SOCIAL CARE: THE SILENT CATASTROPHE

By David Plank

Cambridge Fairness Review
Update of Social Care: from Crisis to Catastrophe
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David Plank is a former local authority Chief Executive and Director of Social Services. He is author of the Cambridge Commons pamphlet, *Social Care: From Crisis to Catastrophe*. He now lives in Cambridge.
INTRODUCTION - AN UPDATE


Cuts in essential government funding of local authorities every year since 2010 have produced a catastrophe in social care for the vulnerable adults, children and young people who rely on it. The last two years have been particularly severe and there is no end in sight.

The government’s general grant to Cambridgeshire County Council (which is responsible for social care services) is being cut from £111 million a year in 2010 to £39 million this year and to ZERO in 2019. In the last two years alone, the council has been forced to make savings of £58 million a year from social care; from 2014 to 2019 this is planned to rise to £128 million a year. Overall, if full account is taken of savings made from 2011 at the start of the last Parliament to the end of the present Parliament in 2019, the total savings already decided and planned for social care come to £220 million a year. These are obscenely huge amounts.

While a proportion of the savings is ploughed back by the County Council to try to meet some of the huge demographic and other pressures on social care, this is within a significantly reduced and continuously reducing cash budget. The government has made no provision in its funding for the demands from population change and additional duties – or for the new National Minimum Wage. The two groups of people in Cambridgeshire who most need social care are growing larger – children under 15 by 18 per cent, people aged 85 or more by 49 per cent – over the present decade. The new duty to meet the needs of carers is estimated by the county to cost £3.2 million a year; and the new Minimum Wage an additional £22 million a year for the social care services alone by 2019.

This ‘triple whammy’ is harming the most vulnerable members of our community who have the right to expect support from a supposedly civilised society; instead it is being withdrawn.

Because this catastrophe is taking place behind closed doors it seems invisible to most of our citizens. But it is savage in its effects nonetheless even if the cries of distress cannot be heard out in the streets.
PART 1: Cambridgeshire

The human cost of the last two years savings

Examples of the effects of the savings decided in Cambridgeshire over the last two years are:

- **Older people** [affected by savings of up to £30 million a year]: Are having their incontinence pads changed less often, receive less help with their personal toileting - making distressing incontinence more likely - and less help with washing and bathing. The home care service has been reduced significantly and 15 minute visits are taking place; carers, many of them elderly, are often exhausted and their health adversely affected, cut off at home within the four walls.

- **Adults with mental ill-health** [affected by savings of up to £25 million a year]: Are less able to get a much needed residential place; receive less home care and other community support, including advocacy - leading to their deterioration and distress and heavier burdens on stressed and sometimes frail carers with greater risk of breakdown; and less help with recovery and re-establishing a way of living independently.

- **Adults with learning difficulties** [affected by savings of up to £30 million a year]: Are receiving crisis care only with reduced help to live an independent normal life due to less personal care and support to go out for essential routines such as shopping and for the social activity we all need - and less help to get and keep a job. The result is more frustration, more challenging and occasionally violent behaviour for stressed and often lifetime carers to deal with. The savings mean a cut in their ability to be people.

- **Adults with physical or sensory disabilities** [affected by savings of up to £25 million a year]: Are less able to live independently, with more isolation and loneliness due to less opportunity to go out - more “imprisonment” within the four walls and even less chance of getting a job, despite innate ability and desire; more demands on stressed carers and greater risk of breakdown.

- **Children and young people in the council’s care** [savings over the last three years on specialist residential and fostering placements alone of £8.5 million a year]: Are at greater risk of vulnerability to grooming, exploitation or abuse; greater risk of future mental health issues, homelessness or prison; and less independent contact, personal support and advocacy due to pressures on social workers who are supposed to be there for them. And this for children and young people for
whom the state, through the county council, has parental responsibility. Of these young people, about 60 per cent have emotional and mental health problems; and the main reason for entering care is abuse or neglect (62 per cent). One third of the young men and 61 per cent of the young women in a recent young offender institution survey said they had been in local authority care.

