



Bring back EMA!

In autumn 2010 we reported on the anger among many young people over the Government's decision to scrap the Education Maintenance Allowance (EMA).

This grant of up to £30 a week was paid to worse-off sixth-form and FE college students in order to help them to stay in full-time education.

The protests and outcry forced the Government into a partial climbdown: EMA is being phased out for those who were receiving it before abolition and there is a much smaller, replacement bursary scheme for those most in need. This is administered by colleges themselves, who can make some stipulations about behaviour on those they award bursaries.

This replacement for EMA is inadequate; EMA should be reinstated!

● "Save EMA" campaigns for reinstatement of EMA:
<http://saveema.co.uk/>

Amara Obinali, who lives in Barnet, shares the results of her survey of 239 students of all backgrounds in north London on the impact of EMA abolition.

Q1 Age of those surveyed

73% aged 16-17 (year 12), most of the rest 17-18 (year 13). A few 15-16 year olds (year 11) were asked, as they will be starting college next year and will also be the next year affected by the cancellation of EMA.

Q2 Number with both parents/guardians working

39% of people had both parents/guardians working.

Q3 Is cared for by a single parent/guardian [includes single parents with new partners]

61% were cared for by a single parent/guardian.

Q4 Is cared for by a single parent/guardian and is entitled to EMA

Of the 61% being cared for by a single parent, 42% were entitled to EMA.

Q5 On a scale of one to 10 how much difference does EMA make? (1 being no difference at all and 10 being a massive difference.)

Everyone said a number between 5-10. This doesn't necessarily mean they support EMA, they just feel that it does actually make a difference.

Some were harsh about abolition and some were not. Everyone was well aware that it was a bad thing but some felt strongly about it and some didn't.

Q6 What are your views on the fact EMA has been scrapped?

The thoughts/views of a few students are given below.

"It's £30 a week that covers transport and lunch... It helps more than you think it would, it covers the little things that you'd normally worry about."

"EMA would actually help a lot but I'm always late to school and sometimes I don't receive it."

"I do feel sorry for those who are missing out as their parents find it hard to fund their school week."

A lot of students expressed their anger over the fact EMA had been scrapped. They expressed their concerns about the fact they couldn't even find a job to cover for the cancellation of EMA. One student said "there's nothing worse than being in college/university and being broke", which stuck in my head as it really shows how some people are struggling and how the little things in life make a difference.

Q7 How much do you need to get through a week, and if you have money left over what do you spend it on?

All the students that did not need to take the train to college/sixth form said it cost around £10-£20 to get through a school week, depending on their meals. If they ate onsite it may cost about £2-£3 a day; if not then it would cost more. A majority of them go offsite for "better food" which costs more. Those who took the tube to school said they needed above £30 a week and the train prices just keep increasing.

I take the train to school and it costs about £17-£20 a week, £3.40 a day to travel there and back, which is rather a big difference seeing as when you are in high school and have an 11-15 Oyster card a two-way journey costs less than £1.25.

The students who had money left over said they spent it on clothes (college students cannot wear a uniform), weekend activities and some said "more food".

Q8 Has brothers and sisters in the same age range

Over 70% of students had brothers and sisters which meant more expenses for their parents. Some had brothers and sisters who were all young, which isn't so bad as little children are not so expensive, but the others did not, which makes a big difference.

Overall the students had nothing positive to say about the cancellation of EMA; even those who weren't entitled to it had sympathy for others. Maybe not as much as needed but a lot of students do feel strongly about the cancellation of EMA. The cancellation of EMA, along with other government cuts, also sparked hatred as some students said "I hate the government" and "The government's only aim is to target the lower class of society".

Disabled people deserve better

Barnet Council should help disabled residents to lead fulfilling lives in their community, not increase social care charges and allow derogatory statements to be made about them.



by Tirza Waisel

Barnet Councillor Brian Coleman thinks that people with disability don't deserve services. I know it because those who attended the Barnet Council Cabinet Resources Committee meeting on Tuesday 27 September heard him say so.

