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A cooking class at New Barnet independent cafe Potters Pantry where Chipping Barnet Foodbank beneficiaries get to learn new skills and new recipes – read more on page 14

Credit Leïla Davaud

Depot workers prepare for ballot on Christmas strike after rejecting council's final offer

BY LEÏLA DAVAUD

Barnet's streets could be covered in rubbish over the Christmas holidays after staff rejected Barnet Council's latest offer to solve a long-running dispute over twelve years of underpayments.

Trade union Unison has registered a formal dispute with the council on behalf of every member who was allegedly underpaid holiday pay over twelve years while controversial outsourcing giant Capita ran the local authority's payroll. The council says it complies with current legal requirements and disputes that the issue arose from a payroll error.

A formal 'failure to agree' was noted at a meeting last month, where depot workers rejected the council's final offer of 18 months of back pay. They had already turned down that figure at the end of September, saying they would settle for six years instead of twelve.

The official industrial strike ballot is due to start early this month. John Burgess, Barnet Unison branch secretary, told *Barnet Post*: "We went into the meeting in good faith. We can't say the same about the council."

He continued: "They wouldn't offer more than 18 months of back pay for twelve years of underpayment. The council left its employees no choice but to start an industrial strike ballot, which will last six weeks and should end around 19th December."

If it comes back in favour of strike action, waste, recycling and street-cleansing workers will probably end up on strike over Christmas and the new year period.

Burgess added: "People need to ask themselves what they would do if their employer failed to pay them properly and then refused to give them their hard-earned money in back payments. The depot workers don't want to go on strike, but it's the only way they will be taken seriously.

"So, there is a chance that the streets of Barnet will be covered in bins and rubbish over Christmas and New Year's Eve. It is neither ideal nor merry, that is true, but the council has the opportunity to avoid it."

In response, a Barnet Council spokesperson said: "Although there is no legal basis for a backdated claim, council officers recently met with Unison to engage constructively on this issue. Unfortunately, the meeting lasted only a few minutes, with Unison registering a dispute before meaningful discussion could take place.

"The council has already made an offer of 18 months to affected employees as a gesture of goodwill, while recognising its difficult financial circumstances and its responsibilities to residents and taxpayers.

"While we are disappointed that Unison is pursuing a formal dispute and consulting members on potential industrial action, we remain open to the meaningful dialogue Unison said it wanted, to find a mutually acceptable way forward.

"Should industrial action take place, the council will work to minimise disruption to residents and maintain essential services. We will keep residents, staff and service users informed of any impacts and contingency arrangements if required."

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.

CREDITS

Editor
David Floyd

Designer
Jonathan Duncan

Head of Advertising
Klaudia Kiss

Local Democracy Reporter
Leïla Davaud

Contributors
Frank Orman, Anna Mahtani, Dave McCormick, Sophie Winch, Nick Sandamas

CONTACT

barnetpost@socialspider.com

The Mill, 7–11 Coppermill Lane E17 7HA

ADVERTISING

07728 520 116 Mark Brown

mark@socialspider.com

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Published on 30/10/26

Greens slammed for 'blatant act of antisemitism' after conference backs 'Zionism is Racism' policy



Green leader Zack Polanski with Barnet Green activists **Credit** Anna Mahtani

BY DAVID FLOYD

Barnet Labour and Conservative politicians have slammed the Greens after the party adopted a controversial policy calling for Zionism to be "treated as any other form of racism".

The motion 'Zionism is Racism', proposed by Lubna Speitan of Greens for Palestine and passed at the party's conference in Brighton last month, is supported by Barnet's sole Green councillor, Charli Thompson.

It states: "Zionism is a political ideology which called for the creation – and, now it exists, the continuity – of an ethnonationalist Jewish State in historic Palestine to the exclusion and/or domination of the non-Jewish population."

It continues: "This motion is aimed at the political ideology and practice of Zionism, as defined, and not at the religious or ethnic background of those who may identify as Zionists. Not all Jews are Zionists and not all Zionists are Jews."

It concludes that: "Zionism is fundamentally incompatible with anti-racist principles, equality and justice", before setting out a series of actions that the Greens should pursue as an "anti-Zionist" party.

While the term 'Zionism' is highly contested, it is primarily used within the Jewish community to refer to support for some form of Jewish state in the Holy Land.

It encompasses a wide spectrum of political beliefs ranging from sympathy with right-wing Israeli nationalism to strong advocacy of a 'two-state solution' based on Israel existing alongside an independent Palestine, and includes both supporters and opponents of the current Israeli government and its military activity in Gaza.

A recent report from the Institute for Jewish Policy Research highlights that, as of June 2025, 66% of British Jews identify as Zionists.

Existing Green policies on Israel and Palestine had already provoked controversy in Barnet, with both Labour and the Conservatives highlighting the party's positions on the issue as being a factor in their decision not to seek Cllr Thompson's support after both parties secured 31 seats at May's local elections.

However, the new policy drew a furious response from the party's opponents in Barnet. For Labour, council leader Barry Rawlings told *Barnet Post*: "I condemn Green Party motion E03 entirely and unequivocally.

"Pronouncements that 'Zionism is racism' such as those passed by the Green Party have a very dark history, from enabling the persecution of Jews under Communist regimes to attempts to shut out Jewish organisations in the UK."

Cllr Rawlings added: "It is also concerning that the amendment to safeguard Jewish Greens who are members of Jewish organisations or attend synagogues that identify as Zionist failed; that Israeli joint Jewish-Palestinian protest group, Standing Together, has been banned by the Greens, including its Palestinian speakers; that the Antisemitism Policy Trust considers itself to have been effectively 'banned' by the Greens; that the motion passed by the Greens also commits it to campaign against both the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance Working Definition of Antisemitism and the Jerusalem Declaration on Antisemitism.

"This is a clear pattern of behaviour. Jewish residents in Barnet will be deeply worried by the Green Party motion and no one should tell members of the community they are wrong to be so."

For the Conservatives, deputy group leader Lucy Wakeley told the *Post*: "The Green Party has made it policy to treat Zionism, the belief in Jewish self-determination, as a form of racism.

"Worse, Green members voted down an amendment that would have protected members from being pressured or disciplined over their links to synagogues and Jewish groups that describe themselves as Zionist. Offered a simple safeguard for Jewish members, they refused it. That is as plain an example of racism as you will find, and it is now official Green Party policy."

Cllr Wakeley added: "Even more concerning is the announcement that the head of the Jewish Greens has expressed today that she feels she may now need to leave the party. In 2026 to have a major political party be an unsafe place for Jewish people is an abhorrent example of how far antisemitism has spread.