- **Children, young people and their families in need** [no estimate available of total savings so far but the yearly amount is large]: Less social work and other skilled support to help those in difficulties and at risk of deterioration or breakdown - with increased risk of problems further down the road; devastation of the Youth Service, including complete cessation of dedicated youth work with disaffected young people not in touch with mainstream services. The children’s centres budget in 2014 was reduced by one quarter, requiring loss of skilled staff including family workers. It is no surprise that the number of children and young people in care has increased by 100 to 570 over the last two years having been stable at 470 over the previous ten. The cuts in preventative services are one important factor in this.

- **Children with disabilities** [savings over the last two years of £530,000 a year]: Reduced support to families under great pressure due to the needs of the child or young person and the strain they place on even the strongest parental relationships, reduction in ability to provide much needed respite and greater risk of breakdown in families. The number of children with disabilities continues to grow with better health care.

In addition to these specific examples of savings made to date, there is the overall human cost of introduction across the board of tighter gatekeeping and rationing mechanisms. These mean that proportionately fewer people are assessed as eligible for services or personal budgets, and those who are get a reduced service, a less good quality service or have it reduced or withdrawn before it would have been previously. Plus the 'robbing Paul & Peter to pay Peter & Paul syndrome’, for example, the new duty to meet the needs of carers is funded by savings from the very services on which those they care for, and indeed carers, rely!

And all these ‘savings’ adversely affect adults with recognised critical or substantial care needs, or children and young people who without the provision of a service are unlikely to achieve a ‘reasonable standard of health or development’, or where ‘significant impairment’ of that standard would otherwise occur, or who are disabled, i.e., substantially and permanently handicapped by a physical or mental condition.
Why is this happening?

Responsibility for this neglect of vulnerable people in our community lies fair and square with the government. Government funding is critical to local authority income to pay for the essential services it has statutory responsibility to provide. According to the National Audit Office, the government reduced its funding to local government in England by 37 per cent in real terms from 2010 to 2015. This amounted to a 25 per cent fall in local authorities' total income when Council Tax receipts were taken into account.

As stated above, Cambridgeshire County Council’s general government funding fell from £111 million a year in 2010 to just £39 million this year, i.e., by 65 per cent. The Autumn Statement following the 2015 Spending Review confirmed that further large reductions will be made in each year to 2019. By then it will be ZERO for all local authorities, including Cambridgeshire – a reduction of 100 per cent over the ten years from 2010. Or, more accurately, much more than 100 per cent when account is taken of the additional government funding that should have been allocated to local authorities for social care to meet escalating need and additional duties.

The huge gap this creates in the cash available to local authorities has not been and will not be made up in any significant way by the government’s specific grants – or through Council Tax and the Business Rates due to the tight government constraints on them. In any event, the highly regressive nature of Council Tax which even the poorest have to pay in most local authority areas, makes it a wholly inappropriate means of providing for their needs.

It is, therefore, national government policies that have forced Cambridgeshire and other local authorities to make the huge "savings" they have already made – and will go on being forced to make throughout this Parliament.

The triple whammy

Yet at the same time high priority need is going through the roof. The number of children and young people in Cambridgeshire is projected to increase by 18 per cent between 2011 and 2021; and those aged 85 or more by a massive 49 per cent. The figures for Cambridge are 33 and 26 per cent respectively. These age groups have by far the biggest effect on high priority need for social care. No money is being made available by the government to help meet this need other than through the Better Care Fund to assist social and health care ‘integration’ which pales into insignificance alongside the massive cuts in general funding. And new statutory duties are being added without real government cash to back them up. The social
care services are subject to a ‘triple whammy’ of rapidly rising demand, rapidly reducing resources and new statutory duties.

