

Subject: Strong opposition to Haringey's proposed cuts to adults with LD and autism

Dear councillor,

I am the Branch Officer for Haringey Autism, the local branch of the National Autistic Society. We are over 500 families with children or adult children on the autistic spectrum.

I am also the parent of a young man aged 20 with autism, ADHD, a severe anxiety disorder and a bi-polar disorder, who receives a supported living service jointly from social care and the NHS continuing care fund.

I note the extremely drastic cuts proposed to adult services for those with learning difficulties and autism with extreme alarm.

Most adults with autism already receive an appallingly poor and meagre service in Haringey, with most receiving nothing at all as they are ruled out by being considered not severe or critical, or as having mental health as their main presenting difficulty or having an IQ above 70. Even the basic demands of the Autism Act which made it illegal for councils not to address the needs of those on the spectrum whose main needs are not an IQ below 70 or mental health have not been addressed in any way at all. And mental health services outside LD have no ability at all to meet the needs of those with autism or Asperger's, as I am again continually told by distraught parents.

Those who do receive a service often receive a fraction of what is needed, especially if they live at home with their parents who tell me constantly how stressed they are by the lack of support received.

There are assumptions made in the proposals which anything working in the field knows to be less than honest at best, and downright nonsense in many cases.

There are not 20 percent on average savings to be made on the already meagre packages of adults with LD and autism, unless they are to be looked after by the least able and poorest paid support workers that can be sourced. Attempts by Haringey Social services to tender out packages to the lowest bids have resulted in some very poor results including an adult respite service that cannot hold onto any staff.

Most support workers are already poorly paid for an often extremely taxing job but work in a field where it is vital to the adults with autism and learning difficulties that there is continuity. A change of staff can precipitate enormous anxiety in an adult with autism and create mental health issues and challenging behaviours which can be vastly more expensive to address. Poorly untrained, poorly paid and unmotivated staff working with a non verbal, challenging adult in what is often a lone-working situation, with cut hours for managers overseeing them, are a perfect recipe for abuse.

We should not aim for the bottom of the barrel and disguise this under misleading words like 'the better performing authorities'. Rather the middle of the field is probably a much safer and better place to be.

Regarding the closure of day centres, there is huge disquiet among parents who have already seen their adult children suffer great stress being moved into the Roundway service and having to adjust to it, and are now told another big change is on the way with the likely closure of all the day centres, bar one, which doubtless will get tendered out again to the lowest bid made with all its accompanying shortfalls.

Parents from Roundway Day centre for adults with autism who had a meeting in December with Beverley Tarka about the cuts but were astonishingly not told about the proposed closure of the centre during the talk. Two of them, Pam du Pres and Margaret Arhin, told me that they were informed only three days later by another parent/carer who attends the Autism Working Group, that this was the case. I note also that the consultation proposal package sent out to parents for their comments also does not mention the closure of the day centres, though this is what the parents are being asked to back or oppose. It appears highly duplicitous as a consultation. It has also been over the month of Christmas and New Year when there is little time for parents to make an informed decision or organise opposition effectively.

Personally I did not get my invitation to the series of meetings ending the 9th of January until the 10th of January.

There is absolutely not a wealth of employment or supported employment opportunities for the adults deemed severe and critical and who receive a service. In fact even to achieve a 'volunteering' position for a couple of hours a week is only possible for most with a support worker and then you have to pay for the volunteering position as it takes up the time and resources of the place offering volunteering positions.

'Enablement' is a concept which was created by an academic and aimed at infirm or elderly. It was never designed, as she has clearly said to us, for adults with LD or autism and should not be thought of as a possibility for this.

Anyone with autism who can make use of the community is of course doing so already. There are not extra possibilities of a huge world of easy, tolerant and free venues out there, with happy volunteers for our young or older autistic people, who can shout, hit, swear, run off, grab food, smear faeces and damage property and generally can alarm the public. Most parents will tell you the only contact they have with their neighbours is that of receiving their complaints about noise, not offers of help.

Please do not be deceived by the suggestions in these consultations and proposals that somehow a better life is awaiting our adult children despite or because of these cuts. Nothing could be further from the truth, and the hard pressed and heroic parent/carers of adults with autism, often already themselves elderly and poor health deserve better from the local authority than this.

I note that other local authorities who have released their proposals for cuts have not hit out at the most vulnerable, those with LD and autism, to the extent that Haringey have. In fact as far as I have been able to assess, no borough has placed the percentage of the burden of the cuts on this part of their population as Haringey has. I attach our latest NAS review of other borough cuts for your information.

There are many ways to raise extra funds and to cuts budgets rather than aiming for our most vulnerable.

Yours sincerely,

Julia Wilkins,

Branch Officer, Haringey Autism