



# Lost in localism.





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## Foreword

At a time of spending cuts and squeezed budgets at every level of government, people with mental illness and their families are understandably nervous about the future. They are seeing services they used to rely on being drastically scaled back or shut down completely. It's a worrying time.

They also know from experience that mental health services are particularly vulnerable because they have historically been seen as an 'easy' cut to make. People with severe mental illnesses such as schizophrenia are understandably not always the ones who shout the loudest when it comes to influencing local spending decisions.

In an attempt to get a better handle of the scale of the cutbacks, many people with a mental illness and their families, who make up our membership, have been getting in touch to ask how they could find out what proportion of social care budgets in their area are being spent on mental health.

It sounded like a more than reasonable request to us, but over a year after we first set out to find this data, we are still no closer to the truth. If we, as a national charity with research and policy teams can't get hold of the numbers, what chance do ordinary people have?

Why does this matter? It matters because in age of 'localism' in which local authorities have unprecedented freedom over how they spend their money, it seems absurd that they're not required to publish their budgets when they're set.

Eric Pickles has said he wants us all to become 'armchair auditors' and our members are more than ready to take up his challenge, but at the moment the numbers are almost impossible to get hold of.

The way things currently stand, local authorities do not have to publish their spending plans for the coming financial year when their budgets are finalised in April.

In many areas, the only way to get hold of this information is through a freedom of information request (FOI). Even then, very often what comes

back is a set of complex spreadsheets, designed for government officials with no accompanying explanation of the thinking behind any changes.

We simply don't think that's good enough.

The current government has made transparency one of their top priorities and we applaud them for that, but when it comes to local decision making, those good intentions are not being translated into action.

What we're asking for is simple. Once budgets are set, we want local authorities to clearly spell out how much money they're planning to spend on mental health in their area. We want them to present this information in a way that ordinary people can understand, and we want them to make it easy for people to access.

This report is an invitation to Ministers to work with us and other key stakeholders to achieve this. We believe this is the only way that the government will fulfil its ambition for everyone to have a voice in local decisions which affect them.

Without this basic information, it's impossible for individuals or organisations to enter into any kind of meaningful debate about spending on mental health. It means cuts to vital services, such as supported housing or support workers who help people with severe mental illnesses live independently, are being made under a shroud of secrecy.



**Paul Jenkins**  
CEO Rethink Mental Illness

## Introduction

Over the past year, people with mental illness and their families who make up our membership, have frequently asked us to find out just how much money their local authorities are spending on mental health, and how this compares to other areas.

People who use mental health services, and their carers, worry that cuts to public spending will lead to the loss of essential services. They want to know whether their local council is planning to cut mental health spending, and if so, by how much. Without this information, there's no way they can hold local decision makers to account.

Access to this kind of local information is vital at a time when the coalition government has given local authorities unprecedented freedom over how they spend their money.

Providing local communities with this information is necessary if, as we have been promised, 'localism' will make councils accountable to government and to the public.

Many of our members fully intend to respond to Eric Pickle's call for 'armchair auditors', but this depends on how easily they can access the information they need and how easy to understand that information is.

It seems absurd that in many areas, the only way people affected by mental illness can get hold of this information, is by producing their own a Freedom of Information Act request or attending council meetings.

Local authorities should be proactively producing accessible, timely and meaningful information about their budgets, and presenting it in a way that ordinary people can understand.

This report details our attempts over many months to obtain this information and the multiple barriers we faced.

**“Greater openness in spending is the best way to root out waste, spot duplication and increase value for money. That is why I have been asking councils to ‘show me the money’ so local taxpayers can see where their hard earned cash is going... The simple task of putting spending online will open the doors to an army of armchair auditors who will be able to see at a glance exactly where millions of pounds spent last year went.”**

Eric Pickles, the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government, 2010

## At a national level

The Department for Communities and Local Government requires that local authorities make certain information public, including all spending over £500 and the salaries of senior managers.

In 2010, the Prime Minister created a new Public Sector Transparency Board to drive forward the government's transparency agenda. The Board sets out principles for public data provision, including that it should be timely and in as fine detail as possible.

The Local Government Association is also working to increase transparency, including developing guides to open data provision for local authorities.

