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The Human Costs of Austerity: A Case Study of Those Working in the Community and Voluntary Sector in the North East of England

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Abstract

This thesis explores how austerity explains the experience of individuals working in the voluntary and charity sector. The welfare state's primary function is to provide an economic safety net, and to protect individuals against the consequences of many forms of harm throughout their lives. Welfare remains a sizable proportion of UK Government expenditure despite significant reductions since 2010. The voluntary sector directly delivers welfare through contracted services, and it steps in to fill gaps in provision and, therefore, is doubly exposed to austerity measures. Austerity literature mainly focuses on the tangible economic impacts of widening inequality, declining public services, poverty and growing welfare disparities. Gaps in the literature suggest that how austerity is experienced by those working in the voluntary and charity sector is an overlooked perspective. I have used Henri Tajfel's "Social Identity Theory" as a theoretical lens and combined it with Richard Sennett's theories on the changing nature of work to navigate between macro-level policy and micro-level experience and thereby explore the human cost of austerity. This new approach goes beyond the financial and practical to understand the human cost of austerity as it relates to the identities, purpose and lives of those working in the voluntary sector. My findings provide engaging personal first-hand narratives relating to the role of social identity as an employed person and the relationships between job insecurity and the consequences of austerity measures. They demonstrate that austerity, reduced resources, and increased workloads drive the experiences of those in the sector. However, they can also be traced back to the gradual transitioning of services to the voluntary sector, brought about by public sector reforms implemented by previous governments. Membership in the voluntary sector brings a social identity constructed around the ethos of creating social wealth, but it has been undermined by prolonged austerity-driven job insecurity. It has increased workloads and damaged workplace dynamics to the detriment of those working in the sector.

Contents

Statement of Copyright

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Acknowledgement

My PhD journey has been a very challenging but deeply rewarding experience, and I wish to express my gratitude to everyone who supported me along the way. First, I would like to thank Professor Jamie Callahan for being incredibly supportive, bringing a wealth of knowledge and keeping me motivated. I am also deeply thankful to all my other supervisors: Professor Mark Learmonth, Professor Kevin Morrell, Professor Robert McMurray, and Professor Peter Hamilton. They each played a crucial role in shaping my research.

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I'm thankful to all to all the individuals I interviewed and had conversations with during this journey. These are their stories, and it has been a privilege to tell them. Doubly so because of my attachment to the voluntary sector, and my great respect for all those I have worked with.

Finally, I dedicate this thesis to my mum, whose unfulfilled dream of doing her PhD has been a driving force in my life. This thesis is a tribute to her aspirations.

Chapter One: Introduction

The liberal welfare state's primary function is to provide basic economic security for its citizens. Society expects it to protect them from risks associated with old age, unemployment, accidents, and sickness. Welfare is one of the main delivery mechanisms, and it remains a sizable proportion of UK Government expenditure, despite significant reductions from 2010 onwards (Weir, 2001). The voluntary and community sector is a non-governmental, independent, community-driven response to addressing societal needs and social inequality. There are several direct and indirect links between the state's provision of welfare directly to its citizens and the voluntary sector's role in society. These include the delivery of services on the state's behalf, how the sector is funded, and where it steps in to fill gaps in provision.

The aim of this thesis is to explore the human costs of austerity measures, as felt by the staff and volunteers working within the community and voluntary sector. Also, to investigate how the advent of austerity created challenges and increased uncertainty in the sector and how this affected volunteers' and workers' social identities. I hope this study will provide insight into how decades of "New Capitalism", the government policy of austerity, and indeed the "Big Society" have been ideologically driven. Further, my findings show how the voluntary sector's vast knowledge, skills and abilities gained over hundreds of years are periodically taken advantage of. The rhetoric of working in partnership with the government should be written as working instead of the government. These are predominantly unequal partnerships, which have seen the government taking credit for statutory welfare provisions that the third sector really provides, with little control, funds or recognition. This relationship between the state and third sector undermines workers' job security, creating a poor work/life balance and impacting social identity, and therefore, should be treated with caution.

Austerity originates in the political context; therefore, discussions of austerity start from a combined political-economic perspective. They consider its impact on budgets, service delivery and the wider economy. As the coalition's implementation of austerity measures progressed, the focus moved to how it was impacting society. However, the focus remained at a macro level. It considered levels of unemployment, benefits, the reduction in vital services and how these factors affected economic growth. These aspects, while concerned with the well-being of society and how, for example, it affected levels of poverty and what that might mean for those worst off in society, did not extend beyond the more tangible aspects of an individual's day-to-day life, their struggles finding or keeping jobs and the financial impacts of that. This thesis is titled The Human Cost of Austerity, and in this context, Human Cost refers to the core aspects that define what makes us who we are. Our identities and purpose define who each of us is as a person, as a human being. The implementation of austerity damaged the structures that create those identities and, therefore, threatened to rob each of the participants of my study of what makes them who they are. This is the human cost. The individual impact of a massive nationwide economic policy is seen through the lens of how it changed the lives of 20 people in the North-East of England.

Motivation Statement and Background of Study

My interest in this area of research stems from my role as the manager of a small charity in Sunderland. Therefore, I am interested in researching and gaining a comprehensive understanding of austerity and its impact on my sector and the people who work within it. I am the manager of Fightback Charity, which would be considered a 'micro', user-led charity in Sunderland. Our work is centred around helping marginalised individuals who experience multiple disadvantages arising from a combination of health, ethnic, social and economic issues. Our clients are much more likely to need and call upon public services and third-sector organisations to get the help they require, and to a greater extent than the general population.

Fightback is an independent charity that receives no government funding, and ultimately, the charity; and the positions of all staff and volunteers, rely solely on funding rounds from various sources. These funding rounds are the charity's only significant source of funding as Fightback is structured in such a way that it is unable to generate an income directly. From my experience over the years, it has become increasingly challenging to attract funding. There is intense competition from other deserving, micro, small and medium-sized charities, organisations and community projects for an ever-dwindling pot of already limited funds.

This competition places those working within the sector under increasing pressure to continue delivering services despite limited funding. These funding challenges create uncertainty against a backdrop of low wages and short, part-time, and zero-hours contracts. It tips the scales of work/life balance and social identity to the extent that it harms the individuals working in the sector. I therefore consider it essential that we better understand the challenges individuals are facing within the sector, and the impacts on their health and wellbeing those challenges are causing.

Austerity has been widely studied from an economic and political perspective, as would be expected from its origins as a political policy. The impacts of austerity have also been studied in detail using a top-down, society-spanning approach, considering, for example, the rising use of charity food banks (Lambie-Mumford & Green, 2015) and the reductions in voluntary sector funding (Jones, 2016). The effects on individual workers are increasingly well understood in terms of employment conditions (Work-Life Balance in Times of Recession, Austerity and Beyond, 2016; McBride, 2021) and health impacts (Cheng & Chan, 2008; Gilboa et al., 2008; Naswall & Hellgren, 2007). The changing nature of service delivery has also been explored in terms of organisations' ability to deliver services (Clayton et al., 2015) and also emotional impacts upon those at the heart of the service delivery themselves (Clayton et al, 2014). There

is an intersection, however, between funding challenges, increased demand and workplace change in the voluntary sector, which is yet to be fully understood. This thesis aims to draw from these distinct areas of study to understand the human cost of the political policy of austerity as experienced by voluntary sector workers and volunteers in the North-East of England.

Background to Austerity

In 2010 the newly elected Conservative-Liberal Democrat coalition government promised to pull the country out of the recession resulting from decades of unregulated financial and banking practices. In response, they sought to rebalance the economy and bring down the deficit. Radical, sweeping cuts in public expenditure ensued, termed "austerity measures" (Della Porta, 2015).

The Conservative Coalition government frequently referred to decades of overspending under the previous New Labour government to avoid blame for what was about to ensue. At the same time, it focused its rhetoric on describing the austerity measures as an economic necessity. However, both New Labour and the Conservative Coalition drew criticism for protecting the interests of the elites and the free market by focusing on bailing out the banks. This bailout was viewed as being at the public's expense instead of holding the banks legally and financially responsible for the effects of their questionable business practices (Bargawi et al, 2023). Criticism of this approach was most fierce from those concerned with the well-being of the worst off in society. This is because those reliant on the state would go on to feel the most significant impact of these measures, whilst the upper middle classes and the rich were largely untouched (Ahrens & Ferry, 2015).

While there is no denying that dealing with a recession on a global scale was an arduous task, the Conservative Manifesto (2010) would look to go beyond simply fixing a problem; they wanted to change society too:

> "We say: real change comes not from government alone. Real change comes when the people are inspired and mobilized, when millions of us are fired up to play a part in the nation's future" (Conservative Party Manifesto, 2010).

These words would introduce the idea of the "Big Society":

> "How we will revitalise communities unless people stop asking 'who will fix this?' and start asking 'what can I do?' Britain will change for the better when we all elect to take part, to take responsibility. Collective strength will overpower our problems" (Cabinet Office, 2010).

Unsurprisingly, the austerity measures and individual responsibility rhetoric closely mirror 1980s Thatcherism, echoing Friedrich Hayek's work The *Road to Serfdom* (1950). However, as every successive government since 1979 has followed the neoliberal economic path, it is impossible to accurately judge how New Labour's approach to reducing the deficit would have felt. The direction the coalition government chose to take was to offset a lowering of the welfare and social burdens of the state by emphasising and showcasing the work of non-profit organisations, self-help groups and volunteers. The campaign highlighted their professional contributions as social and welfare providers, intending to use their abilities as an alternative route for addressing social problems. Within this rhetoric, there is an acknowledgement that, in the absence of government, the voluntary and community sector possesses the knowledge, skills and competencies to replace and provide a whole host of social and welfare provisions.

The manifesto goes on to state:

> "This reform agenda will empower local communities, gives powers to the 'little platoons' of civil society and the institutional building blocks of the Big Society. In addition, a new National Citizen Service would encourage the concept of public-spirited service, develop the skills needed to be active and responsible citizens, increase philanthropy, encourage people from different backgrounds to engage in regular volunteering and community participation within their communities" (King, 2011).

This described a reform agenda with a rhetoric of empowering local communities, responsible citizens, volunteering, and participation. On the face of it, it suggests a prominent role for the voluntary and community sector. However, as the reduction in spending was across all sectors, there was scepticism over how the government would achieve this as the voluntary sector was not immune to the effects of the spending cuts, and the sector came under increasing pressure to "do more with less" (DeVerteuil et al.*,* 2016). Many critics of government policy in the sector (Blyth, 2013) and beyond (McGovern, 2015) feel that this represents an almost impossible task. One that was forcing many voluntary and community groups to limit or pool resources, stretching them to try and fill the void in community services (Rees & Mullins, 2016).

This form of collective need and community action could be viewed as a throwback to the wartime effort where communities would pool resources during these extreme circumstances (Hampton, 2019). Critiques of the austerity measures and the conservative manifesto reform agenda of the 'Big Society' (2010) suggest it represents a reintroduction of older and more traditional ideas devoid of government intervention or support. The conservative party since Thatcher has an ideology rooted in neoliberalism and the political philosophy of Hayek's *Constitution of Liberty* (1960), which advocates limited government and 'social security as regrettable forms of income distribution'. If they continue to follow that philosophy, they are simply using austerity to pursue their neoliberal agenda, centered on a far more limited account of rights and the state having fewer responsibilities to its citizens at the lower end of the economic spectrum. It would mean that austerity and the big society are simply diverting attention from the sweeping cuts in welfare and state provisions. The focus on the potential of the voluntary sector and community groups has nothing to do with working in partnership but more to do with removing a burden by delegating responsibility elsewhere (Anheier, 2014). Therefore, when assessing the human cost of austerity as felt by those working in the voluntary and community sector, it is essential to understand how decades of 'New Capitalism' through

successive governments have impacted voluntary and community sector workers' social identity.

Research Aims and Questions

My research aims to explore the 'Human' costs of austerity among staff and volunteers working in the community and voluntary sector in the North-East of England and how the advent of austerity has created challenges that have impacted upon or influenced or influenced their 'social identities'.

I will achieve this by addressing the following research questions, which concentrate on key areas that affect both paid staff and volunteers:

- What are the experiences of third-sector managers and volunteers during the years of austerity that followed the financial crisis in 2008 and were those experiences a direct result of austerity?

- What are the effects of austerity on the staff and volunteers' social identity?
- What are the views of staff and volunteers on the government's rhetoric of "austerity"?

A Summary of Theoretical Perspective

The theoretical framework applied to this study is Tajfel and Turner's (1979) *'Social' Identity'* theory, which aimed to understand how collective grouping, or social identity, is connected to an individual's actions in the context of the wider social structure in which groups are rooted. The theory deliberates how individuals' conclusions relating to their 'in-groups' and equally important 'outgroups' are framed by their understanding of their relationship with society (Tajfel, 1974). Therefore, these social identities are a reciprocal, negotiable and flexible, ongoing process whereby individuals perceive, construct, and reconstruct their 'role' or 'roles' within society based on group interaction and group membership. In this case, those working

and volunteering within the community and voluntary sector in Sunderland set against the challenges arising from austerity measures (Brown, 2018).

The economic crisis and subsequent introduction of austerity measures created a feeling of uncertainty for large swathes of the population due to increased unemployment and job insecurity. According to Hogg and Blaylock (2012) this uncertainty can undermine an individual's sense of identity. Consequently, individuals and groups often react by adopting protective behaviours, to reduce uncertainty by polarizing people to extreme and often intolerant positions (Hogg, 2007), such as stringently following social and political protocols or eliminating them (Jost et al., 2012).

This behaviour can initially manifest itself as an increase in trust and social cohesion between groups with shared ideologies or agendas. However, prolonged uncertainty can lead to a decline in social commitment, as the individual's identity is undermined, forcing them to seek out more secure alternatives. Therefore, austerity measures may create positive opportunities for change or negatively reduce chances and destabilise social structures.

An Overview of the Research Methodology

This research employs a qualitative, inductive, social constructionist approach, which argues that all knowledge of reality is derived from and maintained through social interactions (Lock & Strong, 2010). Ketokivi and Mantere (2010) support this and state that the "construction of knowledge is an active, contextualised process whereby people hold perceptions and interpretations based on cultural factors and personal experiences which are continuously reassessed through the process of social communication and negotiation". It also rejects the positivist notions of reality as objective and exterior (Thompson, 2013). Employing a flexible, fluid, constructivist approach is suitable for gathering the conscious experiences, feelings, views, perceptions, meanings, notions, and connotations, placed on

events and challenges by those working within the voluntary sector and how these challenges impact their identity (Ritchie et al., 2013).

Semi-structured interviews were employed as the most suitable way to collect the qualitative data. This approach allows for greater flexibility by concentrating on gathering individuals' views, feelings, ideas, and perceptions from a first-person perspective (Somekh & Lewin, 2011). The sampling approach I have chosen combines convenience and judgmental (purposive) sampling. I have been working as a charity manager for over a decade, and this has enabled me to recruit a mix of 20 staff and volunteers, each with ten years or more working in the sector. Therefore, I know that these participants have witnessed many structural, institutional, economic, and behavioural changes, both before and after austerity measures were introduced, with first-hand experience of how austerity has been felt or impacted upon their sense of social identity.

Thesis Structure

This thesis includes nine main chapters.

- In Chapter One, I provide an overview of the background, research aims and questions and outline the structure of this thesis.

To fully explore the effects of austerity on the voluntary sector, it is necessary to understand three distinct concepts: who the voluntary sector is and how it relates to the public sector, what austerity is and how it is used as a political tool, and the tangible mechanism through which cutting funding at the top of the public sector ultimately impacts voluntary sector organisations. The voluntary sector is not a single entity. However, there is a unifying ethos which has developed over five hundred years or more and has both influenced and been influenced by the parallel evolution of the welfare state. Austerity is an economic and political concept implemented in many unique circumstances throughout history. As with all political policies,

it is necessary to divide the practical from the political to understand it and clearly distinguish between the rhetoric used to sell a policy and, where it differs, the intended effect of implementing it. When a government announces spending cuts, that is rarely, if ever, accompanied by a detailed plan for where those cuts will fall. It may be impossible to predict how those cuts will flow through the intricate web of public sector budgets, local authority decision-making processes and contracts for outsourcing services. Therefore, an in-depth analysis of funding trends before and during austerity is necessary to appreciate the challenges austerity created for the voluntary sector. These three strands of literature review complement each other and feed into the broader analysis of the study. However, any attempt to combine them will risk confusing the thesis. Using three chapters for the literature review allows each component to be understood in isolation first, which adds clarity to a complicated, intertwined topic.

- Chapter Two covers a timeline of religious, philanthropic, charitable, and statutory social provisions in Britain, from early laws, religious duties, mutual aid and credit unions to the emergence of the welfare state. The chapter continues by providing a political timeline of the economic conditions and constraints affecting the UK throughout the 1970s, leading to the adoption of the economic ideology of 'New Capitalism'. It then explores the relationship between the government and the charitable and voluntary sector through successive administrations from Thatcher up to the present day and how those policies affected the sector.

- Chapter Three explores the origins of austerity. It discusses austerity as a policy and its role in the neoliberal agenda enacted by the coalition and subsequent Conservative governments. It also covers austerity and cuts to welfare and local authority provisions. Finally, it continues to explore the diversionary political discourse of austerity and the Big

Society with the subsequent promotion of the 'Community and Voluntary Sector in Partnership'.