> *"Jewish residents in Barnet will be deeply worried"*

"Barnet is home to a large and proud Jewish community. Every Jewish resident should know that Barnet Conservatives stand with them, and this blatant act of antisemitism will not be tolerated in Barnet. Ever.

"We are calling on Cllr Thompson, and the wider Barnet Green Party to declare this motion what we all know it is, an antisemitic and racist policy."

Contacted for her own response to the new policy, Cllr Thompson backed the conference vote.

She told the *Post*: "I support the decision. I understand Zionism as an ethnonationalist political project, and my opposition to it is rooted in a simple principle: equal rights for everyone, regardless of ethnicity or religion. I oppose political ideologies which privilege the rights of one ethnic or religious group over another."

Asked what reassurance she would give to Jewish Green members that the party is a safe place for them she said: "Jewish members must be safe and welcome in the Green Party, and antisemitism must always be challenged. This policy concerns Zionism as a political ideology, it is not about Judaism or Jewish identity.

"Nobody should have assumptions made about their political beliefs because they are Jewish, and disagreement with this policy does not make somebody unwelcome in the party. I care deeply about all members feeling safe and will do all I can to uphold our party's values of diversity and inclusion."

Asked what she would say to Jews in Barnet who regard themselves as both Zionists and anti-racists, she said: "I recognise that some people may regard themselves as both Zionist and anti-racist and sometimes pro-Palestinian. I personally find those positions difficult to reconcile, given my understanding of Zionism as an ethnonationalist political project, but it is not for me to tell anybody how they should identify.

"People know what they believe and what they stand for. I can only be clear about the political ideology I oppose and why. Opposition to Zionism is not opposition to Jewish people or Judaism, and I will always challenge antisemitism."

NEWS

Major boost for treatment services tackling substance misuse across Barnet

BY JOE IVES, LOCAL DEMOCRACY REPORTER

An extra £3.5million in funding for substance misuse, prevention, treatment and recovery services has been signed off by Barnet Council.

The decision was reached at the local authority's cabinet meeting last month.

Payment for the services, worth £3,542,384, will be made through ring-fenced funding awarded by the government's Department of Health and Social Care, via the Office for Health Improvement and Disparities (OHID).

The money, which will help fund Barnet Substance Misuse Prevention, Treatment and Recovery Services, is set to cover the current financial year (2026/27) through to the end of the 2028/29 period.

In a report, the council said the move "will enable the continuation and expansion of established drug and alcohol prevention, treatment and recovery services, including interventions for rough sleepers, women, young people, people in the criminal justice system and those requiring enhanced treatment and recovery support".

At the same time, it says that "some activities


Credit TheShutterVision

and roles are being added to existing provision which will enhance the current treatment offer".

This comes as part of a "continuation and expansion of existing provision with additional provision enhancements".

The money will be used to enhance the local authority's existing contract with Change Grow Live, a health and social care charity predominantly funded by councils to deliver support services.

The organisation, which employs "many" members of staff who have previously used its services, says it is focused "on making sure that everything we do is helping the people who use our services, and the wider public too".

In December last year it was reported that 30 adults had died while in drug treatment in Barnet between April 2022 and March 2025 – a small decrease from the 32 who died between 2021 and 2024.

A total of 8,925 people died while in contact with treatment services across England between April 2022 and March 2025, including 4,273 in the year to March alone.

OHID, which published the data, said that while each year some people die while they are in an alcohol and drug treatment programme, these deaths might not be directly alcohol or drug related.

Speaking last year, Dr Will Haydock, chief executive of charity Collective Voice, which works to improve England's drug and alcohol treatment and recovery system, said: "Crucially, people are dying from causes other than directly substance use.

"Substance use issues don't occur in isolation from other aspects of people's lives, and are often linked to wider disadvantage related to housing, employment and social connection – which we know affect people's wider health.

"We also know that people who use drugs are under-served by general healthcare, so it's not just about substance use treatment."

He said access to healthcare and support must be improved, along with interventions such as support to stop smoking and better cancer screenings.

A spokesperson from the Department of Health and Social Care said the Labour government is "committed to cutting the number of drug related deaths through treatment, advice and support – focusing on deprived areas suffering most".

If you or someone you know in Barnet is struggling with alcohol or substance abuse, visit Change Grow Live's website for further guidance:
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NEWS

Grenfell fire-linked council housing boss leaves The Barnet Group

BY DAVID FLOYD

The housing boss controversially appointed to a senior position in Barnet after being criticised for her role in the Grenfell Tower fire left her job last month.

Laura Johnson was director of housing at Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea at the time of the fire in 2017.

The public inquiry into the tragedy found that Johnson had intervened to demand that contracts for work on the tower were retendered to deliver "value for money". The company that won the retendered contract replaced metal cladding with combustible plastic panels.

Johnson was also criticised for slowing down the installation of self-closing fire doors and failing to give sufficient weight to advice from London Fire Brigade.

She was initially appointed as group director of development and property at The Barnet Group, the council-owned company which operates Barnet Homes, on an interim basis in June 2024.

When the appointment came to light last year, it was slammed by Grenfell survivors group Grenfell United.

The campaigners told *The Guardian* at the time: "The fact that some of the people involved are still working in housing is a slap in the face to every survivor and bereaved family."

Johnson was appointed to the £157,078 role on a permanent basis this summer after what The Barnet Group described as "A robust recruitment process".

Barnet Post understands that Johnson left her role on Friday, 9th October and that members of The Barnet Group's board were emailed a brief statement which provided no further details.

A spokesperson told the *Post* on 12th October: "We can confirm that Laura Johnson is no longer employed by The Barnet Group. In common with any employer, we owe obligations of confidentiality to those working for us, applying for, or being considered for any role at any level. For that reason, it would be inappropriate for us to comment further."



Laura Johnson speaking at the Grenfell Tower Inquiry, May 2022
Credit Grenfell Tower Inquiry

The news was welcomed by Hendon MP David Pinto-Duschinsky. He told the *Post* he had written to the chair of The Barnet Group to question the decision to appoint Johnson.

After reports of Johnson's departure, the Labour MP said: "It's right that Laura Johnson has left her position. I wrote to the chair of The Barnet Group several weeks ago to share my deep concerns over her appointment and to demand they reconsider their decision to appoint her.

He added: "Someone who was criticised by the Grenfell Inquiry should have never been appointed."

At the time of Johnson's permanent appointment, Green councillor Charli Thompson described the appointment as "appalling" and told the Local Democracy Reporter Service: "Handing [Johnson] one of the most senior, highly paid roles delivering services for Barnet Council, with responsibility for thousands of homes, shows that no matter how serious the consequences of her previous decisions, there is no accountability."

