



the centre for **voluntary action**

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16th January 2017

Dear Mrs. May,

Please help us to preserve and develop Birmingham's shared society.

We write to you as a group of concerned local charity leaders, to appeal for your support in helping us to continue to work with Birmingham City Council to build and maintain your vision of a shared society in this city.

We represent a range of organisations delivering essential services to the city's most vulnerable people in the fields of mental health, disability, homelessness, domestic violence, caring, substance misuse and offender rehabilitation – services which are facing unprecedented levels of disinvestment as the Council grapples with the need to deliver a balanced budget for next financial year. Council officers and elected members have been working intensively and constructively with us to find ways to deal with the current budgetary challenges. However, the imminent risks to the lives of vulnerable people are such that we feel we need to ask you for extra help.

A consultation is currently underway on proposed cuts of £5m, rising to £10m in 2018/9, within the Supporting People and Third Sector Grant Programme, which has already absorbed cuts of 50% from an initial total of £50m. If carried out, these additional cuts will erode the housing and housing-related support which underpins the infrastructure of a shared society in Birmingham, and directly disadvantage unprecedented numbers of at-risk local people, including at least:

- 2000 people with mental health problems;
- 1670 homeless single people;
- 520 homeless families;
- 950 people with learning disabilities;
- 600 people with physical and sensory disabilities;
- 2100 victims of domestic violence;
- 4200 vulnerable young people, including care leavers;
- 750 ex-offenders and those at risk of reoffending;
- 787 people with drug and/or alcohol dependencies.

Our analysis indicates that the proposals would also place at risk an estimated £144m of levered income and critically destabilise a not-for-profit sector which has already absorbed disproportionate losses of funding. Our data shows that 50% of local not-for-profit services (including those providing preventative and rehabilitative support which reduce pressure on upstream and downstream provision such as Accident and Emergency departments) report likely closure within 2 years should these cuts go ahead. In other words, the financial changes proposed would not be savings, but long-term costs borne by the most disadvantaged people in Birmingham.

In early December, Birmingham dealt with a very public tragedy, when rough sleeper Chiriac Inout was found dead outside a car park in John Bright Street in the city centre on the coldest night of the year. The death of a single homeless person is one death too many, yet we are now seeing reports that around 20 homeless people have died as a result of the wave of cold weather sweeping across Europe. We believe that further deaths in Birmingham are likely if these proposed cuts go ahead, and are therefore appealing for you to urgently increase housing support and social care funding to help ensure that Birmingham – a city with a proud track record in inclusivity but a disproportionately high number of social challenges – is able to meet the needs of all its citizens.

We warmly welcomed your commitment, given at the Charity Commission annual meeting on 9th January, that government would step up to play an active role in tackling the "everyday injustices" which leave so many people in society feeling overlooked, and your recognition that charities and social enterprises have a key role to play in this agenda. However, it is not clear to us that there is a full appreciation at government level of the pressure on our local authority - pressure which is severely limiting its ability to meet its obligations to all the people of Birmingham.

On this basis, we would also like to meet with you to discuss our concerns and to share our ideas as to how local voluntary groups can work with local and central government to meet these current social and financial challenges. We would be happy to welcome you to Birmingham to visit us and our service users - or we can come to you if that would be easier.

Our history of working side-by-side with Birmingham City Council in supporting the people of this city is one we take great pride in. As partners, we and the Council are now faced with a catastrophic sea-change in our current and future resource-base, one which would permanently disable our ability to meet the needs of society's most vulnerable people. Once these services are gone, they will be virtually impossible to regain. We respectfully ask for your practical and personal help in ensuring that the shared society in Birmingham isn't dismantled, and is instead supported to flourish for the benefit of all.