We fully support these initiatives. However, the majority of information we have sourced from local and national government over the last year has been anything but clear. Authorities are extremely varied in their transparency, and there is no requirement to go beyond the provision of raw data, or meet any standards that ensure their data can be easily understood and accessed by the public.

If the government's transparency drive is really about ensuring that the people affected by local decision making and changes to services can hold their local authority to account, then government transparency initiatives must make the right information available for them to do this.





## Making transparency work

How do we achieve a level of accountable transparency that makes ‘armchair auditing’ a reality? The autonomy that national government has given local government makes it unlikely that Ministers will want to prescribe how local authorities collate and share data. Government may consider the transparency requirements it has already placed on local government sufficient, despite this being a long list of local government spending over £500 that does not show spending trends over time.

There is no easy answer, which is why Rethink Mental Illness wants to engage with Government, and expert stakeholders, to develop solutions to make local authority budgeting decisions accessible to everyone. This must include the most vulnerable in our society, so that no-one is excluded from localism and everyone has information they can really use to hold their elected representatives to account.



## The evidence

From Autumn 2010 to Spring 2011 our members reported proposed cuts to social care and support for mental health across the country. 230 people contacted us through an online *Cuts Watch* survey, describing a partial or full loss of services they had relied upon. It was clear that most people did not feel that local consultations had been meaningful, or that the impact of changes to services on people with mental illness had been carefully considered. It was also clear that concerned individuals were finding it difficult to get to the bottom of what final decisions, including signed off budget for the year, had been made, and why.

In an attempt to seek clarity, we undertook a Freedom of Information Act (FOI) request in March/April 2011, to local authorities across England with responsibility for mental health social care services.<sup>2</sup>

We asked for information that would give us a clear and detailed picture of any changes made to mental health service spending in 2011-2 compared to 2010-11. We anticipated receiving two sets of figures that we could easily compare, as well as documentation explaining the rationale for any service changes, as agreed through community engagement activities and Cabinet budget meetings. This seemed reasonable given the principles set out by the Public Sector Transparency Board regarding timely and detailed information.

2. 143 out of 150 local authorities with responsibility for social care services, due to a small number of technical errors in conducting the FOI request.

## The FOI results

13% of local authorities used their reply to direct us to the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG), referring to Section 22 of the Freedom of Information Act.<sup>3</sup>

The Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) annually collects data from all local authorities on the money they allocate across services, and this is available from June each year. This meant that those local authorities who signposted us to DCLG required us to wait for up to three months before being able to access the amount they had budgeted for mental health services. This also means that citizens have to access centrally held data, rather than being supported to engage by local authorities.

Some journalists also requested budget information around this time, but the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government, Eric Pickles MP, wrote to local authorities to recommend that they use Section 22, and refer enquiries to this pending central data.<sup>4</sup> This was the first barrier to obtaining time-relevant budget data.

In June 2011, DCLG made available the information that local authorities had signposted us to. This clearly set out the budgets for mental health services for the 2011-2 financial year. We also requested data for 2010-11, so that we could pinpoint which areas had increased and which areas had reduced mental health spending.

As some local authorities had responded to our FOI, and others had referred us to the DCLG figures, we wanted to check whether they were consistent. We found that:

- 21% of local authorities reported budget cuts or increases to the FOI and to the DCLG that differed by more than 10%.
- Only 10% of local authorities provided the same data to us and to the DCLG.

These inconsistencies were a cause of some concern because it was unclear which figures we should rely on. We couldn't understand what money had been allocated to mental health services by local government each year, and why the figures were so different.

We contacted the ten local authorities who supplied data that we considered to be the most inconsistent with the data they supplied to government.

The explanations we received from them seemed reasonable, but had not been clearly explained at the time of asking for information. They highlighted the range of variations between the categories local authorities use to present their budgets (which can include funds not derived from central government) and that these differ from categories that government wants data reported against. This meant that some of the figures contained in the government data table contained sums amalgamated by local authorities across different types of services.

The result is confusion and uncertainty about which information is correct and can be relied upon by citizens and communities when holding their local authority to account. The limited nature of the information provided made it mostly impossible to determine what funding had been allocated to social care for different groups, what evidence lay behind funding decisions, and whether funding had changed year on year and how. Without this breadth and depth of accurate, detailed information it has so far been impossible to accurately hold local government to account on its spending decisions. Would-be 'armchair auditors' are left in the dark.

