you name it, then there is a Jewish lens with which we can look through it and we always wanted to bring Jewish life and Jewish culture alive in a three dimensional way.

"We want to offer people multiple entry points into the community, into Jewish life. So, if you're interested in food, you can come and learn to bake a challah or you can help with the foodbank or you could celebrate Jewish festivals through the foods that we eat.

"If what you're interested in is film, then we show



“*There is a Jewish perspective on everything*”

The mural outside JW3
Credit David Floyd

mainstream films and Jewish films. We're a home for the Jewish Film Festival every year where we are the cinema that has more screenings than any other."

While the centre is proud of its Jewishness, there is also a clear focus on reaching beyond the Jewish community, to share Jewish culture with others. I ask Simonson about how the centre engages with people who are not Jewish.

He responds: "I'm so glad you picked up that point because it would

be quite easy to say, well, we're a Jewish community centre built by the Jewish community for the Jewish community and that's it, and especially these days where there's a nervousness in Jewish community"

Simonson explains that Dame Vivian Duffield, the philanthropist who had the initial idea for the centre and provided the funding to build it, there was always an aim to engage with non-Jews, in a similar way to Jewish community centres in the US.

FEATURES

times

Open to all

He adds: “We wanted to do something different that meant that non-Jewish people would interact with Jews and with Jewish life and Jewish ideas, again in a three-dimensional way.

“There’s a big sign in the JW3, magenta colours on the outside of the building that says open to all, and we’re always encouraging of everyone, but we don’t ask people who they are.”

Although visitors are not asked who they are as part of each visit, the centre does do an annual survey of users. The most recent of these showed that 20% of those answering said they weren’t Jewish, 89% of those non-Jewish visitors saying participating at JW3 “helped increase their understanding of Jewish culture and helped them feel more connected to the Jewish community”.

While the vast majority of those attending Hebrew language classes are Jewish, Simonson says: “Krav Maga classes, which is a self-defence class, it’s about 80% not Jewish.”

He adds: “In our Jewish festival celebrations, unsurprisingly, most people are Jewish, but there’s always people that contact us and say, I’m not Jewish, I’d like to see how you celebrate Hanukkah or Purim, is that okay? And we always say yes.”

Given Simonson’s clear enthusiasm for everything the centre does, I expect my question about his highlights from the past 13 years to produce a long list. He does not disappoint. From the overall achievement of reaching one million visitors much earlier than anticipated in 2018/19 to memories of big name speakers including David Beckham whose visit “could have stopped the traffic” and Tom Hiddlestone, who had a queue of fans waiting all day to get in. With a mixture of pride and bemusement, Simonson remembers: “Some of them had painted pictures for him or knitted things for him.”

A royal visit

The individual stand out moment, though, took place in December 2022: “The King’s visit was really on a different level to anything I’ve experienced, because he’d only become King a month

or two before. It was one of his first visits anywhere as King. It was his first visit as King into the Jewish community.”

King Charles joined local teenagers to help them wrap Christmas for local children in hospital – and made a donation of food to the centre’s foodbank while meeting the volunteers.

“He was supposed to be here for about 40 minutes, he was here for about an hour and a half, the last stop we went into our main hall, our main auditorium, and we had been doing an event for Holocaust survivors: a Chanukah tea with some food and live klezmer music and the King walked in.

“Ava Schloss, who sadly passed away this year, who was the stepsister of Anne Frank, had met the King before, and she grabbed his hand and pulled him into the circle.”

At that point, with his security team looking concerned; “he joined in the Jewish dancing with them and then the video, and it went around the world, it was on television news in South Africa and America and Australia and all over, this image of survivors that Hitler and the Nazis tried to wipe out, and there you have nearly 80 years later, dancing with the King of England in such joy. I don’t think that moment could ever be topped in my career, in my life.”

From the joy of the Royal visit, we move on to the unavoidable question of how JW3 responds to the recent rise in antisemitic attacks, both in Barnet and beyond.

Difficult few years

Simonson says: “The last couple of years have been the toughest, I’ve worked in the Jewish

community for over 30 years, and we’ve been through some tough times before, but nothing, nothing at all like this.

“In the last month or two, it has reached a level I never thought I’d see in my life, where you’re finding Jewish venues targeted, a number of them within Barnet, synagogues, Jewish charities, I mean, blowing up ambulances, it’s just unthinkable.”

As part of the wider problem facing the community, the rise in hatred creates specific, direct problems for JW3 itself. Simonson explains: “JW3 had that call to tell us that our building had been on the list that some people that had been arrested on suspicion of working on behalf of the Iranian regime, and those people lived in Barnet, in Finchley, had been conducting hostile surveillance of our building, that’s a call that no one should ever get.

“That suddenly triggered a whole series of things that meant I was spending more time in meetings with counter-terrorism, with the Met Police, the Community Security Trust, with our security company.

“I’m a community and youth worker, that’s my qualification, I started off as a youth worker in Redbridge, and what we do here is about strengthening people’s identities and building community, we shouldn’t have to be in meetings worrying about security.”

The stark reality of this situation is literally reflected in the centre’s security bill; “We now spend over £600,000 a year on security, I can’t get my head around that figure.

“We have to raise just under £2million a year, of which

£600,000 has to be spent on security. If we didn’t have the word Jewish on our building, but we did all the kinds of things we do, it would cost us £50,000–£60,000.

“Imagine all of that money we could be spending on our frontline activities, on our foodbank, on our free activities for the elderly, on our arts and culture and our youth programmes and everything else we do, and instead it has to be spent on security 24–7, just

Syrian refugees, Afghan refugees, Muslims, Christians, now’s not the time to do that, let’s retreat into a corner, let’s dial the volume down, let’s only be for Jews, let’s not allow anyone in, let’s lock the gate and have a buzzer and you have to show your identification.”

But “we had those conversations and they didn’t last more than a moment because we said that’s not who we are”.

As an example, Simonson describes recent Iftar celebra-

Blowing up ambulances, it’s just unthinkable

because we’re Jewish.”

Beyond the financial implications, there is the personal impact on those who work at the centre. Simonson says that this “puts a level of pressure on people”. He adds: “We have to brief our staff and we have to brief our volunteers, and some people get quite badly triggered by these kinds of things, because they shouldn’t have to be fearing that, in a place that has a nursery and has antenatal classes and a cinema and people playing bridge and bingo.”

While Simonson is an unusually positive person, his anger at this situation facing the Jewish community is clear: “It’s a ridiculous, unfathomable thing, and there are days where I think, why isn’t the entire country standing up and saying this is madness and this is wrong.”

