

Underfunded and Under Pressure: Why Citizens Advice Barnet's Employment Casework Service Needs Urgent Support

February 2026

Executive Summary:

- Citizens Advice Barnet is the only free provider of casework and complex advice in employment in Barnet.
- Our employment casework service prioritises those who are most in need and highly vulnerable.
- The team handles complex cases, which often involve challenging exploitative practices or unpaid wages.
- Our expert team, headed by our employment solicitor, David, has a 100% success rate.
- Employment advice services have been affected by the lasting impact of the Legal Aid, Sentencing and Punishment of Offenders Act 2012 (LASPO) which removed most employment issues from legal aid funding.
- Due to financial pressures, if we do not secure further funding for our employment casework, we will have to close the service at the end of March.
- The government is bringing in some positive changes to employment rights with the Employment Rights Act, though the changes were slimmed down as the Bill passed through parliament.
- Any impact of changes to employment law will be limited by the lack of free employment advice services in Barnet: if people can't access support to uphold their rights, they can't uphold them, and rogue employers will be able to exploit workers.
- It is vital that Citizens Advice Barnet secures funding so the employment casework service can continue to support vulnerable clients.

Introduction:

Government policy has recently shifted towards protecting individuals' employment rights. However, this comes more than a decade after legal aid funding was withdrawn for most employment cases and at a time when the few remaining free services, including Citizens Advice Barnet's employment law casework, are struggling to survive due to insufficient funding. Following the closure of the Barnet Law Service in 2014, Citizens Advice Barnet took on some of its staff and functions, including David, the centre's lead solicitor who specialises in employment. This now makes us the only free provider of casework and complex advice on employment law in Barnet. Furthermore, three of our five neighbouring London Boroughs have no free employment casework service. Our vital employment casework supports vulnerable individuals who have no other means of accessing justice. Without it, governmental changes are likely to have limited impact in Barnet, as people will be unable to access support to uphold their rights, leaving them at risk of exploitation by employers. It is essential that we secure funding for our expert employment team.

What the Employment Casework Service Does:

Our free employment casework service prioritises those most in need, including those with a disability, language barrier or racialised ethnicity. The service enables vulnerable workers to access dignified working conditions, the pay they are entitled to and find remedies, especially through settlements. Employment casework can be accessed through our comprehensive triage assessment via phone, email or face-to-face at key community locations. Through this we can identify the nature and urgency of individuals' problems as well as identifying their vulnerability

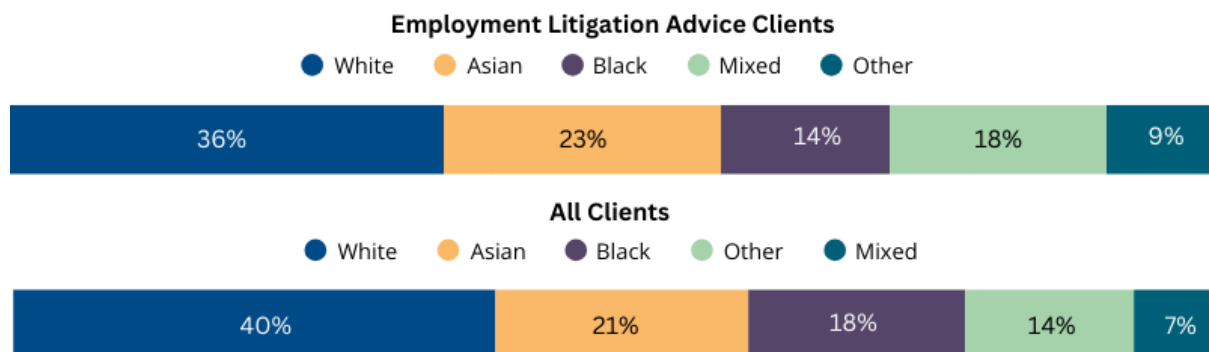
and needs and how we can best support them. The team prioritises the most complex casework which often takes years to resolve, focusing on helping those with intersectional disadvantages (73%), interconnected issues (89%) and no other means to access justice. As a result of this and our limited resources, we can only support around 30 clients a year.

The most complex cases involve multiple claimants; significant ongoing engagement with other agencies, Tribunal/Court proceedings and negotiations; clients who remain employed by the disputed employer; and other issues, such as housing (tied accommodation), insolvency and/or company law (an employer in liquidation/administration), and immigration. Almost all cases involve challenging exploitative practices, such as disability (53%) or other (21%) discrimination. However, most clients first seek help securing unpaid wages and are often unaware of the extent to which they have been exploited.

