



**‘Lewisham Council Cuts’
Report of the Lewisham People’s
Parliament February 2021**

This report is written in plain English

The Lewisham People's Parliament

The People's Parliament is here to represent the views of people with learning disabilities who live in Lewisham. It is a project run by Lewisham Speaking Up and it is funded by the Big Lottery Community Fund.

There are six Lewisham People's Parliament reps who are elected by other people with learning disabilities. They are paid the London Living Wage for their work with Lewisham Speaking Up.

Background to this report

The People's Parliament reps have known for a while that Lewisham Council were planning cuts. They were worried about the effect this might have on the lives of people with learning disabilities.

They decided that they wanted to do three things

1. Write to the Mayor of Lewisham saying they were worried about the cuts.
2. Write to the 3 Members of Parliament for Lewisham. They wanted to ask the Lewisham MPs to let the Government know that Lewisham Council needs more money.
3. Hold a Lewisham People's Parliament to find out what people thought about the cuts.

This report is in 2 parts.

Part 1 tells you what happened at the People's Parliament meeting on 2nd February 2021.

It also says what people with learning disabilities think about the cuts.

Part 2 tells you what happened after the meeting. It says what happened when the Mayor and other people in the council talked about the People's Parliament on the cuts on 3rd February 2021.

Part 1 – The People’s Parliament on 2nd February 2021



Colin Smith - People's Parliament rep

The meeting was held on Zoom and was introduced by People's Parliament rep Colin Smith. **32** people with learning disabilities joined the Zoom meeting.

Colin explained what the meeting was about. He said that the Parliament reps were worried about the cuts making people with learning disabilities more isolated.

Colin talked about how Lewisham Council gets a lot of its money from the Government. He said that the reps had written to all of the Lewisham MPs asking them to ask the government for more money for Lewisham.

Colin told everyone that 2 MPs had written back to say that they would talk to the government about Lewisham needing more money. They were Vicky Foxcroft MP and Ellie Reeves MP. Colin said it was good that the MPs had listened to the Lewisham People's Parliament.

Then Colin introduced Councillor Chris Best to talk about the cuts.

Chris is the deputy Mayor for Lewisham and she is also the councillor responsible for adult social care. Councillor Jacq Paschoud was also at the meeting.

Chris started by saying that the Lewisham People's Parliament does good work representing the views of people with learning disabilities in Lewisham.

She went on to explain that the Council are having to make cuts because the amount of money they get from the government has been cut a lot over the last 10 years.

Chris said that things have been made worse by Covid-19 and this has cost the Council even more money. She said the Council has lots of difficult choices to make about what to cut.

She said that the Council has to cut £40 million over the next 3 years. £11 million of these cuts will be in Adult Social Care.

Chris said there were two cuts that she thought would have a big effect on people with learning disabilities.

The first cut was about saving money by bringing together Adult Learning and Social Care Day Services.

The idea is to have more Adult Learning courses that help people to be independent. This could be training to help get a job or be a volunteer.

Councillor Best and Councillor Paschoud have said that for this to work Adult Learning would need to open the whole year and not just in term times.

Chris said that people with learning disabilities should get good jobs and get paid the London Living Wage. She gave the example of the Ignition Brewery in Sydenham, which the Council supports.

The second cut was to what are called 'concessionary' travel passes. These are travel passes given by Lewisham Council and not by the group called London Councils.

People should check who they get their freedom pass from.