- Chapter Four explores national funding trends in the voluntary and community sector in the UK, including sources of funding, voluntary sector income and expenditure from both central and local government funding. It then looks at regional funding to charitable and voluntary organisations, the inconsistencies across the sector concerning organisational structure and size, and, more specifically, funding to the sector within the North -East, using Sunderland as an example.

- Chapter Five explains the theoretical framework applied to this study: Tajfel's (1979) Social Identity Theory, which aimed to understand how collective grouping, or social identity, is connected to an individual's actions in the context of the social structure in which groups are rooted.

- Chapter Six outlines Richard Sennett's *'The Personal Consequences of Work'*, which focuses on the changing world of work, and its impact on the individual. The chapter connects Sennett's work to social identity and the human cost of austerity.

- Chapter Seven provides an outline of the research methodology: research questions, research philosophy, approach, and method. It also provides an overview of the steps for data collection and analysis.

- Chapter Eight tells the story of austerity in the voluntary and community sector through the comments and narratives of my study's participants. It explores how individuals in the voluntary sector have gained an identity associated with that secvtor and how the loss of connections gained through working in the sector impacts that identity. It also analyses how participants perceive the rhetoric of Conservative austerity measures compared to the actual impact of the measures. Finally, it explores the participant's responses to how austerity has impacted the job security of third-sector workers, managers and volunteers.

This is achieved by exploring the cause of job insecurity within the sector, and then looking at the consequences of prolonged job insecurity within the sector. There are three thematic sections within my analysis: Identity of and within the voluntary sector, understanding of and response to austerity rhetoric, and the effects of austerity on the people working in the sector. However, the identity of voluntary sector workers is such a central part of their overall identity; that it is integral to their beliefs and perceptions. Therefore, it is futile to talk about their response to austerity rhetoric in isolation. Equally, the politics of austerity feeds into how the participants talk about changes in their workplace and the 'us vs. them' narrative they use to understand these changes, with senior management becoming almost an extension of the group that was imposing austerity. It was, therefore, more of a single story with three themes running throughout its entirety, and hence I opted to structure my analysis along those lines, allowing the narrative approach to guide the reader through the different aspects of my findings.

- Chapter Nine, revisits the research questions and, using my analysis and theoretical framework, discuss their implications and how successfully I have answered them. I also address the thesis's contribution and identify any limitations of my study and identify areas for further research.

Chapter Two Voluntary and Statutory Welfare Provisions

Introduction

In the UK today, statutory welfare provisions, such as free healthcare, education, social housing, unemployment benefits, pensions, and support for people with disabilities, are often taken for granted. As a result, people have no concept of the life and hardships people experienced before the creation of the welfare state. Nor do they understand the long, arduous journey generations of socially minded and visionary reformers endured before creating this social welfare safety net. This chapter provides some examples of the notable religious, philanthropic, charitable, and statutory social provisions in Britain, from early laws, religious duties, mutual aid and credit unions to the emergence of the Welfare State. It will continue by providing a political timeline of the UK's economic conditions throughout the 1970s. Then, describe the economic ideology underpinning successive government strategies regardless of party, from Margaret Thatcher's in the 1980s, through 'New Labour' in the 1990s to the coalition government in the mid-2000s and beyond. Finally, how these policies have impacted the voluntary and community sector.

Religious, Philanthropic, Charitable and Statutory Provision

There is an assumption that formal charitable giving and philanthropy are modern. That they are features of a democratic society and that they arose out of a moral consensus within increasingly affluent and socially mobile class structures (Jung & Harrow, 2015). However, it is a much older aspect of society. In the UK, the voluntary and charitable sector has a long and convoluted history that can be traced back over 900 years to a time of absolute monarchy and feudal lords.

These social interventions, while moral, were often far from being altruistic. Instead, they were reactions to actual or perceived social, religious, and political threats (Sanghera, 2016). Therefore, it is likely that changes were often driven by a need to protect the interests, positions, and power of the ruling and better-off classes (Schwabach, 2012). For example, the proclamation by Pope Gregory VII that the Church was independent of the state. This proclamation may have encouraged the Church to use its vast wealth and power to exert more influence over the people, to go beyond just attending to their spiritual needs by providing over 500 hospitals for use by its parishioners.

One of the first documented measures of state was the introduction of the Charter of Liberties in 1100. Fearing a peasant uprising, Henry I issued a charter enforcing commoners' rights. It held the King, feudal lords, and Barons accountable for their treatment of those they ruled over. It was an entire century before the Magna Carta (1215), which proclaimed civil liberties, obligations and responsibilities of the King and his subjects, and is still the backbone of British Law today (Alvey, 1995).

Before the Reformation in 1534, Christians would undertake the 'seven works of mercy', which were to relieve the bodily distress of the poor. (Matthew 25v. pp32-46). They included providing food and water for the hungry and thirsty, welcoming strangers, clothing the naked, visiting the sick and prisoners and burying the dead (Bowden & Mosely, 2008). In post-reformation England, Queen Elizabeth I took control of her Noblemen and Clergy, making them accountable to the state. However, civil, political, and religious uprisings remained a real threat (Williamson, 2021), prompting Elizabeth in 1552 to appease her subjects by legislating to regulate poverty relief by law through Parish registers (Dean, 2015). By 1563, funds were being raised to help the deserving poor. Those too young, ill, or old to work would be looked

after in poor houses or orphanages (Hindle, 2005). However, those considered to be the "idle poor" would be flogged (Mcintosh, 2005).

Protestant and secular ideas were also fuelling philanthropy. As a result, individual charities emerged that wealthy, influential and foresighted benefactors funded; individuals like Thomas Gresham (1519-1579) founded the Gresham College and Thomas Sutton (1532-1611) founded the Charterhouse Hospital and left vast charitable legacies (Macdonald & Howorth, 2018).

In 1601, the first recorded state intervention to regulate charitable work was made, which included laws governing philanthropic institutions. It was called the 'Statute of Charitable Uses', also known as the 'Statute of Elizabeth', with clearly defined 'Charitable Purposes'. It was quickly replaced by the 'Poor Relief Act' in 1601 or the 'Elizabethan Poor Law', which contained a list of purposes or activities the state believed were for the general benefit of society. The activities were funded by private contributions from noblemen and affluent merchants (Mcintosh, 2011). It is the foundation of the modern definitions of charitable purposes as stated in Charitable Law (Prochaska, 1992).

From 1642–1666, a succession of civil wars and periodic outbreaks of plague resulted in towns and cities that had lost 80% of their inhabitants. In those five years, England lost 2.5% of its population. In addition, rich and poor alike suffered in the Great Fire of London (1666), with not only buildings in need of replacement but also an entire workforce (Samuel Pepys Diary, 2nd to 15th September 1666). These events prompted a range of policies and benevolent giving from the affluent aristocracy and other wealthy benefactors. If it was not for purely altruistic reasons, then surely to provide the education and training needed to ensure a skilled and semi-skilled workforce and ultimately to secure the safety of their own position (O'Halloran, 2006). Regardless of the political and societal reasons behind these waves of benevolence, it soon

became clear that the voluntary sector was here to stay. It could not only fill in the gaps in provision, of which there was very little but also act as a form of social control.

The Quakers, also known as the Society of Friends, were founded between 1651 and 1655. They were one of the early notable and widely influential religiously-based charitable movements. They are 'natural capitalists', have a history of ambitious, creative, and effective nonviolent activism, and endeavour to live and promote a puritan protestant lifestyle (Brigham *et al.,* 2017). Quakers created schools and colleges throughout Great Britain and Ireland. Individual Quakers were also instrumental in the abolition of slavery, the promotion of women's rights, and the humane and fair treatment of prisoners and the mentally ill as part of the Abolition Project of (1783). They were also funders of the Service Civil International and the International Voluntary Service, Amnesty International and the National Famine Relief Committee in May 1942, which evolved into Oxfam. Prominent Quakers created leading financial institutions such as Lloyds Bank, Barclays Bank, Backhouse Bank and Friends Provident Insurance. The Cadbury's, Terry's and Fry's chocolate factories and Rowntree's confectioners were also notably founded by Quakers. In addition, many created philanthropic grant-making trusts supporting various charities and voluntary and community organisations.

Towards the end of the 1700s, collective, regular, organized donations from wealthy merchants and other affluent people known as associated philanthropy started. They raised these funds to pay for specific activities like building and running hospitals. This process is still evident today (Davis, 2017). Legal recognition of social, political, and community-based societies soon followed, enabling people of little means to pay into basic insurance protection. Such schemes would cover old age, illness, and funeral costs, suggesting a growing social consciousness from the wealthy and the state (Harris, 2004).

Throughout the 18th and 19th centuries, the Enlightenment and the industrial revolution significantly changed every area of political, social, and working life. Mass migrations from the countryside to inner cities led to everyone competing to secure their place in the rapidly expanding, densely occupied cities (Williamson, 2021). This industrial expansion made it relatively easy to find work, although much of it was barely enough to live on. In large cities, there was an increased need for money, compared to rural areas where exchanging goods for services was the norm. However, this created its own problems. Although the inner cities brought more opportunities, they also condensed social and financial issues associated with crime, poverty, homelessness, illness, and the enduring effects of old age (Winstanley, 2011).

One of the most influential philosophers, historians and sociologists of the time, Karl Marx (1818-1883), viewed industrialization as a cause of captive poverty. Wealthy landowners, the middle classes and industrialists were acquiring great wealth at the expense of the poor by exploiting this captive workforce. Employers effectively forced workers to sell their capacity to work for a pittance (Prochaska, 1992). In 1834, due to the vastly increasing numbers of city dwellers, the Government removed its obligation to support people by implementing a poor law. Instead, the law provided voluntary agencies with a direction for rescuing the deserving poor (National Archives, n.d.).

Influential and financially powerful people such as George Peabody (1795-1869) dedicated themselves to reforming the social lives and statuses of the people. They were instrumental in creating affordable, high-quality housing for the working class (Croot, 2004). Andrew Carnegie (1835-1919) and George Cadbury (1839-1922) each set about revolutionising employment practices and became just as famous for their philanthropy as their original business acumen (Musafer, 2012).

Between 1871 and 1874, self-help financial organizations called Mutual Aid Societies were formed. Members would contribute and, in turn, would have support with expenses incurred through illness, old age or death. They enabled people of even little means to save for unexpected or significant life events and were eventually given official recognition (Anheier, 2014). The Employers and Workmen's Act of 1875 was instrumental in forming trade unions, housing projects, and other cooperatives. With it came other legislation that introduced care for the infirm and support for the destitute. At this time, the rate and scale of change were massive, with all areas of political, religious and social life subject to reform. As a result, there was progress in taxation, working conditions, civic and criminal law, prisons, education, health care, sanitation, and care for orphaned children (Harris, 2004).

Dr. Barnardo (1845-1905) founded a renowned not-for-profit organization in 1867 that provided safe refuge with homes for orphans and abandoned children. It went on to develop various fundraising activities, such as opening charity shops and formal payroll donations, which generated a regular income, a model that is still followed by many charities today. (Barnardos.org.uk, 2022)

During the Victorian era, Britain was going through a prosperous period of industrialization, with a need to educate people to fulfil employment needs. As a result, 'ragged schools' appeared, where poor children and orphans could receive meals and clothing and learn a trade such as shoemaking or domestic housekeeping skills. Many working-class children attended school for at least some of their childhood, and with the 1880 Elementary Education Act, school attendance became compulsory for every child.

As the United Kingdom entered the 20th Century, the demand for state intervention increased dramatically. Some, such as Benjamin Gray (1862-1907), suggested that the state was unwilling to intervene politically or financially in the everyday lives of individuals. However,

societal expectations were changing rapidly, and the public needed access to decent, affordable housing, education, health care and insurance against uncertain life events.

From the beginning of the 20th Century, regulation of all aspects of social life began to materialize. Around 1910, trade union membership had increased, and there was industrial unrest amongst sailors, textile workers, miners, and transportation workers in response to falling wages, long hours and poor working conditions. Against this background, the government was prompted to pass new legislation. Government advisor Robert Laurie Morant (1863-1920) and economist William Braithwaite (1876-1938) drafted a format for creating the 1911 National Insurance Act. Prime Minister David Lloyd George introduced it, and a young Liberal, Winston Churchill, supported it, stating that it would be best to:

> "Underpin the existing voluntary agencies with a comprehensive system – necessarily at a lower level – of state action."

This first state-sanctioned contributory insurance system against illness and unemployment in Great Britain was born. Unfortunately, the act only applied to wage earners, about 70% of the workforce. Their families and the unwaged were not covered, although it did remove the need for those who then became unemployed to rely on the social welfare provisions of the poor law. The government knew that the trade unions and friendly societies often operated their own insurance schemes, so it took this as a starting point. They took advantage of their operational expertise along with that of other insurance companies, such as the National Amalgamated Approved Society and The Prudential Mutual Assurance, Investment, and Loan Association. The organisations were soon coerced into administrating this new system, which had over 4.3 million members on a not-for-profit basis, whose contributions were forwarded to the National insurance fund. It was a challenging time for the government and the approved societies. The government underestimated the cost of implementing the scheme, and the voluntary sector struggled to deliver services without sufficient funds. In 1939, the country was plunged into

World War II, and by 1940, such was the expectation and strain upon these administrators to provide welfare provisions that the approved society membership was almost non-existent (Dennett, 1998).

The Welfare State

During the war years, a Tory lead coalition government under Winston Churchill decided to embark upon devising a viable way to rebuild Britain after the war ended. In 1941, Churchill commissioned William Beverage, a Liberal British economist and social reformer, to write a comprehensive plan to rebuild post-war Britain and rid society of the five 'Giant Evils' of want, disease, ignorance, squalor and idleness (Sir William Beveridge Foundation, 2021). Beverage completed his report in 1942, but the war raged for another three years. In 1945, the Conservative Manifesto instructed voluntary and local authority hospitals to prepare to work in partnership as a precursor to establishing the National Health Service (NHS). Later the same year, Clement Attlee's Labour Party defeated Winston Churchill's Torys in the general election. Attlee quickly announced that he would abide by the findings of the 1942 Beverage Report and introduce a comprehensive welfare state.

The welfare state would include establishing a National Health Service and a Social Security System providing a safety net that would protect the population from "the cradle to the grave" and which national insurance contributions would fund (Greengrass, Grant and Collini, 1999). The introduction of such a state welfare scheme was unprecedented in scale and scope. However, while this state intervention appears altruistic, it also aimed to rebuild Britain and ensure that post-war Britain had a continuous supply of healthy, educated people to fulfil the increasing needs of modern industry (Green, 2008). In 1946, The National Insurance Act was introduced, which created a single national organisation in the healthcare field, effectively

making approved societies redundant. They finally ceased to exist in 1948 with the introduction of the NHS (Hoskin, 2010).

Wavering Support and Role of Voluntary and Community Organisations

It would be logical to assume that the need for voluntary and community sector organizations would disappear with the invention of a welfare state. However, their ability to provide welfare services where state provision was absent was a significant accomplishment, which Lord Beveridge highlighted in his 1948 Voluntary Action Report. The report suggested that voluntary and community organizations should continue to provide complementary services alongside state agencies to support vulnerable groups, such as people with disabilities, mental health problems and those suffering the problems associated with old age (Oppenheimer & Deakin, 2011).

However, over a century of hard work by voluntary and community groups was effectively demoted to relative historical insignificance compared to the formation of the welfare state (Ramsden & Cresswell, 2019). Nevertheless, this working arrangement has continued to some degree in its present form. For example, the Wolfenden Report (1978) described the view that the British government function was corporatist with a welfare consensus with local authorities as the professional senior partner in service delivery and the voluntary sector as a subsidiary (Chesterman 1979).

The welfare state expanded dramatically throughout the 1950s with the advent of new technologies, but so did demand and people's expectations. This raised concerns about the mounting costs of continuing to implement improvements and services and the precise role of the state (Greengrass *et al.*, 1999). In the post-war period, political parties made limited references to charities and the voluntary sector. No major party manifesto used the word charity

until 1970. At this time, the roles of the voluntary sector and the state were still debated (NVCO, 2019).

During the 1960s, political parties started to promote the idea of volunteering as a way of improving society without a price tag. The 1964 Liberal Party and 1966 Conservative Party manifestos requested voluntary support with international relief and promoted voluntary service overseas. The 1966 Labour Party Manifesto concentrated on domestic needs by promoting the need for volunteers and voluntary agencies to tackle the "war on want" (poverty).

In 1969/70, the Labour Party's popularity was riding high because of its economic achievements. In only five years, they had reversed the massive £400m financial deficit incurred by the previous Tory Government and achieved a £550m national surplus. Yet, in 1970, while focusing on Tory failures, they only faintly suggested any voluntary contribution to welfare:

> "We believe that the contribution that ordinary people can make to our present welfare and national future is still largely untapped and undeveloped, people want more responsibility. It is this that makes us wish to extend opportunities for everyone to have a bigger say in making decisions, whether in their local community or in their place of work" (Labour Party Manifesto, 1970).

