
Petition: Save Crawley Open House – Statement by Petitioners

'This petition demands that West Sussex County Council rejects the proposed cuts to Housing Related Support, which will cause untold misery for the most vulnerable members of our society, and instead maintains this vital support for our local homeless.'

The message is clear: West Sussex residents are calling upon county councillors to rule out cuts to Housing Related Support, not just to put them out to consultation, not to delay them until the budget-setting meeting and not to express personal concerns before ultimately voting them through.

While district-tier councils, as housing authorities, deliver statutory housing functions, this funding is about West Sussex meeting its duty of care to vulnerable adults, part of the Council's social care role. In fact since 2003, West Sussex has received tens of millions in dedicated funding from central government precisely to meet those obligations. In 2011, that funding was base-lined into the County Council's grant, meaning elected members are free to decide how to spend the money in fulfilling the council's responsibilities. Following a question on the proposed cuts I had raised in Parliament, the Parliamentary Under-Secretary for MHCLG, said:

"[I]t is for local authorities, who are independent of central government, to make decisions on spending and manage their budgets in line with locally determined priorities."

That means it's up to individual county councillors to decide whether this funding is worth maintaining. Let's be clear exactly who depends upon these services, it's rough sleepers with nowhere to go, women fleeing domestic abuse, children exiting care and older people who need help to stay in their own homes. The people this money is there to support are the most vulnerable members of our society, people who count on us to stand up for them.

No one doubts the county council faces tough financial choices, least of all other councillors, but prevention is key to cutting costs. As Cllr Daniel Humphreys, Leader of Worthing Borough Council, recently told members of Adur and Worthing Councils:

"I suspect that if this money was taken away the people who are being supported would probably just end up back on the doorstep of County Hall needing other forms of Adult Services anyway."

When we remove at-home support from older people, they are forced into nursing homes. When we push children out of supported housing they become a new generation of street homeless. When we leave people on the streets, every part of the public sector feels the effects. The costs just keep going up.

There is another way, other councils have successfully focused on generating new revenue instead of making efficiencies, but even when it comes to cuts we've shown there are far better alternatives than this. Residents, charities, local MPs, councillors and council leaders, and even the Government has made it clear West Sussex doesn't have to make these cuts, it is up to members of the County Council to now decide if they will stand with us in supporting the vulnerable.