



# MAKING THE CUT

*Interim report: December 2014*

brap



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# WHO WE ARE AND WHAT WE'RE DOING

## brap

brap is a Birmingham-based equality and human rights charity that supports public, private and voluntary sector organisations to respond to the challenges associated with our society's increasing diversity. Though we work across the country, much of our focus is on supporting agencies in Birmingham to develop new, progressive approaches to promoting equality.

For more information go to [www.brap.org.uk](http://www.brap.org.uk), follow us on Twitter ([@braphumanrights](https://twitter.com/braphumanrights)), add us on Facebook ([brap.birmingham](https://www.facebook.com/brap.birmingham)) or watch the videos on our YouTube channel ([BrpHumanRights](https://www.youtube.com/BrpHumanRights)).

## Making the Cut

Like many people, we're apprehensive about the long term impact of austerity measures on traditionally excluded groups. Although a number of studies have been conducted to consider the impact of public service spending cuts on individuals and services, we're concerned that some of the equality implications of this are not being picked up sufficiently. In a city like Birmingham that has historically faced systemic patterns of inequality in some key public services (e.g. housing, education and employment) and is also facing higher budgetary pressures than some other localities – issues of inequality associated with austerity measures are a central and mainstream concern.

This led us to establish a project where we would draw upon the views and experiences of a range of committed local organisations working with some of the most vulnerable people in the city. This 'Making the Cut' project, funded by the Barrow Cadbury Trust, is helping us to generate a better understanding of the impact of local public service re-design on front line services over time (an 18 month period). Throughout the project we'll be speaking to individuals working in organisations (mainly voluntary sector – but some public sector) providing public services, in order get a better sense of the effect that successive spending reviews in Birmingham are having on the people that they help in the community.

### **What do we want to know?**

Broadly speaking we're focusing on:

- the key equality challenges for public services in the context of public service re-design/budget cuts
- emerging or increasing patterns of inequality that need to be addressed in the city
- the key challenges organisations are facing in supporting beneficiaries going forward

### **Who are we speaking to?**

We've got some fantastic local organisations (including voluntary sector and public sector) involved, working on a variety of issue and with a range of people across the city, including (but not limited to)...

- Birmingham and Solihull Women's Aid
- Castle Vale Community Housing Association
- Jericho Foundation
- Kikit Pathways to Recovery
- SIFA Fireside
- St Pauls Community Development Trust

Making the Cut will run over the next year and a half and during that time we'll send out a short online survey every 3 months and speak to people involved for a more in-depth discussion every 6 months.

### **What happens next?**

This project aims to highlight how current strategies are impacting on the most vulnerable, so we'll be keeping everyone involved in the project up to date with what we are finding from other agencies across the city. One of the benefits of this project is we'll be in a position to notice emerging patterns across the city. We'll report back on the issues and challenges organisations are facing and the concerns being raised, and this information will be shared with key stakeholders across the city via an email bulletin. Results will also be reported back directly to policy makers within the council and other local commissioning agencies to help share 'on the ground'/qualitative information about where inequality gaps may be widening in the city.



# WHAT PEOPLE SAID

## Surveys

The first Making the Cut survey was sent to participants in October/November 2014. Below are a brief summary of the results of this first survey.

**Since the last survey (in November) has there been a change in the level or range of services you are able to provide?**

Yes, fewer services offered	54.5%
Yes, more services offered	27.3%
No change	18.2%
Don't know	0.0%

Key themes emerging from comments:

- Spending cuts directly impacting on ability to provide services (e.g. some services de-commissioned)
- Wider range of services are needed and the range of people that require our services are more diverse
- Staffing resources are more thinly stretched
- Can only focus on activities in contract (as pressure on resources increases) – whereas previously could provide more holistic support

**Other than changes to the level or range of services, has your organisation made changes in your work due to cuts in public funding since the last time we asked?**

Yes	81.8%
No	18.2%
Don't know	0.0%

Key themes emerging from comments:

- Increase in use of social enterprise models / engagement with corporate sector
- Redundancies have had to or will have to be made.
- Reduced networking / engagement with other agencies due to pressure on costs (e.g. travel)
- Have had to invest charitable reserves to cover increased demand
- Less time / resources to track impact of our work

**Has there been a noticeable change in the demand for your service since the last time we asked?**

Increase in demand	72.7%
No significant change	27.3%
Decrease in demand	0.0%
Don't know	0.0%

Key themes emerging from comments:

- Economic environment and welfare reforms have increased pressure on households
- Cuts to other services means fewer to address increased demand, creating further demand
- Increased demand for financial, housing and benefits advice
- Other agencies that used to deliver services in the community have closed

**Do you face any challenges in referring your service users to other agencies?**

Yes	54.5%
No	27.3%
Not applicable	9.1%
Don't know	9.1%

Key themes emerging from comments:

- Fewer people to refer to as organisations shrink or close due to cuts (some previously very reliable agencies have been forced to close)
- More competition for services means referring own service users on is more difficult
- Our staff often have to advocate more strongly for some of our service users to get them into referred services
- Health services particularly stretched – not always able to engage with housing organisations

**(If yes) Have these challenges increased over the last year?**

Yes	77.8%
No	0.0%
Don't know	22.2%

Key themes emerging from comments:

- Increased demand and fewer organisations or services to refer on to (as above)
- The default answer to a referral request feels like 'no' nowadays – requires strong advocacy to change decision

**What are the barriers (if any) your organisation is currently facing to doing your work as you would like to?**

Key themes emerging from comments:

- Funding – services have had to be reduced or stopped altogether due to cuts in funding
- Fewer other resources e.g. fewer or demoralised staff
- Less money for case-based work
- Smaller pots of money for shorter periods puts significant pressure on resources
- Lack of funding for employment support work
- Lack of equality when competing for tenders
- Uncertainty e.g. about sustainability, about future policy (changes to which may affect work and/or funding in the future)

**What impact (if any) have you noticed the public sector cuts in Birmingham are having on the people that use your services?**

Key themes emerging from comments:

- Stress, increased complaints and uncertainty because there are fewer options for support available to people than there were previously
- Support has been removed which would normally prevent vulnerable people falling into serious need, which means people at risk are becoming more so
- Women and children have fewer choices about what to do about their situation – fewer advice agencies / higher thresholds for accessing services can leave many people vulnerable. For women and children affected by abuse there are fewer refuge spaces and more use of unsuitable temporary accommodation. Less emergency support for these individuals and increased need for support to respond to food poverty
- Potential for local authority cuts to be a false economy – crisis prevention will cost more than preventative intervention. Lack of sustainable strategy for third sector funding
- Significant effect on children and young people in deprived areas (reductions in play, youth work and employment support)

**Have you noticed that particular groups/types of people in Birmingham are being affected by public sector cuts and public service re-design more than others?**

Yes	81.8%
No	0.0%
Don't know	18.2%

Key themes emerging from comments:

- Disadvantaged people are becoming more so
- BME communities
- LGBT people
- Unemployed people



- Children
- Disabled people
- Women and children with no recourse to public funds
- EU women affected by DV but with little employment history that cannot access state support
- Victims of trafficking who have had benefits eligibility reduced

**What are the barriers (if any) your organisation is currently facing to doing your work as you would like to?**

- It seems like contracts are awarded on which is cheapest, not on quality. But it's a false economy, fewer services and less support now is just creating problems for the future
- "There are 13 million people in this country who are now below the poverty line, 1 million people in one of the richest countries in the world now face indignity of relying on food banks... these are very real issues and it's been done in the name of austerity and we've had this drive of people being called scroungers but actually half the people on benefits are in work because the wages are not paying enough" Salma Yaqoob on BBC question Time, Thursday 12th June 2014

# WHAT IT MEANS

So far we've got feedback from Making the Cut participants about the impact of local public service re-design on organisations providing public services by having an introductory conversation with them and asking them to complete an online survey.

The two main themes that stand out from the responses discussed in this report are...

## 1. LESS AVAILABLE

Local public service re-design and national benefits changes are directly impacting on local organisations' abilities to provide services:

- Funding cuts and, as a result, increased competition for remaining funding sources has meant organisations across the board have seen a reduction in income. Less funding has meant services have had to be reduced or cut altogether.
- These kind of reductions and redundancies which have been made necessary by reduced funding has left organisation with fewer resources and demoralised staff, making providing services all the more difficult.

## 2. MORE NEEDED

Meanwhile demand is increasing:

- As funding cuts has meant many organisations having to reduce or close, there is an increased demand on remaining organisations
- The public spending reforms have also directly impacted on households, tightening budgets and increasing the need for support from voluntary sector organisations, for example as seen by the increase in the number of people accessing food banks.

## In summary...

Participants in this survey have identified a range of disadvantaged groups (such as children, women, migrants and disabled people) that are being hit hardest, as their need for support increases but the number of places where they can receive that support reduces.

This picture can be seen in other parts of the country too. Our challenge, as a city, is identifying our own unique response to this. A number of survey participants talked about more strategic commissioning in some areas and better communication channels between agencies that are referring to each other. In our next survey we'll be exploring more closely potential ideas to improve support for vulnerable people in the city.

We should say - the picture is not completely bleak. Organisations involved note that they are still providing services for people who need them, even with resources being very thinly stretched. However, there is concern about how this can be sustained in the long term.



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brap is transforming the way we think and do equality. We support organisations, communities, and cities with meaningful approaches to learning, change, research, and engagement. We are a partner and friend to anyone who believes in the rights and potential of all human beings.



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