Council cash limits

To try to square this vicious circle, the County Council like other authorities has set cash limits for its total spending and for each of its services. These limits have been reduced year by year and will continue to go down. To keep spending within them while also trying to respond to escalating top priority demand, the council has been forced to make recurrent ‘savings’ from 2014 of £70 million a year by this year, rising to £159 million a year over the next four years to 2019. Within this framework, the social care services, which form two thirds of the overall budget, have been required to make “savings” of £58 million a year over the last two years, a requirement which rises to £128 million a year over the next four (more than half of which remains to be identified in future years’ budgets).

Cambridgeshire’s total net budget for social care in 2014 was just £252 million a year after some provision was made for demographic and other pressures and that year’s savings were taken out; in 2015 it reduced to £241.7 million. It is within this reduced and reducing cash limit that social care is obliged to meet huge demographic pressures, inflation and additional statutory duties. The council’s current Business Plan assesses that by 2019 further provision of £83.4 million a year will need to be made in the social care services budget for inflation, demographic change and other pressures – which has to be met within a reducing cash budget. This is why the year after year savings requirements are so big. It is also why tighter and tighter gatekeeping and rationing is such an important part of the savings.

Overall, if full account is taken of savings from 2011 at the start of the last Parliament to the end of the present Parliament in 2019, the total savings already decided and planned for social care come to £220 million a year (which excludes increases in income through, for example, raising charges for services). These are recurrent yearly figures, NOT cumulative, over a period of years. Despite commendable efforts to improve the efficiency and effectiveness with which the social care service uses its money, these huge figures have required major cuts in services and will require even more. There is no two ways about it.

Next year’s savings

The County Council’s additional savings proposals for next year’s budget became public at the beginning of November 2015 before the
announcement of the government’s Spending Review and Autumn Statement (see later). It is anticipated that further savings of £26.8 million a year will have be made in children’s and adults social care in 2016. If agreed, these would have additional consequences in later years so that their cumulative effect would amount to £73.3 million a year by 2020 – of which £50.2 million is rated by officers as having the highest risk level, of red, in their impact on children and adults in need. These savings represent roughly 30 per cent of the social care net budget for 2015.

Illustrative examples of the proposed savings rated at the ‘red’ risk impact level are given below.

For adults with learning difficulties alone the savings amount to £17.5 million a year on top of the up to £30 million a year savings made in previous years’ budgets. According to the officer report to councillors these mean: ‘Accepting more risk in (care) packages’; ‘requiring a 7% reduction in the average cost of residential care, a 5% reduction in the average cost of supported living and a 6% reduction on average across community-based services’. Cuts of up to £47.5 million a year for a group of people much smaller in number than older people seem unconscionable.

Further cuts of £8 million a year are proposed for older people - on top of up to £30 million a year already made. These mean: ‘. . . that we will support only the same number of Older People in 2021 as we do in 2015, despite the demographic pressures. . . (which) will be very challenging to implement and could have a negative impact on the outcomes of the older people we support and some older people may not receive the amount of care they had hoped for or may not be placed in the care setting they would have ideally chosen’. In other words, older people will get worse care with worse results for them and in services not necessarily of their choosing. (Choice of where to live/not live and of preferred form of support has been for decades a fundamental tenet of good care.) And a third to one half of the older people who would have got care in 2015 will not get it in 2021, the number of older people in Cambridgeshire aged 65-74 having grown by 31 per cent, aged 75-84 by 33 per cent and 85 or more by 49 per cent by that year.

Yet more savings are proposed for adults with mental health needs of £3.3 million a year on top of the up to £25 million a year already decided – and with a further reduction in grants to voluntary sector mental health support of £134,000 a year on top of the £1 million a
year cuts already made in support to this poorly resourced sector. These mean: ‘. . . the cost of support packages for existing service users will be reduced which may in some cases result in a reduction in the amount of support received. For new service users . . . this may mean in some cases that the level of support is less than may have been expected. Reduction in the cost or amount of care funded is likely to have an impact on outcomes in some cases’. In other words, even poorer support than the already much reduced level for these highly vulnerable people.