Doubling down on community

What JW3 is definitely not doing in response to this is either giving or shutting

up. Simonson explains that “it would be much easier right now to say because of that we are going to dial our volume down a bit, be a bit less out loud and proud Jewish”.

More specifically: “We could also say now isn’t the time to be doing Jewish Muslim activities, now’s not the time to be doing a food bank that reaches non-Jewish people,

tions held at the centre, during which Muslims break their fast during Ramadan “Six weeks ago we had the most incredible Iftar here we’ve ever had: 140 people here, roughly half were Muslim, roughly half were Jewish, the rest were neither Muslim nor Jewish. It was moving and incredible, we gave space to our Muslim friends to pray as the fast went out and our volunteers, Jewish and Muslim, came together and cooked kosher halal vegetarian food for them and it was beautiful.”

Describing the point in our tour of the building where I witnessed one of the centre’s community projects, he adds: “You saw today when we went up to the demonstration kitchen, Jewish and Muslim women came together to cook meals for a local refugee centre. Now could be the time where we don’t do any of that [but] what we’re doing is doubling down on that.”

Asked to looking beyond the centre’s Bar Mitzvah, to its next 13 years Simonson says: “You can have strategies and planning but then reality hits and at the moment a lot of what we do has to react to the context we find ourselves in”.

However, he says: “We want to get to a point sooner rather than later where that is not the context: war in the Middle East and the impact of that growing antisemitism.”

Then the focus “is about turning up that joy, dialling it up even further, building the buzz in and around JW3 so more and more people can be unashamed and proud and out there with their Jewishness”.



MP hopes 'broken' Send system can be fixed

Dan Tomlinson, MP for Chipping Barnet, has pledged to "fight" for Barnet's children with special educational needs and disabilities (Send) to get the "school places and government support they need".

Tomlinson told *Barnet Post* that the current Send system is "broken" and has repeatedly encouraged residents to reach out to him with any issues, promising to be "listening, understanding and feeding into national government".

As first reported in the March issue, the *Post* has spent several months speaking to parents of children with Send needs, as well as young adults and teachers at special schools. Most parents complained of a lack of suitable local school places for their child.

One parent in Finchley told the *Post* that since moving to Barnet two years ago, her son's caseworker has failed to properly update his education, health and care plan (EHCP) and she is unable to find a school which can meet his needs. He is meant to be starting secondary school in September.

Lucy, a single mother, had to leave work to homeschool her autistic son when he left nursery, because she was unable to find a school that could meet his needs. "Luckily, a year later I found a place for him at The Windmill, a special school in High Barnet".

She has since gone back to work part-time.

Charlotte Charlesworth, headteacher at Oak Lodge School, a special school for children and young adults aged 11–19 in East Finchley, told the *Post* her school expanded in 2016, but there are some years it still struggles to meet growing demand. As such, places are regularly over-subscribed, "and so we have to be more strict in our consideration of whether we can truly meet the needs of students".

She explained that teachers have to be "careful and considerate" of current students when deciding whether they have the capacity to take on more.

The 2026 Send white paper, "Every child achieving and thriving", sets the goal of 60,000 new school places for Send students by 2030.

The *Post* asked Tomlinson what this will look like in Barnet. The MP said he doesn't know yet but "I imagine it would mean a mixture of more places



Maya Sall talks to local parents, teachers and politicians about their expectations of better support for disabled children

within mainstream and specialist schools".

He added that he doesn't want future decisions in the borough to be "rushed". "Time and again we see governments come in with arrogance, thinking they can quickly implement changes to save money".

He said he wants to avoid a system which "doesn't work for the individuals that are using it, and in the long term, costs everyone more money".

"Taking our time isn't about cutting costs," he added, "it is about investing in the right places".

Charlesworth said that investment is needed not only in creating new school places, but in teacher recruitment. She explained that "it's very difficult to find people who actually have an understanding of what a special school is", because teacher training courses rarely have student placements in special schools.

"We tend to adopt a 'grow your own' approach, where staff that have joined as teaching assistants

go on to become qualified teachers." She explained that her school's whole leadership team started as teaching assistants, but because of the high numbers of staff needed at a special school, this method of internally recruiting staff is not fast enough to keep up with growing demand.

Charlesworth added that they have previously "struggled to find anyone to interview" when advertising for teaching roles, but said Barnet Council had been very supportive in assisting with recruiting drives.

Tomlinson also praised the council for "trying its best with limited resources" and said his government is doing its best to enable councils to rise above the "low baseline we inherited from the previous government".

Parents, however, have told the *Post* that they feel frustrated with how they are treated by Barnet Council, with some having to take the local authority to a tribunal to get funding for their child's needs. Saskia, who has twice taken Barnet Council to a tribunal and won,

told the *Post*: "I understand that there is no money... but what we really want is to be treated with a bit of dignity, and to be told the truth."

The government white paper has promised to enact better accountability, acknowledging the difficult relationship many parents have with their local authority. When asked what accountability could look like in Barnet, Tomlinson replied: "There are lots of fantastic individual caseworkers and people providing support in the council, who are in that role because they want to help".

He repeated that parents can raise issues with him and his team.

In response to questions from the *Post*, Pauline Coakley Webb, Barnet Council's 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."

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."



Dan Tomlinson MP



Cllr Pauline Coakley Webb

ELECTION 2026



Severe Labour losses leave Barnet Council under ‘no overall control’

Nicole Bowen with an overview of the results

Labour lost majority control of Barnet Council last month after suffering major losses in the 2026 local election, leaving the authority on a political knifeedge.

The final results left Labour and the Conservatives tied on 31 seats each, with the Green Party winning a single seat in Woodhouse and holding the balance of power. A party requires 32 seats to command a majority on the 63-seat council.

However, everything would have been different if the Conservatives had won eight more votes in the split Whetstone ward, where the party’s second candidate Kevin Ghateh finished seven behind reelected Labour councillor Ezra Cohen. A second Tory victory there would have seen the party secure the narrowest of majorities.

The result shows a sharp reversal from 2022, when Labour took control of Barnet for the first time since the borough was created in 1965, winning 41 seats under council leader Barry Rawlings.

Labour lost six wards during the election, with most gains going to the Conservatives, led by Peter Zinkin, who was re-elected in Golders Green.

Labour’s most damaging defeats were in Childs Hill and Brunswick Park, where the party lost all three seats in each ward to the Conservatives.