However, as a shadow government desperate for re-election, the Tories were eager to enlist anyone they saw as advantageous to their pursuit of power. They acknowledged the contribution of volunteers and voluntary organisations within areas such as housing provision and social welfare and suggested that this should be enhanced as part of a: "Genuine partnership of effort between statutory and voluntary organizations" (Conservative Manifesto, 1970).

The Tories won the election and, by 1973, had created the Home Office Voluntary Sector Unit (VSU). The VSU would provide direct government funding to certain 'umbrella groups' it identified as crucial to supporting the welfare state and the sector's future development (Crowson, 2011). However, from 1973 to 1975, Europe experienced a period of economic

stagnation. In the UK, wages fell, and the cost of living increased, as did unemployment. As a result, in 1974, the Conservative Manifesto pledged to review the Charities Framework. The review recognised the valuable work done by voluntary organisations and the need to help them 'without compromising their independence'. It effectively opened the door to the possibility of partnership should they be elected (Conservative Party Manifesto 1974). Edward Heath (Con) subsequently lost the 1974 election to Harold Wilson (Lab). However, by 1976, Britain's economy continued to perform poorly, forcing the government to ask the International Monetary Fund (IMF) for an emergency bailout. The bailout conditions forced the government to impose pay caps, which led to trade unions demanding pay raises. When those demands were unmet, waves of strikes followed across all the major utility providers from 1978 to 1979. Ultimately, this led to the election of Margaret Thatcher as conservative prime minister later the same year.

Start of New Public Management (NPM) or a Culture of Managerialism

In 1979, Margaret Thatcher (1925-2013) became Prime Minister, inheriting a country in recession, with a weak economy, high inflation, and a damaging series of strikes, termed 'The Winter of Discontent' (Aitken, 2013). Thatcher's economic policies were heavily influenced by the works of Friedrich Hayek (1899-1992) and Milton Friedman (1912-2006). Both economists condemned governments' economic intervention as a precursor to an authoritarian state. They argued that lower taxes were the only way of encouraging growth and served as an incentive to hard work (Gaunt, 2013). Thatcher adopted Hayekian ideology, opposing traditional ideas about the welfare state and proposed less government, lower taxes, and the importance of free market trade for business, consumers, and partnerships (Jackson & Saunders, 2012). The Conservatives demonstrated an apparent dislike and distrust for public sector unions' power over industries during the previous decade. On the advice of Hayek, they

set about using law-and-order politics and changes to union legislation to prevent strikes and break up the unions (Metcalf, 2017). To some extent, quelling the power of influential authorities, such as the unions, had a knock-on effect. Although the government had previously praised the work of the community sector, they were also uncertain about engaging with or devolving power to the voluntary and community sector, as they were historically very capable of mobilizing people en mass.

The heavily debated Wolfenden report (1978) had already highlighted the important function served by the voluntary sector. It recognised that the voluntary sector could deliver various services without state intervention, interference, or support. It suggested that the government engage with the sector, as there was a need for effective partnership to ensure a healthy welfare pluralism (Rowe, 1978). However, the voluntary and community sector was also concerned about collaboration due to the power imbalance, as the voluntary sector would be the junior partner (Webb and Wistow, 1987).

As the economy was struggling, the fiscal reality of rebalancing the economy was a priority for which Thatcher set about attempting to control inflation with quick-fix Hayekian and Friedman monetarist policies that raised the exchange rate. However, this resulted in the closure of many factories, shipyards, and coal mines in favour of cheaper imports, and sweeping cuts to welfare provision soon followed (Feigenbaum *et al.*, 1998). To appease the population and prepare them for what was to follow, Thatcher publicly advocated the need for self-discipline and restraint, which she soon followed up with the slogan (TINA) 'there is no alternative'. The emphasis was placed on individualism and self-reliance rather than government intervention (collectivism). On the domestic welfare front, Thatcher desperately needed help from the voluntary sector. Still, her public rhetoric had neglected to provide the secure role for the voluntary and community sector the government had promised in previous manifestos. The

voluntary sector suggested that any collaboration would have to address issues of inadequate resources and funding, maintaining independence and the whole relationship between government and civil society, which were as pertinent then as they are today (Harvey, 2007).

Historically, the voluntary sector had a long track record of influencing policy, attracting funding and mobilizing volunteers. The National Association of Victim Support Schemes is an example of what the voluntary sector can do. The scheme was set up in 1979 and funded by a combination of private trusts and the Home Offices Voluntary Services Unit. Of 67 projects nationwide, 22 were created purely by voluntary organizations and church personnel. By 1986, it had expanded dramatically with 293 schemes and victim support, becoming a registered charitable company and securing core funding from the Home Office. As a first step towards greater collaboration and contracting of services to the voluntary sector, in 1978-1979, the DHSS granted awards of £4.4m to voluntary organizations to run various health services under the 1968 Health Services and Public Health Act. This amount doubled to £8.9m by 1981–1982. Other services, such as the Prison and Rehabilitation services, co-opted the voluntary sector, with the Home Office's VSU providing grants in excess of £420,000 to the National Association for the Care and Rehabilitation of Offenders (Crowson, 2011).

In 1981, Thatcher attempted to clarify and justify the government's position when she addressed the WRVS, stating:

> "That the only effective way to reach all those who need help is through the voluntary service of millions of individuals who do what they can because they want to. And, however, much money we have and, however, rich Britain becomes there's no way and no budget which could produce statutory services to meet the needs which as volunteers you now satisfy".

Thatcher continued:

> "The vitality of voluntary organizations would be sapped if they were to ever make themselves creatures of government. So, our role, with the voluntary organizations, is to help you to do the administration and work of mobilizing this enormous army of volunteers which can do the work throughout the community in a better way than

anyone else can." (Speech to Women's Royal Voluntary Service National Conference, Margaret Thatcher Foundation, n.d.)

From this speech, it appears Thatcher views volunteering as a purely individual pursuit. However, this public proclamation also illustrated that the government recognized the potential of tapping into the voluntary sector's knowledge, competencies, organizational and mobilizing abilities and resources, which the state could then apply to many areas of provision. As services cost money, it can be concluded that the state aimed to attract voluntary sector collaboration to get more services for less money. Therefore, appeasing and encouraging the charitable sector was vital to achieve this. However, conservative market policies also influenced the format of funding available to the voluntary sector. Grants were suddenly replaced with reciprocal contracts in what became known as the 'contract culture'. Public rhetoric was also focused on promoting and encouraging individual volunteering to support the roles needed from the voluntary and community sector. With this in mind, in 1982, Chancellor Geoffrey Howe, after consultations with the NCVO, announced a range of generous tax reductions, relief and exemptions for charities.

On the domestic economic front, inflation rose from 10% to 22% at its peak. Three million people were unemployed by 1982, a level not seen for 50 years (BBC News, 2013). The government was also desperate for new initiatives to avoid political suicide at the upcoming election. The government called upon David Young of the Manpower Services Commission (MSC) for help with unemployment. Young utilized the Organization for Rehabilitation and Training (ORT) as a model and eventually co-opted an initially hostile and suspicious voluntary sector into the MSC's Community Programme. This programme eventually had over 200,000 people working for it (NCVO, 1986). The MSC provided 20% of funding for the entire voluntary sector during the 1980s, 72% through its Community Programme, with over half of all projects delivered by voluntary organizations.

The state and voluntary sector had now entered into an often uneasy financial partnership as grants and contracts had become a vital source of income to the voluntary sector. However, relying on state funding was dangerous, as it reduced their independence and meant that the government had them under ultimate financial control**.** As early as (1979) the Gladstone Report, entitled "*Voluntary Action in a Changing World*", called for a 'radical welfare pluralism'. The proposal involved ending the relationship with the state to focus its abilities independently to develop community action initiatives and self-help groups (Gladstone, 1979).

However, regardless of which party was in power, relinquishing social or economic power has never been on any government agenda, with subsequent initiatives created to foster closer working relationships. To try and keep the voluntary sector onside, the 1983 Conservative Election Campaign claimed that the voluntary sector would gain £30 million in tax measures if re-elected. Later that year, Thatcher was re-elected on a promise to reduce public spending, with social security at 30 per cent of public expenditure. However, to uphold election promises, a significant rethink was required to reduce the burden and responsibility of the state in providing welfare and auxiliary services.

Thatcher rejected the idea that 'the state can and should do everything' (Feigenbaum, Henig and Hamnett, 1998). She had already promoted the potential of voluntary action by directly indicating that the voluntary sector was being given a stake in what would be termed a new 'mixed economy of welfare', which had a Thatcherite/Hayekian policy of ending the so-called dependency culture upon the state (Floud *et al.*, 2004).

During this time of recession and funding cuts, the NCVO Director, Lady Usha Prashar (1984), had regular contact with government departments and civil servants to influence policy and improve relations between the voluntary sector and the government. However, left-wing critics

suggested such a partnership was akin to selling your soul to the devil, as everything the Tories do would ultimately harm the voluntary sector and others (Vinen, 2013).

From 1984, Thatcher moved onwards with her vision of a free market economy, where 'privatization' became the new buzzword, and her government privatized 33 major nationalised companies between 1984 and 1991. There was an emphasis on the 'free market' as the most efficient and effective means of delivery. For the conservatives, dealing with the business world was far more straightforward than dealing with domestic issues of health, education, and welfare. Balancing the needs of British citizens, the voluntary sector as the co-provider and the government's free market ideology had become an arduous task (Johnson, 1991).

Behind the scenes, in 1985, the Director of the Child Poverty Action Group noted that:

> "Ministers complain endlessly that the voluntary lobby interpose themselves between the executive and Parliament making decision making it more difficult to balance" (Child Poverty Action, 1985).

However, since the early 1980s, Home Office reports have supported the need for social action and stated that:

> "Society benefits if all those who can are encouraged and enabled to play an active part in responding to common needs, the needs of the disadvantaged or less fortunate" (Social Action, 2016).

This was the policy context within which the voluntary sector was expected to operate. It has a similar rhetoric to the 'Big Society' of the present, indicating that if we strip away public ministerial personality and approach, there has been no change in Conservative ideology in almost 40 years.

The government and voluntary sector had become increasingly co-dependent. The voluntary sector relied on central funding and the increasing demand from the government for services. Concerns from the voluntary sector were increasing, as they were unhappy at being seen as delivering right-wing politically motivated policies (Taylor & Lansley, 1992). As a result,

some left-wing councils co-opted politically acceptable voluntary bodies into a 'rainbow coalition', which provoked Central Government to restrict activities by capping funding (Crowson, 2011).

By the 1987 election, the Tories had already established what the voluntary sector could offer and how to utilize their capabilities, with their rhetoric of supporting the voluntary sector increasing significantly. However, local government responded with indifference towards the sector, with minimal funding and competition between the two creating barriers and hostility, although they often provided reduced fuel and premises charges (Winyard & Davis, 2017). Both the government and charities voiced concerns about control, improving management standards, transparency, and accountability, and how to revive philanthropy and encourage more individual action (Horton, 2015).

In 1988, Douglas Hurd, the then Home Secretary, set out his views on the need for wealth creation and also what he referred to as social cohesion:

> "The creation of wealth and social cohesion were necessary for 'our future progress. The acquisition of wealth was also necessary as a precondition that allows people to fulfil their duties as 'active citizens'".

He went on to discuss the impact of combining the public and voluntary sectors: "The combination of voluntary and public services increased their effectiveness and flexibility" (Crowson, 2011). However, critics argued that this was simply an attempt to gloss over controversial health, housing, education and crime prevention reforms by saying these measures would improve the efficiency of public services by devolving power to the people (Vinen, 2013).

Central government grants to voluntary organisations more than tripled from £93m in 1979 to £292m in 1988 (Vahs.org.uk, 2013). As a result, throughout the 1980s, the voluntary sector

grew significantly from 132,300 registered charities in 1980 to over 171,000 by 1990, with assets estimated at £30bn in 1980 and tripling in the following decade (Mason, 2013).

In 1990, up to 4% of the entire workforce were estimated to be full-time paid employees of the voluntary sector, with an additional army of thousands of unpaid helpers. According to the SCPR/Volunteer Centre survey in 1981, 44 per cent of the population undertook voluntary work, averaging 2.7 hours per week. By 1991, this had increased to 51 per cent. However, although this appears to be a vast combined achievement of both the government and the voluntary sector, the Thatcher government benefited far more from it than the voluntary sector. It desperately needed the voluntary sector to implement and secure its domestic obligations in many areas of social provision while offsetting or reducing the financial burdens it carried. Whereas although the voluntary sector grew significantly, engaging in partnership with a government ideologically focused on free trade and the market was a double-edged sword. Some large and supersized voluntary organizations may have gained influence within government policymaking but at the expense of their independent status. Political affiliation created ethical barriers; contracts were biased in favour of the government and had limited legal protection for voluntary and community organizations. The government overlooked organizations they viewed as left-wing. Co-option meant that the government still wielded power, constraints, and financial control over them, and therefore, the government could effectively break them if they fell out of favour.

In 1990, with Thatcher's resignation, there was an air of optimism. Many across the political spectrum had tired of what they perceived as an autocratic style of governance, so they were pleased to see it end. However, even with a change in management, it was the same government, simply with a different leader. Therefore, it was doubtful that anything could or

would change as all the major global economic countries were firmly focused on capitalism's promotion and needs.

The Continuation of NPM

John Major became Prime Minister in 1990, which was viewed with relief across the entire political spectrum (Kendall, 2000) as Thatcher's style of New Public Management had been confrontational and involved abolishing layers of government (Patton,1991). However, the previous decade's public service reforms using business sector models and economic policies to minimise the state's role and secure value for money continued as privatisation remained a key policy. In 1990, the Home Office created its Efficiency Scrutiny programme to oversee contracts to the voluntary sector and secure value for money. However, those receiving this kind of scrutiny tended to see it as an intrusion into their right to manage their own affairs, interference, and covert financial manipulation (Jenkins, 2008).

In 1991, the government White Paper '*Raising the Standard'* reaffirmed their commitment to privatisation and continuing to contract out public services but did implicitly accept that many services should remain within the public sector. However, the Tory right believed the only good public service was a privatised one. Hence, the Conservatives' privatisation policy, which had dominated the 1980s, continued during the Major years based on their dogmatic belief that free-market competition creates 'people power' (Institute of Economic Affairs, 2017).

To put a human face to social policies, Major introduced the Citizen's Charter in 1991. It was designed to improve public service delivery across a range of public services by treating users as consumers. With it came the addition of a 'Charter Mark' awarded to certain service providers as government/public recognition of excellence in provision, relating to standards of openness, accessibility, inclusivity, choice, performance against targets and redress when things

go wrong (HMSO, 1991). While the Charter Mark offered symbolic rewards for good service, there was general criticism that the charters were all sticks and no carrots (The Guardian, n.d.).

Major went on to win the 1992 general election after reversing Thatcher's highly unpopular poll tax, albeit with a reduced majority. He attempted to reconcile the voluntary and community sector with the Conservative agenda, as the voluntary sector were more than capable of delivering flexible, cost-effective services within the community. However, the Conservative Party Chairman Chris Patten patronisingly declared, "We should milk the voluntary sector of ideas", which somewhat soured relations. Major tried to counteract Patton's outburst by stating that he had a personal and emotional commitment to reform:

> "To rest our fortunes entirely on privatization seemed to me too ideological, too lacking in vision or ambition. The services that could not and should not be privatized – chiefly schools and hospitals – were important to millions of daily lives" (Deakin, 2009).

Critics believed the conservatives' contract culture threatened the very ethos of voluntary action (Scott *et al.,* 2000). The nature of the citizen's relationship with public services was argued to be fundamentally different to that of the purchaser of goods in the market (Deakin, 1994). Third-sector providers played a significant role in delivering social care services long before the advent of the contract culture. However, tensions increased across the voluntary and community sector. The contract culture brought with it a price for the voluntary sector in terms of independence and sustainability (Dickinson et al., 2012).

In 1997, the 'Charter' was rebranded as the 'Public Service Charter' and remained a significant attempt to promote public sector reform that the Blair government carried over. Successive reviews by the House of Commons Select Committees (1998 and 2008) concluded that:

> "The Citizen's Charter has had a lasting impact on how public services are viewed in this country. The initiative's underlying principles retain their validity nearly two decades on – not least the importance of putting the interests of public service users at the heart of public service provision" (PAC Twelfth Report, 2008).

In conclusion, although almost two decades of Tory rule, during which they promoted the neoliberal values of self-interest, self-reliance and individual opportunity, which brought new opportunities for many and saw a general increase in the standard of living, it also highlighted the widening gap in economic inequality. Moreover, even with a change in managerial style, government policy that employed a consumerist approach and the growth of 'contract culture' systematically undermined working practices, sustainability, and job security within the voluntary sector. However, hope was on the horizon as in 1997, a general election was looming and the prospect of an entirely different party in government.

The Third Way (New Labour: New Language)

In 1997, Tony Blair's New Labour government was about to change the face of politics as they assumed office after a landslide election victory. Many voters from middle England initially feared a return to old socialist ideals due to past associations with inefficiency, high inflation and the power of the unions. However, middle England had nothing to fear from 'New Labour'. The 'New' referred to ideas to modernize traditional socialism. Ones that would appeal to a new generation of voters who had been heavily influenced by over a decade of Thatcherism. Blair's first step was to uphold a pre-election pledge to maintain the previous Conservative government's spending plans for two years. As well as to keep direct taxation rates at existing levels throughout their government, effectively continuing liberal attitudes to the provision of public services (McLaughlin *et al.*, 2002).