See page xxx for information on each local authority area.

53% of local  
authorities did  
not respond with  
the information  
we asked for.

## What needs to change?

Social care is not currently transparent enough for local communities to understand local decisions, let alone to hold local representatives to account. At this time of austerity it is unacceptable that people cannot see where resource is being used in their area until spending lists are published at the end of the financial year. People should be supported to contribute to decision making, which includes being properly informed about plans and budgets.

**We want real local accountability.**

We call on the Department for Communities and Local Government, the Transparency Board, local government organisations such as the Local Government Association and London Councils and voluntary sector organisations to work with us to make changes for the better.

We would like to work together to address these information gaps, and deliver transparency and accountability in localism. A more proactive approach to engaging local communities will also reduce the burden on staff processing Freedom of Information requests.

**From April 2013 local authorities should be required to proactively provide documentation for local communities showing that they have:**

- Undertaken meaningful consultation with residents on proposals, assessed the impact of cuts on vulnerable people and taken these into account in making final decisions.**
- Published budget information in April for the year ahead, categorised in a format which is accessible and understandable for the lay community. This should be detailed enough to show how much resource is allocated to care and support for different groups, in a consistent format year on year so that trends can be seen.**

## Appendix 1: Local authority reported budgets for mental health social care services 2010-11 and 2011-12

\* Signposted to Government data.

 No response to our FOI.

 Cuts and increases reported to FOI and to Government different by more than 10%.

 Figures provided to FOI and to Government are the same.

 No data due to technical error in conducting FOI.

	FOI MH 2010-11 (£000)	FOI MH 2011-12 (£000)	FOI % difference 2010/11 - 2011/12	DCLG MH 2010-11 (£000)	DCLG MH 2011-12 (£000)	DCLG % difference 2010/11 - 2011/12
Barking and Dagenham*				4348	4119	-5.3
Barnet	7338	6776	-8	9611	8551	-11.1
Barnsley	4829	5594	13.7	4809	5569	13.6
Bath and North East Somerset	7291	7146	-2	4144	3182	-23.2
Bedford	2179	2623	16.9	3218	3792	15.1
Bexley				3893	3866	-0.7
Birmingham				26264	22479	-14.4
Blackburn with Darwen	3105	3205	3.1	3294	3938	16.4
Blackpool	4613	3712	-19.5	4613	3712	-19.5
Bolton	5795	5250	-9.4	8588	6510	-24.2
Bournemouth	2646	2637	-0.3	3210	3360	4.5
Bracknell Forest	2011	1841	-8.5	1856	1584	-14.7
Bradford				8721	519	-94
Brent*				8912	8655	-2.9
Brighton and Hove				6194	6135	-1
Bristol	7674	9223	16.8	7674	9222	16.8
Bromley	5558	5677	2.1	5789	5736	-0.9
Buckinghamshire	6815	4027	-40.9	7842	7445	-5.1
Bury				3595	3523	-2.1
Calderdale*				3534	3444	-2.5
Cambridgeshire	7884	11387	30.8	10361	11853	12.6
Camden	17634	20504	14	12394	18188	31.9
Central Bedfordshire	3954	4506	12.3	3954	4506	12.3
Cheshire East				6885	6033	-12.4