Despite finishing with the same number of seats, the Conservatives won a convincing victory in the popular vote, taking 35.4% to Labour’s 27.5% and winning nearly 23,000 more votes.

Greens make breakthrough

The Green Party recorded its strongest-ever performance in Barnet, winning its first council seat

► The count in progress
Credit David Floyd



in the borough and emerging as a significant challenger to Labour in several wards.

In Woodhouse, Green candidate Charli Thompson led the poll with 1,331 votes, taking a seat from Labour and helping create a split ward between Labour and the Greens.

The Greens also pushed Labour hard in Friern Barnet, despite former Labour councillor Linda Lusingu, who defected to the Greens before the election, failing to win re-election. Although Labour held all three seats, including that of council leader Barry Rawlings, Green candidates finished only a few hundred votes behind.

While gaining its first elected councillor in Barnet is big for the Greens, the result took on additional significance after it was confirmed that the council was in no overall control. While neither of the two main parties was prepared to discuss a deal with the Greens

to see its candidate elected as leader (see page 2), Cllr Thompson is likely to have a big influence on a vote-by-vote basis.

Reform falls short

Reform UK fielded a full set of candidates across Barnet for the first time after former Conservative leader Mark Shooter defected to the party in 2024.

Shooter himself stood in West Hendon but was unsuccessful as Labour retained the ward.

While Reform UK failed to win any seats, the party still mounted notable challenges in parts of the borough, particularly in Conservative-leaning areas. It performed strongest in wards including Edgware and Edgwarebury but was unable to convert votes into seats.

Fragmented voting

Several wards produced exceptionally close contests.

In Whetstone, Labour narrowly

held onto one seat after several recounts, with Labour’s Ezra Cohen defeating Conservative Kevin Ghateh by just seven votes.

Mill Hill also attracted attention after independent candidates outpolled several parties. Independent candidate Frank Orman received more than 1,000 votes, outperforming Green, Reform and Liberal Democrat candidates in the ward.

High Barnet and East Barnet also emerged as important battlegrounds, where votes for the Conservatives contributed to split wards and fragmented voting patterns.

In a nail biting finish to the count, it was David Allen’s win for the Tories in East Barnet at the expense of outgoing deputy mayor Edith David that ultimately tipped the council into no overall control.

The election also saw an unusually high number of split wards, with five wards returning councillors from more than one party. Barnet Vale had previously been the borough’s only split ward following the 2022 election.

A total of 312 candidates contested the 63 seats on Barnet Council, a significant increase on the 207 candidates who stood in the 2022 election.

A full breakdown of the ward results is available at: barnetpost.co.uk/2026/05/09/local-election-2026-barnet-council-results-in-full

Antisemitic attacks provide backdrop to election

BY DAVID FLOYD

The vote in Barnet took place amid a backdrop of the alarming rise in attacks on Jewish people and buildings in and around the borough in recent months.

Talking to *Barnet Post* at the count last month, Barnet Conservative leader Peter Zinkin reflected on the impact of the situation on Jewish voters he had spoken to on the doorstep.

Cllr Zinkin said: “The Jewish community is desperately anxious, and therefore they are looking for support, and they are looking for the council to provide them with that support.”

When asked what Jewish residents were asking the council to do, he explained that they saw the



council as having a key role alongside the Mayor of London and central government. He said: “What they see at the moment is we have a Labour government, a Labour mayor and a Labour council, and what they believe is that those three layers of government have a collective responsibility to sort things out, because the progressive escalation of events is very, very worrying.”

Describing an example, he said: “It affects every aspect of life. We have the letter that yesterday one of the main Jewish boys’

schools sent out to parents, saying there was an attempt by a car to drive at a group of pupils on the way home. Something like that is not the sort of thing which is designed to reassure people that the authorities are on top of things.”

Cllr Zinkin praised the role of the police but said the need for additional policing showed how serious the problem was; “The police have done a tremendous job. Unfortunately due to all the things that have happened, police resources have very significantly been increased. And that is government money.

“But the real question is, why was it necessary to do that? And the reason why it was necessary to do that is because the government has allowed wider society to normalise Jew hatred.”

Cllr Zinkin’s Labour counterpart, Barry Rawlings, also recognised the impact of the attacks. He told the *Post*: “It’s been a long period and a difficult election. Given that, in Barnet, it was at the same time we just had those absolutely terrible antisemitic attacks.

“That makes you realise what the council does to make a difference.”

ELECTION 2026



David Floyd talks to Barnet's political leaders as a dramatic night in Hendon proved inconclusive

After the 2024 general election saw exhausted politicians (and journalists) spending all night waiting for the final result, it was a relief that this year's count took place during the daytime.

However, when the first recount (in Whetstone ward) was announced at around 12.30pm, it was clear we were going to be in for a long day.

As the results came in – and predictions lurched from Conservative win to Labour win to the final end result of no overall control – *Barnet Post* talked to the borough's political leaders to get their reaction.

Talking to the *Post* during the afternoon, Conservative leader Peter Zinkin said that, while the end result was still unclear, he felt that "as Barnet Conservatives, we've made huge progress".

He added: "When we started today, the Labour group essentially had 40 seats in the council, we had 20 seats. At the very least it will be extremely close"

Cllr Zinkin said that the close result "changes the dynamic of everything in the council, because all of the committees and other things are based on political proportionality, and therefore the amount of seats that we will have and the amount of seats that they will have, will be completely different, and the whole place will feel completely different".

In terms of key priorities, he drew attention to the council's growing debt, which has seen it request over £130million in exceptional financial support – permission from central government to borrow money – in the past two years. Cllr Zinkin said: "We have to either sort out the finances, which would be my preference, and that if we don't get to that point, we will have them to account."

Labour leader Barry Rawlings, also speaking to the *Post* before the final result was clear, reflected on the council's track record since his party took power in 2022.

He said: "Personally I feel it's gone very well in the four years we introduced a lot of new things. We still can do more.

"We've done the first part of getting per-unit spending under control. We need to have proper financial stability, which includes lobbying for money as well as making some tough decisions."

Noting Labour's positive result in Barnet compared to elsewhere in London, he drew attention to the failure of Reform UK and the Greens to make inroads. He said: "The parties that are more divisive haven't won anything. So, it's been a positive vote for community cohesion, for carrying on working as we are."

He said that the borough's diversity, including its Jewish and Iranian communities "make Barnet different from any other borough, and we should be proud of that, and we are proud of that".

