

Full Council, 30 October 2018
Motion: Cllr Reema Patel
Brexit and Barnet

Council notes that a recently published London School of Economics (LSE) report, 'Debating Brexit at a local level: a mixed methods comparative study,' has identified that, out of a range of geographical areas considered as subject of the study, the NHS and social care was likely to suffer the greatest impact in Barnet, given the extent of reliance on an EU-national workforce and the often challenging and low paid nature of the work involved. In addition the LSE report notes that:

'Other jobs at risk were related to Council services. For instance, the difficulty in recruiting administrative staff was pointed out by those interviewed who worked or currently work with the Council. Moreover, a UNISON representative for Barnet, who also identified staff shortage as a key concern after Brexit, stressed that the waste and recycling services could be severely affected after Brexit, because there is a large proportion of East European workers in these jobs, who are uncertain about their status. Overall, local government services are already subject to staff shortages and face difficulties in recruitment. Further legal limitations to the ability of migrant workers to come to Barnet, compounded by the perceived unwelcoming environment for migrants, could further widen the gap between labour demand and supply and impact Barnet in a negative way.'

Beyond the impact on public services, the LSE report also finds that Brexit may have a significant impact on local businesses in Barnet - given the nature and extent to which disposable income is spent on various goods and services provided by local businesses in the area.

In addition to the findings from this report, council notes the wider national picture is contributing to the pressures placed on local public services and business. In particular, the process of leaving the European Union ("Brexit") is as yet unresolved, due to botched negotiations by the Leader of the Conservative Party despite the cut off date of 30 March 2019 rapidly approaching.

There is little clarity or transparency as to what form 'Brexit' will take, which is hampering the Council's ability to address and mitigate against risks. As such, Council expresses significant concern at the lack of certainty and resolution on the issue of what the precise nature of Brexit will be - and draws attention to the extent of negative impact that uncertainty is having upon the Council's ability to prepare for and mitigate risks arising from Brexit. This compounds the pressures placed by over a decade of austerity and year on year cuts to public services; placing those in need of support from the Council at significant risk. Council notes that these developments take place against a backdrop of growing right-wing populism across the world, which has sown the seeds for the creation of "illiberal democracies", contributing to an unwelcoming atmosphere for migrants and other minority groups.

Council expresses concern that the failure of the Conservative Party to lead the debate on Brexit and arrive at a workable deal has created a political environment which gives legitimacy to those groups and individuals who would undermine British values and international civil rights for their own personal and political gain.

Council moves that:

- LB Barnet commissions and publishes a risk register that contains a detailed analysis of the impact Brexit may have under a range of different deal scenarios, so officers are prepared to safeguard public services and citizens whatever the outcome. This would mirror the risk register recently published by councils such as Pembrokeshire and aid officers in their planning for different outcomes; and

- LB Barnet fully discloses the effects of Brexit on recruitment and retention of EU staff in Barnet to date and;

- where EU staff remain employed by Barnet Council, LB Barnet ensures that staff have access to legal advice and financial support to understand and access their rights (including applying for settled and pre-settled status, obtaining permanent residency and/or citizenship).

Under Full Council Procedure Rule 17.17: if my item is not dealt with by the end of the meeting I ask that it be voted upon at the Council meeting.