

Correspondence Michael Fitzpatrick and Catherine West, Prospective Labour parliamentary candidate Hornsey and Wood Green

Michael to Catherine

31 December 2014

Many thanks for taking the time to hear our concerns about proposed cuts to Haringey Council services, that particularly target adult social care services. We have written to our local councillors and to the chairs of the relevant council committees - as well as to our current MP (and to the Ham and High). We would greatly appreciate your support as our prospective Labour parliamentary candidate for our campaign to protect crucial social services in the borough.

As the father of a young man with autism and severe learning disabilities, I am only too aware of how my son and many others rely on these services. As someone who has worked as a GP – in Hackney – for 30 years, I am also aware of the burden of caring already carried by many families, and I fear that further cuts to services that are already barely adequate will push many families to breaking point.

Whatever the financial challenges facing the council, they should not be resolved at the expense of some of the most vulnerable adults in the community, including those with autism, learning disabilities and other complex needs. Yet of the £74m cuts proposed by Haringey Council, 40% are to come from adult social services, and 25% of these cuts are specifically targeted on services for people with learning disabilities (who are also affected by major additional cuts in care packages).

The budget includes proposals to close three out of four day centres for adults, including the only dedicated service for people with autistic spectrum conditions in the borough (at Roundway). Residents whose needs have been assessed and are currently receiving appropriate services are likely to find that these will be drastically curtailed. Home care services may be transferred to lower-cost providers (employing staff at lower rates of pay, with lower levels of expertise and experience). This will not ensure services which are responsive or of a high quality. Nor will residents be safer: a 25% cut in the number of social workers removes another source of protection for people who are vulnerable to abuse and exploitation.

The council offers no evidence to support its assertion that its proposed ‘service re-design’ will enhance independence and wellbeing. All my experience as both parent and doctor suggests the contrary: adults denied access to day centres will be thrown back on the resources of their families, with a rapid turn-over of visiting carers, who are poorly-paid and poorly-trained. The likely result is an increase in anxiety and challenging behaviour, greater social isolation and deteriorating mental health (for both individuals and family carers).

I appeal to you as our Labour Party candidate to stand up for residents 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,

Michael Fitzpatrick

Catherine to Michael

2 January 2015

Dear Dr Fitzpatrick,

Thank you for your email and for coming to see me at Middle Lane before Christmas. As I am sure you are aware, following the £100million cut to Haringey's budget in 2010 by the Coalition government, the local authority has been asked to cut a further £70million this municipal year. The Local Government Association has warned that some councils will collapse under the weight of the cuts and Haringey is no exception.

I can confirm that I have written to the Council Leader with your specific concerns and I will forward you her reply.

I would like to join you or any others who might be attending local meetings to speak out against these austerity measures. Please could you let me know the details of those meetings so that I can put them into my schedule?

Many thanks again for writing to me with these pressing concerns.

Catherine West

Michael to Catherine

5 January 2015

Dear Catherine,

I am disappointed by your response to my letter and the concerns raised by Haringey Autism. Whereas your letter starts with the problems facing Haringey Council, we start from the problems facing people with autism and learning disabilities and their families. As our prospective Labour parliamentary candidate, this should also be your starting point. Instead you emphasise the scale of the Council's budget deficit – and even raise the spectre that the Council might collapse as a result (even Haringey Council itself has not suggested this). The implication is that we should share responsibility for the financial difficulties of the Coalition government and the Council. It is preposterous that we are now being asked to accept that the survival of the nation and of Haringey Council now depend upon closing down the few remaining day centres and residential facilities in the borough for people with learning disabilities.

Our first responsibility is to the vulnerable individuals and families who have been targeted to bear a disproportionate burden of the proposed cuts. This should also be your first concern as our aspiring parliamentary representative. Though adult social care accounts for only 30% of Haringey's spending, it will account for 40% of the proposed cuts. Of the cuts in adult social care, 25% are to come from services (residential and day-care) for people with learning disabilities, who will also lose out as a result of cuts in funding for care packages, the voluntary sector, social workers.

We are grateful for your offer to attend some of the consultation meetings organised by the Council (though we have grave reservations about the adequacy – indeed legality – of this consultation process). No doubt we will hear from Haringey Council representatives about the scale of the budget deficit, the need for difficult choices, etc, etc. We would hope and expect that, rather than echoing these justifications for austerity policies, you would add your voice to those demanding that the Council abandon these iniquitous proposals and engage in a proper process of consultation with people with autism and learning disabilities in the borough about the services that they need.

Yours sincerely,

Michael