While he stressed that Labour was a democratic

►
The Greens
have their first
councillor
elected in
Woodhouse ward
Credit: David Floyd

“
*It was a difficult
set of elections
everywhere but
we managed to
hold our own*
”

Tense count leaves uncertain result



party and would vote on whether he continued as leader, he said he hoped to do so. He said: "Whether leading or in opposition, I'm looking forward to the next four years, because I think Barnet's a tremendous place, and the more we can do to make it better, that's what our job is as a council."

Asked how it felt to be the borough's first elected Green, new Woodhouse ward councillor Charli Thompson told the *Post*: "It's really fantastic. We're seeing across the country Greens gaining seats and that's really, really exciting because it shows that politics isn't how it used to be."

Describing how the party achieved its success, she said: "I think, really, it was about working hard consistently for a long time. We're part of a community. We want to represent residents, so we've been listening to residents for a long time."

Asked about her priorities as a councillor, she said: "I'm going to be focused very much on what's going on at Woodhouse. I am very

concerned about the developments that have been proposed in North Finchley. And I want to work alongside residents to challenge those.

"But I will be scrutinising. I will be asking questions, if I'm given the opportunity to do so."

In terms of her overall aims, Cllr Thompson said: "I just want to prove that Greens can serve really well. And I think if I can do that, then we can share that with the rest of Barnet and hopefully get more Greens voted in."

Following the final announcement that borough had slipped into no overall control, the *Post* talked to Conservative deputy leader Lucy Wakeley to get her perspective on a day of high draw.

She said: "We've gained a lot of seats with a lot of fantastic candidates. It was a difficult set of elections everywhere but I think we've shown in Barnet we managed to hold our own and to get in some seats we didn't have before."

Cllr Wakeley said it was too soon to discuss possible deals with other parties but, when asked about whether the party had a plan to deal with the council's massive

debt, said: "We've absolutely got a plan to solve it. I think we've got the skills and the resources to solve it. I think we know we need to get the basics right and focus on that rather than what Labour have been doing and just spending money willy-nilly."

"But I also know that we have the expertise. We have people that have been in the council for a long time that have dealt with financial issues before, that are business owners, that have run successful businesses, that have been in local authorities. And I believe that they all have the skills and we all have the skills to be able to turn it around."

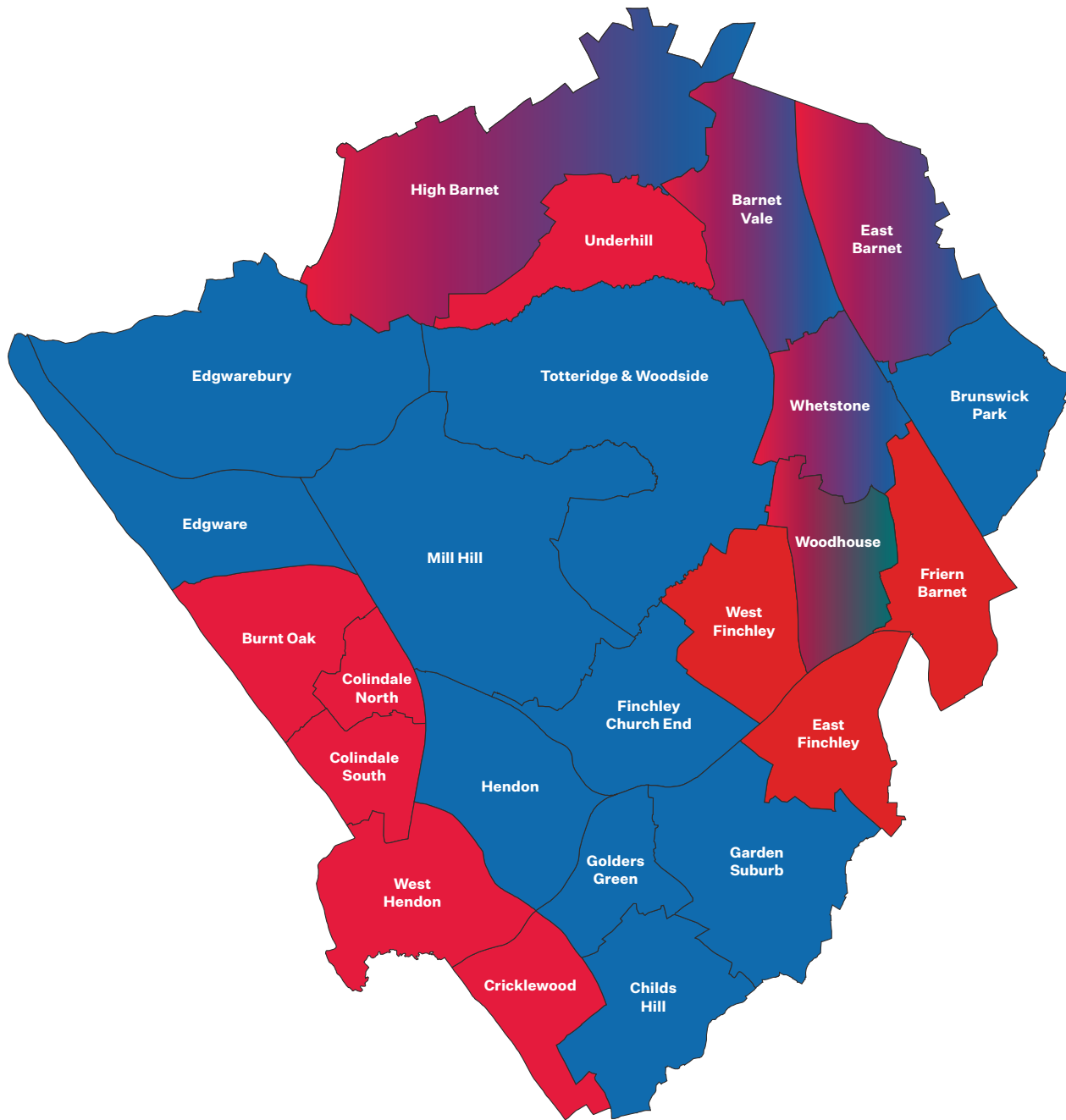
She also reflected on Reform's failure in the borough. She said: "I think actually that has been a really big positive for me. Reform are really targeting, for example, my seat in Edgware they were targeting a lot and despite that they haven't really got anywhere near in the seats we were looking at."

"And they came in with a lot of confidence about what seats they would take and I think that's really good."

