

SAVE AUTISM SERVICES HARINGEY // PEOPLE WITH AUTISM AND LEARNING DISABILITIES MATTER //

Haringey Council rejects compromise deal in favour of full implementation of social care cuts

On Monday evening (23 February) Haringey's Full Council meeting agreed to implement in full adult social care cuts of £24.5m - out of total council cuts of £70m.

The Labour councillors unanimously rejected the possibility of cross party consensus that briefly emerged last Friday night (20 February) at the unprecedented 'call-in' meeting convened by Lib-Dems and the Oversight and Scrutiny Committee to demand Cabinet (the Council's elite decision-making body) answer the many unanswered questions about the Council's alternatives to replace decommissioned care centres.

Outside the Civic Centre, hundreds of local union members, parents, carers and service users marched from Turnpike Lane to a rally at the Centre where they heard speeches criticising the Labour Council for doing the Coalition Government's work of cutting vitally important local services.

To loud applause from parents and supporters inside the Council Chamber, SASH member Mary Langan handed in an online petition - with 7,000 signatures opposing the care cuts, 3000 of which were signed by Haringey residents - to the Mayor presiding over the meeting.

Parents, carers and service users now feel desperately abandoned by the Council who has little else on offer. But the Council has a legal duty to ensure the needs of people with disabilities are safeguarded and to provide adequate provisions for their needs. Adults with severe autism and learning difficulties now face the prospect of being forced out of their day centre the Roundway with no other Council centre to go to. They see their future isolated in their own homes with few opportunities to 'access the community'. A minority may be transferred – yet again – to the Ermine Road centre.

SASH saw Labour councillors engage in yah-boo politics with the Lib-Dems, often seen at Prime Minister's Question Time, in a cynical attempt to deflect attention from their betrayal of the most vulnerable residents in the Borough. Time and time again Labour Councillors spoke of their 'commitment to equality' and to 'using resources fairly' in a tirade of arguments to justify cutting services for the most needy and vulnerable.

Heading a SASH deputation to the full Council meeting last night, Mary Langan made a final plea to councillors to save the day centres:

'For more than 10 years I have been involved in promoting the aspirations of independence and choice formulated in the government's Valuing People strategy for people with learning disabilities. It has been sickening to hear these aspirations being cynically deployed by Haringey Council to justify destroying the very services – like day centres - necessary to improve independence and choice, and provide some quality of life for people with disabilities and their families.

'For more than 10 years we have been involved in trying to improve services in Haringey. But since the announcement of these cuts we have lost all confidence and trust in the Council. We have not been engaged, consulted or listened to in any meaningful way.'

Since 2011 the council has closed more than a dozen residential homes and daycentres forcing elderly, learning disability and physical disability users to accept alternatives in other centres or to receive care at home. Over the next three years almost all of the Council's remaining care provisions will shut - another six day centres and residential homes.

SASH argued the Council had failed to provide independent evidence that what little they proposed would work. All the evidence officers have presented comes from Department of Health programmes and the LGA Adult Care Efficiency Programme – both publicly committed to efficiency cuts, rather than improving the quality of care.

SASH has established that no other London borough will implement adult social care cuts of the order of Haringey's £24.5m: compared with Barnet adult care cuts of £16.7m (a model of outsourced care Haringey now seems bent on following), Camden's £16m and Islington's £11m. In the social care cuts league table Haringey is way out in front of other London Labour Councils.

SASH further argued that the Council's consultation was conducted in a manner that opens the council to the possibility of legal challenge. Only last October the Supreme Court ruled that Haringey had not consulted people properly on its Council Tax Reduction Scheme - despite the advice received from council legal staff.

With these savage cuts in view, care users face the prospect of deteriorating provisions for their legally assessed needs, already assessed as severe.

Martin Hewitt a SASH parent said, "parents expect the council to offer their adult children more privatised home care by untrained, under-paid and unlicensed staff to replace the friendship and skilled training they receive in daycare centres now marked for closure. Users face the prospect of long hours warehoused in their own homes."

This decline in service quality could result in increasing numbers of legal challenges to the council. In April the new Care Act gives users and carers more rigorous national entitlements to care provisions. Reliance on the postcode lottery in social care will be reduced. Nonetheless the Care Act could give rise to new legal challenges.

SASH and other groups will now work together to expose both declining standards and the Council's ill-thought out care alternatives as the austerity of a further £24m cuts bites hard.

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.

Editors notes:

Since 2011 Haringey Council has implemented total cuts of £117m. It is now agreed to a further £70m cuts in services to pre-school children, young people, adults with severe disabilities and dementia and the very elderly.