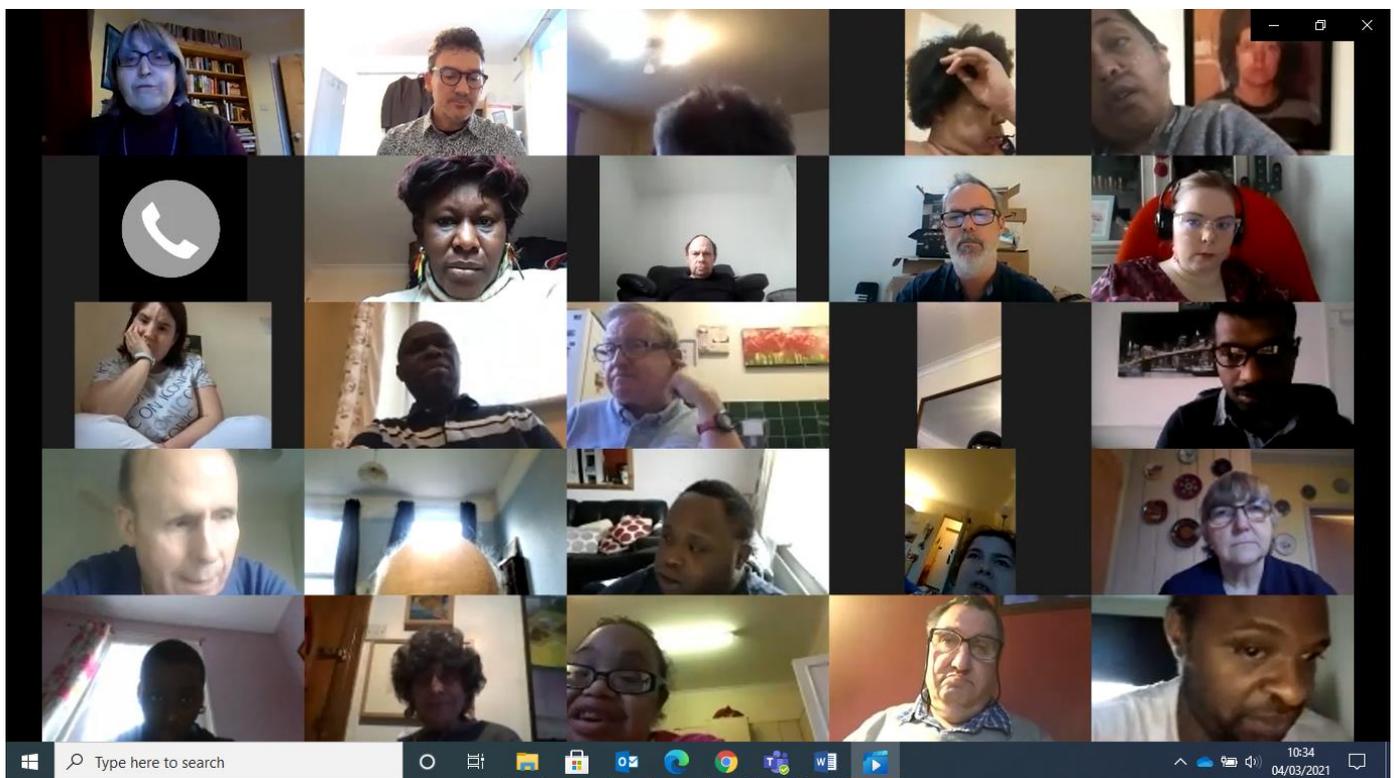
Chris said that there will be more chances to talk about the cuts if they are agreed by the Council. She said that the Council will work with Lewisham Speaking Up to hear what people think.

She said the Council is also working with the Lewisham Disabled People's Commission about barriers for disabled people in Lewisham.

Chris asked what people thought about having more courses at Adult Learning. She asked for ideas about courses to help people get jobs and be more independent.

These are some of things people thought:

- Some people thought more courses to help with work would be good
- Some people were worried about working and losing their benefits
- Some people wanted more chances to do retail work
- Some people said there is not enough support in Lewisham for people with learning disabilities to get work
- There were concerns about people who can't work - what support will there be for them?
- Some people were worried about being in 'training' for work forever with no job at the end
- Someone said they had been on a course for long time but had not been able to get a job



Councillor Chris Best (top left) talks at the Zoom People's Parliament

Colin thanked Councillor Chris Best for her talk. He said we would be going into smaller groups to talk about the cuts. People leading the groups asked people what they thought about the cuts the Council wanted to make.

They were asked about

- cuts to street cleaning
- cuts to adult social care and day services
- cuts to the library services and leisure services
- more Council services moving online.

These are some of the things that people said in their small groups.

What do people with learning disabilities think about the cuts?

General

- The Council don't know the reality for people with learning disabilities.
- It's mucking about with people's lives
- Covid has been difficult. The cuts could lead to more isolation
- What happens if you are shielding?
- Those that will be worse affected are people who are living alone and with no support hours
- The Council should review the changes with the people involved and give them a chance to change it to a better way
- We need to write a letter or go for a march!

Online services

- Technology is a big barrier. For example, click and collect is very difficult for some people
- People need more help if more things are going to move online
- Getting connected to the internet is an issue for people

- This won't meet people's needs – what can you do if you only get 2 hours support a week at the moment? For example, if you need help with using a computer more often if things go online?

Employment

- There is very little support with employment
- We want more quality checking jobs for people with learning disabilities
- There should be more workshops to help with CV writing, interviews and filling in application forms
- There are not enough jobs for people with learning disabilities to go into. A lot of retail jobs are being made redundant
- The Council should get feedback on things regularly to check its quality. For example, the courses they are suggesting at Adult Learning.

Street cleaning

- Cuts to street cleaning – Crazy! So streets, parks will be more polluted. Bins and drains already bad at the moment.
- Disgusting – foxes, rats
- Less street cleaning can cause problems for people with learning disabilities. There will be more hazards in the streets
- People who use wheelchairs will find more hazards on the street because of less cleaning

Adult social care and day services

- Housing cuts. People are worried about losing supported living
- Peoples support hours, will they be cut?
- People are worried that they will be reassessed and have their hours of support cut
- I feel very upset, I will just have to stay at home if the day centre closes
- Cuts to day services – horrendous

- People will be missing day services. Not just for the day centres, but because they are also used in the evening for things like Mencap clubs

Leisure and Libraries

- I think people rely on the leisure centre and if one closes then people won't have one close enough - traveling there could be a problem
- A leisure centre is a community hub, so closing it - where will people go?
- Libraries closing is bad. People go to use the computer and internet. People meet there, it is a community hub.