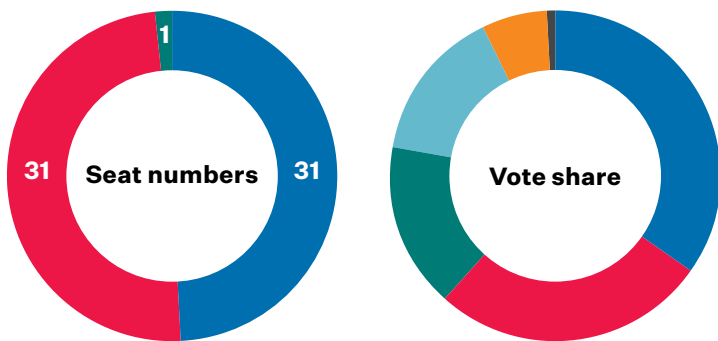
ELECTION 2026



Barnet Council: the full results



Ward	Elected candidates
Barnet Vale	Sue Baker (Lab)
	David Longstaff (Con)
	Richard Barnes (Lab)
Brunswick Park	Lewis Preston-Kyrionymou (Con)
	Paul Roberts (Con)
	Suren Ramanakumar (Con)
Burnt Oak	Sara Conway (Lab)
	Charlotte Daus (Lab)
	Kamal Gurung (Lab)
Childs Hill	Jeremy Conway (Con)
	Adam Gheasuddin (Con)
	Cory Turner (Con)
Colindale North	Andreas Ioannidis (Lab)
	Erin Sanders-McDonagh (Lab)
Colindale South	Humayune Khalick (Lab)
	Gill Sargeant (Lab)
	Nagus Narenthira (Lab)
Cricklewood	Anne Clarke (Lab)
	Alan Schneiderman (Lab)
East Barnet	Simon Radford (Lab)
	David Allen (Con)
	Phil Cohen (Lab)
East Finchley	Alison Moore (Lab)
	Katy Minshall (Lab)
	Ajith Menon (Lab)
Edgware	Shuey Gordon (Con)
	Nick Mearing-Smith (Con)
	Lucy Wakeley (Con)
Edgwarebury	Benjamin Goldberg (Con)
	Lachhya Gurung (Con)
Finchley Church End	Jennifer Grocock (Con)
	Josh Mastin-Lee (Con)
	Sachin Rajput (Con)
Friern Barnet	Pauline Coakley Webb (Lab)
	Beverley Kotey (Lab)
	Barry Rawlings (Lab)
Garden Suburb	Martha Levy (Con)
	Michael Mire (Con)
Golders Green	Dean Cohen (Con)
	Peter Zinkin (Con)
Hendon	Asher Bennett (Con)
	Alex Prager (Con)
	Shimon Ryde (Con)
High Barnet	James Esses (Con)
	Emma Whysall (Lab)
Mill Hill	Elliot Simberg (Con)
	Nicole Ereira (Con)
	Raffy Lachter (Con)
Totteridge & Woodside	Alison Cornelius (Con)
	Caroline Stock (Con)
	Richard Cornelius (Con)
Underhill	Zahra Beg (Lab)
	Josh Tapper (Lab)
West Finchley	Ross Houston (Lab)
	Kath McGuirk (Lab)
	Danny Rich (Lab)
West Hendon	Andrea Bilbow (Lab)
	Rishikesh Chakraborty (Lab)
	Carrie Reiners (Lab)
Whetstone	Ezra Cohen (Lab)
	Stephen Lewis (Con)
Woodhouse	Charli Thompson (Green)
	Anne Hutton (Lab)



Party	Vote share
Conservative Party	34.8%
Labour Party	26.9%
Green Party	16.3%
Reform UK	15%
Liberal Democrats	6.2%
Other	0.8%

Council composition ahead of the 2026 election



Council composition following the 2026 election



FEATURES

13

Thirty years of Exposure: North London youth charity turns a new page

Anjola Fashawe shares how the youth communications organisation changed her life and how its best years are still ahead

► Anjola Fashawe
Credit Exposure

young people every year, but its soul hasn't changed. It's still that same space where you can bring your full self, find your voice, and truly be heard.

I'm living proof. At 20, I'm a lead peer mentor supporting the next generation of young people coming through, building my journalism career through an apprenticeship at *The i Paper*, and profiling fellow Exposure alumna Little Simz, the North London rap artist who was awarded both the Mercury Prize and BRIT Award.

This summer marks a new chapter. Andreas is stepping back, and Fran O'Connell, who has been at the heart of Exposure for 15 years, becomes CEO this month. "Fran knows our young people. She knows what we stand for," says Andreas. "I am handing over the baton with enormous pride."

Fran has supported my journey at Exposure over the years and I know



firsthand how much she cares about every young person she meets. Central to her vision is digital inclusion, making sure young people most at risk of being left behind have the skills and access they need.

A new partnership with the Snap Foundation connects young people to professional networks that would

otherwise feel completely out of reach and there's a real commitment to hiring leaders who come from the same communities Exposure serves.

"I've seen what happens when a young person finds their voice," Fran says. "It changes everything, their confidence, their sense of what's possible, their future. I want Exposure to reach further and make sure that opportunity is there for every young person, whatever their background."

As it enters this new chapter, Exposure is looking for two new trustees, people who share a genuine commitment to young people and can bring expertise in fundraising, digital media, finance, charity governance or equality and inclusion. The role will entail four or five trustee meetings a year, with hybrid options available.

To find out more or express interest contact: info@exposure.org.uk or visit exposure.org.uk

I first walked through the doors of Exposure when I was 16, anxious and unsure I belonged in creative media. What I found was a community that told me otherwise.

Exposure has been giving young people in North London a creative space and platform to publish their work and reach a wide audience since 1996. Founder Andreas Koumi set up Exposure in a small room at the Muswell Hill Centre with a grant from Haringey Council.

No smartphones, no social media, just a belief that young people facing multiple disadvantages deserve a genuine voice. This year, the charity turns 30, and I'm proud to be part of its story.

It has grown into a multi-award-winning youth communications charity working with over 200



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FEATURES

14

“On the catwalk, everyone is equal”

Leïla Davaud goes behind the scenes at a Barnet homelessness charity in the build-up to their fashion show

Through the doors of Homeless Action in Barnet’s day centre, in flies Marcin Nocek, night shelter coordinator at the organisation. Fashionably late. Full of excitement. Ready to take over this haven one outfit at a time.

In a few days, the room will transform and fully adhere to the quote hanging over the front desk: “HAB, A place of change”.

My visit takes place in the run up to the charity’s fashion show, ‘Off the Street’, which took place on Sunday, 17th May.

