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SAVE AUTISM SERVICES HARINGEY

people with autism and learning disabilities matter

<http://saveautismservicesharingey.co.uk/>

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Haringey goes ahead with plans to close day centres and homes against the wishes of users and parents - plans described as 'reckless and irresponsible'

On Tuesday night the Cabinet – Haringey Council's core elite - nodded through plans to cut its budget spending by around a quarter over the next three years, with 40% of the cuts destined to come from adult social care including the closure of daycentres and homes for people with dementia and learning disability. The full package of £24.5m cuts will hit the most vulnerable residents in Haringey: people with learning and physical disability, autism, dementia and mental illness.

The meeting was preceded by a lively lobby of local parents, trade unionists and local bodies united against the cuts outside the Civic Centre, where the Council put up barricades and turned out a small army of private security guards together with riot police to protect councillors and senior officers from the wrath of hundreds of residents protesting against the cuts. Mary Langan of Save Autism Services Haringey said, 'The council is planning to dismantle the structure of adult social care in the borough without any real concept of what will replace it. They are being reckless and irresponsible.'

Despite these protests – and deputations from affected groups concerned with issues from early childhood development to dementia care – the Cabinet voted in favour of the cuts package, hastily drawn up by Council leaders who rushed through a token consultation process over the Christmas holiday period. The campaign to throw out these ill-considered and destructive policies now moves to the full Council meeting on 23 February.

The Cabinet received deputations from organisations representing people affected by the cuts. Marianne Swannell, Vice-President of the National Autistic Society and a Haringey mum, spoke against plans to close The Rowndway, the only council daycentre for autistic adults which parents said was run by dedicated and expert staff.

Marianne said that had her son Charlie received the opportunity to attend The Roundway when he left school, he would have been spared seven wasted and traumatic years in hospital through lack of support in the community. Charlie's lengthy stay was a massive expense to the NHS, which could have been avoided if local provisions with caring and experienced staff had been available. With The Roadway closed other children could suffer the same fate.

Zak, aged 15, with cerebral palsy, and Ibrahim, aged 18, with autism and learning disabilities, spoke articulately and passionately about the importance of the support they have received from the Markfield Centre in Tottenham. Reflecting the feeling of his peers that 'the Council

don't value our lives', Ibrahim invited councillors to visit the centre and see for themselves 'how disabilities can affect people in real life'. Heather Martin spoke about the value of the expert care provided for her mother at the Haynes and Grange day centres, recognised centres of excellence in supporting people with dementia and their families.

Autistic people have a lifelong condition requiring support from experienced and expert staff. They need a consistent structure to their daily lives with familiar people to support them. Their parents need respite from the heavy demands of caring so they can recharge their energy.

People with severe autism – who typically make up the majority of users of daycentres – are unable to appreciate the Council's alternative of "promoting independence and inclusion in the community" with little thought for what this means in practice for users denied daycentres. Closing specialist day centres, cutting vital support services and replacing experienced staff with unskilled workers will reduce independence and diminish the quality of life of individuals and their families and carers.

Join the petition to stop social care cuts

<https://you.38degrees.org.uk/petitions/save-our-autism-services-in-haringey>

SAVE AUTISM SERVICES HARINGEY is a group of parents and carers of adults with autism in Haringey (including some with learning disabilities, mental health problems, epilepsy and other complex needs). Some of us have professional experience of health and social care; some are involved in voluntary organisations active in this field; all of us have personal experience of the difficulties of securing appropriate care and support for people with autism in Haringey. We have close links with Haringey Autism, the local branch of the National Autistic Society, with Haringey People First, which represents people with learning disabilities in the borough, and the Haringey Carers Forum.

Editor's Notes

1. Haringey Council has now finalised its Mid Term Financial Strategy (MTFS). The Council has made two concessions:

* £5.7m cuts in care package reductions have been removed

* an additional £20,000 has been found for advocacy services to support users

Social Care now faces a £24.5m cut rather than the original £30m, made possible first by drawing on Council reserves to the tune of £4.3m (para 3.5, Mid Term Financial Strategy 2015-18, Appendix 3).

2. Key Date: 23 February 2015, Budget setting at Full Council