



## GMB CONGRESS 2011

### CEC Statement: In Defence of Public Services

The Coalition Government is slashing public spending by £99 billion per year by 2015. This includes an enormous 28% front-loaded cut to local-authority funding; the harshest ever funding settlement for the NHS, and more besides. The repercussions of Tory-Lib austerity are being felt across the entire public sector.

GMB maintains that these cuts are unnecessary, dogmatic, extremist and vindictive. The Tory Prime Minister and Chancellor, aided and abetted by the abject Lib Dems, intend to finish what the Conservative Party started in the 1980s: the privatisation and ultimate destruction of our public services. They are exaggerating the budget deficit and refusing to consider positive ways to address it in order to justify their attacks on public services.

The spending cuts directly affect the services that are needed by children and young people, the elderly, people with disabilities, and other vulnerable groups in our society. These are just a few examples:

- 63% of English councils are cutting their Sure Start budgets. 15 out of 17 Sure Start centres in Bromley are threatened with closure.
- Elderly residents in Southampton are facing proposals to pay 38% more for their meals-on-wheels, an extra £1.31 per meal.
- 1 in 5 councils in England have cut services for deaf children.
- The Lincolnshire Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service has lost its team of specialist social workers, after Lincolnshire County Council terminated its funding.
- The Norwich Unthank Centre, which provides specialist support for children who have experienced trauma or abuse, has been cut by Norfolk County Council.
- Hertfordshire County Council is cutting its funding to an Action on Disability charity and eight sheltered housing schemes for the elderly.
- All 7 children's homes run by Essex County Council may be closed, affecting 44 vulnerable children.
- Lancashire County Council is seeking to raise the eligibility threshold for adult social care from "moderate" to "substantial", and is closing respite centres for children with disabilities.

- Buckinghamshire County Council is shutting around 20 day centres for the elderly and disabled.
- Special needs children in Cambridgeshire are losing their transport to school.
- The LuDun disabled sheltered workshop in Dunstable has closed after Central Bedfordshire Council cut its funding to save £200,000.
- Home-Start Preston, which supports lone, disabled and teenage parents and their children, is on the brink of closure after losing its funding.
- The Grange Day Centre for physically disabled adults in Shropshire is being closed by Shropshire Council.
- More than 700 Building Schools for the Future projects have been cancelled by Michael Gove, everywhere from Brent and Blackpool to Liverpool and Lambeth.
- Disabled people in residential care are set to lose their mobility allowance, one of a number of Government cutbacks on disability benefits.
- In Nottinghamshire, speech and language therapy for children over six with autism has ended.
- 13 of the 26 youth centres in Oxfordshire may close after the council withdrew funding.
- 500,000 primary-school children from low-income families have lost their free school meals, once again thanks to Michael Gove.
- Michael Gove has also scrapped the Education Maintenance Allowance, which helped disadvantaged 16-18 year-old students pay for textbooks and transport.
- New families across the country have lost the baby and toddler elements of Child Tax Credit. The Sure Start Maternity Grant has been restricted and Child Benefit frozen.
- 50 per cent of homeless services in England have had cuts to date, in many cases forcing services to close or reduce their provision.
- In the NHS, treatments are being rationed and waiting times are lengthening, thanks to a four-year real-term budget freeze and £20 billion of "efficiency savings". This is on top of Andrew Lansley's dangerous

“reform” plans. See the CEC Statement on the Future of the NHS for a full analysis.

The above list is only a small sample highlighting the damage being done by the Tory-Lib cuts. The withdrawal of benefits and support services such as transport is essentially confining elderly and disabled people to their homes. Families struggling on low incomes are no longer getting the support they need either. These are the cruelest as well as the deepest cuts the country has seen for at least a generation. And the victims are the most vulnerable members of society.

As well as hitting front-line service users, the spending cuts have of course taken a massive toll on jobs—at a time when there are already 2.5 million people on the dole. GMB has tracked 227,599 public-service jobs under threat or already lost. This figure includes 171,709 local authority jobs and 49,682 in the NHS. A great many public bodies have achieved cuts in posts by deleting vacant posts and accepting volunteers for early retirement and redundancy. In some cases there have been compulsory redundancies. Some of the posts under threat are due to go later in further rounds of cuts up to 2014 or 2015. Every post deleted is a job that will not now be available to the nearly one million young workers who are unemployed. The devolved administrations are not immune from the cuts either: Northern Ireland, which is heavily reliant on public-sector employment, has had its funding cut by £4 billion.

### **Fighting back**

The Tories and Lib Dems need to be reminded that building hospitals and schools didn't cause the deficit, it was the bank crash. Public spending actually kept Britain afloat during the 2008-09 recession when the economy was on the brink of a 1930s-style depression. The vulnerable people who rely most on public services are not the culprits and they don't deserve to take the rap. The CEC Statement on the Economy makes clear that the economy can't cope with these cuts and that there is an alternative. As a union and a champion of our public services and the welfare state, we must speak out.

Amidst the wanton destruction of services and jobs, there are many examples of communities fighting back. For example:

- The disabled residents who successfully overturned Birmingham City Council's proposal to restrict funding for adult social care to those with the severest physical needs only.
- The 6 local authorities who fought and won against Michael Gove's decision to scrap their school rebuilding projects.

- The Cambridgeshire residents who are mounting a legal challenge to their council's decision to cut local bus services, potentially leaving elderly people in rural areas completely isolated.
- The 8,000 disabled people and their families who demonstrated on behalf of "the hardest hit" in London on 11 May.
- The library users in Oxfordshire who forced the council to restore library funding for 2011-12.
- The Suffolk campaigners who have forced their Tory flagship council to think again about cutting school crossing patrols and outsourcing services.
- The Shopmobility customers in Southampton whose campaign has won a reprieve for the local mobility scooter centre.
- The half-a-million trade unionists and community groups who "Marched for the Alternative" in London on 26 March.

GMB members have been campaigning in and out of workplaces up and down the country to protest against the mindless destruction of jobs and services. The budget decisions of every public body are open to scrutiny and challenge. No public-service provider who thinks that cuts to vital services can be "pain free" should be allowed to peddle that myth. Trade unions have an important role to play in promoting alternatives.

The message is clear: we do not have to take these cuts lying down. GMB will be there for members and service users in the community, and we will fight tooth and nail to defend the vulnerable. With vision, commitment and good organisation, we can make a difference.