We have an expert employment team who achieve a 100% success rate. Our employment solicitor, David assesses every case referred before deciding whether to take it on to ensure we support those who need the service most. David, who works 0.4 FTE, has almost 25 years' experience as an employment solicitor. He was the supervising solicitor of the Barnet Law Centre and has a previous background in union representation. Our employment team also includes a 0.4 FTE employment caseworker, Kath who supports David. Kath worked as a paralegal with a focus on immigration and employment law, for the British Medical Association as a Senior Policy Advisor in the International Department, and for 20 years as a Senior Information Officer at national Citizens Advice. Our staff are supported by a volunteer, and we further increase our reach through free training and second-tier support.

Employment Casework Client Demographics:

People from racialised backgrounds are over represented amongst employment casework clients, making up at least 64% of such clients as opposed to 60% amongst all clients we see. This is especially true of Asian ethnicities, representing 23% of all employment casework clients, and those from mixed backgrounds, making up 18% of these clients, compared to 14% amongst all clients.



Why are Employment Services at Risk

Employment advice services have been outstripped by demand for several years. This can be attributed largely to the Legal Aid, Sentencing and Punishment of Offenders Act 2012 (LASPO). The Act removed most employment issues (except discrimination) from legal aid funding. Furthermore, even for discrimination cases, legal aid funding is limited by means-testing, provider capacity and geographic coverage. This inaccessibility of free advice for employment issues means that many people bring claims themselves as litigants in person. Often individuals

resort to abandoning their claims due to financial strains, social, emotional and physical distress. Access to justice has been dramatically reduced in the wake of this Act and this has meant free employment advice services are a vital but stretched resource.¹

Funding to such services has waned due to factors such as austerity during the 2010s and Brexit. After 2010, councils' core funding was reduced and remains well below 2010 levels in real-terms, forcing many councils to reduce grant funding for advice services.² Barnet Council has been particularly hard hit, losing around 50% of its funding since 2010, severely limiting its ability to fund advice services, although it has continued to commission and fund the Community Advice Service: generalist advice delivered by Citizens Advice Barnet.³ Furthermore, other charities providing employment advice services have been hit in recent years by the impact of Brexit. The European Social Fund (ESF) has been lost, which many employment support charities relied on. Whilst it was replaced by the UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF), this did not fully make up the shortfall. Three quarters of employment services charities contacted by Civil Society Media said they receive less funding since the ESF was cut.⁴ These funding reductions mean that employment advice services increasingly rely on short-term or project funding as opposed to consistent ongoing funding.

Citizens Advice Barnet recently re-applied for funding for the employment casework service but was unsuccessful, as the funder, which had funded the service for over ten years, had suffered significant depletion of their own funds. Funding for the service ended in the summer of 2025 and we have been funding it from our reserves since. However, we cannot continue doing so in the next financial year, and if further funding is not secured by the end of March, we will have to close this service and risk rogue employers acting with impunity.

Changes to Employment Law Under the Current Government and Impact:

The current Labour Government has made inroads for potential improvements in employment rights for individuals, having introduced the Employment Rights Bill to Parliament on 10 October 2024.⁵ Following gridlock in the House of Lords, the Employment Rights Act passed on 18 December 2025, with many changes expected to be implemented throughout 2026 and 2027.⁶

The key provisions of the Employment Rights Act include: applying parental, paternity and bereavement rights from day one; removing the lower earnings threshold and waiting period for statutory sick pay; and greater protections regarding working conditions for those on zero-hours contracts.⁷ The Act also promises to restrict fire and re-hire practices where employees are re-hired on worse terms, and strengthens protections for those who are pregnant or on maternity leave. A new Fair Work Agency (FWA) will be created to enforce rights such as sick pay.⁸

The Employment Rights Bill encountered significant challenges progressing through the House of Lords. After its passing through the House of Commons, the Bill would have removed the two-year qualifying period for unfair dismissal protections so workers will gain unfair dismissal protection from day one of employment; it also aimed to end zero-hours contracts, ensuring

¹ Taylor & Francis. [LASPO 2012: Ten years and beyond – a socio-legal study of the impact of legal aid cuts on service providers in England and Wales](#)

² Institute for Fiscal Studies. [How have English councils' funding and spending changed? 2010 to 2024](#)

³ Barnet London Borough. [Cabinet to close £29 million funding gap in future spending plan review](#)

⁴ Civil Society Media. [Employment services charities worse off since EU funding loss, report says](#)

⁵ GOV.UK. [Employment Rights Act 2025: factsheets](#)

⁶ Acas. [Employment Rights Act](#)

⁷ Parliament UK. [Employment Rights Bill: Explanatory Notes](#)

⁸ GOV.UK. [Roadmap unveiled to boost rights for half of all UK workers and provide certainty to employers](#)

guaranteed hours that reflect hours regularly worked. Peers particularly opposed these changes.⁹ On unfair dismissals, Conservative peer Baron Sharpe of Epsom said "Making unfair dismissal a day one right will inhibit hiring, and this concern is heightened in the current labour market context of falling jobs." On zero hours contracts Liberal Democrat Lord Fox said: "For the smaller and medium-sized employer it is an added burden that doesn't need to be there if the employee does not wish to leave zero hours."¹⁰ These aspects have therefore been removed from the Act, representing a shift in the likely positive impacts the Act will have.

