

# **Barnet Challenge**

## Report on the findings of a Call for Evidence for the London Borough of Barnet

July 2014

# Executive Summary

During 2014 Barnet Council will review its priorities and spending across all services. The council commissioned the independent research organisation and consultancy OPM to run an online call for evidence to hear views of organisations, businesses and individual residents on the future of Barnet, how the council can ensure that public services best meet the needs of the borough, how the council can change and how organisations and individuals can play a part in meeting Barnet's challenges during this time. OPM has analysed the responses to the call for evidence on the council's behalf. This report presents the findings.

Evidence was sought on two main topic areas:

- ideas on the future of public services in Barnet, and how organisations and individuals can play a role in providing some of these services
- ideas on how the council could be more entrepreneurial and generate more income.

Twenty individual residents and seven organisations responded to the survey between March and June 2014.

## *Summary of responses*

Throughout the survey quite a few individual respondents indicated they would appreciate getting more **involved with council decision-making** and services, e.g. through scrutiny groups, or other consultation activities. Some respondents, however, voiced some scepticism about whether the council would actually listen.

Both organisations and individual residents indicated that the council could do more to **tap into their knowledge and experience**, to help inform council decisions and models of service provision.

Overall, the organisations that responded seem to have **an appetite to work more closely with the council**, and indicated a variety of ways in which this could happen, including in an advisory role, organising working groups, and piloting and testing new models of services and other initiatives.

Some **individual respondents made suggestions about how the council could save money, or how they could help out**. The majority of these

suggestions were relatively abstract, but there were also a few clear cut proposals.

There were several suggestions for where individuals and organisations would envisage **support from the council in making this happen**, of note the provision of financial support, venues and meeting spaces, and support in outreach and advertising.

Both individual respondents and organisations provided a wide range of ideas for supporting income generation. Suggestions included, for example, the council better **utilising its facilities**, to **increase their enforcement role** and the collection of fines, **increasing council tax**, and **making more use of the voluntary sector** to provide support.

Both individual respondents and organisations provided **a wide range of ideas for how the council could generate income**, as well as some suggestions for the council to utilise their skills and assets more. Some would appreciate **more information from the council** on what this might look like. Others felt the council should be undertaking this work themselves.

A majority of those who responded as an **individual resident strongly disagreed with the council's approach to work as a commissioning council**. They didn't believe that outsourcing would save money in the long run, and were worried that it would impact on resident's ability to hold service providers to account. Another common criticism was that it's the council's responsibility to carry out these services, not that of residents. The **organisational responses to Barnet as a commissioning council were slightly more mixed**, with some agreeing, and some disagreeing with the council's approach.

For organisations, a common issue that came up across their responses was around how the procurement and commissioning policies of the 'commissioning council' could **support and enable community and voluntary organisations to bid for, and provide services**.

### *Next steps*

The findings from the call for evidence will go to the new council committees to help inform their decisions.