

UK: Manchester's most vulnerable face devastating cuts

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Labour-controlled Manchester City Council (MCC) has voted through some of the severest cuts to services in the UK. The implementation of £8.6 million cuts in the Supporting People (SP) grant will lead to many of the most vulnerable facing a drastic reduction in services.

Published details of the cuts show that numerous desperately needed services partly or wholly funded by MCC will have a substantial portion of their funding reduced or stopped altogether.

These cuts to services will have a direct impact on thousands of the poorest and most disadvantaged. Manchester is the fourth most deprived local authority in the country, with the majority of its population living in the 10 percent most deprived wards in the UK. Life expectancy is the second lowest in the country.

The last 25 years have seen a dramatic increase in the number of voluntary organisations that provide services within many local authorities throughout the UK. Many of these organisations are now losing funding or are at risk of not being able to continue much longer.

Historically, the funding for many organisations could only be described as precarious, with projects often awaiting last minute decisions each year for their funding status.

The Supporting People programme was set up eight years ago by the then Labour government, with the aim of establishing a low-cost alternative to hospital and institutional care. It funds a range of services, from elderly care to drug and alcohol projects.

Some 59 voluntary/community groups that currently supply services on behalf of Manchester's council will lose in total £2 million from their budget. Support for adults across the city could be reduced by £8 million over the next two years. Included in this will be £4 million of the budget currently allocated to

homelessness, people affected by drug and alcohol problems, travellers, ex-offenders and refugees.

The cuts will include £1 million from services provided for people with mental health problems, £900,000 from learning disabilities provision, and £800,000 in cuts from services for elderly people, including meals-on-wheels, and people accessing non-residential social care. Included in this group will be some of the most disabled and frail older people, who will be asked to make a greater personal financial contribution towards their care.

Many of the areas facing cuts have been providing services for a considerable period of time and to many people in the city, who have become dependent on them for a significant amount of their care and support.

Across Manchester there are a number of projects that will have to close because of the cuts in funding, including:

- Praxis Care at Willow Park Housing Trust, and Great Places Housing's Next Step accommodation. Both these projects work with people suffering from mental health problems, helping to provide accommodation and support.

- William House, a project working with ex-offenders and those at risk of offending, which offers accommodation and support containing 14 self-contained flats with help provided 24 hours a day.

- The Richmond Fellowship project for women escaping domestic abuse.

- Marillac House providing supported accommodation for teenage parents and single homeless young women.

Other projects that will lose money include the mental health charity Turning Point, which will lose £70,000. Breakthrough UK, a project that provides supported employment for disabled people, will lose

two-thirds of its £622,000 funding. Manchester Women's aid will not be able to go ahead with plans to expand much needed accommodation for women and children fleeing domestic violence.

The Supporting People cuts will have an impact across the UK. The *Guardian* reported a study of ten local authorities, several of which are threatening to wipe out or severely reduce SP funding for services, including mental health, physical and learning disabilities, ex-offenders and older people.

Support for people with mental health problems is to be cut by 42 percent in Haringey, London. This includes a proposed reduction by 18 percent to learning disabilities services. Support for older people is to be axed in Hull and reduced in Kent, Essex and Calderdale.

In Nottingham, the SP funding has fallen from £22.3 million to £12.3 million—almost 50 percent. Nottinghamshire council have proposed stopping funding for wardens and emergency alarms in sheltered housing, which would have a significant impact on 11,500 older people.

Paul Farmer, chief executive of the mental health charity Mind, has said “the sudden withdrawal of support for mental health sufferers would have a devastating effect.”

The implications of reducing SP funding for homeless services were also highlighted by the *Guardian*. A quarter of hostel beds, some 44,000, available to homeless people could be lost within months as a result of SP funding cuts that threaten to force tens of thousands of people onto the streets. Charities warn that the problem of “visible homelessness” will resurface as councils make savings of up to 65 percent to budgets that are providing key services to vulnerable people. The reduction in hostel beds and related supported housing risks triggering an explosion of mental illness, rough sleeping and crime.

Campbell Robb, Chief Executive of the charity Shelter, said, “Where these cuts take place they will pull away the safety net from some of the most vulnerable families and individuals in our society and will inevitably lead to an increase in homelessness.”

In Manchester, as in many other areas across the UK, these cuts are being justified and implemented by Labour councils. Again, the trade unions are not lifting

a finger to protect these services and their workforce. Indeed, Labour and the Trades Union Congress play the key role in facilitating the right-wing coalition government's austerity measures.



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