The committee referred to the provision of transport to vulnerable people in the borough. On paper it had considered the Equality Act 2010: "The council [...] must have due regard to the need to (a) eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct that is prohibited by or under the Act; (b) advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it; and (c) foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it."

A recently published report by the Equality and Human Rights Commission ("Hidden in plain sight, Inquiry into disability-related harassment", September 2011) says: "Our evidence shows the most critical factor in organisations improving their performance, is the level of commitment and determination to address the issue [of harassment directed at disabled people - TW] shown by their leaders. It is, after all, senior officers and executives who set the priorities for organisations."

Yet, Cllr Coleman was heard at this meeting saying:

"I would like to see some legislation which would mean we would not have to provide a service for these people." (<http://alturl.com/4w2w9> - Barnet Eye blog) [see also: <http://alturl.com/qdmtq> - Mr Reasonable blog - and <http://alturl.com/yqj92> - Broken Barnet blog].

"These people" - a derogatory term such as might be used to put down Jews, black people, lesbians and gays, and other oppressed groups.

Quite outrageous really. You would think it a problem if *anyone* thinks people who are impaired, people who need help from their community's social services, should be discriminated against. But when the person doing the discriminating is an elected councillor and cabinet member and a member of the Greater London Assembly (the body which is in charge of Transport For London) it is a much bigger problem.

You would naturally fear that Brian Coleman's outrageous personal views about disabled people could easily be translated into him not providing transport services to vulnerable people.

We are talking about the council-run adapted vans or ambulances stopping mornings and afternoons in our streets, with patient drivers and support staff picking up those with severe physical disabilities or with learning disabilities from their homes to take them to day centres, to schools and colleges or to social activities. Without this accessible transport upon which disabled people depend, they are likely to be house bound and isolated or pay a fortune from meagre benefits if they want to go out.

I'm scared when I realise that vulnerable people in Barnet are in the hands of someone who despises them. I am even more scared when I realise that present in the same meeting was Kate Kennally, Barnet Council's Director of Adult Social Care and

Health, and that she didn't say a word of protest in response to Coleman's derogatory remark!

Kate Kennally is the highly paid officer employed to overview the services for vulnerable people in Barnet, to make sure they are well protected and taken care of. She is the one who has ultimate responsibility for the council's duty of care toward adults with disabilities.

I am scared to think of the risk Coleman poses to people with disabilities, but even more than that I am scared to think what protection people with disabilities have in the borough of Barnet if the top person who is in charge of their well-being seems to have so little respect for disabled people and does not defend their rights.

Maria Nash, a veteran disability rights campaigner and a wheelchair user herself, says that disabled people are used to being insulted and disrespected. That is a shocking reality.

Should we, people with and without impairments, residents of Barnet, continue to accept this attitude and not challenge it?

Councillor Rajput's Local Account

Councillor Rajput, Barnet Council's Cabinet Member for Adult Social Services, sent a letter to voluntary sector organisations on 24 October, aimed at "all Barnet residents who have an interest in social care services", asking "for their thoughts about what we should include in our first local report on adult social care services."

He asked for replies by 19 November! A "Local Account" is a non-statutory self-assessment of the council's performance, according to guidelines from the national Department of Health.

If the Council is indeed so serious about this exercise, why do they not explain that this is its purpose? And why do they give us so little notice?

That is why we, Barnet Alliance for Public Services, decided not to collude with this empty gesture.

Instead, we submitted a number of questions to the Cabinet's budget meeting on 3 November challenging their plans for adult social care. The questions and replies are available on the Barnet Alliance website: <http://alturl.com/fwc6u>.

If Councillor Rajput wants to know more about his own Adult Social Services he could start by reading the data collected by the Campaign Against Destruction of Disabled Support Services. (See below for an example.) It paints a bleak picture.

