



IT'S THUMBS DOWN TO COUNCIL'S 'SELL-OFF'

UNISON



Huge protest at 'privatisation' of services

By Mary McConnell

HUNDREDS of trade union members, residents and council workers have staged a rally against proposals to privatise huge swathes of council services.

Protesters gathered as the members of Barnet Council's cabinet met to rubber-stamp the latest phase of the Future Shape Of The Council programme at Barnet House, High Road, Whetstone.

The report outlines the way in which major council services, such as refuse collection, parks maintenance and upkeep of roads, could be managed and delivered by a joint body made up of private sector companies and council employees.

John Burgess, the branch secretary of Barnet Unison which represents many council workers, said: "I thought the rally was excellent. There

was such a big mix of council staff members, residents and people from other organisations. It was a great day for democratic engagements."

After the rally hundreds of protesters crammed into the meeting room to hear what the members of the cabinet had to say.

Mike Freer, leader of the council, said: "The status quo is not an option.

"But this is not a blueprint to outsourcing or off-shoring services – all options have to be considered. We will not be recreating the current structure of the council under a private company.

"Continued underfunding is the biggest threat to council services and we will look at other local authorities and see how they have retained services while improving quality and cost efficiency."

Mr Freer enraged trade unionists by accusing them of regurgitating anti-government

rhetoric from the 1970s. Mr Burgess said: "I was disgusted with how we were received in the cabinet meeting. That does not reflect relations between the unions and the council. Now we are waiting to see what the plans are, and where we fit in to the whole process."

Alison Moore, leader of Barnet's Labour group, said: "Until Mr Freer comes clean about the role of the private sector in delivering services, our campaign against mass privatisation will continue."

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