



# Fight to restore a library service that is 'failing our children'

By Daphne Chamberlain

The Government is currently looking at whether Barnet Council is fulfilling its legal duty to supply a comprehensive library service and there is still time to make your voice heard.



Self-service: The book lending machines in the library foyer

Following a meeting of campaigners last month at East Finchley's Constitutional Club, an open letter is being sent to Culture Minister Karen Brady concentrating on the drastically reduced service to the borough's children and young teenagers. Although more than 12% of library users are in the 12-15 age bracket, they can't even enter a library on most days without an adult who is registered for

PIN-controlled access. Only PIN-registered adults over 16 years old can gain entry when libraries are unstaffed, which is for most of the time.

## Still locked out

Speaking for Save Barnet Libraries (SBL), Emily Burnham told *The Archer* that the council is paying for security guards instead of librarians, while children and many older and vulnerable library users are

still locked out.

She told us: "The council doesn't even know how many library users have registered for a PIN code. In early October, Mike Freer is on record as saying 15,000 had registered, while by mid-month Cllr Thompstone is quoted as saying only 11,000.

"What is certain is that the vast majority of over 186,000 card holders counted in 2015-16 have not signed up. This is a damning indictment of unstaffed libraries, and we call on Barnet Council to halt these disastrous plans immediately, and restore a properly staffed and resourced library service."

## Still time for action

SBL thank the many library users across the borough who have already contributed statements about the impact of the cuts on them and their families. They have updated the Culture Secretary, but are continuing to collect statements, which they emphasise are crucial to winning their case.

SBL can be contacted on [www.savebarnetlibraries.org](http://www.savebarnetlibraries.org), where you can also sign the open letter to the Culture Minister, calling for the restoration of library services for children. Paper copies of impact forms and the open letter are available by calling 07794 634290.

## A mission for healthier eating

Tee Tarjun is a man on a mission. The owner of the Mightee Fit gym on Fortis Green, N2, is calling on local cafés and restaurants to offer healthier options on their menus.

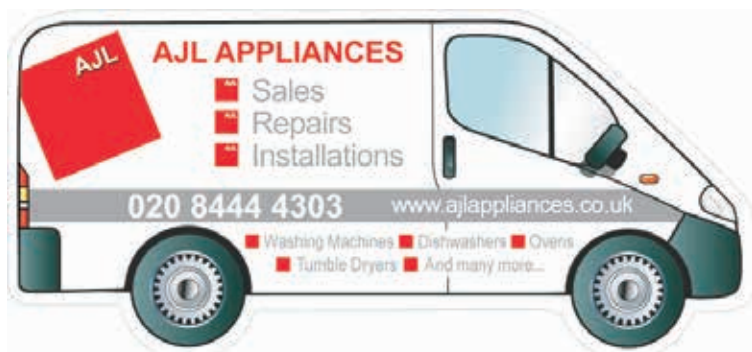
"This is a call out to the restaurants of East Finchley," says Tee. "Lots offer vegan or gluten-free options but there could also be healthier options too. Growing up in Northern Cyprus, food was always fresh, there were lots of salads, fish and meat."

He is a keen advocate of the benefits of eating a healthy diet: good energy levels and concentration to name a few. "I get up at 4am and work until 10pm and I feel great," he says.

Tee is the vice chair of

N2United, the business network in East Finchley. Approaching their one-year anniversary, the 50-business strong committee offers support for local businesses in what is already considered a thriving local community.

As part of N2United, Tee wants to encourage everyone to eat out in local restaurants but thinks it's important to have the option of healthy choices when we do. He welcomes any restaurants and cafés to get in touch via the gym.



**Autumn Fayre**  
Saturday November 11, 12-3  
**Holy Trinity Church**  
77 Church Lane, East Finchley  
Everyone Welcome, Free Entry  
Fun, games, activities and stalls for children plus tombola and raffle  
Lots to buy: Homemade cakes, chutney, books, toys, good used clothing, bric a brac and crafts  
Hot Dogs and refreshments.

## We all need to start using the library again

When we reported last month on the re-opening of East Finchley Library we asked what you thought of the new set-up. Here's a selection of responses we received, and if there's one message that unites them it's that we all need to start using the service again to prove that the East Finchley community really values its library.

**Louisa Piccirillo-Kadri, a resident of East Finchley for 28 years, writes:**

I was lucky to find a volunteer to help me register and gain access when the library was unsupervised by its staff. She was really helpful but as more and more users came who were new to the system it became clear that more was being demanded of her than simply helping people register. It was a Saturday afternoon and users wanted to know where reserved items were and where specific interest books could be found, just to give two examples.

The library itself was absolutely silent. I would guess that people are either unaware of how the new library system works or even when its opening hours are staffed or otherwise.

Ostensibly libraries are 'lending' libraries and therefore need borrowers to sustain them. If former borrowers or new borrowers are on the wane, then definitely something needs to be done. After so much controversy about saving this library it would be a crying shame if it ever became further threatened for lack of use.

Once a member has registered to have a personal PIN to gain access, it is still a library with a good selection of books and newspapers and magazines. It is warm and there are still clean and decent public facilities. Now that the fight to save it has been won, please can people use it more!

**Rose Welch, of Leicester Road, N2, writes:** How depressing to visit East Finchley Library on an October

Saturday afternoon and to see first-hand the effect of Barnet's cuts to library services. Instead of a librarian, the only person on duty was a security guard who I saw turning away a parent and young child after an angry altercation that left the child in tears. The parent had a library membership card but no PIN number, now a requirement to enter the library when no librarian is present.

How can it make sense to save costs of a librarian's salary, only to pay out for a security guard service that would be unnecessary if a librarian was present? Not surprisingly, once inside the library myself, I found a bleak atmosphere with only one other person there.

Libraries are important community buildings but they need trained welcoming staff to ensure they remain useful and accessible to all, something sadly East Finchley Library now has only for a total of 15 hours in the week.

**Long-time library user Maureen Delandro writes:**

What a sad experience. I crept in as someone left, and the security guard was in the bathroom. So much for security, why is it needed anyway?

A smart new bathroom is now on the ground floor, but it smelled terrible, the bin overflowing.

The staff seemed remarkably chipper, in fact more lively than I have seen them over the years, but the soul has been ripped out of this facility.

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