What happens when you increase adult social care charges

● A single man suffering from multiple illnesses, including stroke, heart disease and cancer, will have to give up at least some of his personal care when the savings he is using to pay the newly imposed "Fairer Contributions" charges run out in a few weeks' time: "They are going to kill me, they will simply kill me."

● A single woman with a heart condition told her care-worker to come only twice a week instead of five days a week to help her with bathing and cooking: "I am trying to do the cooking by myself, but it takes me very long as I feel very weak and dizzy, so I'm scared that one day the effort will cause a deterioration in my health and I will fall down."

● A woman with limited mobility, following complex physical illnesses, who has an overdraft and no savings, wonders why she was assessed as having to pay for her care-worker: "I am just not going to pay!"

● An elderly woman with MS, who cannot afford to give up her care-worker as she is

dependent on the personal care, says: "I used to be able to go out from time to time, visit friends, buy little gifts for my grandchildren, but now I can't afford even a small bunch of flowers for my friend and I don't like to come empty handed, so I'm not seeing my friends any more. These cruel council bosses think we should live isolated within our four walls just because we are disabled!"

● A dementia carer, whose husband used to go to a day centre four days a week, is now reduced to only twice a week. She says: "Without these two days at the day centre we would end up breaking up - I simply don't have the patience any more, I need this respite when he is in the day centre, and he is enjoying it too!" (Her husband nods in confirmation.)

● A dementia carer, whose husband decided to reduce the number of days in a day centre due to the charges, and who needs to keep working long after her retirement age (a recurring phenomenon) to fund the necessary services, says: "Leaving him on his own for so many hours when I go to work increases the risk; I never know what he will be up to when he is alone, or whether I may find him dead when I come home!"

Information gathered in interviews by CADDSS - see Campaigns column.

Campaigns

Here we offer a space to Barnet campaigns to tell us about their issues and update us on their activities. To submit an article or introduce yourselves, please email barnetalliance@gmail.com.

Save Our Support Services!

The Campaign Against Destruction of Disabled Support Services (CADDSS) was started by carers and service users unhappy about changes in their support service provision, or who had begun to be charged for the support services they receive, a new charge amounting in some cases to several hundred pounds a month.

There is also a feeling of frustration among service-users and carers in Barnet with the consultations held by the council. These have not been meaningful or genuine and in many cases feel as if decisions have already been made prior to the consultation, that the process is just a tick-box exercise and a rubber stamp.

Protest and challenge:

- The disrespect and disregard of service users and carers by the council's chief officers and councillors
- The flawed consultations and/or the failure to conduct meaningful consultations with service-users and carers
- The "Fairer Contributions" policy and the fact that service users' needs are not being fully met. There are growing concerns that the more widespread privatisation of social services gets, the less people's needs will be met.

CADDSS aims to achieve:

- A review of the Fairer Contributions

Save Our Support Services - survey

Residents of Barnet,

If you can answer "yes" to any of these questions, please contact CADDSS to share your experiences with many others in a similar position and see what we can do together:

- Have you been adversely affected by Barnet Social Care policies?
- Have you been required to pay for services you used to get based on need and not ability to pay?
- Have any of the services you need closed down or been reduced?
- Have you had to cut back on care workers due to the cost?
- Do you find that your quality of life is compromised by any changes to social care provision?
- Do you feel frustrated, abandoned and alone in the face of all the changes to Social Care in Barnet?

A newly formed action group of social services users and their carers wants to collect the stories of disabled and elderly people in order to turn them into action, so that together we can challenge unjust policies that are affecting the well-being of vulnerable people in Barnet.

CAMPAIGN AGAINST DESTRUCTION OF DISABLED SUPPORT SERVICES

Please return to CADDSS1@gmail.com or telephone 07957 486379 for more details.

To contact "Our Barnet" and the Barnet Alliance for Public Services with your stories or views email: barnetalliance@gmail.com