



Quality of library service in Barnet could be investigated

By Daphne Chamberlain

Are you satisfied with Barnet's restructured library system? If not, you have the opportunity to help launch an official investigation into the changes made in the last year.

The Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport is looking at whether Barnet Council is carrying out its duty to deliver 'a comprehensive and efficient library service' under the Public Libraries and Museums Act of 1964. The DCMS has the power to overturn the changes.

Formal investigation

This follows a written request by local campaigners Emily Burnham and Robert Strong on behalf of Save Barnet Libraries. Such requests are not always granted, but the DCMS is looking into this one. After considering all evidence, the department can decide to go ahead with a formal investigation.

It has already looked at

Barnet's reasons for making the changes, and members of the public have been quick to offer their opinions. A decision to carry out an investigation could come at any time, followed by a four-week appeal period.

Users' views sought

Emily Burnham told *The Archer*: "East Finchley library feels like a ghost of what it was without its librarians and without many of its regular users, young and old. Teenagers are visibly shocked when told by council staff that they will be unable to use the library independently most of the time. Meanwhile, the full-time presence of a security guard suggests the council doubts the viability of its own plans. Horrifically, costs are spiralling while the

service is being destroyed, albeit with new floor polish.

"We are pleased that the Minister for Culture Karen Bradley has recognised that our complaint raised sufficiently serious issues so as to require further investigation. To support this process, we are asking library users here and across the borough to tell us about the impact of the changes on them and their families. This will be crucial to ensure that the Minister uses her statutory power to intervene and restore a proper library service to the borough."

Save Barnet Libraries wants to hear from individuals, families, community groups and special interest groups. Visit www.savebarnetlibraries.org for more information.

What do you think of the library so far?

By Daphne Chamberlain

East Finchley Library reopened in late August following more than three months of construction work and reorganisation inside the grade 2 listed building as part of Barnet Council's changes to the library service across the borough.

What do you feel about the re-opened library? Email us at the-archer@lineone.net or write to The Archer, PO Box 3699, London N2 2DE. Here are some of the reactions we've had so far:



Automated: The library entrance. Photo Mike Coles

Opening hours

We have been told all along that the library would be open in its self-service form until 10pm but the closing time is currently 5pm, except on Wednesdays when it is 8pm. *The Archer* asked Barnet Council the reason for this. A spokesperson said that we were currently in transition, while library users become familiar with how the self-service facility works. A temporary "here to help" team would be present for the first few weeks. Once people become comfortable with how self-service works, the opening hours would be extended. Barnet did not say what the eventual closing time would be.

PIN number and library card entry

We have heard of one person who has found this did not work. Has anyone else had the same problem?



The children's library - ready to go. Photo Mike Coles

Staff instructions during emergencies

Leaflets in the library stress the importance of following staff instructions if an emergency exit is necessary. Other leaflets say that people with disabilities, who would need help in an emergency, should report this when registering for a self-service card.

This implies that the council is intending to employ a security guard when the library is unstaffed. The security guard employed in the self-service trial at Edgware Library is being retained. Does this indicate that a public service with no staff available is unworkable?

The empty upper floor

When *The Archer* asked if Barnet had found a paying occupant for the upper floor, we were told that details would be announced when it was appropriate. That was a few months ago, and it still stands empty.

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Rock enrol

The Amateur Geological Society is a friendly society based in north London on the look-out for new members, professional and amateur geologists, young and old alike. It meets on the second Tuesday of every month in Finchley Baptist Church, 5 East End Road, N3 at 7.30pm.

A guest speaker is invited to give an illustrated talk. Recent subjects have ranged from "Essex Geology" and "Darwin as a Geologist" to "One Million Years of the Human Story". There are also regular geological field trips.

Its annual Mineral, Gem and Fossil Show will be held on 25 November from 10am to 4pm at Trinity Church, Nether Street, N12, close to artsdepot in North Finchley.

Membership is £15 per year for ordinary members, £20 for a family and £10 for a student. To join contact the society secretary via the website www.amgeosoc.wordpress.com.

Hair flair

The team at Jo Sutherland Hair Studio in East End Road, N2, has won an award for client experience. The salon was recognised for its service and professionalism by Phorest Salon Software on the strength of its customer reviews, which stayed at four out of five for 12 months.

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