Blair has been described as the 'Third Way' politician. The third way is a form of ethical socialism based on values of "social justice, the equal worth of each citizen, equality of opportunity and community". In 1998, Blair described his modernisation plans for social democracy as a re-evaluation of political policies, and he often referred to them as the 'Third Way'. The Third Way, or centrism, unifies both left- and right-wing politics by advocating an

amalgamation of some centre-right and centrist economics with centre-left social policies. It is also described as a form of ethical socialism, which seeks to remove the unjust elements of capitalism by providing social welfare and other policies (Giddens, 1998).

The 'Third Way' emphasises a commitment to balanced budgets and equal opportunities combined with personal responsibility, decentralising government power, encouraging public-private partnerships, improving labour supply and preserving social capital (Basham, 2002). However, the Third Way has been criticised on the right by conservatives, classical liberals, and libertarians who advocate laissez-faire capitalism and on the left by social democrats, socialists, and communists as betraying socialist values (Hale *et al.,* 2004).

Tony Blair defended his brand of politics by stating:

> "The Third Way stands for a modernised social democracy, passionate in its commitment to social justice and the goals of the centre-left. It is a third way because it moves decisively beyond an Old Left preoccupied by state control, high taxation, and producer interests; and a New Right treating public investment, and often the very notions of "society" and collective endeavour, as evils to be undone".

The Third Way appeared to have an ideological context that would provide the third sector with opportunities beyond the state's control through community-based voluntary action (Giddens, 1998). However, New Labor appeared to preserve the previous government's economic policies to constrain costs in formulating the 'third way' and to re-direct public expenditure under its comprehensive spending reviews by creating a range of 'costless solutions to addressing social problems' (Driver & Martell, 2003; Mohan & Mohan 2002). The New Labour government retained the basic idea of setting standards and incorporated much of Major's approach into their "target culture" for services. However, they also recognized the need to take the relationship between the public and voluntary sectors one step further. They believed that as the voluntary sector focused more on service users' needs rather than profits, they were far less likely to reduce service quality to save money than private companies.

Three high-profile policies relating to the third or voluntary sector soon emerged. In 1997, the first budget provided a charity tax review into charities' financial and legal issues. They introduced it as a response to the reduction in private giving and to help shareholding charities adversely affected by for-profit-oriented tax reforms (Faucher-King *et al.*, 2010). In 1998, the 'Compact' was established by the Deakin Commission, following consultations with 20,000 community groups. The Compact represented a serious effort to bring the third sector into mainstream public policy and improve the resources available to the sector. This was essential as previous policies targeting the sector had been ad hoc, dealing with single issues relating to housing, health or education with no lasting commitment (Parker & Gould, 1999).

The 'Compact' provided principles for a relationship between the private, public and voluntary sectors to provide complementary welfare services, with the voluntary sector remaining independent (Anheier, 2014). The 'Compact' between the government and the voluntary sector differs from the previous 'Citizens Charter' by explicitly expressing the value of a mutual engagement. In contrast, the Citizen's Charter made unilateral declarations without reciprocity of commitment. However, ministerial critics argue that they were not legally binding and, therefore, could be abused (Giddens, 2000).

In 1998, the 'New Deal' workfare programme was introduced to reduce unemployment, provide training, and subsidise employment and voluntary work. A one-off windfall tax on privatised utility companies funded it. However, this 'New Deal' came with a new contract for welfare between the state and its citizens. 'Workfare' conditionality involved balancing 'rights and responsibilities' under new reciprocity principles of 'something for something' rather than 'something for nothing' (Faucher-King *et al.,* 2010).

Citizens were required to attend some form of training, education, or work experience to qualify for job seekers allowance. Furthermore, a national minimum wage and working tax

credits were introduced to increase household income and 'make work pay', reducing the perceived dependency culture. In addition, during their first term, New Labor launched a range of initiatives, including the New Deal for Communities, Health Action Zones, and the National Strategy for Neighbourhood Renewal, to encourage further strategic collaboration (Assinder, 2007).

In (1999), Tony Blair addressed the National Council for Voluntary Organizations, stating that: "In the second half of the Century we learned that government cannot achieve its aims without the energy and commitment of others – voluntary organizations, business, and crucially, the wider public". And continued with:

> "That is why the Third Sector is such an important part of the Third Way ... And history shows that the most successful societies are those that harness the energies of voluntary action, giving due recognition to the third sector of voluntary and community organizations" (Blair, 1999)

Although New Labour spoke of shared social responsibility and devolving power to the people and the voluntary sector, their aims remained the same as the previous Conservative government: to reduce public sector inefficiency and costs. The new policy context of the 'Compact' for Local Strategic Partnerships was to support the voluntary sector through 'community-based approaches' to deliver public services as an effective, costless solution 'beyond the state' (HM Treasury, 2002). This would include decentralized partnerships between community organizations, businesses and the state in the hope of developing self-sufficiency. However, regardless of the party in government, their strict community orientation prevented the voluntary sector from diversifying or extending its role (NVCO, 2009).

Throughout Blair's government, the traditional Labour rhetoric of equality, increasing welfare, and the redistribution of wealth had all but disappeared and were replaced with talk of 'opportunities' and 'participation'. The opportunities for participation were to be within the community, delivered through training, work, volunteering, and other initiatives to address

inequality and social deprivation. Redistribution of wealth required strategic precision to maintain fiscal and voter credibility, suggesting New Labour were more concerned with maintaining power (Lister, 2001). Critics suggest that New Labour's policies were simply a rehashing of 'Thatcherite' economics through privatization, managerialism, marketisation, and competitive market disciplines into public services (Reitan, 2002). However, New Labour had no choice in continuing these economic policies as global capitalist economic pressures and expectations had changed the face of the business and political world, with competitive domestic and international labour markets (Pierson, 1998).

New Labour's Third Way ideology was a form of communitarianism, with an emphasis upon 'rights and responsibilities', by renewing community spirit, capacity, capability, and social capital (Heron, 2002). However, New Labour's public policy has focused on capitalist economic policies, with a high level of managerialism, by maintaining accountability, performance targets, outcomes and 'value for money' (Newman, 2001). It has also been suggested that New Labour's domestic policies were a necessary 'structural adjustment' to address and maintain socialist domestic welfare provisions in a global capitalist economic system (Pierson, 1998).

In 2000, Blair, when addressing the Women's Institute triennial conference, reiterated his stance by stressing the importance of 'community renewal' to the New Labour project:

> "At the heart of my beliefs is the idea of community. Not just the local villages, towns and cities. I mean our fulfilment as individuals lies in a decent society of others. Business, work and with-it community and social life are all in the throes of change... it is no wonder people feel insecure, frightened for their future ... we all share the anxieties of today's world… Lives cry out for the helping hand of an active community not the cold shoulder, the cruelty, of those who say you're on your own. A community there for them when they need it, helping them cope with change" (Carvel, 2017).

However, New Labour appears to have adopted a particularly liberal form of communitarianism, in which the state is rhetorically enforcing the obligations and duties citizens owe to their community (Marr, 2009).

In 2000, New Labour introduced Local Strategic Partnerships (LSPs) in 88 of England's most deprived local authorities. LSPs would bring together local authorities, all service providers, local businesses and the full range of voluntary organisations and community groups (Russell, 2005). LSPs developed from three policy areas: Initially, the need to modernize local authorities who were now expected to project-manage community strategies. This was followed by a regeneration review, which concluded that a more integrated approach was needed. Finally, the Social Exclusion Unit review indicated a need for neighbourhood renewal (Equality and Human Rights Commission, n.d.).

LSPs were non-statutory bodies with local government, voluntary, community and private sector representatives discussing local issues, strategies and allocating funding. They aimed to encourage community involvement, the integration of services, and better local resource allocation. They were more flexible, had more community involvement, and took advantage of the diverse range of existing partnerships across the country which focused on regeneration and renewal, such as the Council for Voluntary Services (CVS). However, their relatively low profile suggests they were not given the credit they deserved (Russell, 2001).

Public records indicate that funding to the voluntary sector for delivering welfare services was reduced from 5.2 billion in 2003/2004 to £4.2 billion by 2006/2007 (Macmillan, 2010). In part, this was due to issues arising from subcontracting, which most voluntary organizations could not do without first becoming social enterprises. Many charities and community groups stated they felt betrayed by the government as they needed to become self-generating businesses before bidding for contracts; otherwise, they would remain reliant on donations and fundraising

(Goddard, 2002). Both bidding for central government contracts and applying to grant-making bodies had become incredibly competitive due to ever-dwindling funding streams (Unwin, 2004).

The 'Third Way' policies introduced by New Labour illustrate that the traditional ideas of political left and right became increasingly blurred, with neoliberal ideology infiltrating both sides of the political mainstream. The dominance of capitalism has required a degree of socialist adjustment to compete in a global marketplace. Such is the hold of neoliberalism in the UK that the political establishment, with support from some media outlets, has become guarded against those who advocated a return to leftist policies, such as Tony Benn and, more recently, Jeremy Corbyn.

In 2007 Tony Blair resigned, but those in the voluntary sector did not expect much to change. Under his leadership and the previous two Conservative governments, the approaches to working in partnership with the voluntary sector had been one-sided, even with goodwill from both sides. The government had been reluctant to relinquish or devolve any power to the sector but still expected it to deliver more and more. Governments have progressively tried to encroach upon the voluntary sector's autonomy, always expecting far more than they were willing to pay for.

Gordon Brown's Government (2007-2010)

Gordon Brown succeeded Blair and promised constitutional reform that was "clear about the rights and responsibilities of being a citizen in Britain today". He reaffirmed the commitment to working in partnership with the voluntary and community sector. In August 2007, the Department of Health's £73 million Social Enterprise Investment Fund was created to develop the social enterprise sector. Enterprise was the operative word, as voluntary organizations converting to social enterprises were significantly more able to secure public loans. These

enterprises would enable voluntary organizations to trade, sell products and services and then reinvest their profits, effectively turning them into businesses, thus, removing the need for further state funding (Hall & Millar, 2011).

However, as neoliberalism promotes the maintenance of independence from the state, autonomy, innovation and self-reliance, it is hard to understand why successive governments have sought to control the knowledgeable, competent, reliable and socially responsive voluntary sector. It is possible that the voluntary sector's far-reaching accomplishments, largely independent of government funding and control, represent an ideological threat to New Capitalism. Perhaps there is professional jealousy, or it may present an opportunity to expand the Capitalist ideal. To the sceptical eye, this illustrates how the neoliberal ideals of business and competitiveness were embedded in New Labour. These new working arrangements certainly benefited the government, as they could then force these new enterprises to compete against each other for contracts, ultimately forcing down service costs. However, for many charitable organizations, it would prove problematic. Although a social enterprise can make profits to reinvest, trying to provide services for the greater public good often conflicts with delivering a profit. Quality of service does not deliver profits in the way quantity would. Becoming a social enterprise would also place organizations firmly within the marketplace, reliant on competitive contracts to secure their future.

In practice, decades of neoliberalism have permeated all working sectors, with many voluntary organizations already expected to do more with less money. New Capitalism has already impacted working practices. Many voluntary sector employees are employed under low-paid, short term and part-time contracts, causing employee retention, motivation, job security and sense of identity to suffer (Prentis, 2013). Conversely, while those that remain charitable organizations are financially reliant on funding rounds and donations, being apart from the

competitive nature of enterprises and businesses means they are free to address social needs without pandering to market forces and the pursuit of profit. Capitalism and the unregulated consumerist market's competitive nature is not without problems, as increasing profit margins drive both ambition and risk. However, those willing to take risks are susceptible to overextending themselves, as was seen in the financial crisis of 2007.

In September 2007, after decades of unregulated financial activities, the system finally broke down, which lead to a global financial crisis and recession. On the domestic front, this started with the Bank of England stepping in as lender of last resort to support Northern Rock. Other banks and financial institutions soon faced difficulties, most notably the Royal Bank of Scotland. The UK government announced a bank rescue package of £500 billion to restore market confidence, stabilise the British banking system and provide a range of short-term loans and guarantees to interbank lending (Winnett & Swaine, 2008). However, the government's actions to stabilise the banking sector resulted in it taking on a significant amount of additional debt at a time when revenues were falling due to the economic downturn.

The 2008 pre-budget report announced various measures to boost the economy. These included a £145 cut to the basic tax rate for people earning below £34,800 pa. A temporary 2.5% cut in VAT; £3 billion worth of public spending being brought forward from 2010; a £20 billion Small Enterprise Loan Guarantee Scheme; £5 billion towards training for the young unemployed and a car scrappage scheme offering a £2,000 off the purchase of a new car when scrapping a vehicle of 10 years old or more (Taylor-Gooby, *et al,* 2017, p53). Despite entering the crisis with a low level of public debt the UK's ability to take discretionary fiscal action was limited by the burden of bank bailouts on public finances. The crisis affected bank profits and significantly raised the national debt to 70% of GDP by 2009, from around 40% before the crisis.

In 2009 the final pre-Budget report indicated that although the recession was worse than predicted, the quantitative easing programme had made a "real difference". Brown announced economic recovery measures, including a public sector pay freeze, a levy on bank bonuses, measures to help the unemployed, and tax increases. Other measures included ensuring he had the best possible advisors to help pull the country out of recession. Therefore, Brown advocated a "Government of All the Talents" (GOAT) with ministerial appointments of non-Labour Party members with expertise in specific fields, including a consultant surgeon as health minister and a CBI director general as minister of state for trade and investment. He brought in the right people for the right job to boost the economy (Yong & Hazell, 2011). At the same time, Brown introduced tax credits for families with children, which helped child poverty fall during his final year as Prime Minister.

Shadow Chancellor George Osbourne quickly blamed Labour for the recession and criticised them for delaying spending decisions. He stated Labour should "never be trusted with people's money again" (Elliot, 2019). However, after decades of promoting neoliberalism, deregulation and free-market capitalism, governments of both flavours, Conservative and Labour, were equally culpable for the financial crisis and subsequent recession.

In December 2009, the Institute for Fiscal Studies (IFS) estimated that there would be a shortfall in public spending of £36 billion in the three years from 2011—with £15 billion of cuts needed to balance the budget. However, with health and education protected, welfare, housing, transport, defence, and higher education would have to be cut. In addition, the IFS estimated it would cost each family £2,400 a year for eight years to pay back the national debt. However, realistically, this was uncertain, as no one knew how long and deep the recession would be. (Brewer *et al.,* 2009)

The government's reluctance to prosecute the heads of corporate banking and financial institutions added to a sense of betrayal in the country, which would not help their election prospects. In 2010, Brown unveiled Labour's election manifesto under the slogan "a future fair for all". However, amid such uncertainty, politicians were only too happy to play the blame game. Nick Clegg criticised Labour, saying "fairness and new politics" were promised in previous general elections but had failed to materialise. Subsequently, in 2010, labour lost the general election. However, there was no clear parliamentary majority, resulting in the formation of a conservative-liberal democrat coalition government instead. Brown left office with the country still gripped by a global recession.

Coalition Government and David Cameron (2010-2016) and Austerity

The 2010 election resulted in the first coalition government since the Churchill War Ministry government. It was led by David Cameron (Con) and Nick Clegg (Lib Dems). Cameron promised a "modern compassionate conservatism" and consistently underlined the NHS as his priority. Although financial measures were introduced in 2008 by the previous Labour Government to counteract the financial crisis, the term "Age of Austerity" was first used in 2009 by Cameron. At the Conservative Party forum, David Cameron declared that "the age of irresponsibility is giving way to the age of austerity". He committed to ending what they perceived as years of excessive government spending. Furthermore, Cameron stated that he was committed to eliminating the financial deficit as quickly as possible and bringing about prosperity. During Cameron's first term in office, his government created the Office for Budget Responsibility (OBR). The OBR's purpose was to review government spending to eliminate the budget deficit and reduce the national debt as a percentage of GDP.

In 2010, the austerity programme was created and enforced with what can only be described as savage cuts. There was a 25% reduction in local government spending, 22 billion in cuts to

welfare spending, police numbers were cut by 17,000, budget cuts for the courts and prisons, and an increase in VAT. This approach was promoted as getting the UK's finances in order, a necessary short-term discomfort yielding long-term security and prosperity (Rex & Campell, 2021). By 2014, the cuts had amounted to a staggering £100 billion reduction in government expenditure, and although taxes had also increased, 80% of the deficit reduction came from spending cuts. On the face of it, the deficit reductions were impressive. However, the stimulus needed for economic growth was absent. Consequently, it remained low, with any new jobs being low-waged, leading to a dramatic rise in personal debt (Hood *et al.,* 2018).

From a sociological perspective, the impact of these cuts was felt unequally. In 2010, it was estimated that 45% of those in debt had mental health problems, compared to 14% with no debt, and 40% of benefit claimants in Britain cited "mental health" as their primary condition (Knapp, 2012). This illustrates that far from being compassionate, the cuts were disproportionately affecting the most vulnerable sections of society. Between 2011 and 2013, other austerity measures included a two-year pay freeze for five million public sector workers to reduce public expenditure by £3.3 billion by 2014–15. Subsequently, wage increases were capped at 1% for 2013–2016, later extended to 2020 in the 2015 budget. In addition, in 2013, Welfare reforms included a benefits cap of £26,000 per household and child tax credits limited to the first two children. The limit on child tax credits significantly increased child poverty and forced many parents to rely on food banks (Norris, 2016).