Cheshire West and Chester	2796	3764	25.7	6549	5615	-14.3
City of London				1241	1025	-17.7
Cornwall	4655	6017	22.6	7034	6145	-12.6
County Durham*				11436	8543	-25.3
Coventry	5604	5387	-3.9	5604	5387	-3.9
Croydon	8779	23661	62.9	9616	10383	7.4
Cumbria	5061	5179	2.2	6557	6683	1.9
Darlington	1904	1831	-3.8	1904	1832	-3.8
Derby	4530	4077	-10	5792	4890	-15.6
Derbyshire cc	7986	8081	1.2	15603	12503	-19.9
Devon CC	10006	11162	10.4	11041	12124	8.9
Doncaster	4160	3728	-10.4	4091	3664	-10.4
Dorset CC				5221	4979	-4.6
Dudley	6146	5765	-6.2	6065	5307	-12.5
Ealing	7251	6220	-14.2	11037	7382	-33.1
East Riding of Yorkshire	4389	4701	6.6	4465	4327	-3.1
East Sussex	15091	15165	0.5	17650	17407	-1.4
Enfield	7917	8353	5.2	12260	11714	-4.4
Essex	21446	19284	-10.1	27086	22557	-16.7
Gateshead				3522	2648	-24.8
Gloucestershire				7216	12125	40.5
Greenwich	7213	7344	1.8	7159	6932	-3.2
Hackney	10959	10479	-0.4	9847	9736	-1.1
Halton	2756	2596	-5.8	3265	3034	-7.1
Hammersmith and Fulham				8027	8709	7.8
Hampshire	15146	15382	1.5	15146	15382	1.5
Haringey				11179	10141	-9.3
Harrow				6129	6096	-0.5
Hartlepool				2665	2863	6.9
Havering	3274	3269	-0.2	3361	3314	-1.4
Herefordshire				2647	3414	22.5
Hertfordshire	19135	18036	-5.7	26237	22817	-13
Hillingdon	7016	6800	-13	5441	6587	17.4
Hounslow	7014	6948	-0.9	4946	5809	15
Isle of Wight	3113	3244	4	3113	3248	4
Islington	8604	8549	-0.6	8604	8549	-0.6
Kensington and Chelsea	8219	8024	-2.4	8219	8024	-2.4
Kent				25120	24448	-2.7
Kingston upon Hull*				5505	4528	-17.7
Kingston upon Thames	4243	3838	-9.5	4186	3751	-10.4
Kirklees	7347	7370	0.3	7164	6505	-9.2
Knowsley	2824	2783	-1.5	2967	4196	29.3
Lambeth				13449	12576	-6.5

Lancashire	27177	24734	-9	27934	25717	-7.9
Leeds				15887	13607	-14.4
Leicester City*				23713	33507	29.2
Leicestershire	10425	10307	-1.1	11944	10307	-13.7
Lewisham	8187	9187	10.9	9244	9867	6.3
Lincolnshire	7842	7092	-9.6	11762	10495	-10.8
Liverpool				15721	16067	2.2
Luton				3135	3350	6.4
Manchester	14887	13242	-11	18599	18589	-0.1
Medway	4534	4334	-4.4	4534	4334	-4.4
Merton	3749	3487	-7	3803	3487	-8.3
Middlesbrough	2966	3671	19.2	5048	4737	-6.2
Milton Keynes	3156	3359	6	3112	3591	13.3
Newcastle upon Tyne	8336	9263	10	6667	7080	5.8
Newham*				9345	9010	-3.6
Norfolk	24019	15676	-34.7	24019	21979	-8.7
North East Lincolnshire	5860	6506	9.9	5894	6323	6.8
North Lincolnshire				3647	3558	-2.4
North Somerset	3674	4912	25.2	5433	5378	-1
North Tyneside				3350	2715	-19
North Yorkshire				7355	7442	1.2
Northamptonshire				18447	15767	-14.5
Northumberland	6252	4337	-30.3	6216	4332	-30.3
Nottingham				7081	5959	-15.8
Nottinghamshire*				14283	13106	-8.2
Oldham	6183	6788	8.8	4950	6768	26.9
Oxfordshire*				8430	8936	5.7
Peterborough	1750	1721	-1.7	1750	1721	-1.7
Plymouth				5095	5022	-1.4
Poole	2761	2892	4.5	2872	2175	-24.3
Portsmouth	4987	5205	4.2	5264	5350	1.6
Reading	4263	4411	3.4	5234	5266	0.6
Redbridge				6784	6261	-7.7
Redcar and Cleveland				3869	3472	-10.3
Richmond upon Thames	2618	2573	-1.7	5066	5236	3.2
Rochdale	4531	4777	5.1	4629	4898	5.5
Rotherham				6271	5710	-8.9
Rutland*				312	323	3.4
Salford				7466	8013	6.8
Sandwell*				8679	7917	8.8
Sefton	7911	7869	-0.5	7911	7869	-0.5
Sheffield	14436	12915	-10.5	10944	10253	-6.3
Shropshire	4917	4452	-9.5	4992	4502	-9.8
Slough*				4362	4191	-3.9

