

(published 1 January 2015)

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

Dear Editor,

As the father of a young man with autism and severe learning disabilities, I am appalled at the proposals in Haringey's 'three year plan and budget consultation' to impose drastic cuts in the services on which he and many others rely. 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, and dementia.

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 (if often scarcely adequate) 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 achieve the declared objectives. All experience 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 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