This was closely followed by the Local Housing Allowance (LHA), which restricted housing benefits paid to public housing tenants for rooms deemed to be spare. The LHA was popularly referred to as the bedroom tax and affected an estimated 660,000 social housing tenants, reducing their benefit by an average of £12–£22 per week. It reduced DWP expenditure by a further £500 million per year. Although this was clearly a cost-cutting exercise, the government

claimed it would free up larger houses for people who needed them, even though they already knew that there was insufficient public housing stock available to enable people to downsize. This problem was compounded even further by local councils enforcing criteria that meant multiple children under ten could occupy the same bedroom.

Research by the Housing Charity Shelter (Neate, 2018) indicated that 80% of tenants experienced a cut in housing benefits, which in some cases amounted to hundreds of pounds per month. There were 320,000 people recorded as homeless at that time. The government added insult to injury by imposing a 1% cap on the annual increase in benefits, below the rate of inflation. In addition, severe benefits sanctions continued to be enforced for unemployed claimants judged not to be seeking work, which only added to the pressures many families felt. By introducing benefit caps and a bedroom tax to achieve their aims instead of tackling the housing crisis and low pay, the government made politically popular cuts, which amounted to economic opportunism at the expense of low-income families (MacFlynn, 2015).

In 2014, Cameron's Government announced that austerity measures would be extended until at least 2018 and stated they had no intention of increasing public spending once the structural deficit had been eliminated. They proposed that the public spending reduction should be made permanent. Some economists claimed that the austerity measures could never realistically be relaxed. Otherwise, it would result in yo-yo-ing of economic policies (Wintour & Watt, 2013).

Cameron secured an outright majority in the 2015 general election and continued with the austerity programme originally started under the coalition. By 2015, Civil Service numbers had been reduced to the lowest level since WW2, potentially reducing public sector expenditure by £5bn (Williams, 2015). For those who support reducing expenditure, it was proof that the civil service required streamlining. However, the human cost is undeniable, as it has ultimately increased child poverty among working families. In 2015, the National Audit Office concluded

that 15 local authorities were at risk of insolvency, with 70% of local authorities stating they could not provide non-statutory services beyond 2023 if funding remained restricted.

Most macro-economists argue that the Coalition Government's austerity programme was too severe and unnecessary (Gamble, 2015). The austerity programme cost the average household £4,000 (Wren-Lewis, 2015). However, from a purely financial perspective, it can be argued that the austerity measures worked. The economy had grown from £2.4 trillion in 2010 to £2.8 trillion by 2016. Unemployment had fallen from 2.51m in 2010 to 1.67m in 2016, and the deficit halved from £154.8bn in 2010 to £74.9bn in 2016. However, the harsh economic measures had come with a devastating human cost, and Cameron had presided over the most prolonged sustained fall in living standards for 50 years (Partington, 2017).

A 2018 United Nations Investigation found that the austerity programme had breached UN human rights agreements relating to women, children, disabled people, and economic and social rights, stating it "entrenches high levels of poverty and inflicts unnecessary misery in one of the richest countries in the world" (Alston, 2018). Concerning the reasons behind austerity, the United Nations stated: "Austerity, as practised by this government, was a political choice, rather than an economic necessity, and the human costs have been huge" (Yeginsu, 2019).

In 2016, Cameron resigned following the result of the referendum on the UK's membership of the EU. However, many critics suggested that Cameron was escaping from questions and responsibility for irregularities relating to the collapse of the Big Society Bank and the unpredictable fallout of triggering Brexit.

Theresa May's Government (2016-2019)

In 2016, Theresa May became Conservative Prime Minister following David Cameron's resignation. May identified herself as a 'One Nation Conservative', which is politically paternalist, maintains tradition and promotes mainstream economic policies designed to help ordinary people (Mason, 2017). A July 2016 Ipsos MORI poll found that 55% of those surveyed thought May was a suitable PM, with a 2016 *ComRes* poll suggesting she was more in touch with ordinary people than David Cameron.

During her Leadership Campaign, May stated:

> "The government I lead will be driven not by the interests of the privileged few, but by yours. We will do everything we can to give you more control over your lives. When we take the big calls, we'll think not of the powerful, but you. When we pass new laws, we'll listen not to the mighty but to you. When it comes to taxes, we'll prioritise not the wealthy, but you." (Street, 2018)

A year on, in May 2017, the Conservative Manifesto promised: "we will govern in the interests of the mainstream of the British public" (Conservative Party Manifesto, 2017). However, it was unclear how they would achieve this given that the government had also pledged to continue reducing the fiscal deficit by maintaining the freeze on benefits and welfare cuts, indicating a fundamental clash between the rhetoric and policy.

May was viewed as a different kind of leader, with a leadership style that avoided confrontation, revealing her hand, or giving grand speeches, but instead preferred to work quietly and consistently towards effecting change behind the scenes (Mason, 2017). The *Financial Times* compared May to German Chancellor Angela Merkel, stating, "May has a ruthless streak and gets on with the job" (Parker & Warrell, 2014).

However, the rhetoric of her campaign speeches never reflected the reality of what followed once she came to office. In 2016, a four-year freeze was introduced on all working-age social

security payments, affecting 11 million families and reducing government expenditure by £13bn. The Welfare Reform and Work Act (2016) removed the work-related activity component for ESA, lowering payments for disabled people by £29.05 a week, further reducing government expenditure by an estimated £450m pa 2020/21. In 2016/17, the 2013 Benefit Cap had already been reduced from £26,000 to £20,000 pa, affecting over 116,000 households across the UK. By April 2015, this measure had already reduced government expenditure by £225 million. Other changes included ending housing benefits for people aged 18–21, saving the government an estimated further £3.3 million pa.

There was no mention of austerity in the 2016 budget, leading analysts to conclude that the austerity programme had ended. However, in February 2017, the Chancellor proposed departmental budget reductions and freezing DWP working-age benefits until 2020, equating to a massive 40% reduction since 2010.

The most significant reductions in local authority spending of up to 40% occurred in the historically economically deprived North of England, compared to an average of 24% nationally. In 2017, the Joseph Rowntree Trust identified an increase in child and pensioner poverty compared to the previous year, with reductions in benefit support and a shortage of affordable housing as contributing factors (JRF, 2019).

The Welfare Reform Act 2012, with its benefits cap, bedroom tax, budget cuts, benefits sanctions and the introduction of universal credit, increased the number of children in "relative poverty" by 600,000, with over a million families with children relying on food banks, which had more than tripled since 2010 (Trussell Trust, 2019). In addition, since the 2010 introduction of the austerity programme, with sweeping welfare reforms and benefits cuts, it has caused over 120,000 extra deaths (Rimmer, 2017). Austerity has also been linked to a fall in life

expectancy amongst poorer socioeconomic groups and those living in deprived areas of the UK (ONS, 2018).

Other social welfare and research agencies, such as Shelter, also concluded that by 2018, 50,000 families were living in bed and breakfasts or other forms of temporary accommodation, with many more homeless. Some were living on the floors and sofas of friends and acquaintances, with 33,000 of those affected being working families (Bulman 2018). Shelter attributed this to higher rents, the freeze on housing benefits and a shortage of social housing. However, Crisis claimed that 219,000 people were homeless by the end of 2019, and the level of homelessness in the UK was a "neon sign that something is fundamentally wrong" with how our society is being run (Crisis, 2019).

The (OBR) predicted that in 2018–19, public sector debt would fall for the first time since 2001–02, as tax revenues would exceed public spending. However, this surplus failed to materialise, and while in August 2018, the deficit was at its lowest level since 2002–3, in the budget, they announced a deferral of the target for eliminating the deficit until 2022-23. However, there appeared to be no end in sight for the austerity measures, with councils expected to continue operating on a shoestring budget. The fear was confirmed in early 2019, with three-quarters of councils expected to raise taxes to the legal maximum to cover costs while still cutting services (Murry, 2019).

Overall, in the past decade, governments have maintained consistency in two areas, firstly reducing the deficit despite the social hardships it created. Secondly, promoting the neoliberal ideals of maintaining free market capitalism with continual praise of the private sector and maligning public and welfare services. A prime example can be seen in criticisms targeted at Blair's government, suggesting that public sector productivity declined by 0.3% pa during those years, whereas private sector productivity rose by 2.3% pa. This criticism fails to hold up

to qualitative analysis. Achievements such as adding nurses to wards and teachers to classrooms may statistically suggest reduced public productivity. Still, it blatantly ignores the improvements in schools and hospitals. If anything, this merely illustrates that the lure of money and maintaining power and control is the focus of neoliberal ideology, blinding a succession of governments to the extent that they can no longer distinguish between 'cost' and 'worth'.

On the economic policy front, the original 2010 pledge to eliminate the fiscal deficit by a specified deadline has consistently moved back from 2015 to 2018, 2020, 2022 and now 2025 with no foreseeable increases in public or welfare services spending (Crawford *et al.*, 2016). In conclusion, the introduction of 'Austerity' measures to rebalance the economy, which was promoted as the ideal temporary solution to dealing with the financial crisis, was never a temporary measure but a permanent ideological framework for absolving the government of its economic responsibility to the welfare state. During the most recent Conservative Governments, regardless of leadership, there has been a 60% reduction in funding for local authorities, with more than 220,000 redundancies of local authority employees (Mellor, 2018)

The Revenue Support Grant for local authorities fell from £9,927 million in 2015–16 to £2,284 million for 2019–20, leaving 168 local authorities with no grant for 2019–20 (LGA, 2020). Sweeping welfare cuts combined with an increased demand for social care have dramatically reduced spending on refuse collections, libraries, sure start programmes, bus service subsidies and road maintenance, and increases in council tax rates in 2010 and 2018. Equally, throughout May's three years in office, public speeches omitted any suggestion of devolving power to local governments, promoting the third sector, or providing welfare services. This despite announcing in the 2017 Autumn Budget that they were working towards a civil society strategy,

suggesting that the government had little to offer the charitable and community sector (Kay, 2017).

On the 3rd of October 2018, Theresa May announced, "austerity is over" after eight years of cuts and tax increases, stating, "The end is in sight and there are better days ahead" (Kentish, 2019). However, there were limited new public spending commitments in the 2018 budget, and commentators suggested austerity was not truly ending (BBC News, 2018). This suggests either a communication breakdown or a deliberate strategy ahead of the next election. The level of dissatisfaction was evident in both political and public circles; in less than three years, May faced more calls for resignation than both Thatcher and Blair combined, with 33 of these relating directly to Brexit, including from the secretary of state for work and pensions and the minister of state for disabled people (Institute for Government, 2019).

At this time, a new generation of rising MPs, such as Dominic Raab, were asserting their political muscle by publicly endorsing the abolition of half of all government departments, including Business, International Development, Culture, and the "pointless" Equalities Office, stating, that "Middle-class Peter should not be robbed to pay working-class Paul" (Raab, 2013). However, with the departure of May in 2019, the Country, Austerity and Brexit would now be determined by what some critics suggested would be the unpredictable and distorted lens of Boris Johnson (Edwards, 2019).

Boris Johnson (2019-2022)

Boris Johnson became the Prime Minister in May 2019 after May's resignation. Johnson quickly called a snap general election in December 2019 and led the party to victory with 43.6% of the vote, giving it its largest seat share since 1987. On 31/01/2020, the United Kingdom withdrew from the EU with a workable EU-UK trade and cooperation agreement. Leaving the EU was the act Johnson had promised would revive the UK's fortunes. However, much of his

tenure was occupied with dealing with the COVID-19 pandemic and its aftermath. Johnson responded to the pandemic by introducing a range of emergency measures, such as lockdowns and a range of safety and distancing measures, providing financial support through the furlough scheme, benefits uplift, out-of-school meal support and the roll-out of a vaccine programme to minimise the impact of the virus on the NHS, businesses, and the general public.

Throughout this crisis, even with regular, daily 5 p.m. government updates, neither the government nor the media drew significant attention to the voluntary sector's role. In the absence of much-needed statutory care and support, especially for vulnerable, disabled, and elderly people, the voluntary and community sector has carried the weight of caring for those in need. While many public sector organisations and larger charities closed their doors during the pandemic, offering only limited online services, countless grassroots charities and community organisations, up and down the country, continued to work throughout the pandemic at significant risk to themselves. Organisations such as soup kitchens and food banks found ways to continue providing essential services to local communities, ensuring that elderly, vulnerable, marginalised and disabled people could access support. Voluntary sector staff and volunteers worked tirelessly throughout the pandemic, collecting and delivering food, toiletries, and prescriptions to those in need, maintaining contact with vulnerable and disabled people to reduce the sense of isolation, responding to urgent issues and emergencies, and promoting mental health wellbeing. Illustrating that in times of crisis, while governments and other statutory agencies fumble around trying to find their feet and lack an organised and coordinated approach, the voluntary and community sector already knows what is needed and where. Organisations rooted in their communities are aware of social needs and are well-versed in responding to the needs of people in crisis.

Summary

In the past four decades, from Thatcher through to the 'Citizens Charter', 'The Compact', Blair's 'Third Way' and more recently, Cameron's 'Big Society', each successive government has promised a significant role for the third sector in the provision of welfare services. However, regardless of the government, what was promised and what was delivered are poles apart. This is because each successive government has been reluctant to relinquish any power. Funding arrangements always benefit the government far more than the voluntary sector as the arrangements demand more work for less money.

The change from grants to a contracts system may have been the signal that regardless of government, policies were now firmly focused on maintaining the capitalist market with consumerism, accountability, targets and sustainability a priority (Reitan, 2002). Cameron's initial assertions that austerity measures were a temporary and necessary fiscal measure were reassuring to the electorate, especially with the rhetoric of 'we are all in it together' and 'Big Society' which may have provided some sense of social solidarity in the face of financial adversity (Brady *et al*., 2012).

For the government, it provided the perfect opportunity to endorse their pseudo devolvement of public services with the support of the voluntary and community sector by focusing on the potential of community empowerment and action. However, on the ground, the reality of policies that endorsed austerity and the 'Big Society' were felt very differently. In the next chapter, I will explore the origins of Austerity; how Austerity has been used as a policy to covertly introduce stringent broad economic cuts to welfare and Local Authority provisions. I will then continue to explore the diversionary political discourse of austerity and the introduction of the Big Society as a format for promoting social action, encouraging volunteers, and working in partnership with the Voluntary sector.

Chapter Three Austerity, Policy, and Welfare Provisions

Chapter three will explore the origins of austerity as a policy and its role in the neoliberal agenda as enacted by the Coalition and subsequent Conservative governments. Also, it will explore austerity cuts to welfare and Local Authority provisions. It will then continue to explore the diversionary political discourse of austerity and the Big Society with the subsequent promotion of the Community and Voluntary Sector in Partnership.

The Origins of Austerity

There have been numerous examples of austerity or austere measures throughout history. The word austere itself originates from ancient Greek via Latin. In Latin, 'austerus' means dry, harsh, sour, or tart, which comes from the Ancient Greek 'austēros', meaning bitter or harsh, associated with making the tongue dry or harsh from fruits used in wines.

Historically, periods of austerity (harsh times) arose when resources were severely limited due to drought, war, disruption in trade routes or poor governance. An early example was in the Roman Empire when they introduced severe restrictions on grains, bread, food, and other resources after decades of decadence, corruption, and mismanagement. These measures ultimately led people to flee a starving Rome, which saw the end of the Western Roman Empire (Della Porta, 2015).

More recently, the meaning of austerity has become stern or severe (Oxford English Dictionary, 2019). This period of austerity is not the first time the UK has been subject to austerity measures in the modern era. The 1920s were a decade of economic stagnation after the First World War (1914-1918). There was widespread unemployment and poverty, and neither of the two consecutive Conservative Prime Ministers, Andrew Bonar Law (1922-1923) and Stanley Baldwin (1923-1924), nor Labour Prime Minister Ramsey Macdonald (1924 and 1929-31) had

any ability to control. Unfortunately, the Wall Street Crash of 1929 plunged the global economy into crisis in 1930. This Great Depression hit the UK's heavy industry particularly hard, with coal mining, shipbuilding, cotton mills and steel works bearing the brunt.

In 1931, the government introduced austerity as a policy following pressure from the Treasury to pursue fiscal austerity to reduce the budget deficit and restore confidence in the Pound. Prime Minister Ramsay MacDonald and Chancellor of the Exchequer Lord Snowden felt compelled to implement public sector wage cuts and to slash unemployment benefits by 10%. They also introduced means testing for claimants. Poverty was rising amongst the working class, and these measures were risky for a government that did not want a repeat of 1926's general strike. However, the economy recovered by 1936 (Crafts & Fearon, 2010).

Political, trade and other unregulated institutional and economic factors are often the primary causes of economic downturns (Butterwood, 2016). The liberal ideology of the ruling classes at that time perceived that idleness caused poverty. Families receiving benefits were seen as burdens on the state, and it was because they received the dole that they were 'feckless' (Bosanquet. 1979). It also suggests that some ninety years on, little has changed in that the political ideology of individual responsibility remains the focus of current austerity policy and the Big Society.

