Draft message to Somerset councillors – you can find who your councillor is here <https://www.writetothem.com/>

Dear councillor XXXXX

I am writing to express my concern over the transferral of Somerset’s learning disability service to Dimensions, and ask you to communicate this to the cabinet in advance of the transfer of employment date of 1 April 2017.

Although the public were not told of any predicted cuts or closures, and councillor William Wallace made it clear that “there are no savings targets associated with this decision”, it is now clear that to make the £4m saving predicted, Dimensions will get rid of staff, reduce the terms and conditions of those left, and possibly close day centres.

I do not see how any of this aligns with the cabinet’s stated aims for the transfer, nor with what service users said they wanted and were promised during the consultations. A transfer that was supposed to be about quality has become about cost.

As a member of staff / service user / supporter / etc, I witness the importance of continuity of care and skilled, motivated staff to give people the best service possible. The council’s own consultation showed a high level of satisfaction with the service.

Nonetheless, Dimensions have announced cuts that will hit the care provided to vulnerable people as well as making staffing problems worse. Higher turnover, recruitment issues, and low morale will not be improved by attacking people’s pay and other terms.

UNISON has also raised the legal risk to the council from rushing these changes without proper consultations under the TUPE regulations. The current handover date of 1 April 2017 seems far too soon, particularly given approaching elections. At a minimum I would want to see longer for Dimensions to work with all stakeholders to find a way around the cuts.

Dimensions have justified their cuts as “to address the need to bring the service into line with the available funding”. A £4m reduction in cost was forecast over the six year contract, with an in-house service costing £195m and Dimensions’ £191m. Not only has this aspect become central despite the cabinet denying savings were a driver of the handover, but the cabinet has announced that it does not intend to use the full 3% council tax levy for social care that is available for the next two years.

Raising 3% rather than the proposed 2% would secure enough funds to avoid the cuts Dimensions have laid out and keep the learning disability service on a sustainable, high quality basis. Do you really to see this Somerset success story undermined for the sake of a 2% reduction in overall service costs, which could in any case be met by raising additional funds?

I hope that you will talk to representatives of staff and service users to understand the harm these cuts will do to the service. I look forward to your reply explaining what you will do about my concerns and how you have raised these matters with the cabinet.

Yours sincerely