Yours sincerely,



Brian Carr, Birmingham Voluntary Service Council
Maureen Connolly, Birmingham and Solihull Women's Aid
Helen Wadley, Birmingham Mind
Dave Rogers, Midland Mencap
Jean Templeton, St Basils
Natalie Allen, Birmingham Changing Futures Together
Chris Bates, Birmingham Rathbone
Tom Harrison, Midland Heart
Paul Wright, Fry Housing
Matt Green, Crisis
Muna Choudhury, Ashram Moseley Housing Association
Gail Penberthy, BID Services



Contributors:

Birmingham Voluntary Service Council (BVSC) is local charity and a voluntary sector membership body which represents the interests of the local voluntary and community sector in Birmingham. It is our mission to help everyone build and benefit from a fair and equitable Birmingham. Founded in 1916, BVSC been at the forefront of supporting voluntary action to tackle inequality and injustice for over a century.

www.bvsc.org

Birmingham and Solihull Women's Aid supports women and children affected by domestic violence, rape and sexual assault. We believe that women and children have the right to live free from violence, abuse and fear. We work in close partnership with agencies such as housing and the police to ensure the best outcomes for women and their children. Our one-to-one, tailored support services deliver long-term, positive outcomes for women and their children by addressing all of their needs including poverty, debt, homelessness, housing, legal issues, health and wellbeing.

www.bswaid.org

Birmingham Mind is a registered charity working mainly in Birmingham. We support up to 3000 people experiencing mental health difficulties at any one time. We have a range of residential care homes, supported housing, outreach services, recovery and wellbeing services. We also offer a range of training courses.

www.birminghammind.org

Midland Mencap is a charity which works and campaigns for accessible and inclusive services and a better quality of life for everyone with experience of learning disabilities and additional needs. Midland Mencap is one of the region's leading learning disability charities with a strong, respected and established reputation for excellence and innovation. We shape and design quality services by listening and responding to what people tell us.

www.midlandmencap.org.uk

St Basils is a Birmingham-based charity that works across the West Midlands with young people aged 16-25 who are homeless or at risk of homelessness, helping over 5000 young people each year. We have a range of accommodation and support services to help young people regain the stability they need to rebuild their lives, gain skills, training and employment and move on successfully, breaking the 'cycle of homelessness'.

www.stbasils.org.uk

Birmingham Changing Futures Together is a voluntary sector-led Big Lottery funded project to support adults with multiple and complex needs (homelessness, addiction, risk of reoffending, mental ill-health). It works with public, voluntary and private sector partners to achieve systemic change to ensure services are more responsive and user-centred.

www.changingfuturesbham.co.uk

Birmingham Rathbone is a locally based charity providing support, care and supported housing to people with learning disabilities in the city, enabling them to live as independently as possible in the community and to achieve their full potential.

www.rathbone.co.uk

Midland Heart is a leading UK housing, care and support business helping people to live independently. Founded in 1925, we deliver housing, care and opportunity by providing 33,000 high quality affordable homes to over 70,000 customers across 55 local authority areas. Midland Heart

innovates to bring health into the home through a range of service models that blend housing, care and public health initiatives to support an individual to live with dignity and independence in their own home.

www.midlandheart.org.uk

Fry Housing Trust was set up in memory of Margery Fry, a British prison reformer and the UK's first female magistrate. Since its formation, we have maintained our identity as a provider of specialist services to vulnerable adults with an offending history, many of whom have multiple and complex needs.

www.fryha.org.uk

Crisis is the national charity for homeless people. We are dedicated to ending homelessness by delivering life-changing services and campaigning for change. We want to do more for more homeless people in more places across the UK and help to change their lives for good. We want to change the way society thinks and acts towards homeless people.

www.crisis.org.uk

Ashrammoseley is a West Midlands housing association that provides community-inspired housing and services. We are committed to our role as a social housing provider and this remains at the heart of what we do, delivering high quality housing and support services to customers, residents and service users across Birmingham and Coventry.

www.ashrammoseleyha.org.uk

BID Services is a charity working in partnership with people with people who are deaf, hard of hearing, visually impaired or have a dual sensory loss. Our mission is to provide high quality services and opportunities that make it possible for people to have choice and control over their lives. Our sister organisation, the Deaf Cultural Centre is the UK's first Deaf Cultural Centre supporting a range of community and art activities, as well as providing high quality conference and event space through our social enterprise The Signing Tree.

www.bid.org.uk