Class prejudice and inequality persisted during the Second World War and the remainder of the 1940s. The notion that the war eroded class structures as people pulled together in the face of a common enemy was wildly exaggerated. However, it was also necessary to instil unity and nationalistic pride at that time (Harris, 1992). Like the trade unions, the war effort was highly successful in rallying millions of people's support with solidarity and sacrifice for the greater good. The wartime measures such as rationing food, clothing and fuel were effectively a form

of austerity. However, this situation was viewed differently, as what was at stake was more significant.

The formation of the welfare state in the immediate post-war years is viewed as an altruistic act. However, from a sociological perspective, the two World Wars in relatively quick succession had illustrated to those in power that the people were capable of mass mobilization, so the socialist act of providing domestic welfare was a defensive act on the part of capitalism to ward off the threat of revolution (Cooper, 2020). A less cynical view would be to suggest that the people had earned their stake in a welfare system, and the state also needed to ensure a healthy, educated workforce as a means of social reproduction (Thiel, 2022).

Austerity as a Political Policy

The modern concept of austerity derives from classical and contemporary 20th-century liberal economic theories. It was informed by notable works from economists such as Friedrich Hayek (1899-1992) and Milton Friedman (1912-2006), who promoted the idea that private investment, minimal state intervention and individual responsibility were the routes to sustainable growth (Metcalf, 2017). As previously mentioned, austerity, rationing and frugal measures are traditionally reactions to actual or perceived scarcity of resources, such as famine, war and adverse economic conditions. However, despite the prosperity of the three decades after the 1940s, there was also a significant period of disillusionment as the so-called capitalist–citizen accord was breaking down (Volscho, 2016). During the financial crisis of the 1970s, the UK's IMF bailout required an economic structural adjustment programme (New Capitalism), which led to more liberal political and economic policies than those of previous governments. However, over the past 40 years, the idea of a leaner welfare state has crossed all political spectrums. Globalisation has forced politicians to face the realities of the interconnectedness of domestic and international markets.

During the 1980s, the Conservative government under Margaret Thatcher (1979-1990) sought to liberalise the British economy through deregulation, privatisation, entrepreneurialism, and Hayekian economic reforms to balance the economy and reduce the state's role (Evans, 2013). In 1997, New Labour distanced itself from traditional socialist political and economic concepts by maintaining the Conservative government's fiscal commitments. This new Third Way approach was sometimes referred to as "social-ism", which recognised individuals as being socially interdependent and each citizen's equal worth and opportunity. Although Blair significantly increased public spending in areas such as education and health care, he also introduced several controversial market-based reforms. (Pettinger, 2017) Under New Labour, there was an 18% growth in real income and a significant reduction in relative poverty (Joyce & Sibieta, 2013). However, critics argued that Blair abandoned genuine socialism by moving to the centre and accommodating capitalism (Piper, 2013).

In 2008, the global financial crisis hit the UK, and the Brown government responded by employing its own structural adjustment programme. There were a number of measures to stimulate the economy, with assurances that interest payments would continue to be made and controlling overall government debts would be a high priority. Opposition MPs were quick to point the finger at Labour's fiscal policies as a cause of the recession, with George Osbourne reasserting this in 2012 by publicly declaring that "Labour must never be trusted to run the country's finances ever again" (Osbourne, 2012). Whereas the recession originated in the US. Due to the interconnected nature of global financial institutions, the UK and other major world economies were exposed to the effects of poorly regulated banking practices.

In 2010, a Conservative-Liberal Democrat Coalition was elected, with David Cameron becoming Prime Minister. This victory allowed Cameron to implement what he saw as "modern compassionate conservatism". Richard Kelly (2008) suggested that Cameron's ideological

approach was more of a triangulation of Blair's Third Way and One Nation Conservatism, with Cameron once describing himself as "the Heir to Blair". However, critics argue that Cameron's political, domestic, and economic policies were influenced more by Thatcherism (Bale, 2011).

A Comprehensive Spending Review (HM Revenue, 2010) highlighted a need to implement public spending reductions and restrictions in financial activities. It also suggested that public spending on welfare and benefits had reached unsustainable levels. The report signalled a collective responsibility for rebalancing the nation's finances in light of bank bailouts and soaring national debt. This meant reducing the difference between what the government spends and the revenues it generates, ultimately reducing the national debt by running a surplus. Therefore, measures would require significantly reduced public expenditure and increased taxes. In principle, it is a simple, logical economic formula for controlling the economy. However, it could also be argued that if economics were that simple, recessions would not happen.

Many people assumed that austerity as a policy in 2010 was a temporary fiscal measure to ensure the government could honour its debts and maintain market confidence. Although cuts would be significant, the rhetoric of "we are all in this together" and a greater emphasis on the voluntary sector suggested that the measures had been socially considered, would be evenly distributed, and aimed to protect vital services. However, this would not be the case. Instead, the decisions lacked consultation, support from local councils, or discussions with the voluntary sector they supposedly wanted to recruit. The cuts were indiscriminate, culminating in a political ideology of brutal economic reforms unparalleled in political history (Goodman 2018).

The 2008 financial recession and subsequent deficit reduction policy of 2010 have been and continue to be used as a justifying mantra for fulfilling neoliberal ideology under the guise of

austerity measures (Krugman, 2012). Austerity measures are the rhetorical tool by which central government is covertly attempting to reconfigure institutional balances, reducing local authorities' economic, political, and institutional powers by reducing and outsourcing services in readiness for deregulation and liberalisation (Peck 2012). Severe, broad, sweeping spending cuts used to implement a neoliberal revival would have met significant public resistance had the narrative of economic necessity not been available as a trojan horse.

Critics argue that many of the conservative party's austerity measures have been non-negotiable, unilateral decisions, and devoid of any public or cross-party debate relating to the extent of cuts to public spending and the state's role (Crawford *et al.,* 2015). Austerity policies often appeal to wealthier creditors, who prefer a higher probability of payback on their government securities by less wasteful governments (Amadeo, 2018), as opposed to the general public, whose concerns tend to relate more towards good public services. The political discourse continued to invoke a range of idiosyncratic vocabulary and metaphors, such as "the nation's purse strings", "taxpayer's money", "public money", and "the national piggy bank" (Daley *et al.,* 2017). This language is akin to mass subliminal manipulation, suggesting that tapping into the public purse is being greedy and irresponsible to even ask, want or expect anything from the state in a time of austerity.

In reality, this gave the government license to continue slashing public expenditure while eroding the universality of access to welfare and neglecting the social and financial realities of living in an age of austerity. In turn, while the voluntary and community sector was seconded to deal with the fallout of austerity, it was also subjected to cuts in government funding and reductions in available loans and grants. As a result, thousands of voluntary sector charities, organisations, projects, and self-help groups were forced to close, placing greater pressure on an already underfunded and overworked sector, including its workers and volunteers.

These fiscal measures are often offset by encouraging public consumption and personal debt. However, with reduced incomes and benefits, economic growth driven by consumerism is severely limited without it, leading to a dangerous increase in personal debts, especially among low-income families (Dagdeviren & Luz 2019). This is supported by the Economist Carmen Reinhart when she stated:

> "Austerity seldom works without structural reforms, such as, changes in taxes, regulations and labour market policies. However, if poorly designed, these measures can disproportionately hit the poor and middle class" (Reinhart, 2013).

Critics of the policy, such as David M. Kotz, suggest that after the (2007-2008) financial crisis, the austerity measures in the form of severe welfare cuts were unnecessary, did nothing to promote economic recovery and were nothing more than an attempt to reaffirm the neoliberal capitalist model (Kotz, 2010).

Within this framework, the Coalition and Conservative governments followed a political narrative emphasising the devolution of power, termed Localism. Localism has traditionally drawn cross-party consensus and broad support from policymakers, NGOs and activists alike (Trench, 2007). References to Localism suggested that central government conceded financial and operational autonomy to local governments and created public forums for greater community decision-making and involvement. However, the unevenness of public spending cuts hit voluntary sector organisations in deprived areas more due to their dependency on statutory funding, which was also being cut (Clifford., 2012). At the same time, those areas saw heightened demand for the sector's services due to the cuts. Therefore, Localism only enhances political, economic, and operational freedoms within the strict financial limits imposed by austerity. This form of Localism negatively impacts the local authorities and voluntary and community organisations that would have usually taken a lead role in local

democracy (Bailey & Elliott, 2016). This exercise in the pseudo devolvement of the state, coupled with funding cuts, covertly forces local authorities to opt for deregulation and privatisation to balance their ever-dwindling budgets.

In conclusion, although the government's austerity policies were ideologically driven, they have successfully reduced the fiscal deficit. Institutionally, the policies promoting individual freedom, choice, action, and free markets are portrayed as necessary for reducing bureaucracy. When this is coupled with third-sector organisations being coerced into competing for local authority contracts to provide social and welfare provisions, it appears to be a public exercise in preparing service providers and users for privatisation. Many economists and policymakers acknowledge that society is different from the market. Still, the government has purposely neglected to consider that price is not the same thing as value, as they have essentially stripped the fabric of the welfare state (Waugh, 2018). Knowing that there would be a human cost in the form of intensifying inequality did not deter successive governments from continuing along the path of sweeping public spending cuts. In another sense, maintaining the free market is more important than the welfare of its citizens (Metcalf, 2017).

Austerity Cuts to Welfare and Local Authorities

Five years after the global financial crisis in November 2013, David Cameron finally revealed that austerity was ideologically driven when he stated that he wished for permanent austerity to produce a leaner, more efficient state (Watt & Inman, 2013). Critics quickly reacted to this and argued that this leaner and more efficient state is also ruthless and uncaring as it only benefits the ruling classes while those at the lower end of the economic spectrum suffer disproportionately (Haddad, 2018). Moreover, the harsh realities of embarking on such radical and wide-sweeping deficit reduction plans worsened living conditions for many people at the

lower end of the economic spectrum, increased unemployment, and underemployment, and radically reduced public sector jobs (Elliott, 2012).

The impacts of the austerity measures were felt across all public and voluntary sectors. Since 2010, there has been a 60% reduction in funding for local authorities, with more than 80,000 employee redundancies and a further five million public sector workers who had their pay frozen for two years (Davis et al., 2019). Local Authority spending cuts have resulted in closed libraries, reduced waste collections, the cancellation of Sure Start programmes, bus service subsidies and road maintenance spending slashed. In addition, local authorities reported that 70% of them will be unable to provide non-statutory services beyond 2023 if funding remains restricted.

Financial stability, sustainability, scrutiny, and accountability are, or at least should be, the responsibility of both central and local governments in times of recession where income generation and job creation are beneficial to, if not vital to, kick-starting the economy (Prof Tim Jackson of the Sustainable Development Commission, 2009). However, restricting funding to local governments means jobs are lost, investment is lost, wages are cut, and people who rely on services are left wanting. Simple economics shows that if local government funding falls, they have to cut services or increase their income somehow. Higher local taxes can act as a barrier to investment and may have other negative consequences for individuals and businesses. However, to create leaner, more effective local governments, it could be argued that central government must implement a financial framework for spending to provide them with sufficient financial expertise and detailed financial direction so millions could be redirected from unnecessary and wasteful council spending (Bale, 2011).

In human terms, the cost of austerity on British citizens will take years to quantify and appreciate fully. However, to date, the effects of austerity on those reliant on the state in one

form or another have been unnecessarily harsh (Matthews-King, 2017). The cuts and their subsequent effects on people have been unprecedented within the welfare and benefits system. Benefits that were initially capped at £26,000 fell again to £20,000, affecting over 116,000 households. The Local Housing Allowance (LHA) or "bedroom tax" was then introduced for social housing tenants, further reducing their benefits by at least £12–£22 per week, with 80% of tenants being affected, and an end to housing benefit availability for people aged 18–21 (Unison, 2014).

By 2018, 50,000 families, including 33,000 working families, lived in some form of temporary accommodation. Many more were homeless or sleeping on floors or the sofas of friends (Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government: Social Housing Lettings (2017-2018). From the information available, it seems austerity spared no one, as even the work-related activity component for ESA was removed for disabled people, leaving disabled people unable to buy daily necessities (Purcell, 2019).

Under the New Labour administration, between 1996 and 2010, there was a priority to reduce child poverty by increasing benefits and tax credits for families with children. However, post-2010, the coalition government systematically reduced child benefit and tax credits for parents. It abolished the Education Maintenance Allowance, affecting both low- and middle-income people of working age and families with children on low income. Consequently, child poverty rates increased by over 300,000 from 2012 onwards. (Butler & Arnett, 2015). The government then limited tax credits to the first two children, dramatically increasing child poverty amongst larger families. Over a million families with children now rely on food banks, and their usage has tripled since 2010 (Hills, 2016).

Job Seekers Allowance and Universal Credit claimants were also hit with strict benefits sanctions enforcing a conditionality of entitlement, with sanctions spanning many months and

amounting to more than 40% of an individual's weekly income being removed. As a consequence, rent, bills and other expenses were neglected, dramatically increasing personal debt and plunging people into depression and suicide, with an estimated 120,000 extra deaths attributed to austerity (Webster, 2019). Annual welfare benefits increases were capped at 1% below the rate of inflation, and a four-year freeze on all working-age-related benefits affected over 11 million families, significantly increasing child poverty amongst working families (CAB.org.uk, 2015). Cuts in benefits and low wages significantly increased personal debt across society, with 45% of those in debt reporting having mental health problems (Knapp, 2012). Overall, these austerity measures directly caused the most prolonged sustained fall in living standards in the UK for 50 years, with a coinciding fall in life expectancy (Campbell, 2017).

In 2018, the Resolution Foundation predicted that if the planned reductions to working age benefits were implemented, there would be a further £2.5bn of cuts in 2018-19 and £2.7bn in 2019-20, with the poorest 20% being most affected (Corlett *et al.*, 2018). Despite these plans, May suggested in 2018 that the end to austerity was imminent. However, Chancellor Phillip Hammond contradicted this by indicating that austerity measures were set to continue until the 2020s. This is because the deficit would not be cleared by the decade's end, and the British economy needed to brace itself against an uncertain international market following Brexit. He said that to counteract the effects of Brexit, budgetary spending on public services would be reduced by a further 2% in 2022–23 than in 2019–20.

Therefore, with no end to austerity in sight, even the promise of paid work as a means of alleviating poverty is not possible for the majority of families in the lower income bracket, as even with one or more family members working, families are often still reliant on working tax credits to bring in a living wage, indicating a significant labour market inequality (Hills *et al.,*

2010). Moreover, fiscal policies rarely affect the upper middle class and economic elites, who consistently remain immune to their effects. In contrast, even a slight income reduction for low-income people will significantly impact affordability (Reinhart, 2013).

Although there have been several increases to the minimum wage in recent years, now termed The Living Wage, this is merely a legal minimum wage, and despite its name, it does not actually amount to a living wage (Hills *et al.,* 2010). It does not afford lower-income families any luxury, protection, or guarantee. Therefore, as austerity measures are predicted to continue indefinitely, it is almost impossible for those receiving minimum wage or in the lower income bracket to attain a living wage without the addition of working tax credits (Carr, 2019). It also begs the question that if benefit cuts are to continue, will the minimum income guarantee be lowered, as this will inevitably create an even wider income and labour market inequality? The Economist Robert Shiller summed up this dilemma concisely in 2013, by stating: "The most important problem we are facing now, today… is rising inequality" (Dorling, 2015).

Figure 1.1 illustrates the percentage of departmental cuts across all government departments during (2010-2011) and (2015-16) showing that the DWP and local governments experienced radical reductions in funding, affecting vulnerable groups reliant on public services.
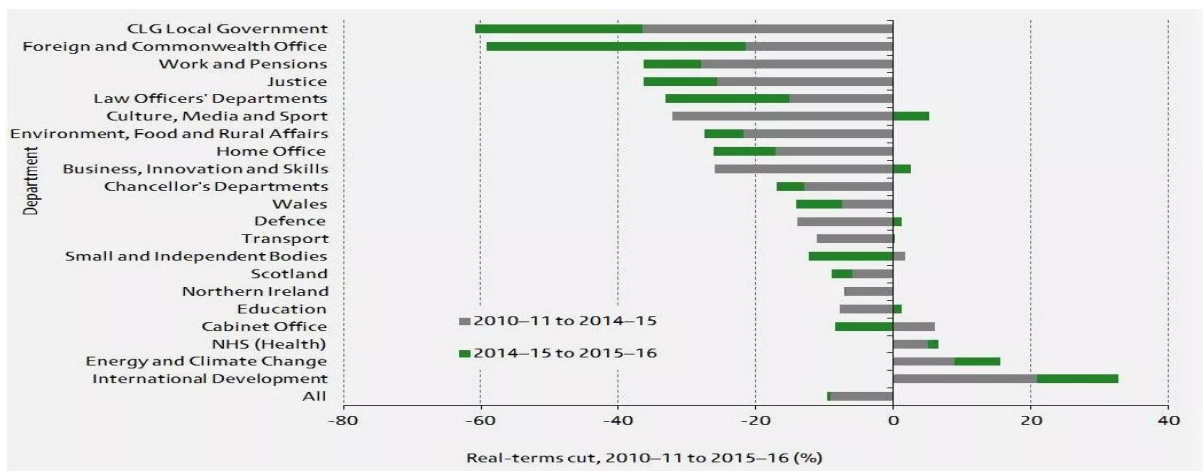
(Source: IFS, 2015)

In conclusion, shifts in political ideology have led to a change in governmental policies relating to financial accountability and responsibility. Throughout the 1980s, 90s and 2000s, various policies emerged from The Citizens Charter, The Compact and the Third Way, with rhetoric revolving around promoting greater choice, improving services and accountability. However, in reality, regardless of government, it appears that the only thing that has changed is the branding used to sell old policies, as they have all been based on reducing public spending and accountability through pseudo-localism initiatives and seeking alternative routes of social provision (Floud & Johnson, 2004). Suppose these austerity measures continue for the foreseeable future as a means of reducing the financial deficit, as even in the post-pandemic political climate, they appear likely to do. In that case, these policies are ideologically driven. However, this also begs the question of how far these neoliberal policies will go before they threaten the very fabric of collective, welfare-based British society as we know it in favour of an individualistic culture, which brings with it massive inequality, disadvantage, and no safety net for the majority of the population.