Additional savings for children and young people in care of £7.2 million a year on specialist residential and fostering placements – on top of the £8.5 million a year already made – requiring a reduction of the number in care from 570 to 453 over 5 years; and ‘. . . reducing Education Support for Looked After Children [i.e., children in care] to minimum statutory responsibility” thus reducing “support for these vulnerable groups” and requiring “personal education plans . . . (to)be developed and monitored by the social worker rather than a Virtual School teacher.” Already reduced life chances will be even further reduced; and the feasibility of reducing the number in care by more than a hundred over 5 years seems at the least dubious when it has increased by a hundred over the last two.

And ‘. . . further significant reductions of £3.8 million a year in preventative services for children, young people and their families in difficulty - including in 2017 ‘. . . a significant reduction in the number of Children’s Centres’, meaning that ‘. . . significant parts of the county will not receive the current Children’s Centre offer’’. It is also proposed that early help is further reduced including complete removal of the budget to support reduction in teenage pregnancies; with further reduction of the vestigial remains of the devastated youth service which would remove support to apprenticeships and job finding for vulnerable young people.

Many other savings are rated by officers at the highest risk level of red, including: a further cut in spending on meeting the needs of people with physical disabilities and people on the autistic syndrome (£3.8 million a year); and for Children & young people, Speech and Language Therapy (£120,000 a year) which ‘will mean the ending of drop in services that are currently provided in children’s centres’.
The feeling may be shared by now that the savings proposals seem to have reached a level almost of desperation to achieve the cash savings that withdrawal of government funding requires the County Council to make so that it can stay in the black while making some semblance of continuing to meet its statutory obligations – both of which it is legally obliged to do. The savings proposed for next year’s budget have not yet been decided finally by the County Council but, as will be seen, the Autumn Statement will not stop them having to be made.
PART 2: Government Policy

This is happening everywhere

This is happening up and down the country from Cambridge to Coventry to Carlisle. The Association of Directors of Adult Social Services reported in its 2015 Survey of adult social care departments in England that: there have been £4.6 billion of funding reductions from 2010 to 2015 representing 31 per cent of net budgets in real terms, including £1.1 billion in 2015 alone. More than half (54 per cent) of all reported service reductions were in home care (for all groups), 30 per cent of total reductions being in home care for older people; more than 400,000 fewer people were receiving social care services than in 2009 and of those who are still supported a significant number get less care; and confidence in planned savings being fully achieved fell from 45 per cent of directors for 2015 to 5 per cent for 2017.

The government doesn’t know what it’s doing

In 2014 the National Audit Office reported that in making crucial funding decisions affecting local government, the government was not well enough informed, did not know what the effects of its previous decisions had been, and did not know what the effects of its future decisions would be. The government made uninformed assumptions about local government’s ability to make savings through so-called ‘service transformation’, and was not sufficiently in touch with the reality of local government to assess the risks of different decisions for the people they affected and for the very financial sustainability of local authorities [My summary.] Only the careless could be on the receiving end of such an excoriating indictment. The careful could not. But it is the vulnerable children and adults who bear the personal cost of this, not the government.

A striking instance of this carelessness and apparent ignorance came to light in leaked September 2015 correspondence between the Prime Minister and the Leader of Oxfordshire County Council within which Mr Cameron’s constituency lies. As George Monbiot put it in a recent Guardian article, it appears that ‘David Cameron hasn’t the faintest idea how deep his cuts go’. In his letter Mr Cameron says he is ‘... disappointed at the long list of suggestions floated in the Council Leader’s briefing note to make significant cuts to
frontline services – from elderly day centres, to libraries, to museums. This is in addition to the unwelcome and counter-productive proposals to close children’s centres across the county. I would have hoped that Oxfordshire would instead be following the best practice of Conservative councils from across the country in making back-office savings and protecting the frontline’.