Behind his thick square glasses, Marcin’s eyes roam the room. Within seconds, he begins to storm around the centre, greeting everyone by name and with a “voilà”. He stands in the middle of the cafeteria, spreads his arms and announces: “This is where we are setting up the catwalk. Right in the middle of the centre.”

Tables will be moved, chairs lined up and music blasted. “We want to break stereotypes and put a reminder out there that even if homeless, our clients are people. They are human and they deserve to be a part of the community too.”

The models are a mix of beneficiaries, volunteers, members of the community, people with disabilities and two dogs. “No comment on that one,” jokes Marcin. “On this day, everyone is equal and free to be whoever they want.”

One, Katrina, will transform for the day. Twenty-one-years old, tall and “born to go down the catwalk” according to Kate, a volunteer and part of the team with a dream at the origins of the fashion show. Katrina visits the day centre for hot meals and company. “I am so excited. It is making me feel special. I will be wearing a very nice jacket, something that I would want to wear on a night out in Soho maybe. I am so happy.”

Eavesdropping and unable to hide a smile, Francesca is the mastermind, or “the genius” as Marcin calls her. Francesca designed every single outfit. “All of it comes from my crazy mind. My family was in the weaving business, my grandmother took the time to teach me. I love that I am able to do this for the centre. In here, people need to build up their confidence. It is needed to build one’s life back up again.”

She shares her story, softly. “I have been homeless, I have used the centre.



▲ Marcin Nocek with volunteers working on the fashion show
Credit Leïla Davaud

I’m not ashamed to say it. I don’t think I could have predicted it. I was unlucky and it went downhill rapidly but I fought my way out of it and I want to show the beneficiaries that it is possible.”

So, she picked up her needle and let her instincts guide her.

“We have zero budget for this event. It’s all done by repurposing donations and passion.”

In the shed dedicated to the event, one can find many treasures. A poncho made out of seven scarves, another one made out of an air bed, a dress made out of an emergency blanket, a coat made of a sleeping bag. Marcin holds them proudly: “It’s fun and quirky. It represents us. We have about 40 pieces and 15 models wearing them.”

Off the Street was brought to life by a wholesome bonding moment. Marcin recounts: “One day, one of our clients asked for clothes, we took him to the shed and he picked a few items to try on. I made him strike a pose and he started to pretend he was on a catwalk. Francesca loved it and recorded him. Kate said she’d

always dreamt of organising a fashion show. We looked at each other and decided to create one!”

And everyone is helping where they can. “One of our clients is a professional barber so he will be cutting hair and working on the models. Another one is currently giving a new life to benches and outside tables in the garden, fixing them up. People tend to forget that homeless have skills and are part of the society.”

Last minute arrangements are being made and the centre is a beehive. Marcin confides: “There is something truly special happening. Seeing our clients practising the catwalk is incredible. They completely transform, there is so much joy in the centre.”

All of them represent the true magic of being part of a community. “And we are not the only ones. Local businesses are setting up stalls in the garden, alongside our talented beneficiaries. It is a real community event!”

For more information about Homeless Action in Barnet: Visit habcentre.org

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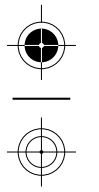
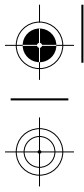
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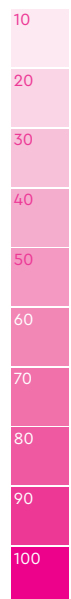
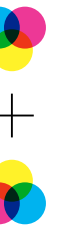
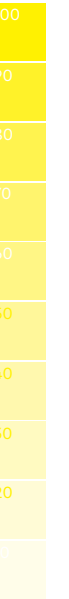
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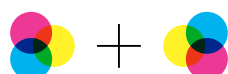
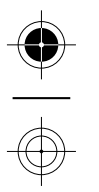
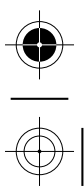
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GET TO KNOW THE FACES BEHIND YOUR LOCAL COMMUNITY NEWSPAPER

Indie News Week is the celebration of independent news. In 2026, we would like to give our readers the chance to celebrate Indie News Week by learning more about the faces behind their local community newspaper and what goes into covering local stories. Here our staff and some of our valued contributors/volunteers introduce themselves:



Joe Ives
 Local Democracy Reporter

My school teachers told me I'd never be a professional footballer. They were right. The fact I can barely kick a ball might've been a clue. Still, being a Local Democracy Reporter means making headlines in a different way. I cover three councils: Barnet, Enfield and Haringey. These local authorities make key decisions for roughly 1 million people on everything from health to housing. Yet the decline in local news over the past two decades has meant the level of scrutiny they receive has dwindled. More often than not my Social Spider colleagues and I will be the only ones covering hugely important decisions. It's a huge responsibility – and privilege.



Anna Mahtani
 Reporter

Right outside your window, the world could be ending and you'd never know it. That's where Barnet Post comes in. Be it celebrating the borough's achievements, or telling stories which might otherwise be forgotten, reporting for a local newspaper has allowed me to get to know my community. When I was covering the Golders Green ambulance attack, I got to witness how important it is for people to tell their stories. Being a part of that, however small it may be, is why I love writing for Barnet Post. Oh, and it's a terribly good excuse to be nosy.



Nick Sandamas,
 Football Reporter

I have been contributing to Barnet Post since June 2024 and my main specialty is Barnet Football Club. I have followed the club for five decades and the Post has given me the opportunity to further my experience of writing by reporting on their fortunes. I attend the matches and submit a match report to go online soon after. A local paper in any borough is paramount to keep people up to date with what's going on and Barnet has that with the Post. I am pleased to be part of a great team and continue to deliver news on the continuing fortunes of the Bees.



Maya Sall,
 News and Investigations

I started my journalism career at Barnet Post. Four years on, I still write for it not only because I have a sentimental attachment to the paper, but because I believe in the 'local rag'. The recent elections have proven once again that national news is influenced by everyday people. And, since writing for the Post, I've discovered that the biggest stories are the ones closest to home, and I'm continually spurred on by the genuine need for them to be told. As such, our community papers are a vital public service, telling the overlooked stories that really matter. Long live the Post and its fantastic community of readers and writers!



Leïla Davaud,
 News and Features

I started collaborating with Barnet Post shortly after moving here from France. While excited for this new chapter, I deeply missed the community I had left behind, so I turned to the local newspaper to better understand my new surroundings and the people bringing it to life. That's when the Post appeared on my screen, looking for contributors. Eager to continue my journalism career, I embraced the opportunity to play a role in this new community and find my voice in my second language. What I expected to be a temporary activity soon became a real sense of purpose. I found a team of devoted journalists determined to put local news back on the front page through ethical, meaningful reporting. It is something truly worth supporting.



