

Dear Sir/Madam

I understand that as part of the Comprehensive Spending Review there is a sub-review of services for families with disabled children. It is in respect of this that I am writing to you. I realise that the final date for submissions to the review was 15<sup>th</sup> of September but hope that what I have to contribute is not altogether too late....

Between February 16th and June 21st 2006 I was involved in a campaign to save a local authority respite care unit for disabled children - Maplewood House in Bamber Bridge near Preston, Lancashire, which at that time served approximately 40 children, including my own son, with severe learning and/or physical disabilities and their families. The local newspaper, the Lancashire Evening Post, supported the campaign which was eventually successful, at least for now. It was also featured on Granada and Radio 4 programmes.

Maplewood House was proposed for closure due to "budget savings" as the letter families received, stated. Lancashire County Council's Agenda for the Full Council meeting which approved the budget on 16th February 2006 quotes Local Government Minister Phil Woolas:

"We have provided a stable and predictable funding base for local services. We expect local government to respond positively as far as council tax is concerned.

Therefore we expect to see average council tax increase in each of the next two years of less than 5%. There is, following today's announcement, no excuse for excessive increases.

Local Government should be under no illusions; if there are excessive increase, we will take capping action - as we have done over the last two years."

It was within the constraints of this 5% capping level that the overall budget was set with the implication that the cuts were necessary because of this. I understand the Audit Commission is the body which assesses the performance of local authorities on public spending matters and that if there were inefficiencies or mis-spending this would be highlighted by the Commission. If there is not a charge to be levelled at Lancashire County Council in this regard and yet a vital frontline service for some of society's most vulnerable members is proposed for closure, then there is obviously some problem in the mismatch between funding and services.

During the campaign to save Maplewood we heard from MPs who suggested that local authorities received sufficient money to fund services and local councillors who thought this not to be the case. Families and their disabled children were potentially to be the casualties of this disagreement had the closure of Maplewood gone ahead. In recent utterances by two senior councillors, on Maplewood and the more general issues it raised, they suggested that there was a problem in that x% of the council tax is spent on y% of the population x being a large number and y being a small one -one of the councillors went on to qualify that by saying that "central government should do more". However, we cannot think in these simplistic proportionate terms. Such sums are required *because* of the high support needs of the disabled children who use Maplewood and other such services, be they few or many. Also the families need a break because of those high support needs and thus a service such as Maplewood is vital.

An article I came across during the campaign asked the question: what impact can a child with a severe disability have on a family? It listed the following:

"A child with a severe disability invariably leads to great personal and financial stress in the home. While some children have a need for intensive medical and therapeutic support or continuous