In their response at the time, The Barnet Group spokesperson said: "Our thoughts remain with the survivors and family and friends of all those affected by the tragic Grenfell Tower fire."

Golders Green hotel development wins planning approval

BY JOE IVES, LOCAL DEMOCRACY REPORTER

A major hotel redevelopment near Golders Green Station has been approved by Barnet councillors.

The application to refurbish and expand Hotel Unique in Finchley Road was given unanimous support by the local authority's planning committee last month.

The scheme will see the current three-star hotel expanded to 130 rooms across two buildings, in an attempt to help rejuvenate the surrounding area.

It will see the demolition of existing car wash facilities and "ancillary outbuildings" on 4 Golders Green Crescent. The locally-listed Refectory Pub, as well as a valve house building at the site, will be retained.

The proposals will see construction of a new four-storey hotel building with 114 rooms. The existing three-storey building fronting Finchley Road will be refurbished to provide a coffee shop and an additional 16 rooms.

The two sections are set to deliver 130 new rooms overall. They are to be connected within the hotel via a two-storey "glazed link" building.

The application was 'called in' to the local authority's planning committee by Childs Hill councillor Cory Turner, who had expressed concern about the impact of the scheme on neighbours, as well as the loss of car wash and parking facilities.

Speaking at the meeting, another representative from Childs Hill, Conservative councillor Adam Gheasuddin, said he supported the scheme – provided it is delivered correctly.

Addressing committee members, he said: "There are potential benefits: in addition to the job opportunities for locals, the proposal would regenerate an underused site, improve the Finchley Road frontage and make use of a location with excellent public transport connections."

Cllr Gheasuddin said the proposals would "provide a welcome opportunity" to turn a site "known" to be associated with antisocial behaviour "into an active part of the community again".

The retention of the "historic" Refectory Pub was also a welcome part of the proposals, the Tory ward member added.

However, Cllr Gheasuddin argued that the benefits of the redevelopment "must balance against the impact on existing residents".

This, he said, would involve "tightly managed" conditions on its construction in order to minimise issues such as noise and disruption.

Planning officers hope that, by redeveloping a useful, but not particularly beautiful, car wash and its surrounding area, the scheme will "enhance" the look and feel of the location.

Councillors on the local authority's planning committee appeared to share this view, giving unanimous approval for the proposals.

The application was submitted by Pressfield Limited which, according to Companies House, is majority-owned by Gyda Properties Limited.

Ten years ago, Gyda was fined £1,000 by Barnet Council for its involvement with a building in Golders Green where environmental health officers had issued a prohibition order. The lives of up to 20 residents were put at risk, the council found. A number of other people and businesses were prosecuted as well, with £145,000 of fines issued in total.

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NEWS

London Plan targets and Green Belt policies criticised by Barnet Council in letter to mayor

BY JOE IVES, LOCAL DEMOCRACY REPORTER

Barnet Council has urged Mayor of London Sir Sadiq Khan to amend his draft London Plan – saying it raises "significant concerns".

The comments come as part of the council's formal response to Khan's proposals, agreed at a meeting of the local authority's cabinet last month.

In a report, the council said it supports the London mayor's "overall objective of delivering sustainable growth and addressing London's housing needs".

However, it also believes key elements of the proposals raise "significant concerns for Barnet".

Every 15 or so years, each London borough council has to create a local plan which outlines the development targets, such as number of homes to be built, and how it intends to meet those targets. The new Barnet Local Plan was adopted in March 2025.

The mayor's London Plan, meanwhile, is a far more wide-reaching document, essentially setting out planning policy across the whole capital, in turn giving guidance for each borough council to follow when creating their own strategies for local development.

Responding to the latest draft of these plans, Barnet Council said it was "principally" concerned with the mayor's new housing target for the borough.



Barnet Council is calling for City Hall to take a different direction on housing policy

This is on top of what it sees as a "reliance on Green Belt release, infrastructure capacity, affordable housing delivery, transport impacts and the need for greater local flexibility to be able to deliver to the needs of Barnet residents".

The letter to the mayor is formally signed off by Neeru Kareer, the council's assistant director of planning and building control, but its arguments are the result of months of work between officers and councillors. Nevertheless, its arguments come as a result of the efforts of a cross-party joint working group including both Labour and Conservative councillors as well as officers.

In the concluding remarks of the 'covering letter' of its official response, the council said it had shown it "supports the objective of sustainable growth across London" while also highlighting "where the Draft London Plan would benefit from further refinement".

Summarising this view, the council argued that "further work is required to strengthen the evidence base for housing delivery, infrastructure provision and the proposed approach to Green Belt release".

Proposed changes to Green Belt development policies have remained a consistent and major concern of the local authority.

Indeed, initial pushback from the council on the issue came shortly after the publication of the draft proposals in July.

At the time, the local authority warned that the mayor "does not have the remit" to make direct changes to the borough's Green Belt as part of any new London Plan.

Part of the draft London Plan describes how developments on Green Belt land could be acceptable if they meet "sustainable location tests".

It also contains scope for sections of the Metropolitan Green Belt to be developed for "residential-led" schemes if "the vast majority" of new homes are located either "within 400m" of an eligible bus route or 1.2km – "15 minutes walk" – from a select list of railway stations.

Barnet itself was identified as having up to seven of these "well-connected train stations" near "broad locations for growth" that contain Green Belt land.

In a statement published alongside its draft proposals in July, the mayor's office said the draft London Plan "sets out a bold vision for the capital and is a blueprint for building a fairer, greener and more prosperous London for everyone over the next two decades".

Following the cabinet's decision, the council's response was sent to the Greater London Authority.

Barnet Council's Send plan approved by government

BY DAVID FLOYD

Barnet Council's plan to reform services for children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities (Send) has been accepted by the government.

The council says that the plan sets out its "ambition for an inclusive, responsive and sustainable Send system, with children and young people, parent carers, schools and settings, and wider partners at the forefront of the proposals".


Credit Andrew Ebrahim

The borough currently has 8,300 Send pupils, and 5,044 of them had an education, health and care plan (EHCP) as of April this year.

In a *Barnet Post* feature published in May, Chipping Barnet MP Dan Tomlinson described the current Send system as being "broken" and pledged to fight for improvements, while one local parent said "what we really want is to be treated with a bit of dignity".

Pauline Coakley Webb, the council's cabinet member for family friendly Barnet, said: "We are delighted that our Send and AP Reform Plan has now been approved, marking an important milestone as we move forward into implementation.

"We are now progressing the actions within the plan and working collaboratively across the local area to translate our priorities into meaningful change.