David Floyd,
 Editor

I edit Barnet Post as part of my wider role as Managing Director of Social Spider CIC, the not-for-profit social enterprise that publishes the paper along with six others across London. I went to school and sixth form in Finchley and had my first job as a library assistant at Friern Barnet Library, so it's great to be back working in Barnet. But I don't want to edit the paper forever. My aim for the Post is to reach the point where we can afford to pay a talented locally-based journalist to take on my role. Please support us so we can do that!



Barnet Post has 87 readers who are supporters of the work we do in covering local news and highlighting issues that are important to our community. We are independent, and we write the facts without bias.

Can you spare £5 a month? Not much, but sometimes it is what we need. Barnet Post exists because our readers are backing us up. Join and support: barnetpost.co.uk/support-us

FEATURES

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In at the deep end

Kurt Barling goes to the theatre and ends up on stage

For six years I have had the privilege of serving as a trustee of Park Theatre, one of North London's most remarkable cultural institutions. It is a theatre that survives not through abundance, but through determination, ingenuity and a stubborn belief that live performance still matters deeply in modern life.

That belief is currently on full display in *Whodunnit [Unrehearsed] 4*, the theatre's ambitious biennial fundraising production running until 27 June. The premise is gloriously chaotic. Every one of the 64 performances features a different celebrity guest playing the Sheriff without ever having seen the script or attended a rehearsal. An earpiece feeds them lines and stage directions live during the show while a fully rehearsed cast attempts to keep the wheels from flying off entirely. The result is missed cues, improvised recoveries, corpsing actors and an audience roaring with laughter at the sheer unpredictability of it all.

Sixty four shows. Sixty four Sheriffs. Sixty four entirely different ways for disaster and brilliance to collide.

And yet behind the hilarity sits something very serious indeed.

Park Theatre is a charity. It receives no core funding from the Arts Council or local authority and must raise at least £600,000 annually beyond ticket income simply to remain operational. This fundraiser is not some optional flourish. It is, quite literally, a lifeline. It enables the theatre to continue offering affordable tickets, free access for schools and community groups, creative programmes for young people, dementia initiatives and outreach work across the local area.

In a sector rarely flush with resources, this is theatre helping itself survive.

And importantly, it does so without bitterness. We understand why public funding bodies increasingly prioritise regions outside London. Theatre belongs to everyone, not merely to the cosmopolitan elite. But while we accept that reality, we also quietly get on with delivering what we believe matters: affordable, accessible live culture in the heart of North London. We keep ticket prices below cost where possible. We do not moan. We create.

Into this carefully choreographed mayhem the directors introduced another element this year: unsuspecting audience participants drafted into the performance for extra spontaneity.

That is how I found myself, entirely without warning, standing backstage with approximately fifteen minutes notice before being thrust into the opening performance alongside Gaby Roslin. That is because one lucky member of the audience gets a ticket label BT1 or BT2. These are for the on stage bartender role. Cue more embarrassment

and hilarity.

No one had mentioned this possibility when I arrived for what I assumed would be my usual Saturday evening fix of live theatre.

Now, to be fair, I had spent many years at the BBC performing live in a different sense, improvising under pressure as a television news correspondent when technology failed, scripts changed or events overtook the running order. Live broadcasting teaches you how to think while falling. But stepping onto a theatre stage is another matter entirely.

The last time I had performed in theatre was sometime around 1980 at the National Youth Theatre. I remember very little of that production now. Perhaps mercifully.

So there I was, suddenly trying to ad lib my way through the first half of a Wild West murder mystery while desperately attempting not to derail a production involving

experienced performers who actually knew what they were doing. I recall flashes rather than sequences: trying to keep a straight face, missing cues, laughter erupting around me, and the peculiar adrenaline that only truly live performance creates.

Because that is the magic of theatre. Unlike film or television, it exists only in that moment. Every audience creates a unique collective experience that can never quite be replicated again. One line lands differently. One pause extends too long. One accidental glance sends the cast into hysterics. The imperfections are precisely the point.

Looking across at Gaby Roslin on stage, I found myself reflecting not simply on performance, but on generosity. Here were people with established public profiles willingly placing themselves in vulnerable, ridiculous situations for no financial reward whatsoever, purely to support a community-centred cultural institution. The celebrities receive no payment. They volunteer because they believe places like Park Theatre deserve to exist.

That matters enormously.

The ancient Greeks and Romans understood that live theatre was not merely entertainment but civic life itself: a shared public space where communities gathered to feel, laugh, question and experience something collectively. In an age increasingly dominated by algorithms, isolation and on-demand streaming, there is something profoundly human about sitting shoulder to shoulder with strangers while absolute chaos unfolds in front of you in real time.

You feel alive in live theatre because anything might happen.

At Park Theatre, quite often it does.

So, if you want an evening of genuine unpredictability, enormous warmth and proper belly laughter, come and join us at Park Theatre. Support a venue that continues to fight for affordable and accessible culture against increasingly difficult odds. Treat yourself to a show where nobody, including the cast, entirely knows what is going to happen next.

And, check your ticket, if you are particularly lucky, until 27th June that unrehearsed moment could be yours too.

Kurt Barling and Gaby Roslin in *Whodunnit4* at Park Theatre
Credit: Craig Sugden



SPORT



Cockfosters defeated at Wembley on penalties

A disappointing end to the season could still prove a positive turning point in club's history, writes Tommy Rose

There was heartbreak for Cockfosters at Wembley as their remarkable FA Vase journey ended in the cruellest fashion, as AFC Stoneham lifted the trophy after a penalty-shootout victory.

For a side that had made a habit of holding their nerve from twelve yards throughout this historic run, this time fortune fell the other way.

The final whistle after a goalless 90 minutes brought one last test of composure, but Cockfosters were unable to find the decisive touch as Stoneham claimed the FA Vase trophy, winning 4-2 on penalties beneath the arch.

Yet, despite the pain of defeat, there was overwhelming pride among the 3,500 travelling supporters who made the journey to Wembley for the greatest day in the club's history.

Cockfosters matched their Hampshire opponents throughout a tight and hard-fought contest. Chances came at both ends, with Kendall Gyamfi going close for the Fosters and Connor Sansom

producing important saves to keep the scores level.

The crossbar denied both sides during a nervy second half, as the game edged inevitably towards penalties.

When the decisive moment came, Stoneham held their nerve. Cockfosters, who had already survived four shootouts during this unforgettable FA Vase campaign, could not conjure one final escape.