Solihull				2917	4015	27.3
Somerset	8221	8791	6.5	8310	8300	-0.1
South Gloucestershire	1901	1935	1.8	2558	1928	-24.6
South Tyneside				3953	2983	-24.5
Southampton				5329	4905	8
Southend-on-sea	3935	3710	-5.7	3605	3359	-6.8
Southwark				14711	13507	-8.2
St Helens	3063	2838	-7.3	3342	2839	-15.1
Staffordshire	10917	11377	4	12779	12022	-5.9
Stockport				5316	5143	-3.3
Stockton-on-Tees	4668	4374	-6.3	4668	4374	-6.3
Stoke-on-trent				4897	4460	-8.9
Suffolk				12742	14903	14.5
Sunderland*				5008	5494	8.8
Surrey	6076	5929	-2.4	16995	17389	2.3
Sutton	4111	6731	38.9	4547	4924	7.7
Swindon	2201	1857	-15.6	2201	1857	-15.6
Tameside	4259	3514	-17.5	4454	4697	5.2
Telford and the Wrekin*				3830	3775	-1.4
Thurrock*				2190	2561	14.5
Torbay*				3728	3713	-0.4
Tower Hamlets				12954	11853	-8.5
Trafford	4091	3756	-8.2	4091	3756	-8.2
Wakefield				5669	5480	-3.3
Walsall				8672	9632	11
Waltham Forest				6373	6759	5.7
Wandsworth	9845	9005	8.5	8115	8582	5.4
Warrington	4942	4751	-3.9	4939	4751	-3.8
Warwickshire	8838	7985	-9.7	5480	2529	-53.9
West Berkshire				2172	2145	-1.2
West Sussex	9633	9124	-5.3	9633	9124	-5.3
Westminster*				13783	12937	-6.1
Wigan	6485	6068	-6.4	6478	6036	-6.8
Wiltshire*				7215	6973	-3.4
Windsor and Maidenhead	2454	2514	2.4	2693	2678	-0.6
Wirral	5611	5218	7	8082	6822	-15.6
Wokingham				3407	4182	18.5
Wolverhampton	5888	5882	-0.1	6294	6036	-4.1
Worcestershire	7800	10400	25	7285	9603	24.1
York	3138	3076	-2	3493	2800	-19.8

Rethink Mental Illness is a charity that believes a better life is possible for millions of people affected by mental illness. For 40 years we have brought people together to support each other. We run services and support groups across England that change people's lives and we challenge attitudes about mental illness.

- We have 250 services which help people live independently, make the most of their lives, make their voice heard, cope in a crisis without hospital and find out about their rights. We may have a service near you, go to [www.rethink.org/services](http://www.rethink.org/services) to find out.
- We have 150 support groups where people can share experiences and find understanding. We may have one near you. Go to [www.rethink.org/groups](http://www.rethink.org/groups) to find out.
- We campaign to improve people's rights to care and put an end to stigma and discrimination. [www.rethink.org/campaigns](http://www.rethink.org/campaigns)
- We have a network of thousands of members who feel part of a movement to improve the lives of people affected by mental illness. Join us today [www.rethink.org/join](http://www.rethink.org/join)
- We provide reliable information on topics from medication to housing rights. Go to our website [www.rethink.org/information](http://www.rethink.org/information) or call 0300 5000 927.
- We have specialist advisors who help with benefit problems, debt, access to services, medication and rights under the Mental Health Act. Call 0300 5000 927, Monday to Friday, 10am to 1pm or email [advice@rethink.org](mailto:advice@rethink.org)
- Join our online community 'Rethink Talk', where people connect to others with similar experiences [www.rethink.org/talk](http://www.rethink.org/talk)
- We train teachers, the police, and everyone who needs to understand mental illness better. Call 0300 5000 927 to find out more.
- Our research gives new perspectives on mental illness and improves the evidence base. Visit [www.rethink.org/research](http://www.rethink.org/research)



Rethink Mental Illness is a partner in:





**Leading the way to a better  
quality of life for everyone  
affected by severe mental illness.**

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