Cllr Coakley Webb added: "Importantly, this is an evolving plan rather than a fixed document. The national Send landscape continues to develop, and we will ensure that our approach reflects emerging government guidance, policy, and new legislation as these become available."

To read a summary of the plan:
Visit barnetlocaloffer.org.uk/main_site/documents/2461-barnet-s-send-and-ap-reform-plan.pdf

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COMMENT

Don’t bin residents’ ideas



Frank Orman is chair of Mill Hill Residents’ Association

Frank Orman says now is the time to listen

Many residents tell us that, when it comes to local decision-making, they feel like an afterthought: informed once a decision has taken shape, consulted after the direction of travel has been set, and then thanked for their ‘feedback’. At best, they feel like a box to tick. At worst, an obstacle.

In seven years as chair of the Mill Hill Residents’ Association (MHRA), I have learned the opposite, that residents are one of the greatest sources of expertise, ideas and inspiration this borough has. The last few months have proved it.

In September, we asked residents around Mill Hill what moving household bin collections from weekly to fortnightly would mean for them. In under three weeks, 1,387 people replied, the biggest survey response in our association’s history, and 473 took the time to write to us in their own words.

Their verdict was almost unanimous: 89% said their bins are already mostly full, completely full or overflowing by collection day under today’s weekly service. Only 3% expected the change to have no major impact, and 94% want the plans paused until residents can understand and challenge the decision.

“Imagine how differently things could go if residents were treated as partners from the outset”

Behind those numbers are real households: families of five and six with nowhere to put a second week of rubbish, flats where 18 households share a handful of bins, and carers managing incontinence waste for a disabled relative. Some residents told us that, even with weekly collections, they are already getting maggots in their bins.

There was anger too. One in four comments mentioned council tax. As one resident put it: “Council tax goes up, service levels go down. So we pay more, for less.”

Residents know Barnet has had to ask the government for exceptional financial support this year, and many feel that, once again, they are being asked to pay for financial problems they did not create. The pressure on the council is real but residents feel it first, on their doorsteps.

Residents did not simply say no. They came with ideas such as collecting every ten days rather than every 14; reducing collections to fortnightly in winter but keeping them weekly through the hot summer, when smells are at their worst; putting different bins on different schedules, so recycling stays weekly; and providing larger or extra bins for families, flats and households with medical waste. These are practical ideas from people who use the service every week, and they deserve to be properly tested.

This is the council’s chance to show it really is listening. Recently, the cabinet asked officers to appraise options for future waste collections, including frequency. That is exactly the stage at which residents’ ideas belong on the table, and residents have shown they are more than ready to take part.

Residents deserve a place at that table. Too often in Barnet, they are brought in at the end of a process, to react to decisions that have already taken shape, rather than at the beginning, to help shape them. Consultation that comes too late to change anything feels like lip service, and breeds the frustration we saw in our survey.

Imagine how differently things could go if residents were treated as partners from the outset. Decisions would be better informed, problems would be spotted earlier, and solutions would come from the people who know their streets best. And when difficult choices do have to be made, residents would understand why, because they helped make them.

This is not a new argument for us. For years, MHRA has called on the council to involve residents from the start on a range of local issues. Bins are simply the latest example.

Nearly 1,400 people gave up their time to tell us what they think and how things could be done better. That is not a problem to be managed. It is an extraordinary resource, and one Barnet can use wisely.

So my ask of the council is simple. Put residents’ ideas into the options appraisal. Beyond bins, bring residents to the table at the start of the decisions that affect them, not as an irritating afterthought at the end.

Mill Hill Residents’ Association will keep listening, and we will keep reporting back.

Frank Orman is chair of Mill Hill Residents’ Association.

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FEATURES

Where has all the money gone?

Anna Mahtani looks at the causes of Barnet Council's massive budget deficit

Barnet Council is currently facing a £113.5million shortfall in 2027/28, making it one of the predicted largest deficits in the UK and the biggest in London. So how has the deficit become so big and what does the 'Barnet Graph of Doom' have to do with it?

A review by accountancy body Cipfa for the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) recently outlined Barnet Council's shortfall. This report was commissioned as part of the approval process for the £79.6million in exceptional financial support (EFS) that Barnet received to plug the gap in its budget for the current financial year, which followed similar borrowing of £55.7m in 2025/26.

The report showed the council was at high risk in 13 out of 18 categories, citing a lack of a "credible and deliverable savings plan" and an over-reliance on "borrowing-backed EFS".

"Loads of councils are going to be facing exactly this soon, if they're not already facing it now," said Greg Stride, a principal researcher at Local Government Information Unit (LGIU), a think tank working with councils across the UK. According to LGIU, 39% of councils will need to seek EFS in the next five years.

He told *Barnet Post*: "Barnet is, with some slight differences, a relatively typical example of what's happening across the country in terms of temporary accommodation spend," he explained. "The number of people who are homeless has increased as the cost of living crisis has gotten worse. And the cost of housing people has also increased at the same time."

Back in December, research by the charity Shelter showed that Barnet had one of the highest homelessness rates in England, with one in 55 residents experiencing homelessness. Last year, cabinet member for housing Ross Houston told *Barnet Post* that the percentage of people seeking homelessness assistance had risen by 83% since 2022.

This was to meet their legal duty to provide social care and temporary housing for homeless people but, Stride said, this creates other difficulties: "The big problem is that all of these things that we think of as non-statutory, that we think of as changing a place to a nice place to live, they also have an effect on the expenses of the statutory services.

"If you have really nice parks and you can go out for a walk every day, then you're likely to be healthier and happier than if you don't have those things. Healthy and happy people tend to be less expensive."



▶ Cabinet member for finance Simon Radford is trying to balance Barnet Council's budget

This other big factor in the impending crisis has been looming for the better part of two decades now. In 2011, Barnet Council released what has since been dubbed the 'Barnet Graph of Doom' – a document in which council officers calculated that, if government support didn't increase, the council would eventually run out of funding for everything except social care and children's services due to their rising costs.

"Since the post-war period in Britain, social care has been a local authority responsibility, which means there's 153 different ways of doing social care. And that's just England," Catherine Needham, a professor of public policy and public management at University of Birmingham who focuses on social care, told the *Post*.

Whereas the Beveridge Report in 1942 laid the foundations for Britain's welfare system, in practice social care was largely left to local authorities under the 1948 National Assistance Act.

According to Needham, this meant the government never came up with a "financially feasible approach to disabled people, older people, people with mental health conditions and carers."

She added: "Since [the Barnet Graph of Doom was published], we've seen a massive cut in the budgets of local authorities at the same time as increasing demand for social care."

