

ASSISTANT GENERAL SECRETARY'S OFFICE

Rt. Hon. David Cameron MP
Rt. Hon. Nick Clegg MP
10 Downing Street
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13 September 2010

Dear Prime Minister and Deputy Prime Minister,

Next month, the Comprehensive Spending Review will set down new spending regimes for government departments. Every expectation is that there will be serious and widespread cuts, and these, in turn, will require local authorities across the country to cut the services they provide to their communities.

As we represent employees working in local authorities - mainly in social care, housing and neighbourhood services, care of the elderly and support for young people - we are already dealing with serious service reductions brought about by local authority cost-cutting. June's emergency budget tightened the screw further. Our very real fear is that still further cuts this autumn will deliver the final blow to many essential provisions.

We, therefore, urge you to be fully aware of the erosion to services that is already taking place and, on behalf of those we provide for, ask that you go forward with your spending plans with great care and compassion. It may concern you to know, for instance, that the following service cuts are already underway:

- In East Ayrshire, where a three year council tax freeze has been in place, thousands of elderly people and people in need of social services support are at risk as the jobs of 600 personal carers hang in the balance.
- In Glasgow, the free fruit programme in primary schools is at risk. Breakfast clubs, fitness initiatives and play schemes are also threatened in a city with great health challenges. This is yet more evidence of how it is children, who are bearing the full brunt of the spending cuts, and it will be children in poorer families who need this support greatest who suffer most.
- In the North West, Knowsley Borough Council, budget cuts mean that the Meals on Wheels facility for the elderly has been privatised. So too have those in Birmingham, where it is now unclear what provision there is for a hot evening meal for the users. When a colleague enquired what hot meal provision would be in the evening she was told that the pensioners could phone a local take-away. Service reductions of this nature are cruel in their impact on those in greatest need.
- Vital support for our young people is also under attack. In Birmingham, child services are facing £13 million worth of cuts; a staggering 1500 jobs look set to disappear. The youth support organisation, Connexions has been hard hit by cuts already. In Cheshire and Warrington £1.7m has been slashed from the budget, leading to 75 redundancies so far. While in Birmingham, 430 jobs are at risk. In Southampton, £4 million is to be cut from the budget, with the majority coming from children's services which will again harm those most in need and least able to speak up for themselves.

- In Northern Ireland, a much valued summer play scheme for children with special needs was only saved because the service users and providers fought for it, but its future is uncertain amid fears that the cuts will see it go once- and- for all next year.
- In Wales, one county council, Powys, has already announced plans to cut 500 jobs. This local authority is the largest employer in mid-Wales; there is no other alternative employer of its size. The local community cannot withstand losses of this magnitude and with six percent of the workforce to go, the remaining services will be stretched to breaking point.
- In Hull, Hull Forward, an organisation designed to support and encourage the city's private sector economy, has been axed. The Hull area is heavily dependent on the public sector for jobs, so the removal of a mechanism to increase private sector employment seems senseless.
- In Bristol, plans to build council houses for the first time in a generation have been rolled back. Instead of 72 homes, now only 12 are in the very early stages of going ahead. In Jersey, zero hours contracts are being introduced. Workers will have to queue to find out if they have work that day, taking an island, which has more than adequate resources to deal with the deficit, right back to the desperate poverty of the 1930s.

Ordinary and vulnerable people will pay most heavily if they lose the services which are often the only thing which stand between them and despair. As their service providers, we cannot stand by and permit this to happen.

There is a better way. Nobody disputes that the deficit must be addressed but many expert economists agree that the best way to reduce the deficit is over a longer period, investing in the economy now for sustainable growth and the creation of jobs. The widely acknowledged fragile state of the economy, including worrying indicators on unemployment levels, means that cuts to these vital services will increase inequality. Very possibly, we will have the grotesque situation in this country where those most in need are paying for a financial crisis not of their making. This is a situation you have both said would not be justified.

Your promise to the electorate was that cuts would be "fair"; that they would not damage services; and that the most vulnerable would not suffer. So we respectfully ask that your government abides by its promise, especially to those for whom this country, still the fifth richest in the world, must care – for the elderly, those with disabilities, and children and families. As leaders of this government, please instruct your chancellor and departments to remember their duty of care to all in society as they go forward with the CSR.

Yours faithfully,

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On behalf of
 Unite local government workers from Scotland, Wales, England and Northern Ireland