Austerity and the Big Society

Politically, the main objective of all governments is to enable and maintain favourable conditions for businesses and corporations to flourish (Jones, 2000). Therefore, when it comes to social and political issues, big ideas are often treated with scepticism and tend to raise more questions than they provide solutions for, such as what is the political motivation, is it motivated by ideology, need, or self-interest. History has shown they are so often intertwined. For example, in 2010, David Cameron's coalition government publicly stated that austerity measures would be temporary and enacted purely out of economic necessity. Political commentators were sceptical of the motivation driving such measures. However, to soften the blow and divert attention away from the savage cuts to welfare and public services that were

to come, Cameron sought to engage the public with his notions of restructuring and devolving a range of statutory social provisions in what they branded the Big Society (Heywood, 2011).

The Big Society was portrayed as integrating the benefits of social solidarity and mass mobilization with the ideals promoted by the free market through volunteering. Conceptually, this is a mix of communitarianism and libertarian paternalism. Communitarianism is a system of social organisation based on small self-governing communities, emphasising individual responsibility to the community. Libertarian paternalism legitimises the rights of private and public institutions to affect desirable behaviours while supposedly respecting freedom of choice (Walker & Corbett, 2013). However, critics argue that legitimising the rights of institutions (giving them power) to affect the behaviour of those (lacking or having less power) in no way reflects any notion of devolving or empowering individuals but is covertly fascism, clearly authoritarian, coercive in nature, and therefore, ultimately subject to abuse (Heywood, 2006).

Although the Big Society as a promotional brand is attributed to David Cameron's 2010 general election manifesto, the ideology underpinning its formation was evident as early as the 1980s and 1990s as both Conservative and New Labour's policies towards the voluntary sector had been dramatically altered, with accountability and maintaining targets being a primary focus. Even the structure of funding services had changed as funding moved away from traditional grant-making to providing reciprocal contracts, which later became known as the contract culture (Giddens, 2000).

Domestically, when looking at the issues of maintaining a comprehensive welfare state, little has changed over the past four decades regarding policies, action, and spin. Only the rhetoric used to repackage and present old policies as new ideas, as what is given with one hand was ultimately taken away with the other. Fluctuating media and policy agendas always focus on

the constant tension between the socialist provisions of the welfare state and the free-market capitalist agenda. Yet, despite the political swings to the left and right and funding issues, some seventy-plus years on, it still works.

Initially, the discourse around the Big Society hinted at the devolvement of governmental powers to local councils with the help and expertise of 3rd sector organisations to prioritise, decide on, and provide a range of welfare services required within their locality. Many assumed that the over-arching objective was to encourage and empower people to take an active role in providing welfare and community services. However, the implicit idea was really "if the people do it for themselves, then they are less reliant on the state" (Bale, 2011).

To facilitate the policy of the Big Society, the government promoted the excellent work, strengths, and values of third-sector organisations. It expressed an intention of working with those organisations to achieve policy aims via outsourcing, contracts, grants, and other forms of financial and non-financial relief. These arrangements would be made with various community groups, social enterprises, charities, mutuals and co-operatives (Lee & Beech, 2011).

In 2010, the Big Society Network Foundation was created to generate ideas, support, and develop talent, enterprise, and innovation. It was financed using £2 million of National Lottery funding and public-sector grants. It promoted the concept of businesses, charities and social ventures working together to unleash social energy within the UK. The Times described it as: "An impressive attempt to reframe the role of government and unleash entrepreneurial spirit" (Fox, 2010).

However, when describing the realities of the economic crisis and subsequent austerity measures, Coote of the New Economics Foundation suggested: "…although there are strong, sensible ideas at the heart of the Big Society vision... Big Society raises a lot of urgent questions

in the light of public spending" (Coote, 2010). Ed Milliband criticised the coalition government for: "Cynically attempting to dignify its cuts agenda" (Wintour & Mason, 2015).

He suggested that the Big Society was merely a mechanism for reducing the size of the state, dressed up as reviving community action. He also described the Big Society as nothing more than a cloak for the small state. Polling at the time suggested that much of the public agreed with him; an Ipsos-Mori poll in 2010 found that 57% of public respondents thought that the creation of a Big Society was "just an excuse" and that the government expected the community and volunteers to do the work of statutory services to save money in light of cuts to public services.

In 2011, the government continued to promote the benefits of volunteering, using it as a distraction from highly unpopular welfare cuts. They created the Big Society Bank in readiness to receive Big Society Capital (BSC), which was provided with a start-up fund of £200 million to distribute to worthy organisations (Scott, 2011). In 2013, the Cabinet Office stated that BSC was the key to funding social investment, with easy access to affordable finance for charities and community groups. This central funding platform would provide a funded loan scheme with approximately £600 million available to facilitate the growth of social enterprises. Using money available to them under the powers of the Dormant Bank and Building Society Accounts Act (2008), the government would set aside an estimated £400 million for reinvestment into the community (Crouch 2018). It was not a universally popular idea. The Financial Times commented that raiding dormant bank accounts was a brilliant idea in theory as it reduced the financial downfall (Warwick-Ching, 2018). However, critics of the plan argued that claims that the money would create a self-sustaining market were misleading as BSC could not directly invest in social enterprises. Instead, BSC allocated funds to investment and innovation foundations, such as the National Endowment for Science, Technology and the Arts, which

distributed funding contracts (NESTA, 2012). The NVCO expressed at the time that this mechanism was unworkable for many voluntary and community organisations (NVCO, 2012). Further criticism came from charity workers who fervently stated:

> "…the government is trying to take credit for our hard work, when we were delivering the Big Society long before the government came up with the term this is nothing more than the government wanting the same work doing on the cheap" (NCVO, 2013).

This was reiterated by Newcastle councillor Nigel Todd (2013), stated: "Politicians should avoid appropriating something that other people are already doing and then rebranding it in a highly charged political arena." (Hetherington, 2017)

Following the closure of the Teesside branch of the charity Nightstop, the branch manager Jane Cavana commented: "We all thought we were delivering the big society before David Cameron came out with the phrase. It seems that all it means is that they want the same work doing; but doing on the cheap" (Barnard, 2013).

Critics felt Cameron should avoid making such claims, as they alienated the voluntary sector, which he needed to secure as key players in the Big Society agenda. Those organizations would be essential to decentralizing government functions, a process that could unlock £78bn in charitable assets for Big Society (Wintour, 2011).

The Localism Act (2011) was introduced to enable voluntary bodies to apply to provide services to local councils (Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government, 2011). The government announced it would grant 25% of public service contracts to the private and voluntary sectors, hoping to create demand (Stanton, 2014). Community groups could also bid for community assets, such as shops, pubs and playing fields, even if privately owned (Colenutt, 2011). However, the severity of the budget cuts was forcing local councils to increase their rents and rates to try and bridge the shortfall in income, making them unaffordable for most small, medium, and even some larger organisations (Lowndes &

Pratchett, 2012). In reality, the Localism Act failed to devolve power to locally elected representatives, as political networks ensured other centrally designated bodies would be chosen, for example, Michael Gove's free schools (The Guardian, 2014).

The creation of the National Citizen Service soon followed in 2011, as voluntary workers were seen as vital to providing a range of community services, eventually attracting over 30,000 young people (Sharman, 2015). Historically, the voluntary sector was best placed to help the government in devolving welfare services as they had already proved their capabilities with over a century of providing a diverse range of social and welfare provisions, with and without any state assistance. In 2010/11, the voluntary sector contained an estimated 162,175 voluntary organisations, employing over 827,000 employees, and an estimated Gross Value Added (GVA) equivalent to approximately £12.2bn. Cameron suggested that the voluntary and community sector, with the combined action of volunteers, was the key to pulling the country out of recession. The Cabinet Office Community Life Survey found that volunteering had increased by 9% year on year, which they described as "illustrating a clear justification of their Big Society agenda" (Wilson, 2016).   However, the voluntary sector was already reporting a significant increase in demand for many of its services. The inevitable fallout from austerity measures was starting to impact those at the lower end of the economic spectrum as a result of cuts to benefits, benefit sanctions and low wages fueling poverty, homelessness and debt (Frazer & Marlier, 2011).

The once-vaunted but poorly defined Big Society was colliding with the realities of spending cuts. Local authorities and third-sector organizations expressed significant concerns over their abilities to generate revenue to sustain services. In addition, most third-sector organizations found it almost impossible to access funding from BSC because they could not navigate the

stringent rules of the competitive contracts and loans due to the structural, legal, and ethical barriers (O'Hara, 2014).

At the same time, irregularities were starting to materialise. In 2012, the Big Society Network made a funding application to the Big Lottery Fund for a project called Your Square Mile to enable local people to improve their community. Despite the application being reportedly weak in half of the qualifying criteria and being judged as high risk, it was still awarded £830,000. Unfortunately, the project failed as it only attracted 64 groups, compared to the million predicted (Syal, 2017). In contrast, a much smaller but professionally managed and operated regional charity based in Sheffield called the Key Fund effectively supported over 2,000 organisations, trained 6,500 people, created 175 business start-ups, and, as of 2018, was looking to expand to the north-west (Social Impact Report 2018 - Key Fund, 2023).

In 2012, the Cabinet Office changed its eligibility criteria to award the Big Society Network a grant of £299,800 for its Get In project, which also failed (Public Accounts Committee, 2014) Despite these failures, in 2013, the Big Lottery Fund awarded a further £997,960 to the Big Society Network for a project called Britain's Personal Best, aimed at encouraging educational, athletic and creative excellence, but suspended payments within six months due to insufficient progress (Concoran, 2014). However, these irregularities have evaded public attention or significant media reporting and have yet to be adequately investigated.

The voluntary and community sector also expressed fear, suspicion, and uncertainty about what was to come for an already underfunded sector often heavily reliant on public sector contracts and funding (Hamilton, 2014). A Charities Aid Foundation (CAF) survey in 2015 found that one in six small and medium-sized charities were under threat of closure due to falling donations and council spending cuts. It concluded that almost half of the charities who were contracted to provide local authority services expressed distrust for the government's Big

Society agenda as they were forced to use their own financial reserves to prop up the contracts, while one in three was forced to reduce services or jobs (Butler, 2012).

After 2012, David Cameron ceased to use the term Big Society publicly or within any government statements, leading to speculation that, financially and operationally, the scheme was struggling. For example, Sir Stephen Bubb of the Association of Chief Executives of Voluntary Organisations stated that Cameron's lack of narrative to deliver the Big Society, coupled with crippling cuts, rendered it effectively dead (Bubb, 2013).

Subsequently, in 2014, the Big Society Network collapsed, an event which caused the Prime Minister to be subjected to cross-party criticism. The Big Society Network's final audit report published by the Civil Exchange in January 2015 stated that the Big Society's ideals were systematically undermined by the inherent cuts in charity grants and deliberate restrictions on the right to challenge government policy through the courts. The audit also highlighted that far from the promised role for charitable and voluntary organisations within the Big Society agenda, government policies created structural barriers to gaining contracts and favoured the private sector. These findings indicated that there had been no significant decrease in the centralisation of the British Political system (Civil Exchange, 2015). The Cabinet Office responded that the report did not fairly reflect the significant progress made and that "some of the changes we have introduced are irreversible" (Woodhouse, 2015).

In general, questions remain about the relationship between the Big Society as both a Network and a Bank, such as why the Conservative Government, the Big Lottery Fund, and the Cabinet Office signed off on £1.8m in funding to the Big Society Network with no tangible gain or investigation (Concoran, 2014). Other structural and managerial issues may or may not be connected to financial concerns but raise questions about accountability, nepotism and conflicts of interest arising from the connections between David Cameron, the Network itself and the

Conservative Party. These include Big Society Trustee Giles Gibbons, the former business partner of David Cameron's "blue skies guru" Steve Hilton, the chairman, Martyn Rose, who worked with Michael Gove and Theresa May, and Chief Executive Steve Moore who had previously worked for former chief whip Lord Young (Ricketts, 2014). In addition, when the Big Society Network was awarded a second grant from the Big Lottery Fund after two previous expensive failures, it was chaired by Peter Ainsworth, a former Tory MP. These issues illustrate that there had been no relinquishment of power, authority, or independence at any level of the organisation and management, as those running the Big Society Network were from within the Conservative Hierarchy.

In the 2015 general election, the Conservative Party manifesto guaranteed places for children in the National Citizen Service. However, the percentage of people volunteering across all age groups had been declining consistently since the start of the economic crisis. The election was also notable for omitting any mention of the Big Society, which had disappeared from the election rhetoric. Instead, public attention was to be diverted to securing border controls and reducing the budget deficit (Conservative Party Manifesto, 2015).

Contemporary Austerity Literature

Researchers in the UK are still studying the effects of austerity measures, focusing on the long-term impacts on the economy, society, public services, and the well-being of the British people. They are studying how it continues to affect different groups and different parts of the country and how ongoing policy measures continue to affect those groups. British economist Simon Wren-Lewis (2015) has written extensively about the politics and economics of austerity policies. Much of the other austerity literature focuses on the economic impacts, and how policies such as these have resulted in widening inequality, poverty, and welfare disparities. The rising use of charity food banks has been investigated (Lambie-Mumford & Green, 2015)

and is one component of the steeply rising demand for help that voluntary sector organisations are feeling.

The reduction in care provision from the public sector has been explored via its impacts on marginalised groups and those who have had to step in and look after their own (Macdonald & Morgan, 2020). Martin Knapp (2012) studied the mental health impacts of austerity policies, and the consequences for mental health provision (Cummins, 2018) and the wider ramifications for health (Stuckler et al., 2017) have also been investigated. Studies have been conducted into the impact of voluntary sector organisations' funding in different parts of the UK (Jones, 2016). John Clayton et al. conducted research into both the impacts of reduced public spending and the localism agenda and how that has affected the ability of third-sector organisations to address the challenges faced by marginalised communities (Clayton et al., 2015). Clayton's work also addressed the emotional impacts of austerity on those delivering services from within the public sector (Clayton et al., 2014).

Gaps in the literature suggest that the prevailing perspective on austerity overlooks how it is felt and experienced by those working in the voluntary and charity sector as managers and volunteers. The consequences for everyday life have been studied in a broader sense (Hall, 2019), but the specific way that the lived experience of those filling the void left by retreating public sector has not. In a workplace context, work-life balance in times of austerity has been widely studied (Work-Life Balance in Times of Recession, Austerity and Beyond, 2016). The health consequences of job insecurity (Cheng & Chan, 2008; Gilboa et al., 2008; Näswall & Hellgren, 2007), and flexible working (Benach et al., 2002) have been explored. As have the changing realities of zero-hours contracts and in work poverty (McBride, 2021). There is an intersection, however, between funding challenges, increased demand and workplace change in the voluntary sector, which is yet to be fully understood. This thesis aims to bridge this gap.

Summary

The Big Society provided the government with the ideal opportunity to form a partnership with the voluntary and community sectors and showcase their ability to provide and deliver welfare provisions. However, the Big Society rhetoric has fallen far short as policymakers still appear reluctant to formally devolve welfare provisions with issues relating to insufficient funding, contracts, security and legal status. Research carried out by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation (2013) suggested that Britain was likely to endure a state of austerity until at least 2018, affecting most levels of civil society, from individuals to public service provisions and charities, indicating that welfare services would also have to operate on a reduced budget. Comments from within the charitable sector also indicated that structural, financial and ethical issues prevented most organizations from taking advantage of any funding contracts without turning them into enterprises and businesses (NCVO, 2012).

Previous reassurances of the temporary nature of austerity measures were soon shattered in a 2013 speech when the government proposed that the public spending reductions would be made permanent (Wintour *et al.,* 2013). This announcement coincided with the demise of Big Society rhetoric. Further confirmation that austerity was a policy agenda could be gathered from the inconsistencies between Theresa May's (2018) speech proclaiming that "the age of austerity was over" with a contrasting address the same year by Chancellor Phillip Hammond (2018) indicating that austere measures would continue until at least 2022 as the deficit has not yet been eradicated (Financial Times, 2018).

