



Merton Centre for Independent Living. Adult Social Care Consultation Response

07/12/2015

Overall response

We have already written to Merton Council¹ and spoken at Scrutiny² meetings to express our concerns over the impact of the cuts³ proposed, and the process by which these cuts are being decided. In addition, we are submitting this formal consultation response.

Merton Council is already a low spending council, and you do not have the scope to cut Adult Social Care further while still meeting your statutory duties. In fact, Council Business Plans, both in this round and last year, acknowledge that statutory duties may not be met as a result of these cuts.

We also feel that Merton Council's approach to "ratios" is entirely inappropriate, as a pound cut from Adult Social Care (ASC) has a far greater impact on people's dignity, independence and wellbeing, than a pound cut from other departments. In fact, we struggle to understand how it can be claimed by the Council that last year we were told a cut of £9mn was a 1:1 ratio for ASC, and this year we are told a cut of £14mn over the same time frame is still a ratio of 1:1.

Given the volume of previously agreed cuts which have already been deemed unachievable⁴ it is entirely clear to us that the scale of the proposed cuts to ASC is unreasonable. The result of an unachievable task is that when cuts can't be met, even less palatable and more damaging cuts get rushed through instead.

Ultimately, the impact of reduced services is that disabled and older people will be made vulnerable, the very opposite of the "promoting independence" agenda. We will be isolated, trapped at home, stressed,

¹ Open letter sent 07/12/2015

² Healthier Communities and Older People Scrutiny Panel 22/10/2015, Sustainable Communities Scrutiny Panel 11/11/2015, Overview and Scrutiny 24/11/2015

³ At our event "My Voice Matters" 03/12/2015 members requested that we always refer to so-called savings, as "cuts"

⁴ "Deleted savings" in Business Plan

and barred from contributing to society. In response to the proposals, our members talked about having to take medication to cope with the changes, and their feelings of hopelessness as a result of continued cuts to services. Some spoke of giving up on life completely⁵.

We made many of these same points in response to last year's consultation process⁶ and it is deeply frustrating to be repeating the same feedback from members and local disabled and older people, with no apparent impact on decision-making. The cuts proposed represent a false economy and a huge departure from the prevention agenda.

When Councillors tell local people that they have to make cuts to services, what is actually being said is that other things are considered more important than disabled and older people. The Council are making choices about where and how to allocate savings targets, where you spend money, and how you raise money. Our lives matter too.

The Response to Specific Cuts

Staff Cuts:

As we expressed last year, Merton CIL's members are concerned by the reduction in staff at day centres and their proposed replacement with volunteers, which hasn't worked⁷. Cuts which have already taken place have resulted in fewer external activities, larger groups, and a less secure setting without enough staff. Further cuts will inevitably result in a worsening situation.

In addition, we have considerable concerns over further cuts to the assessment and commissioning team, which the Council acknowledges will result in reduced capacity to carry out assessments and reviews, give social work support, undertake safeguarding activities, fulfil DOLs responsibilities and undertake financial assessments, monitor quality and performance. Our members further point out that cuts have already started to bite and they already face challenges accessing services.

Decommissioned Services:

Our members have told us how important the existing services are, and the damage cutting these services will have on their lives.

⁵ Focus group with Merton CIL members 26/11/2015

⁶ <http://www.mertoncil.org.uk/about-us/consultations/>

⁷ <http://democracy.merton.gov.uk/documents/s10039/Volunteers%20report.pdf>

Cuts to respite (Crossroads) will not only create additional stresses and strains for carers, it will also worsen the lives of disabled people who rely on their carers to support them. For some people, a few hours respite is the only chance they get to break from caring duties, and without this service, our members talk of complete breakdown.

Meals on Wheels cuts assume that the current service users are able get food delivered from the supermarket, or get community support. Our members tell us that the community won't deliver dinner, and many older people can't use the internet or afford the minimum delivery charge⁸. The ultimate result will be older people at risk of malnutrition.

Our members have been very confused by what is actually proposed around cuts to Imagine which has been communicated very unclearly. They have talked about the valuable support being delivered and concerns about the lack of clear alternatives for this service.

Cuts to Support Packages:

Merton CIL considers it to be unacceptable to target support packages for cuts, as these packages reflect people's assessed need. In addition, we have seen no evidence of additional training for staff around assessments, which was promised in mitigation to the cuts last year.

Cuts proposed range from 5% to 15% but we have been reassured that in reassessments, people whose needs have increased will receive more support. This necessarily means that other people will lose out to an even greater extent.

Our members have expressed extreme anxiety around the proposed cuts to support packages and feel that the proposals are illogical because support packages are being proposed as the alternative to cuts in other areas.

Cuts to the voluntary sector:

Halving support to the voluntary sector makes little sense when the majority of cuts described above expect the voluntary sector to bridge the gap. Our members described this situation as "ridiculous".

⁸http://www.wimbledonguardian.co.uk/news/13875724.Meals_on_wheels_may_be_scrapped_in_fresh_wave_of_council_spending_cuts/