

Letter from Michael Fitzpatrick to local councillor

30 December 2014

Re: Proposed cuts in Haringey services for people with autism and learning disabilities

Dear Councillor,

I am writing to you as my local councillor in Stroud Green because of my concern at the proposals in Haringey's corporate budget plan to impose drastic cuts in adult social care services. 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 a local councillor 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,