> *"The budgets that local authorities have are not sufficient to meet the legal requirements that they have to provide social care under the Care Act"*

Needham explained that due to an ageing population and changes in people's general health and long-term conditions, demands for health and social care services will continue to rise.

"The budgets that local authorities have are not sufficient to meet the legal requirements that they have to provide social care under the Care Act," she said.

"Generally," added Needham, "people don't understand social care very well. They think it's a bit like the NHS. They're surprised when they find that actually, most of it's run by private companies. And if you've got assets above the means test threshold, which is only £23,250, then you will be paying for it yourself."

The result is that social care is currently simultaneously costing councils an unsustainable amount of money while also leaving a large number of people to pay the full costs of their care themselves. In 2021, the Office for National Statistics said around 36.7% of care home residents were paying their own costs.

"The problem is none of us know whether we'll need it or not," said Needham. "It puts an enormous amount of strain on social workers or local authorities having to make impossible decisions because they have not got enough money to go around all the people that need it."

With regards to social care in Barnet, the Cipfa report said the council was in a "high-cost, average-outcomes position" where the demand and price of adult social care, children's services and temporary accommodation "outpace transformation delivery, resulting in ongoing reliance on EFS and weakening financial resilience."

Looking ahead, Greg Stride drew attention to how the government is trying to address these challenges with a multi-year financial settlement agreement and the recent 'Fair Funding Review'. But, he said, these initiatives have their limitations: "[The Fair Funding Review] was one of those things where that was a good idea, in my view, to make sure that you took money from places that had loads and gave it to places that didn't have as much. But the problem with it is it didn't affect the size of the pie. It just affected how it was sliced up," he explained. "And the issue is that we need more pie, essentially."

Likewise, Needham argued that councils need more funding: "There's been lots of political promises but actually a real lack of delivery. So, we've just limped on in this system where it just, everybody knows that there is not enough money to meet the demand."

NEWS



Barnet residents celebrate beans
Credit Dave McCormick

Celebrating cool beans

Dave McCormick joins a group of local residents with their fingers on the pulses

At the start of Barnet Climate Action Week around 50 people came together to celebrate how cool beans can be.

For a couple of hours last month we spent time drinking tea, tasting different bean-based recipes, sowing seeds, taking part in competitions, playing games and having great conversations.

Why are beans cool? They come in different shapes, sizes and colours, are affordable and good for our health and can be turned into a variety of tasty cakes, dips, salads, curries and more.

And by shifting to plant-friendly diets and reducing the amount of meat and dairy products we consume we can help address the biodiversity and climate emergencies that we face.

What's not to like?

You don't have to be vegetarian or vegan – just gradually introduce plant-based ingredients into your diet and discover how you can save money and help save the planet.

Thanks go to Incredible Edible Barnet and St John's United Reformed Church for organising and hosting a lovely way of celebrating how cool beans are!

Edgware synagogue appoints new Senior Rabbi

BY DAVID FLOYD

An Edgware synagogue has appointed a new Senior Rabbi to lead its congregation from next year.

Rabbi Debbie Young-Somers will take over from Rabbi Mark Goldsmith at Edgware & Hendon Reform Synagogue (EHRS) in Stonegrove on 1st May 2027.



Rabbi Debbie Young-Somers
Credit Edgware & Hendon Reform Synagogue

Rabbi Debbie is already part of the clergy team at the synagogue. She first served at EHRS, which is the largest synagogue in the Movement for Progressive Judaism, as a student rabbi in 2007–08 before returning in April 2020.

Explaining the decision, EHRS chair Joanna Sigalov said: "Rabbi Debbie is the perfect choice for EHRS. She is deeply respected and loved by members of every generation, and we are delighted that she will lead us into our next chapter. What makes this appointment particularly special is that we already know the person we are entrusting with our future."

Talking about her appointment, Rabbi Debbie said: "After nearly seven years at EHRS as part of the clergy team, working to nurture and grow the community – from our tots' services through to essential community care offerings for all, and so much in between – I feel incredibly excited and honoured to be working with our wonderful professional team and lay leaders to continue to shape EHRS, help her flourish and make Judaism meaningful in a constantly evolving world."

FEATURES

Sleeping out to support the homeless

Charity Homeless Action in Barnet challenged people across the borough to spend a night sleeping outside between June and September, reports Leïla Davaud

A Barnet charity has been challenging local people to spend a night sleeping outside to raise money to help rough sleepers.

In response to increased demand for Homeless Action in Barnet's (HAB) support, it organised a 'Big Sleep Out'.

The goal was to raise money and awareness of the conditions rough sleepers face. Even though the participants had a certain level of comfort, the message was clear: show up for your community by sleeping "under the same sky".

The homeless day centre hoped to get 100 people involved. So far, around 50 have participated and raised £8,500. Tom Nevitt, from HAB, told the *Post*: "It has been genuinely moving to see people across Barnet willing to give up their comfort for a night to support those experiencing homelessness.

"Of course, sleeping outside for one night can never replicate the reality of homelessness, but it can help people think about what it means to have no safe place to go at the end of the day."

Across the summer, different groups met to sleep outside, in secure spaces. Courtney Rose and her mother, Stephanie Cramer, took part on 26th September. Courtney said: "We slept in Temple Fortune in the Alyth Synagogue's courtyard with ten other people. We raised over £500, which was our target. We are delighted! One rough sleeper stayed with us, if he was reserved at first he opened up eventually. We learnt he was a very talented artist.

"It meant a lot to be doing it as mother and daughter. We both work a lot and it was good to do something meaningful together. We wish more people got involved. It's only one night, we hope to see more members of the community showing up next time!"



Big Sleep Out participants
Credit Homeless Action in Barnet

Courtney and Stephanie are both engaged in different campaigns organised by HAB, such as 'Walk in their shoes', an event they participate in every year.

Tom said that, aside from the usual supporters, he found it "particularly encouraging how many young people got involved: the vast majority of participants were under 18, including a Scout group and three different groups of students.

"We'd like to build on that with a broader youth-focused challenge, giving young people different ways to take part and raise funds and awareness, rather than sleeping out being the only option."

HAB supports some of Barnet's most vulnerable people. In a standard week, around 250 people seek support from the team.

Tom explained: "For us, the money raised is incredibly important. It helps us provide practical support such as food, showers and warm clothing, but also the longer-term support people need to move away from homelessness and rebuild their lives.

"Just as importantly, seeing people turn up, fundraise and talk about homelessness sends a powerful message to the people we support: their community cares about them and hasn't forgotten them. We're enormously grateful to everyone who took part."

