

Catherine West says:

When George Osborne stood up at party conference and announced tax cuts, the upshot was more budget cuts somewhere down the line. And as we have seen, these cuts end up at the door of already stretched local councils.

Following changes to the funding formula, boroughs with higher deprivation, areas where the need is greatest, have had proportionately greater cuts to government grant. Haringey, the 13th most deprived borough in the country, is facing cuts in the next financial year of a further 5.8%. Wealthier Tory-run Richmond, which has suffered barely any cut to its government grant since 2010, will get an extra 1.7% next year.

At a meeting with families and carers of autistic and learning disabled residents in Haringey, I heard first hand what this means for the most vulnerable and their families. These cuts will be devastating.

Cuts to residential services and day centres lead to social isolation and mental breakdown. They effect the whole family: otherwise economically active adults are forced to stop working to become full time carers. And they lose the vital support that allows them to care properly. I fully support the National Autistic Society's aims of protecting services, day centres and support packages for those with learning disabilities and autism.

Government cuts have been pushed through in the name of an austerity programme that has not worked: the deficit has only been reduced by a third and the debt has doubled. This is not surprising. Coalition government policies have resulted in inequality growing (we are now the most unequal country in the OECD) and this has led to the UK doing worse on a range of measures, from infant mortality to the economy itself.

The damage that will be done in the next 5 years, should these failed policies continue, is quite terrifying. And the cuts we are seeing to services for the most vulnerable will only get worse. Labour will not have more money to spend. But we will certainly spend it differently. The election in May is critically important.