

Response from Haringey Learning Disabilities Partnership Board 15 December 2014

To Cllr Peter Morton, Health and Wellbeing lead, Haringey Council

Response from Haringey Learning Disabilities Partnership Board members to the proposed cuts in adult social care

Dear Cllr Morton,

As members of the Haringey Learning Disabilities Partnership Board, we are shocked and alarmed at the plans for major cuts to services for adults with severe learning disabilities. Planned cuts include:

- Closure of 3 of the 4 day centres for people with LD/autism;
- Closure of Linden Road residential home
- Reductions in spending on individual care packages and residential placements for vulnerable adults of just under £10m (around a fifth of the budget);
- Reduction in the number of social workers by a quarter;
- Removal of council funding for daytime activities for people living in residential homes and supported housing.

We believe that these proposals represent an abandonment of the council's commitment to protect its vulnerable residents. Furthermore, we believe that, if these cuts are implemented, the Council will be unable to comply with its legal responsibilities under the Care Act 2014. We are fully in favour of exploring new and better ways of enabling people with LD to live fuller lives and we accept the importance of promoting *prevention and early intervention* (as stated in the Corporate Plan). However we believe that the proposed cuts in funding for services will achieve *exactly the opposite result*. Evidence from research carried out by the LDPB (see below) shows that these budget cuts will make the lives of people with LD much harder, and put family carers under more pressure, leading to a greater potential for family breakdown, abuse and neglect.

Impact of the cuts

The Corporate Plan asserts that that the 'impact on residents' of cutting £30 million (a third) from the adults social care budget will be 'improved well being'. However, no evidence has been put forward by the Council to back up this wholly unrealistic assertion.

The LDPB undertook substantial research in May 2014 into the views of people in Haringey with LD, their family carers, and staff who provide LD services. This research has now been published.* Our study found that:

- People value highly existing local services such as day centres, social clubs, and supported housing. People with LD said they would be 'upset', 'sad', 'angry', 'anxious', 'lonely' and 'isolated' if services were withdrawn. Many said that cuts to their services would have an adverse impact on their health.
- Carers regard these services as essential to their own well-being, as well as to the well-being of the person they care for. A key finding was that cutting services that help carers to carry on supporting people at home would not actually save money - because it would result in many carers no longer being willing or able to fulfil this role, with the result that more expensive services, such as 24-hour or residential care, would then be needed.

Closure of day centres

Three out of the four centres providing day activities for people with LD are set to close, with the loss of skilled, experienced and dedicated teams of staff. The Corporate Plan asserts that 'community-based activities' will replace the provision currently provided by day centres. The plan offers no evidence that there will be capacity to support the genuine inclusion of people with LD in mainstream community activities in the absence of a centre from which this can be organised. We fear that these closures will result in more people with LD – and in particular those with more complex needs and challenging behaviour – being stuck at home. The resulting isolation and boredom are likely to have adverse effects on their physical and mental health – as well as imposing a greater burden on families and carers.

After ceasing to fund access to day centres for people in residential care and supported housing, the council expects housing providers to support daytime activities, but without providing additional funding. Some providers may be unable to provide such services, and it is not clear how the council could monitor these provisions – especially in view of the proposed cuts in social worker staff.

Cuts to individual care packages

Under the Care Act it is unlawful for local authorities to use reviews of individual care packages as a mechanism for reducing support - *unless* there has been a reduction in the actual level of need. Yet the council is proposing to reduce by a fifth the budget for such packages. It does not explain why it expects the levels of need to fall so dramatically.

Driving down contract costs: a 'race to the bottom'

The council aims to drive down the costs of commissioned services to match those of the cheapest in London. There is likely to result in a 'race to the bottom' in terms of quality of services. The Plan does not give details of how it can ensure that the quality of care is maintained.

London Living Wage

The quality of care is intrinsically linked to the training, skill and commitment of the workers delivering that care, and decent pay and conditions are an important element of this. The Plan makes no reference to the council's previously stated aim to achieve London Living Wage accreditation. Has this commitment been abandoned?

Access to and objectivity of assessments

The LDPB currently receives regular reports from the carers' forum about the great difficulty families are experiencing in gaining access to social workers, and about delays in assessments (notably in relation to 'transition' to adult services). The plan to cut social work numbers by a quarter will only make this situation worse. We are also concerned that social work managers are being urged to have 'uppermost in their minds' the need to make budget savings, potentially to the detriment of their professional duty to the individual client.

Access to advocacy

We are concerned about plans to reduce advocacy services:

- The new contract allocates only £50k for all advocacy needs of vulnerable groups, including people with LD, mental health service users, and dementia sufferers, and their carers. This is inadequate to meet the requirements stipulated in the Care Act.
- The remit of the new advocacy support offer is narrower and more restricted than the previous arrangements. People will be unable to refer themselves but will have to be vetted by the council, which has a clear conflict of interest in cases where people are seeking advice in relation to challenging council decisions.

Provision of support for the Partnership Board

We would like to place on record our shock and dismay at the way the decision to withdraw the contract providing support for LD members on the LDPB has been handled by the council. The lack of consultation, lack of information and hasty decision-making have been distressing for all involved and have resulted in the loss of valued and skilled advocates. (We note that the Interim Director of Adult Social Care has made an apology to the board in relation to this matter.)

Consultation period is too short

We are concerned that the council has arranged a very short time for consultation over these proposals. A consultation period arranged over the Christmas break makes meaningful consultation with those affected by these cuts very difficult.

We urge the Cabinet to reconsider the proposed cuts to services for vulnerable adults, and we request the following:

- Clarification of the council's position on the London Living Wage.
- A commitment that all families and users of services are *routinely* informed of their legal rights under the Care Act before any changes to support packages are considered. They should be informed that reviews *cannot* be used to cut support *unless* there is evidence of a change in the level of the person's needs. They should also be told how they can challenge council decisions on care packages.
- That the council provides (anonymised) data to the LDPB on the results of reviews to care packages, indicating changes to levels of funding and support.
- That the council commissions independent research into the impact of any cuts/changes in service provision on vulnerable residents and publishes the results on its website.
- That the council publishes data on delays to assessments of eligibility for adults social care, and sets a target for length of time from an assessment being first requested to it being completed (under the Care Act this must be timely and reasonable).
- An extension to the consultation period on the draft Corporate Plan.

Yours sincerely,

Sarah Miller and Mary Langan

on behalf of the carers, service users and voluntary sector representatives on the Haringey Learning Disability Partnership Board

cc

Cllr Claire Kober

David Lammy MP

Lynne Featherstone MP

*'The impact of cuts in services for people with learning disabilities in an inner city borough', in *Learning Disability Today*. November/December 2014.