FEATURES



The launch of Women In Business Network's Barnet group

New business networking opportunity for women in Barnet

A new local branch of Women in Business Network has launched in Barnet – founder Hazel Theocharous talks to Leïla Davaud

The Women in Business Network (WIBN) has a new group in Barnet.

Launched in High Barnet on Tuesday, 6th October, the group, which is led by Hazel Theocharous, aims to create a supportive and professional environment where women can build meaningful business relationships and discover new opportunities.

For Hazel, who has been a WIBN member for twelve years, launching the Barnet group is about offering women "more than a place to exchange business cards".

Having spent six years in the corporate world before being made redundant, Hazel went on to establish her own business, focusing on wellbeing and helping people overcome confidence issues and imposter syndrome.

Her own experience of building a business helped her recognise the value of having a supportive network around her. "I was missing some sort of sorority in the business world," she explained. "A safe space to throw ideas around and talk about similar challenges."

Before the launch, Hazel made more than 60 calls to women in business across the borough. She said: "It was encouraging to discover how many women were working locally and how much potential there was to bring them together."

The group began with three founding members, with seven potential members visiting on launch day. The businesses represented span a variety of sectors, including travel, family law, accountancy, beauty, photography, speaking coaching and virtual assistance.

The monthly meetings at Judges Restaurant will give members the opportunity to introduce their businesses, exchange referrals and explore collaborations. The group also operates an exclusive professional-sector policy, helping members develop relationships within a group that brings together complementary businesses rather than direct competitors.

Sam Lawton, one of those present to support Hazel, said: "All women here are brilliant. But they need a network to thrive in their business."

The hypnotherapist has launched twelve WIBN branches across London.

She explained: "For new business owners, particularly, the early years can be challenging. Having a network of trusted contacts can provide a valuable sounding board for new ideas, help members navigate difficult decisions and offer encouragement when things do not go to plan."

Ruchelle Scott has recently started her own business as a beauty therapist. She came to the launch looking for advice and inspiration. "I'm across the road, so it's fantastic to have a local network," she said. "The energy around the table today is great, you can feel it. Everyone is passionate about what they do and willing to offer support in any form."

Travel business coach and founding member of the WIBN Barnet branch, Anna Taylor helps people develop income streams within the travel industry. Rather than operating as a traditional travel agent, she works with a team of 250 people and supports them in building their own businesses. "I'm really excited to see where this group goes and how we grow together," she said. "Let's see where we all are in four months' time."

Wendy Paul is another member bringing her experience to the network. After a career of more than 25 years in the NHS, spanning administration, personal assistant support, service management and project management, she now provides administrative and organisational support to businesses around the world.

She said: "It can be very lonely to set up a business on your own. I was scared when I started, and I'm glad I found a place where I can find support and guidance." The meeting was also her first time pitching her business to a networking group. She added: "The positive atmosphere and good intentions of the women around the table helped me feel so much more comfortable."

Member and photographer Brigitta Mastroiami reminded her fellow entrepreneurs: "Hiding is no longer an option. It's time to be confident and proud."

Hazel Theocharous concluded: "With monthly meetings, plenty of online services and members already bringing a range of skills, experiences and ideas to the table, the group has an opportunity to become a valuable part of Barnet's local business community."

For more information:
Visit wibn.co.uk
Email teambarnet@wibn.co.uk

Cooking up a storm in East Finchley

Dave McCormick attends Phoenix Cinema viewing for a film responding to the climate and biodiversity crises

Mix together a cinema, a film, concerned residents and representatives of local community groups and what do you get?

Around 130 people came along to the Phoenix Cinema to watch a screening of the *People's Emergency Briefing* and discuss actions that we can individually and collectively take.

The film clearly summarises the challenges we face, why urgent action is both necessary and affordable, the solutions already available, and the barriers we must overcome.

While hearing about the climate and biodiversity crises can create climate anxiety, many of the audience responses were cautiously positive.

"It is essential viewing – we need to help everyone see the film."

"Everyone needs to understand that taking action will lead to a better world."

"A people-supported movement – wonderful and so necessary"

"In an emergency I ring 999 and expect a rapid response – we need a rapid response from the government and our councils to the crises we face."

Asking what actions we can take triggered great suggestions.

"We need to get all our MPs to watch the film – write to them, talk to them, pester them, get them to realise that there are votes in taking action"

"Encourage more cinemas to host screenings"

"Reach out across our community to get more people on board and encourage them to take action"

Yet a note of reality was introduced.

"So far there have been a small number of screenings in Barnet, and we need to reach around four hundred thousand residents."

"The longer we delay just makes it harder"

By the end of the evening, people were signing a petition demanding a televised emergency briefing by the government, talking about how to organise further screenings at the Phoenix and across the community, joining local community groups and putting pressure on our councillors and MPs.

We have the ingredients to make some noise and cook up a storm; now we need to make it happen.

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FEATURES 14

From food parcels to homemade meals



BY LEÏLA DAVAUD

▲ **Chef Lisa passing on tips to cookery class participants** **Credit** Leïla Davaud

As the cost of living crisis continues to make food harder to afford, the Chipping Barnet Foodbank has become a lifeline for people struggling to make ends meet. Last year, it distributed 7,835 parcels to members of the community.

But receiving a food parcel is only part of the challenge: beneficiaries also have to work out how to turn those few ingredients into meals.

Which is why, on a Tuesday evening, Lisa Violino grabs her apron and approaches Potter's Pantry's big wooden table. It is covered in tins and cooking utensils. The Italian chef is used to hosting cooking classes, "but this one is even more special," she says.

In the comfort of the local cafe, four men surround her to listen. They eye her every move. Finally, she clasps her hands and asks: "How are your chopping skills?" They all grab knives and follow her instructions.

Watching nearby, Jean Gibb smiles at the scene. She has been the co-owner of Potter's Pantry in New Barnet for the last eight years. She says: "I also volunteer at the Chipping Barnet Foodbank every month. I was able to see who would come, what they would take and started to think about what they could make out of it."

Jean came up with the idea of a cooking class and suggested it to Lisa, who immediately agreed to lead it. The recipe of the day is a vegetarian chilli. Lisa Violino explains: "Meat can be too expensive, but it doesn't mean that you can't eat something consistent and delicious without it."

Lentils, chopped tomatoes, onions, kidney beans... Everything ends up in a pot to cook slowly. In the meantime, the participants get to know each other better.

Mattie signed up for the class as soon as he heard about it. He explains: "I was nervous when I arrived. Nervous about learning and about seeing people but it is great! I had seen the others in passing at the foodbank but we never talked."