After the small groups everyone fed back what they had said.

Colin closed the meeting and said that we would have another Zoom meeting about the cuts soon.

Part 2 – What happened after the People's Parliament on Cuts when the Mayor and other people in the Council met on 3rd February 2021

Straight after the People's Parliament on Cuts Councillor Jacq Paschoud sent an email to Marsh Stitchman, who helps the Parliament reps to do their work.

Councillor Paschoud said 'I have to agree with the person who said that they don't think a lot of people understand the true issues that the people you support face. If the cuts are going to Mayor and Cabinet tomorrow, I will write this evening trying to express some of the issues raised this afternoon.'

The next morning on February 3rd 2021, Councillor Paschoud sent a long email to the Mayor of Lewisham, Damien Egan. She repeated a lot of the concerns that people had said at the People's Parliament. She ended her email by saying:

'I very much hope that every effort will be made to minimise any impact of cuts on the Learning Disabled community who, despite having so much to say and contribute, largely go unheard.'

Councillor Paschoud also asked to speak at the Mayor & Cabinet meeting that evening where the cuts were likely to be agreed.

The cuts were agreed at the Mayor & Cabinet meeting on the 3rd February 2021. At the end there was a speech by Councillor Jacq Paschoud and a long talk between Councillors and Council employees about what the People's Parliament had said.

Here are some of the important points made about the People's Parliament at the Council meeting.

Councillor Jacq Paschoud said 'As a Council we need to have a vision of how things impact people and how some people suffer multiple impacts, because they suffer the universal impacts and then they suffer targeted impacts and we do need to watch how these things add up.'

Councillor Jacq Paschoud also said 'If any Councillors do approach the People's Parliament and if you are willing to listen patiently, you will find that it's a group of some of the most thoughtful and insightful people that you will meet. They are very realistic, they want to get their point over and if people listen carefully, a lot of good insightful stuff about how we need to live in Lewisham does come out of it'

Mayor Damien Egan said 'I'd echo that encouragement, as all my interactions with the People's Parliament have been nothing but positive and nothing but insightful.'

Tom Brown, Director of Community Services said 'We need to deal with people as individuals and try to shape our offer around those individuals and help them to optimise their independence and working with the People's Parliament and the Speaking Up group will be a great way to make sure we do that.'

Councillor Jonathan Slater said 'As someone who is responsible for the Disabled People's Commission, I'm really proud that we have this set up for Lewisham which actually represents the voice of our

residents with disabilities and Lewisham Speaking Up...actually nominate two members to the Commission....also as someone who is now responsible for Adult Learning Lewisham, any thoughts and ideas we can get from the People's Parliament on how we can make it work better, particularly for our residents with learning disabilities, I'm always open to hearing that and which I can feedback to the head of the service.'

Councillor Chris Best said 'It was really powerful to hear from the people yesterday and I think they really understood the impact of the government austerity and there was certainly a lot of discussion about how they had really been facing difficulties over the past few years. So I want to pay tribute to all of the fantastic work that you do and the People's Parliament in speaking up and advocating for people with learning disability in Lewisham.

Councillor Chris Best also said 'The group have just been fantastic in lobbying, the fact you are speaking here tonight, they've lobbied MPs, they've been lobbying Government..'

Councillor Chris Best said 'What I said I would do is go back to colleagues and look for more opportunities...in the past, we haven't done that well on employing people with learning disabilities and I want to look at what more we can do....'

You can download the video recording of the Council meeting here:

https://lewisham.public-i.tv/core/redirect/download_webcast_link/535677/

The part about the People's Parliament starts at around 53 minutes.

What Next?

The People's Parliament reps were very pleased that what was said at the Parliament was listened to and taken seriously by the Mayor, Councillors and Council employees.

We want to make sure the Council follows up on some of the things that were said:

- Working with Lewisham Speaking Up and the Disabled People's Commission on more detailed consultations about the cuts as they are agreed
- Making sure that the cuts do not affect disabled people more than non-disabled people. Keeping a check on how the cuts are affecting people's lives
- Looking for more opportunities for paid work for people with learning disabilities
- Making sure that people with learning disabilities are supported to get online and use technology
- Making sure that people with learning disabilities are involved in co-producing and reviewing the new work that Adult Learning Lewisham will be doing

For more information or to discuss anything to do with this report contact Marsh Stitchman martin.stitchman@lsup.org.uk

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March 2021

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