

Letter from Mary Langan to local councillors

30 December 2014

Re: Haringey Council plans to cut services for people with learning disabilities/autism

Dear Councillor,

I write as the mother of a young man with autism and severe learning difficulties – and also as an academic researcher who has recently published (in collaboration with Sarah Miller of the Markfield Project and the Haringey Learning Disabilities Partnership Board) a study of the impact of cuts in services for people with learning disabilities in Haringey. (See Learning Disability Today, Nov/Dec 2014 - attached)

Haringey council plans to close one residential care home (Linden) and three of the borough's four remaining day centres (including the only one – at Roundway – dedicated for people with autism). It also plans to cut spending on home care packages by around 20%, as well as cutting funding for the voluntary sector (by £1.4m) and reducing the number of social workers by 25%. It seems that Haringey has singled out vulnerable adults as the main target of its austerity measures: adult social services account for 40% of Haringey's proposed budget cuts of £74m.

These cuts have catastrophic implications for people like my son who rely on these services – and for families and other carers who will have to take on additional tasks of caring. Inevitably, some families will be unable to cope and their adult children will end up in institutions like Winterbourne View where they will be at high risk of neglect and abuse.

Haringey Council announced its budget plans a week before Christmas, with a consultation period that amounts to little over two working weeks, offering four one hour meetings in day centres. This is grossly inadequate to consult with affected individuals and their families – including, according to the Council's own figures, 648 adults with learning difficulties, as well as many more with dementia and other complex needs.

In its consultation document, Haringey Council proposes to 'review the appropriateness of care packages through a reablement approach'. But it offers no evidence that such an approach is appropriate to any of the groups currently using these services (including people with autism, learning disabilities, dementia). Nor has it indicated what 'alternatives to traditional approaches' it proposes – when the consequences of these cuts will simply be to increase the burden on families and other carers. By contrast, our research confirms the importance of day centres and other services to the health and wellbeing of service users and their families.

I appeal to you as our local councillor to stand up for residents like my son with learning disabilities and autism, many of whom are unable to speak up for themselves. Urge the Council to think again, rescind these cuts and engage in a proper consultation with service users and their families and carers about the sort of services that would improve the quality of their lives.

Yours sincerely, Mary Langan