

Homeless services face cuts

Funding will disappear for county's schemes

Services for the homeless and vulnerable in the Lancashire County Council area are to be decimated in order to meet government spending targets.

Lancashire County Council is facing budget cuts of £65 million over the next two years as part of the council's bid to save £262 million by April 2020.

As part of the cuts, spending on non-statutory services and the £12 million budget for the Supporting People team – which covers housing-related services – is to be slashed.

In future just £3 million will be set aside to meet the needs of 16 and 17 year olds who are homeless, because this is a statutory service.

At an emotional and highly charged meeting of providers at County Hall in Preston last week, it was explained that although officers had fought to retain the service, the decision to cut provision had been made.

A cushion of £10.1 million from reserves is proposed to honour existing contracts as they are phased out.

Disappear

In Lancashire there are around 50 providers offering 700 placements for vulnerable people. In 2014-15 3,500 people used the services provided by the agencies.

The council agreed new contracts for the service this year, with an end date of March 2017 and an option to extend for up to two years. Now the service providers

have been told that after that date their funding will cease.

One of the services affected is the M3 Project, based in Rawtenstall, which provides schemes for homeless 16 to 25 year olds and teenage families across East Lancashire. Just 20 per cent of the project's clientele are aged 16 and 17.

Project manager Alan Dorrington said: "We are already looking at ways we can adapt our service and trying to identify any potential funders. We knew that our funding was likely to be cut

"When we found out about the cuts it was devastating. Staff morale has improved now that it has been clarified that the funding is not going to cease in 2016, as first suggested, but we now have to look very carefully at everything we do."

Consultation

Lancashire County Council's cabinet ratified the proposals on 26 November and they are now out for public consultation. No one from Lancashire County Council

was available to comment.

Other local authorities in the north have also changed the way they fund Supporting People.

Paul Andrews, Manchester City Council's executive member for adult health and wellbeing, said: "The Supporting People budget has been mainstreamed into our budget and is

no longer a separate budget line.

"However, we continue to fund services that are non statutory, such as drug and alcohol schemes, and non-statutory homeless services as well as sheltered services."

A spokesman for Liverpool City Council said: "Originally Supporting People was given in the form of a grant but from 2010 formed part of the city council's general fund budget. The supporting people budget has reduced from £46.523m in 2003 down to its present size of £11.904m in 2015, a reduction overall of approximately 75 per cent."

CATHERINE SMYTH



Chloe, just one of many young people helped by the M3 Project

even further, but we did not anticipate that it would disappear altogether."

The project, founded in 2003, was on a high after being named joint winner of the Rossendale Business Awards community business of the year earlier this month.

"We have got until March 2017, but in real terms we will have to wind down services that will no longer be funded before that and we will not be in a position to take on new clients," Dorrington said.

"Some larger organisations will have other ways to support their work. It is the small providers, like ourselves, that will be hardest hit.

NEWS IN BRIEF

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

Orange sofas and cushions have been placed at various points in Leeds to encourage residents to get comfortable talking about domestic violence. West Yorkshire Police received 43,000 domestic abuse reports over the past 12 months but true figures are thought to be much higher. The conversation is online too. Tweet @LCC_News or email getcomfortable@leeds.gov.uk.

SHEFFIELD'S TRAM-TRAIN

Sheffield is due to get the UK's first tram-train in 2017. The tram-trains, which have the technology to run on both street tram tracks and the rail network, will run three times an hour between Sheffield and Rotherham – taking 25 minutes. The pilot scheme will test whether the technology could be used elsewhere in the UK.

DISUSED HOUSING

A Leeds homeless charity is not backing the opening of empty houses in Leeds to homeless people. A petition urging the city council to follow the model in Manchester spearheaded by Ryan Giggs and Gary Neville has garnered over 8,000 signatures but St George's Crypt, which has the capacity to house 40 people, said there is already adequate provision in Leeds. "We understand that not all cities are fortunate to have a facility such as the Crypt," said a spokesman.

SOLAR PARK

Plans for a 20,000-panel solar energy park in Cumbria are set to be approved by Allerdale Council this week. The park, which would be run by UK Sustainable Energy, is planned for Flimby but locals have opposed it because of potential disruptions to farming and transport. Planning officers, however, have recommended the development committee approve the plans, saying: "The proposed solar panels will be relatively low."

Got an event, campaign or story from your area? Call 0161 831 5563 or email news@bigissuenorth.co.uk