The disappointment was evident at full-time, but it should not overshadow what has been a season of extraordinary achievement for Gavin Kelsey's side.

Only days earlier, Cockfosters had also suffered heartbreak in the league play-off final, narrowly missing out on promotion. To fall short twice at the final hurdle would be enough to crush many clubs. Instead, this campaign feels more like the beginning of

something significant.

Over recent months, the club has captured the imagination of supporters, not only in Cockfosters but across Enfield and beyond. Crowds have grown, local interest has surged, and the team's run to Wembley brought new attention to the club.

At Wembley, that community spirit was impossible to miss. Flags, scarves and songs echoed around the national stadium as supporters embraced an occasion many thought they might never see. For younger fans especially, these are memories that will last a lifetime.

While there is no trophy to show for it, Cockfosters have earned belief and will look to continue building stronger ties with the local community.

The hurt of Wembley and the play-off final will linger, but when players and supporters regroup in July for the new season, they will do so knowing they were part of a historic campaign that could yet be the foundation for even greater days ahead.

While there is no trophy to show for it, Cockfosters have earned belief

SPORT

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A season of promise for the Bees

Nick Sandamas on Barnet FC's first season back in the EFL

Many fans would say Barnet's first season back in the EFL following a seven year absence was a success despite the fact that they missed out on a play-off spot by the skin of their teeth. This disappointing ending followed a great run of results from mid-March to the final game which yielded eight wins in the final nine games.

However many supporters were expecting the worst after a poor start which yielded three successive defeats and an early League Cup exit.

August to November 2025 – A slow start followed by a recovery

Eventually, at the fourth time of asking, the Bees got off the mark with back-to-back away wins at both Swindon and Cheltenham, who were defeated by an Ollie Hawkins goal.

Danny Collinge struck a late goal to salvage a point against Colchester.

September began with a 4–1 thrashing against Luton Town in the Vertu Trophy, followed by an even worse performance against Shrewsbury. The game saw manager Dean Brennan red carded by referee Kirsty Dowie, which would lead to repercussions later in the season. Barnet managed their first ever away win at Crewe Alexandra the following week.

Then, Nnamdi Oforborh struck a brace as the Bees finally broke their home duck to beat Grimsby 3–0. A 1–1 draw followed against Oldham and they finished the month with a win in the Vertu Trophy on penalties against Brighton's Under-21s after a draw. Callum Stead scoring late to take the game to penalties.

October started with successive wins over Accrington and Tranmere Rovers with goals scored by four different players but this good run came to an end when Notts County scored deep in stoppage time to grab a smash and grab win.

Cambridge were beaten 3–2 in the final Vertu Trophy group game and this was followed by a 2–2 draw at Barrow.

November began with a disappointing first round exit from the FA Cup against Fleetwood.

Then in their next league game, the Bees flew into an early 2–0 lead against promotion chasing MK Dons thanks to Adam Senior and Shelton's penalty but were pegged back and had to settle for a point.

Three successive draws followed to end the month in the top half.

December 2025 to February 2026 – Brennan banned

Senior set them on their way as Bristol Rovers were dispatched to the tune of 4–0 but Barnet then came unstuck at Chesterfield as they suffered

their first away defeat since August.

Poor performances came against both Salford and Newport which resulted in one point, however they ended 2025 with victory at Bristol Rovers.

2026 arrived with Joe Kizzi's brace securing all three points in a 2–1 win against Crawley.

Then their next game saw them beaten by Grimsby by a single goal.

New signing Kabongo Tshimanga made a goalscoring debut with two goals in a 3–2 home win over Oldham.

Then Shelton struck deep in stoppage time to beat Tranmere with the month ending with a point from a dull goalless draw away to Shrewsbury.

Tshimanga scored again but the Bees were held by Crewe, then went to Walsall the following Saturday and won 3–1. Idris Kanu on the scoresheet for his first goal of the season with the other goals coming from Senior and Tshimanga.

At this point, news filtered through that boss Brennan had been banned from the dugout for the next nine games following comments alleged to have been made in a game last autumn. After that, it was left to coaches Connor Smith and Jerome Okimo to shout instructions from the bench.

Cheltenham Town arrived the following weekend and parked the bus

with the game ending goalless. Next up, despite Senior giving Barnet the lead, Ollie Clarke scored twice in the second half to secure Swindon all 3 points.

Then a poor performance resulted in a 4–1 loss at Colchester, Jack Payne with a fine hat-trick but this was quickly turned around with single goal wins against both Accrington and Chesterfield to put the Bees back in the play-off picture.

March 2026 to May 2026 – So near and yet so far

Only one point was gained in the next three games to seemingly end any hopes of a top seven finish but then an amazing run of results turned the tide which saw them fall within a whisker of joining the play off party.

It began in mid March with a fantastic away day success against MK Dons and victory over Cambridge thanks to Collinge's early second half strikes.

With Brennan now back in the dugout, leaders Bromley were next to arrive at The Hive on Good Friday and the home side led 2-1 going into the last few seconds before George Evans scored in the 102nd minute to break Bees' hearts.

However this didn't derail their play-off bid as they went to Fleetwood on Easter Monday and came back with a fine 5–2 victory.

A late goal from Callum Stead secured all 3 points in a 3–2 win over eventually relegated Barrow.

Notts County were dispatched 2–1 at Meadow Lane with Tshimanga at the double followed by an astonishing 6–2 home win over Gillingham.

Callum Stead scored a remarkable five goals (the first to do so in an EFL game since 2012) including a ten minute hat-trick in what was ultimately his swansong in front of the home faithful. He finished with 16 goals for the season.

With the play-off bid now over, the Bees went into their last game of the season away to Harrogate (who were fighting for their lives) with a chance to finish in their highest league position since the 1999/00 season and achieved it with a 2–1 win. Phillip Chinedu scored the winner to relegate the Sulphrites.

Stead finished as top scorer with 16 goals and for 28-year-old Tshimanga scored an impressive 12 goals in only 21 games following his January move from Crawley Town.

So near yet so far for the Bees in what was a remarkable last nine games of the season. It could have been so much more had they been more consistent before that great run but anyhow it's a stepping stone towards bigger and better things for next season.

With Anthony Hartigan, Mark Shelton, Callum Stead and Ollie Hawkins moving on, the rebuilding process begins.

A crucial summer ahead for the men in black and amber.

“
It could have been so much more had they been more consistent
”

►
The Hive
Credit: Katie Chan via
Wikicommons





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