

Council	Agenda Item 15(d)
21 May 2011	Brighton & Hove City Council

NOTICE OF MOTION

LABOUR & CO-OPERATIVE GROUP

LEGAL AID CUTS

“This Government proposes to cut £350 million to legal aid, as part of the Legal Aid, Sentencing and Punishment of Offenders Bill.

As a result, over half a million fewer people a year will receive support from the legal aid system.

This Council believes that these cuts to legal aid are short-sighted and counter-productive because many of the issues covered by legal aid will simply escalate, resulting in greater cost to the taxpayer further down the line. For example, according to cost-benefit analysis from the Citizens Advice Bureaux, for every one pound of legal aid expenditure on:

- Housing advice, the state potentially saves £2.34
- Debt advice, the state potentially saves £2.98
- Benefits advice, the state potentially saves £8.80
- Employment advice, the state potentially save £7.13

Furthermore, Law Centres help 120,000 people annually. Independent research has revealed that for every £1 spent by a Law Centre in the provision of legal service, at least £10 was generated in savings and social benefits.

Of these 120,000 people, with problems such as eviction, unfair dismissal, exclusion from school and domestic violence, it is estimated that 60,000 will no longer be helped, if these proposals are brought into force. There is no alternative source of advice available or that is suitable.

This council believes that this Government’s proposals remove vital support when people need it the most and that it is an irresponsible time to be leaving the most vulnerable in society without advice or legal support, when demands on advice services as a result of Government cuts are higher than ever.

This Council acknowledges that advice centre funding has been hit by cuts from all angles, from local authorities and central government grants from BIS, DCLG and now the Ministry of Justice. This has put at risk, on average, nearly 45% of the funding that advice centres receive.

This Council acknowledges the role of the local advice centres and is grateful of the hard work which helps so many vulnerable people in Brighton & Hove. These include Age Concern, Brighton Housing Trust, Citizens Advice Bureau, Community & Voluntary Sector Forum, Fitzhugh Gates Solicitors, MACS (Money Advice and

Community Support), Mind, Rise Women's Refuge, The Bridge Community Education Centre and the Whitehawk Inn.

Approximately 20,000 residents receive one-to-one advice from voluntary sector agencies in this city, with the Brighton Housing Trust providing specialist casework support and representation to 3,000 people per year. Legal Aid accounts for around 90% of BHT funding for advice and around 25% of the Citizen's Advice Bureau.

This Council therefore deeply regrets that due to proposed cuts, the admirable work of our local advice centres may be unable to continue and therefore resolves to:

- (a) Express its support to Brighton & Hove's Justice for All campaign in asking Government to rethink their cuts to legal aid, and;
- (b) Requests the Chief Executive to write to the Secretary of State for Justice, Ken Clarke to express concern over these proposals."

Proposed by: Cllr Warren Morgan Seconded by: Cllr Gill Mitchell

Supported by: Cllrs Meadows, Farrow, Gilbey, Pissaridou, Carden, Hamilton, Marsh, Turton, Lepper, Fitch, Robins.