The Council Leader’s six page response patiently provides the information Mr Cameron so clearly lacks and dispels the misinformation of which he appeared to be seized. It will be noted that all of the cuts Mr Cameron lists and more have either already been made or are envisaged imminently in Cambridgeshire.
Part 3: The government’s failed opportunity

The Autumn Statement

The government had the opportunity to put this wrong right on 25 November 2015 when the Spending Review and Autumn Statement were announced. Sadly, the opportunity was comprehensively missed.

Yes, local authorities will be able to increase Council Tax by 2 per cent for social care, realising £2 billion by the end of this Parliament in 2020; or £1.7 billion, according to the Local Government Association; or £800 million, according to the King’s Fund, taking account of likelihood not just potential.

And there is also the ‘£1.5 billion’ ‘by 2019/20’ [starting in 2017] ‘to add to the Better Care Fund to support better joint working between health and social care’.

These sums are the total over the period 2016 to 2020, NOT the sum in each of these years; so the 2 per cent if levied by all councils would produce, at most, roughly £500 million a year by 2019 – or £425 million (the LGA) – or £200 million (the King’s Fund).

Small beer in unfair glasses

BUT this is small beer set against the sheer scale of the cuts – and it is unfair to the poor:

Cuts in government grant

Over the same period the government’s general grant to local authorities in England, on which social care funding relies, will be cut by a further £6.1 billion a year by 2019, when it will have been removed altogether; and Cambridgeshire’s general grant will reduce by a further £39 million a year to zero, having already been reduced from £111 million a year in 2010. The detailed finance settlement for local government announced after the Autumn Statement on 17 December provides significantly less general grant for Cambridgeshire than the County Council had anticipated in the next three years: 2016 – £5.5 million less; 2017 – £9.7 million less; and 2018 – £5.1 million less. The Settlement confirms that the grant will be removed altogether by 2019.

The Leader of the Cambridgeshire Council has said that this could mean £5 million a year more savings in 2016 than was planned for. Given its proportion of the total budget, social care is likely to bear the brunt of this.
2 per cent Council Tax and social care savings

Because of the huge pressure on its social care services, it is likely that the County Council will increase Council Tax in 2016 by the additional 2 per cent for social care on top of the likely annual increase of 1.99 per cent, i.e., by nearly 4 per cent, notwithstanding the tax’s highly regressive nature (see below). It is after all between a rock and a hard place. If the council feels able to increase it by a further 2 per cent in each year after this, by 2019 only £20 million a year at most would be being raised for social care. And this is supposed somehow to offset the social care savings between 2011 and 2019 of £220 million a year, including the £58 million a year made in the last two years alone and the further savings of £70 million a year currently planned over the next four years. Do me a favour! It is better than nothing at all — but not much better.

Nonetheless large savings will still have to be made

In 2016 in Cambridgeshire, the 2 per cent Council Tax addition would raise at most £4.8 million a year and the intended addition to the Better Care Fund would not have started (not due to begin until 2017). The latest estimate of the savings required of the social care services in 2016 is £26.7 million a year. Therefore, even with the additional Council Tax income, savings of approximately £22 million a year would still have to be made. In practice it is likely that all of the additional income will be eaten up by the government’s welcome increase in the National Minimum Wage from next April — for which no allowance has been made in the government’s funding of local authorities (see below). If this is the case, as seems likely, the full savings of £26.7 million will still have to be made.

Council Tax is highly regressive and unfair

A major drawback in the government’s approach is reliance on Council Tax which is now a highly regressive tax. This is due to (a) the abolition of Council Tax Benefit by the coalition government and (b) the complete failure of successive governments to ensure the better off pay their fair share through regular revaluation of properties to reflect up to date prices and allow the introduction of new higher Tax bands reflecting the growth in property values. As a result, the average rise estimated by the Local Government Association of £96 a year by 2020 for the average Band D taxpayer due to a 2 per cent increase in each year from 2016, would further punish the poor. In practice, it may be roughly 4 per cent a year when the annual Council Tax increase is included as well; adding something like £192 a year to average bills. In these circumstances
many councils will be reluctant to add yet more to annual Council Tax increases at the cost of the poor. This reluctance will grow year by year as authorities consider further 2 per cent social care increases. In judging this councils will also be aware of the “£12m per year” that the police will be able to add to the “2% annual increase” in their Council Tax levy to meet their needs where “areas . . . have historically kept council tax low” – also announced in the Autumn Statement.