The impact of the Employment Rights Act has been reduced, and funding cuts to employment advice services leave them too overstretched to fully protect the remaining rights that the Act promises to uphold. Vulnerable people such as those that our employment casework service see need access to free employment representation to ensure these rights are protected. Without this access, the Act will bring limited change to the experiences of vulnerable people facing employment injustice.

Conclusion

Our employment casework service provides crucial, tailored advice to often vulnerable individuals who lack access to private representation. The expert service supports those who need it most through often complicated cases which can span several years. Employment services such as ours have been at risk for several years, stemming from the LASPO 2012 removing most employment cases from eligibility for legal aid. Austerity and Brexit have squeezed councils' funding for employment advice services and reduced outside funding such as the ELF.

Whilst the Government is trying to implement changes to employment law, such as the removal of the two-year qualifying period for unfair dismissal protections, via the Employment Rights Bill; the reality is that if people can't access support to uphold their rights, they won't be able to and rogue employers will be able to exploit them. Funding for our free employment casework service came to an end last summer and we will have to close it in March if no further funding is found. This would mean the irreplaceable loss of our employment solicitor, David, and his team's expertise. It would also leave vulnerable clients in the borough unsupported and create new barriers to the protection of rights that the Government's Employment Rights Act is designed to secure.

The uncertainty of the continuity of our employment casework service places our vulnerable clients at considerable risk. It is vital that Citizen's Advice Barnet remains able to provide support for the complex, lengthy and emotionally draining process of bringing claims against employers and can continue to aid vulnerable workers in their journey to justice.

⁹ Parliament UK. [Employment Rights Bill](#)

¹⁰ Sky News. [Workers' rights bill set for parliamentary 'ping pong'](#)

Case Studies:

Jay is a 58 year old man living with his wife in rented accommodation in the borough of Barnet. He was employed as a waiter in a restaurant in northwest London for 21 years. In April 2024, Jay's employer announced that he would be moving abroad and that another local businessman would take over the restaurant. The new employer took over the restaurant, and for a while Jay and the other staff carried on working as normal. However after 6 weeks, the new employer announced that he had decided to close the restaurant. Two days later the restaurant closed permanently and all the staff, including Jay, lost their jobs. Jay and his colleagues weren't given redundancy pay, notice pay or holiday pay.

Jay was distraught as a result of this sudden loss of his income. Having worked in restaurants for many years, he was not trained or qualified to do other types of work, and he struggled to find a new job. The specialist employment team at Citizens Advice Barnet took on Jay's case, with our solicitor acting as his formal legal representative. We lodged a grievance and an appeal with both the original employer and the new employer. When the employers ignored this correspondence, our team pursued claims on Jay's behalf in the Employment Tribunal over unfair dismissal, failure to pay redundancy pay and notice pay, and several other breaches of Jay's employment rights. Our solicitor represented Jay at a Preliminary Hearing in the Tribunal, and started preparing the case for a three day trial next year.

However, after somewhat complex negotiations with the lawyer acting for the second employer, Jay's Employment Tribunal claims were settled for a payment of £12,000. This payment has greatly eased Jay's immediate financial difficulties. Jay has undertaken training to become a licensed security guard, and hopes to be able to secure new work shortly. Jay has expressed his gratitude to Citizens Advice Barnet for taking on his case and obtaining a successful outcome.

Alis was a supermarket assistant who was subject to a workplace misconduct investigation which triggered her anxiety. Due to her anxiety, the client's behaviour towards the investigation initiated the dismissal procedure. The client was dismissed without notice or pay in lieu of notice.

The employment team then began a claim on the Alis' behalf, where the employer was being sued for wrongful dismissal, unfair dismissal and discrimination due to the client's disability. The team started the ACAS early conciliation process and proceeded to continue preparing the claim for tribunal. These actions led to negotiations ensuing between Alis and the employers, which ultimately led to a settlement. The employment team succeeded in assisting the client in receiving a £3,000 settlement for this matter.