The 61-year-old dips a spoon into the chilli and tastes it. "I definitely don't use enough spices at home. Next, I want to learn how to cook a stew, it's my favourite food!"

His cooking buddy for the evening, 38-year-old Luke, stirs the concoction patiently. "I'm happy Jean and Lisa started these lessons. I hope they do more, I want to come back."

Jean reassures everyone: "As long as people want the classes, I will host them. I'm hoping to make it happen every six weeks." She continues: "I am pleased with how it turned out. We have music on, people get to know each other. They get to take home what they prepared together. It's special, it's organic!"

Jean worked in mental health for 20 years before opening the cafe. "It feels like going back to what I used to do a little. I try to give a space for people to socialise and there is nothing better than food to bring people together and fight isolation."

Peter, 59, quickly realises the class goes beyond what he came here for. "I initially came for social interactions but I am really getting on board with the cooking. I usually do fry-ups and microwave meals and this is making me want to improve my skills."

Agreeing with him, Jamie, 41, admits: "It's easy to be lazy when it comes to cooking. It is a real skill and it is sometimes a bit discouraging. I keep to pasta and grill mainly but it is good to learn new recipes and how to cook them with very little. It inspires me to try more."

Jean was hoping for this outcome. "Another project I have is to make recipe cards that can be placed in food parcels. All of them would only use what the foodbank can provide," she explains.

Lisa adds: "People need to be able to feed themselves with what is available to them."

For now, Jean is focused on developing the food classes. Recently, she added a small section to the cafe's menu. "Clients can decide to pay an extra £1 or £2 that will be donated to the project. It would help to buy more utensils and single-ring electric hobs."

The goal is to have enough to grow the class and have it moved to the foodbank. "Until then, Potter's Pantry will host. We are closed in the evening so it is natural to use the space for members of the community. We're all in this together!"

> *"It's easy to be lazy when it comes to cooking – it is a real skill"*

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ARTS & CULTURE 15



Cast members rehearsing for 'The Unfriend'
Credit Incognito Theatre

Review – *The Unfriend*

BY SOPHIE WINCH

One of Friern Barnet's hidden gems is Incognito Theatre, a volunteer-led amateur theatre group that staged a riveting and brilliantly funny production of Stephen Moffat's satire *The Unfriend* last month.

The British public's fervent death-grip on etiquette is often mocked by other countries, but rarely is it actually fatal. *The Unfriend* pushes our desperation to not step on anyone's toes to its sinister and absurdist limit. It is simultaneously a parody of brash boundary-blind Americanism and something more self-deprecating: a grave warning to anyone who winces in recognition at Very British Problems' social media posts.

"Brilliantly funny actors and a masterful set combine to effervescent effect"

"We lack the necessary social skills to avoid death!" moans Peter, our unnervingly relatable protagonist, played with compelling awkwardness and polite neuroticism by Alan Crossan. He finds himself in the most English of farces, confronted with a terrifying houseguest and trying to find a way to ask her to leave.

Peter and his wife have met Trump-loving Denver resident Elsa Jane Krakowski on a cruise. Because of their pathological inability to say no, they have accidentally invited her to stay in their home with their children, the surly teenaged Alex (Ethan Gold Wahlhaus) and put-upon Rosie (Jaya Kaur). Catherine Jansen-Ridings as a fuschia-clad Elsa is a particular highlight, larger than life perhaps because she's taken other people's. Her charm is so strong that, despite being obviously psychopathic, you find yourself rooting for her a little.

Excellent too is the slightly more sensible Debbie, Peter's long-suffering but, unfortunately, also British wife (Alice Gill-Carey), whose monologues when pushed to breaking point are particularly captivating. Of the supporting cast, Steve Chapman stands out as a delightfully well-observed neighbour, who, enviably immune to this endemic fear of confrontation, uses his superpower to remind Peter about his responsibilities regarding their shared fence.

Moffat's writing – especially satirically slick here – is given enough space and breathing room to shine by a very capable group of actors, although some bits can seem a little over-long and played on one note. This is made up for, though, by the comedic ability of the main cast, who land every joke with aplomb.

The set, by Incognito Theatre's regular set designer John Savage, is an astonishing feat. It is versatile, fabulously intricate (down to a working fridge), and makes very intelligent use of the small television screens flanking the stage, on which are displayed (among other things) an impressively spoofed true-crime documentary, a videocall, and a newspaper clipping.

Incognito Theatre have done Moffat's excellent satire justice; brilliantly funny actors and a masterful set combine to effervescent effect. A treat for fans of dark comedy (especially *Inside No. 9*), or debilitatingly polite people in need of a wake-up call.

Incognito Theatre's next show, 'A Voyage Round My Father' by John Mortimer, runs from 6th December to 12th December. For more information:

Visit incognitotheatre.co.uk/whats-on/shows/a-voyage-round-my-father

Advertisement



SPORT

Busy month for Bees as promotion chase continues



Prenton Park – Home of Tranmere Rovers FC **Credit** Wikimedia Commons

Nick Sandamas on Barnet FC's mixed return from seven games in October

It was a busy October for the Bees with seven games.

The first action was a Football League Trophy group game against League One AFC Wimbledon and, with a Barnet line-up which included a first team debut for 18-year-old academy product Anthony Haralambous in goal, the game ended goalless. The Bees then prevailed on spot kicks with Romany Crichlow the hero to give them a good chance of qualifying for the knockout stage.

There followed a superb performance in coming from behind to beat Steve Evans' Bristol Rovers 3-1 in their own back yard, which was made even better by the fact that the Gas had won their previous eleven home league games (dating back to January).

Ellis Harrison had given Rovers a superb start in the fourth minute with the opener but, in the second half, it was a different story as the determined Bees roared home with three goals in the final ten minutes to clinch victory.

Adam Senior, with his first goal of the season, equalised. Then, with five minutes to go, Rovers' Tommy Leigh saw red for a late tackle on Charlie Lakin. This proved crucial as it allowed the eleven men to take advantage. Zac Williams put Barnet ahead with a peach of a strike before Kabongo Tshimanga scored late to send the 500 travelling fans into raptures. The three points kept the Bees in second spot in League Two.

Next was a trip to Merseyside to face Tranmere Rovers and, in only their third ever meeting, the Bees came out on top, coming from behind for a 2-1 victory to remain on the coattails of leaders Salford City.

A magnificent first half strike for Tranmere by Will Vaulks was cancelled out by a second half double strike from Barnet top scorer Tshimanga with the winning goal coming from the spot three minutes from the end.

Swindon Town visited next and left The Hive with a fine 3-1 win to end the Bees' unbeaten start to the season. First half goals from Mitch Clark and a brace from Aaron Drinan put the Robins out of sight. Tshimanga's goal was a mere consolation.