In Cambridgeshire only Cambridge City continues to provide a local discretionary scheme providing relief from Council Tax equivalent to the abolished national Council Tax Benefit entitlement. Elsewhere in the county almost everyone has to pay Council Tax, including people on income-based Job Seekers’ Allowance and Employment Support Allowance, Income Support and Pension Credit.

Poor people cannot afford to pay what is already demanded of them, let alone a 2 per cent addition to the annual increase they would have had to pay in any event plus possibly an additional police levy. It seems likely that court proceedings for arrears of Council Tax, which increased nationally following the abolition of Council Tax Benefit, will continue to go up.

There are other disadvantages of using Council Tax

No guarantee: There is no guarantee that the 2 per cent Council Tax levied for social care would be in addition to what social care might otherwise have received. A council could at the same time as allocating the 2 per cent to social care, reduce the amount it might otherwise have allocated from the rest of its Council Tax income in order to mitigate the huge pressures on its spending elsewhere.

Penalises deprived areas: Using Council Tax penalises those authorities with low Council Tax bases, that is, the more deprived areas. No equalisation scheme has been proposed by the government.

Progressive national taxation should be used to increase resources for social care fairly. Regressive and highly inequitable local taxation should not be used with its associated transfer of political unpopularity from government to local government under the false prospectus of devolution. These narrow political calculations should have no place in the funding of social care for our most vulnerable citizens.

Unfunded rises in the National Minimum Wage: No provision has been made in government funding for the cost to local authorities of the significant increases in the National Minimum Wage, announced in the Summer Budget, which increase the costs of both contracted and directly provided residential and community support services. Even before the new national rate of £7.20 an hour comes into effect next
April, hard pressed residential care homes are at risk of closing due to councils not being able to meet charges which cover their costs adequately. The County Council anticipates additional costs from this unfunded new demand of £5.9 million a year in 2016 rising to £22 million a year by 2019 and to £27.6 million a year by 2020. No provision has been made for this yet by the social care services as the budget proposals assume that the cost “is funded corporately”, an approach which has not yet been confirmed corporately. In practice, it is probable that the Council will expect some or all of any extra income from the 2 per cent social care addition to Council Tax to be used to meet this new unfunded by government demand. As will be seen, this additional cost is significantly greater than the extra Council Tax income: by £1.1 million a year in 2016 and £2 million a year by 2019. So, it is possible that the savings total expected of the social care services will go up not down.

*Better Care Fund addition:* It is not clear that the increase in the Better Care Fund will be new money rather than erosion of the additional resources being made available to the NHS – as it has been to date, contributing to the large Trust deficits across the NHS. Also, it seems that these additional resources are funded in part by cuts elsewhere in health spending, such as the preventative Public Health Grant to local authorities and cessation of nurse training bursaries. Nor is it clear that all of the additional Better Care Fund money will be spent on social care. The Better Care Fund is not generally available to mitigate the catastrophe occurring in children and young people’s social care services.

**Social care cuts will continue**

Despite the Autumn Statement the cuts in social care will continue virtually unabated. Overall, the combined benefit of the potential Council Tax increases and the addition to the Better Care Fund pale into insignificance alongside the sheer scale of the social care funding gap. A recent report from the independent Health Foundation said for the UK as a whole: ‘Our analysis projects a potential funding gap for adult social care of £6 billion a year by 2020/21 and £13 billion a year by 2030/31 unless there is a change of policy’.

These estimates do not include the constantly overlooked funding gap in children’s social care, and they are for a single year, not the four year period of a spending review. Compare a gap of £6 billion a year by 2020 for adult social care alone with a potential additional income from the 2 per cent Council Tax by that year of roughly £500 million a year at most, plus a one-off addition to the Better Care Fund of £1.5 billion by 2019 starting in 2017, which may or may not
be new money. And all this IF, and it is if, councils feel able to
demand an extra £96 a year on average from the average council
taxpayer on top of the annual increase, let alone make an even
greater proportionate demand on poor people who simply do not have
the money to meet it.

As will be seen, the Autumn Statement’s announcements are the
equivalent of an ice cream offered as a palliative to those
suffering the torments of the fiery furnace.

This is not my view alone. Lord Porter, Conservative Chairman of the
Local Government Association in response to the Spending Review
said:

“Today’s Spending Review has handed down a difficult £4.1 billion
funding cut over this Spending Review period for our residents and
comes on top of almost £10 billion in further demand-led cost
pressures facing councils by the end of the decade. The consequences
for our local communities who will suffer as a result should not be
under-estimated. . . Even if councils stopped filling in potholes,
maintaining parks, closed all children’s centres, libraries, museums,
leisure centres and turned off every street light they will not have
saved enough money to plug the black financial hole they face by
2020. . . Tragically, the Government looks set to miss a once in a
generation opportunity to transform the way money is spent across the
public sector and protect the services that bind communities
together, improve people’s quality of life and protect the most
vulnerable.”
PART 4: The harm this is doing

This silent catastrophe is occurring in our midst – here and now. We need to wake up to it; so does the government. Cuts in social care are not like potholes in the road, obvious to everyone. They harm people’s lives behind the four walls, hidden from public view. It is understandable that the public may not know what is going on unless it hits them or someone dear to them personally. But there is no such excuse for government.

The government, apparently blinded by its rhetoric of service transformation and back of office savings, is inflicting untold damage on the weakest members of our ailing commonwealth. Its savage reductions in government funding of local authorities are depriving the most vulnerable members of our society of the social care stuff of life – the personal care and support which is essential to a minimally decent life.

This harms us all. If we do not stick together when times are hard but allow the continuing effects of the global financial crash to inflict most harm on the weak and vulnerable, all of us are diminished. As a society we are not taking the responsibility we have for all our fellow citizens. We are working apart, not together, and our mutual strength as a community of solidarity and respect continues to disappear into the past when individualism, materialism and the residual state were not anywhere near as prominent as they are now.

As the Chancellor of the Exchequer said when making the Autumn Statement to the House of Commons on 25 November, ‘a civilised and prosperous society like ours should support its most vulnerable and elderly citizens.’ I could not agree more.

David Plank
January 2016
We are a new organisation for progressive-minded people in and around Cambridge. We aim to be a “hub” organisation, or network, for local citizens and local members of national groups with shared interests in promoting social justice and reducing inequality. We are the local representative body for The Equality Trust, and we believe that equality is better for everyone, rich or poor. We have three priorities:

- To make local people aware of the poverty that exists in and around Cambridge and to bring people together to campaign for the living wage; against the precarious low wage economy; and to end the punitive benefits system which is causing hunger and misery to thousands of residents.
- To campaign for a more equal society and against the rising tide of inequality here and in the country as a whole.
- To draw attention to the absurd cruelty of a housing market that prevents ordinary citizens here from buying or securely renting their own homes, unless their circumstances are so desperate that they qualify for social housing.

We have a positive belief in a communal response to this country’s difficulties in place of neo-liberal economic and anti-state policies.

We have published three previous reports; Cambridge: Wealth and Want, on inequality in Cambridge, The Struggle for Social Housing, and Social Care: from Crisis to Catastrophe, on the decimation of social care services in Cambridgeshire. We are working on a pamphlet on inequalities in health.

We are holding a major public meeting, on the theme, “Equality is Better for Everyone,” with Richard Wilkinson, co-author of The Spirit Level, on Tuesday, 3 May 2016, at the Friends Meeting House, Jesus Lane. Membership of Cambridge Commons is free and open to all, but we would be grateful for donations so that we can do more. You can join us on our website, www.thecambridgecommons.org.