A chance for Barnet to put that result behind them then came against Oldham Athletic but, despite Tshimanga putting them ahead with 20 minutes on the clock, Mike Fondop popped up with a last ditch strike to deny the Bees three crucial points.

As we went to press they were due to face York City and Crewe Alexandra, two tough encounters to test the Bees' mettle but which would hopefully yielded more points with Tshimanga also hoping to add to his nine goals so far.

This month, it's back-to-back cup ties to get going with home games against both Tranmere Rovers and Leyton Orient in the FA Cup first round and EFL Trophy respectively, followed by league encounters against fellow promotion chasers Walsall and then against strugglers Port Vale and Rochdale.

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ARTS & CULTURE 17

Ascendance takes Barnet on an 'emotional journey'

Sophie Winch talks to Matthew Rosier about his installation at the borough's Light and Flight festival

Matthew Rosier will show his installation *Ascendance* this month at the Light and Flight festival, a major arts event across two weekends celebrating local history and creativity in Barnet.

To make his videos, Matthew toured a film set to locations across the borough, focusing on spaces with a sense of established community. Among these were Middlesex University, Barnet and Southgate College, and Unitas (a charity and youth hub). Working with Middlesex University, he constructed a floating rig, allowing participants, aged 16–20, to hover above the ground. "The project is so inclusive of our wide creative community across the borough," says Dr Helen Bendon, deputy dean for arts and education at Middlesex University.

Matthew's subjects came from many different neighbourhoods and communities, including the Nepalese Community Centre, Art Against Knives, youth clubs and colleges. There was an "amazing mix" of young people, he says. Alongside these participants, members of Beat (the Barnet Educational Arts Trust) were involved in creating a soundscape by collecting birdsong. "It's been really lovely to involve our young musicians in the project," says Sharon Broughall, CEO of Beat.



▶ **A hovering participant in the 'Ascendance' film tour**
Credit Zoe Scholes

Alongside filming flying young people, Matthew has been working to record the stories and voices of twelve older participants. These range from Mahender, who in 1968 walked from India to East Finchley, to Simon, vicar at the Stone Grove estate, whose perspectives on the shifts of Barnet's demographics take his narration beyond his own story.

"I've lived in London a long time," Matthew tells me, "but always in the East and South; North [London] is a less well-known area for me".

Working on this project, he soon discovered that Barnet felt like a 'settled' place, with "less of a sense of coming and going", and a strong emphasis on "local community". He also observed a great sense of cultural diversity, something which he was keen to foreground in his work. In particular, Matthew says, he was very inspired by the Unitas youth centre in Burnt Oak. "It's such a happy place," he says, "and I felt really connected with all the people there".

"It's the case across London," he says. There's more of a history than people sometimes appreciate, as people have ended up "congregating and putting roots down" everywhere. Matthew says one of his biggest inspirations has been Steve McQueen's *Year 3* project in 2021, which featured a photograph of every year three class in London, displayed in the Tate Britain's grand hall space. "Right in the middle of Brexit, it was completely overwhelming to be in that," he tells me. "Looking at all of those faces, you realise 'there's no discussion [about immigration] here. This is the future.'"

"If this could even begin to do something like that, that's what I would want," he tells me. "It's funny, sad, and awe-inspiring – there's an emotional journey with it that I hope people will experience".

Matthew wants people to experience the feeling of "rising and going forward", in a time that can feel "very dispiriting and scary. He hopes the project will uplift its audience, and show how much people have been able to overcome.

'Ascendance' is being shown at the Light & Flight festival. It will be unveiled on Saturday, 14th November at 4.30pm and remain on display until Sunday, 22nd November

Entry is free and tickets can be booked here:
Visit lightandflight.co.uk

Everyone is an artist with Community Focus

BY LEÏLA DAVAUD

Staring a rat straight in the eyes wasn't on the day's *Barnet Post* to-do list. Thankfully, just like its companions, Ratatouille is frozen in 2D. "This is the masterpiece of a student who really loves rats," laughs Phil Powell, Community Focus's head of communications and marketing.

Friary House in Friern Barnet has become a safe haven for children and adults with disabilities and additional needs who have a particular interest in art.

Anna Hor, interim CEO and the *Post's* guide for the day, walks into one of the classrooms. She explains: "Right now, we are hosting a creative writing session and a mixed-media art class. We try to cater for different ways of expressing ourselves and learning."

Community Focus welcomes children aged ten and over, as well as adults. Phil explains: "We quickly realised the centre was vital. For people with disabilities and additional needs, home is often their safe space. The outside world can be very scary. They are often ignored, if not abused.

"They deserve another space where they can be themselves and not have to hide who they truly are. Pretending to be normal is draining and exhausting. They shouldn't have to go through that to have a life outside their homes."

The strength of this charity comes, in part, from its tutors. All of them are practising artists who bring their individual skills and experience to the classes. One of them is Flo Alfrey, project manager of ARTiculate.

She says: "The project is designed for adults aged between 18 and 30. The students learn transferable skills in the hope of finding a job."

Phil Powell explains: "Funding usually stops once a person turns 18. We try to teach them skills they could learn at school, but in a safer and free environment where everything is designed around their needs."

Flo nods and adds: "It inspires them to join groups and overcome the social anxiety that larger organisations can induce."

Recently, students collaborated with the shop Philanthropy in Golders Green. Alfrey explains: "We created hand-printed T-shirts during the latest football World Cup and even embroidered second-hand denim items. The clothes were then sold in the shop. It's fantastic!"

One of the main barriers to inclusivity is a lack of education on the subject. And who is best placed to teach us about it? Those most affected.

"We launched Dis-labeled," says Phil. "It's a podcast created and presented by people with disabilities, learning disabilities, autism and long-term health conditions. It is a space to share experiences, challenge stereotypes and talk about the things that matter to them."



▶ **A hub of artistic activity at Friary House**
Credit Community Focus

Funded by the National Lottery, Dis-labeled is available on streaming platforms and on Resonance 104.4 FM. "We have recorded 80 episodes," says Phil proudly.

"On the podcast, the students share experiences, interview guests, have a laugh and choose what they want the world to hear. It is really special, and it resonates internationally!"

Community Focus is hoping to expand in the near future. Additional classes would allow the charity to reach out to more people in need of a creative haven.

Phil says: "Stepping in the centre for the first time is a very hard thing to do but once you step within these walls you make friends and family. It's life changing!"

If you're interested in getting involved with Community Focus:
Visit communityfocus.co.uk
Call 020 3743 2326
Email admin@comunityfocus.co.uk

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