There remain several questions about the effectiveness and the purpose of the Big Society. A number of operational and financial irregularities raise serious concerns about why the Conservative Government provided the funding it did, with no tangible gain to show for it. In addition, the involvement of key personnel with direct ties to David Cameron and other senior

members of his party brings into question whether there was any real transfer of power or responsibility. Therefore, it is conceivable that the debate will continue as to whether the Big Society was a serious attempt to devolve government powers to local communities and rejuvenate social action, or the more likely scenario proclaimed by Ed Milliband, that the Big Society is a cloak for the small state (Independent, 2011). The cloak for a small state is the idea that the combination of austerity and the big society was a diversionary tactic to enable the government to roll back state provisions using the third sector to fill the vacuum.

Critics argue that using competitive contracts and expecting voluntary sector organisations to restructure to gain funds placed deliberate and unrealistic barriers on them. Furthermore, if taken, it would have resulted in backdoor privatisation of the welfare state. However, as a consequence of both austerity measures and the Big Society agenda, many third-sector organisations have been adversely affected. Thousands of charities and voluntary groups have been forced to close. There have been significant redundancies within the sector. Organisations have had to prop up welfare services using their financial reserves. Also, there have been dramatic decreases in volunteering, donations, and statutory funding. Individuals working within the sector report increased pressures on them due to increased demand for services, longer working hours, fewer opportunities for promotion, no wage increases, a reduction in work/life balance and an increase in job insecurity (NVCO, 2018).

In the following chapter, I will explore the impact of austerity on the voluntary and community sector from 2010 to 2019 by looking at central and local funding trends, including income and expenditure. I will then look at regional funding of charitable and voluntary organizations within Sunderland and the inconsistencies across the sector. The chapter will then explore the effects of funding cuts in terms of the human cost of austerity on those working in the voluntary and community sector in Sunderland.

Chapter Four Austerity and Funding to the Voluntary and Community Sector

Chapter four will explore national funding trends in the voluntary and community sector in the UK, including sources of funding (central and local government funding, etc.), voluntary sector income and expenditure. It will then look at regional funding for charitable and voluntary organisations. This chapter also explores the inconsistencies across the sector concerning organisational structure and size, specifically the funding of organisations in Sunderland. Finally, this chapter will examine the effects of austerity and subsequent funding cuts on Sunderland's charitable and voluntary sector in relation to income and job security.

Introduction

During the 1960s, the voluntary sector underwent significant changes with the recruitment and formation of a new generation of volunteers and new organisations. An increase in professionalism soon followed, with the growth of campaigning bodies and the diversification of service providers. During the 1970s, direct government funding to the voluntary sector also increased rapidly via the Home Office's Voluntary Service Unit (VSU), which granted funds to umbrella groups identified as crucial to the sector's future development (Wolfenden Report, 1978)

Further change in the voluntary and community sector was on the horizon when, in 1979, a Conservative government was elected after promising to reduce public spending. However, with a country still in the grip of recession and government spending on welfare and social security accounting for 30 per cent of the budget, Thatcher's government seized the opportunity to introduce its neoliberal ideology as a means of reigning in the budget deficit, ultimately changing the British political and economic landscape beyond all recognition. Reducing government spending would prove challenging, as they could not reduce social welfare

services, and privatisation was not an option. Therefore, there was no alternative but to source a range of alternative and cheaper social welfare provisions. The Conservatives adopted Hayekian economic ideology and quickly set about bringing an end to what was termed a dependency culture, in which individuals were seen as dependent on the state for their education, health and pensions (Harkness *et al.*, 2012).

This was described as a social policy revolution as it would alter the nature and extent of the state's contribution to social welfare. As part of this social policy revolution, the government suggested it had secured a significant role for the voluntary sector as a significant welfare provider in what they termed a mixed economy of welfare.

This approach was a leap of faith for the Conservative Party as they distrusted the idea of non-governmental or other 'provider powers', such as the voluntary and community sector (Gash *et al.,* 2014). The notion of provider powers had always been associated with the public sector unions who had held the previous government to ransom over a pay dispute. However, they had no alternative if the government wanted to overhaul the existing system by reducing central and local government expenditure, eliminating bureaucracy, and increasing efficiency. They must engage with and utilise the voluntary sector to provide social welfare.

Thatcher's government developed two policies to accommodate potential new working arrangements with the voluntary and community sector. The first was a general move from providing grants to a more business-orientated approach that provided contracts in what came to be known as the contract culture. This approach effectively guaranteed that the financial and contractual power remained firmly in the government's hands. Secondly, they promoted individual volunteering, the largest possible source of free labour. It would drive down the cost of support to service providers and, ultimately, the government (Jackson, 2016).

The economic model of Thatcher's government included a programme of privatisation and public sector reforms with an emphasis on the market as the most efficient and effective means of delivery. However, the voluntary sector was also expected to work in this model, which was completely unrealistic. The UK welfare system is paid for by the people through contributions for use at the point of need and is, therefore, by its very nature, not a commodity or service that can be floated as a business to make a profit.

To pay for such changes, central government funding to voluntary organisations tripled from £93m in 1979 to £292m in 1988 (Crowson, 2011). The voluntary sector also increased from 132,300 registered charities in 1980 to over 171,000 by 1990 (Mason, 2013). However, by 2003, it was clear that the contract culture was here to stay, as even under the New Labour government, contracts accounted for half of all government funding of the voluntary sector. (Chapter 4: Funding: Grants, Contracts and Commissioning, n.d.)

By 2004, seven years after New Labour came to power, it was clear that the previous decade of conservative political and economic ideology had also influenced New Labour's policies. Blair's Third-Way approach to providing an income to the voluntary sector also aligned with the previous Conservative approach of reducing the traditional grant-making system to a business-orientated process. It awarded contracts, subcontracts, matched funding, and direct payments for specific social welfare services (Mcanulla,2010). However, balancing the economic realities of this overtly competitive global economy with those of domestic welfare provided the New Labour government with a massive dilemma as applying market economics to the welfare state could be portrayed as back door privatisation, which for the labour party would amount to political suicide (Whiteaker, 2021).

Chart: Income and Expenditure of the Voluntary Sector from 2000/1 to 2018/19 (£bn)

Total Income and Expenditure 2000/1 to 2018/19 (£bn)
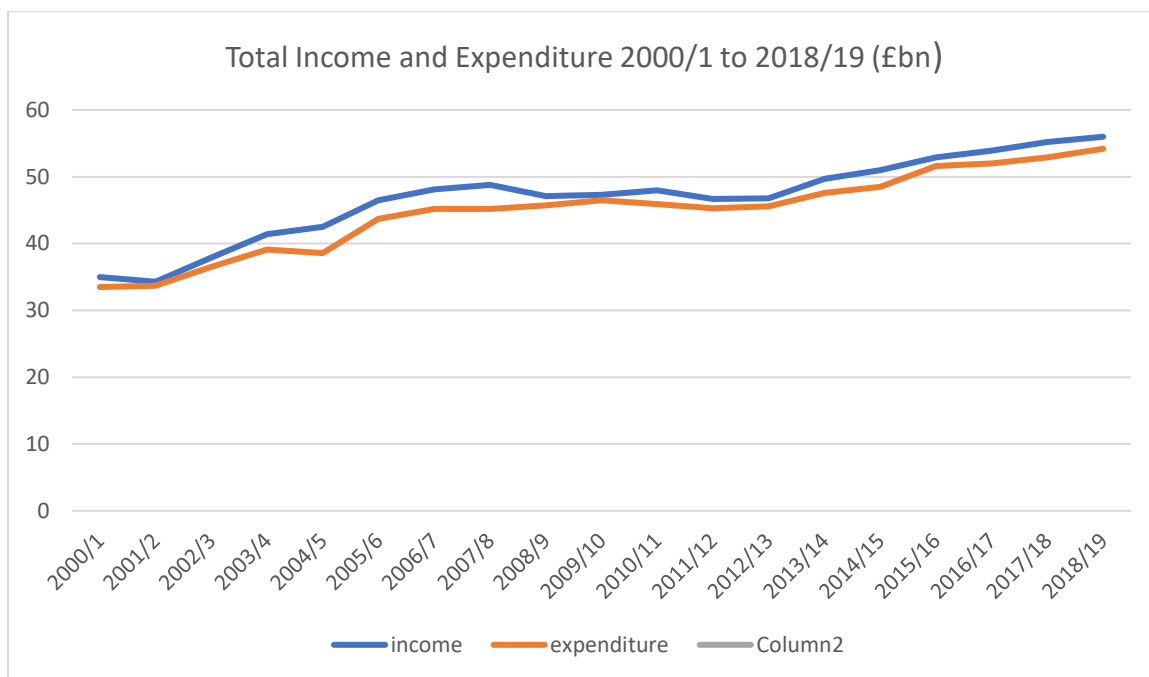
Source: NCVO/UK Civil Society Almanac (2021)

The above chart illustrates that funding dipped in 2011/12 when austerity measures began to take hold. Also, the growth rate since the onset of austerity measures has slowed down, with much of the income being spent. Consequently, many voluntary sector organisations had very little or nothing in reserve. In reality, this only increased competition amongst some large and super-sized organisations within the voluntary sector, with charities taking chunks out of each other to raise funds. In addition, many smaller organisations were effectively prevented from applying for funding as their structures didn't allow them to bid for contracts or trade like a business (Radojev, 2018). Hill suggests that increasing competition was simply a ploy to drive down costs, forcing voluntary and charitable organisations to work on a shoestring budget. In many cases, voluntary sector organisations had little choice but to subsidise the cost of delivering welfare services themselves (Baird *et al.,* 2018).

Across the UK, only a small percentage of voluntary sector organisations received direct government funding via contracts. In 2003/4, 10,500 of a possible 169,248 organisations relied on statutory contracts as their primary source of income (Macmillan, 2010). An estimated three-quarters of small to medium-sized voluntary organisations received no state income at

all. Despite this, the sector was growing. By 2007/08, the number of voluntary sector organisations had increased to 171.074, growing faster than the rest of the economy.

However, the recession had a significant impact on the voluntary sector. The number of organizations fell to 163,392 in 2009/10 in the immediate aftermath of the financial crisis. However, after that initial drop, numbers stabilised before the sector grew again, reaching 167,000 organisations in 2016/2017 (NCVO, 2019). By 2018, the sector had expanded beyond its pre-crisis size to almost 200,000 organisations (nfpSynergy, 2019). Analysts suggested that this was a sign that the voluntary and community sector had recovered from the recession and become buoyant again. However, critics argue that the more recent increase in the number of voluntary and community groups was more likely a direct result of the continuing austerity measures (Jones *et al.,* 2015). There has been a significant increase in poverty, homelessness, personal debt, and mental health issues throughout the UK. The voluntary and community sector is desperately trying to fill the gaps in social and welfare provisions that this conservative government has left (Maggs, 2012)

Voluntary Sector Income

Organisations in the voluntary and community sector have the same basic needs to function effectively as any business. Each organisation needs human resources, a particular range of skills, financial resources, and other non-financial resources. When considering the voluntary sector in its entirety, it is an independent, buoyant, resourceful, and innovative sector. One that has not only influenced statutory laws and policymakers but has continually evolved to meet the needs of its beneficiaries to provide a diverse range of welfare and support services spanning centuries. Due to the ethical and social nature of the services offered by the sector, organisations continue to attract a continuous stream of eager and capable volunteers. It also manages to generate income from a diverse range of sources. Voluntary and charitable sector

funding can be divided into two categories: 50% is donations from various individuals, including direct debits and legacies, and the other 50% is earned income from formal fundraising events, memberships, providing training, fees paid for goods, shops, rents and other activities (NCVO, 2013). The earned income bracket also includes significant government funding, often delivered via contracts.

Government funding describes funding from various statutory bodies, including central, regional, and devolved governments, local authorities, town/parish councils and NHS Trusts. It also includes overseas governments and organisations and various non-departmental public bodies (NDPBs) that provide funding for particular activities or services within a given area. Over the decades, government funding to the voluntary and charitable sector has changed, not only in the amounts it provided but also in the reciprocal expectation, such as the format and the conditions attached to how funds are allocated and spent.

As with the Thatcher government in 1979, the rhetoric of Cameron's coalition government in 2010 suggested that implementing stringent economic measures was necessary to lift the economy out of recession. A similar scenario developed in that it was also vital for the government to be able to provide and maintain welfare services. In light of the sweeping cuts across all areas of the public sector, it would not be able to do without securing alternative routes for low-cost welfare services, which the voluntary and community sector had ample experience in doing.

It is unclear whether the government had thoroughly considered the effectiveness of using the third sector as a co-provider of social and welfare services. When implementing the 2010 austerity measures, they not only dramatically slashed public sector finances but also significantly reduced the funding of the voluntary and charitable sector itself (May, 2016). The income from statutory sources to the voluntary sector totalled £14.2 billion, 50% from local

authorities, 45% from central government and the NHS, and the remaining 6% from European statutory sources (NCVO, 2019). From 2009/2010 to 2012/2013, following the initial spending review, central funding decreased by 7% (£7bn to £6.5bn). This also included reduced central government grants and contracts across the entire sector, with grants falling faster than contracts over that period. However, in 2013/14, central funding increased back to £7.0bn, then £7.3bn in 2014/15, eventually recovering to a higher level than its 2009/2010 peak. However, funding has recently declined to £5.6bn in 2017/18 and £5.8bn in 2018/19 (NCVO, 2017). However, the ability to attract government funding has not been equally spread throughout the voluntary sector, as the table below shows.

Table: Showing the proportion of total income from government funding by size of TSO
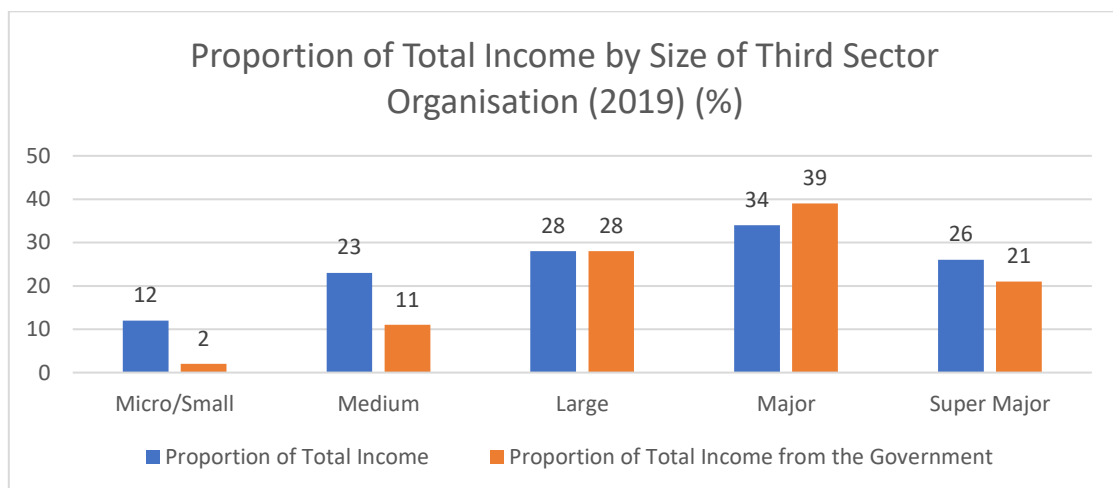
This table illustrates the proportion of direct government funding received by different sizes of voluntary sector organisations. The vast majority of micro/small voluntary sector organisations receive very little, if any, government funding, with most being given to large, major and super major organisations. However, most government funding is in the form of contracts as many of these large to super major organisations are contracted to provide various social and welfare services. This level of funding to the voluntary sector suggests that the government must have great confidence in its ability to deliver, even with the lack of public support for its skills and expertise. However, unfortunately, most micro and small voluntary sector organisations work

at a local level, in some of the country's poorest areas, and continue to struggle to compete for funding from charitable trusts and donors to make ends meet.

Funding from local government is rather different. It was reduced to a lesser extent from £7.9bn in 2009/10 to £7.2bn in 2012/13. In 2013/14, local government funding to the sector increased by £200m to £7.4bn but decreased again to £7.1bn in 2014/15, remaining stable but at around £0.8bn less than its peak in 2009/10. Although local government funding to the sector remained steady throughout 2015/16 and 2016/17, standing at £7.321.4bn. By 2018/19, this increased again to £7.5bn (NCVO,2018). However, as a proportion of all government funding, local government funding has fallen from 52% in 2004/05 to 45% in 2018/19, its lowest since 2004/05. According to Shaw (2018) of the Child Poverty Action Group (Shelter, 2019), central government cuts to local government have, in real terms, not only dramatically reduced the overall income of the voluntary sector but forced local authorities to make substantial savings where possible. This has ultimately hit all social and welfare service provisions and raised poverty levels.

By 2014/15, the voluntary sector received a total income from statutory sources of £15.3bn, 50% from central government and 50% from local government, of which it earned 81% through contracts or fees, 19% through grants, and the remainder from international agencies, such as the EU. In 2016/17, total government funding increased slightly to £15.8bn. This may give the impression that during a time of austerity, the voluntary sector was doing very well and had ample funding. However, this was not a something-for-nothing scenario; government contracts, grants, and other diverse funding sources are generally ring-fenced for a specific purpose or service, many of which were previously provided by statutory services via the NHS, social services, councils, etc.

VOLUNTARY SECTOR INCOME BY SOURCE 2018/19 (BN)

Legend: ■ Public Sector ■ Investment ■ Voluntary Sector ■ Government ■ National Lottery ■ Public Donations

Pie segments: 5%, 8%, 9%, 28%, 1%, 49%
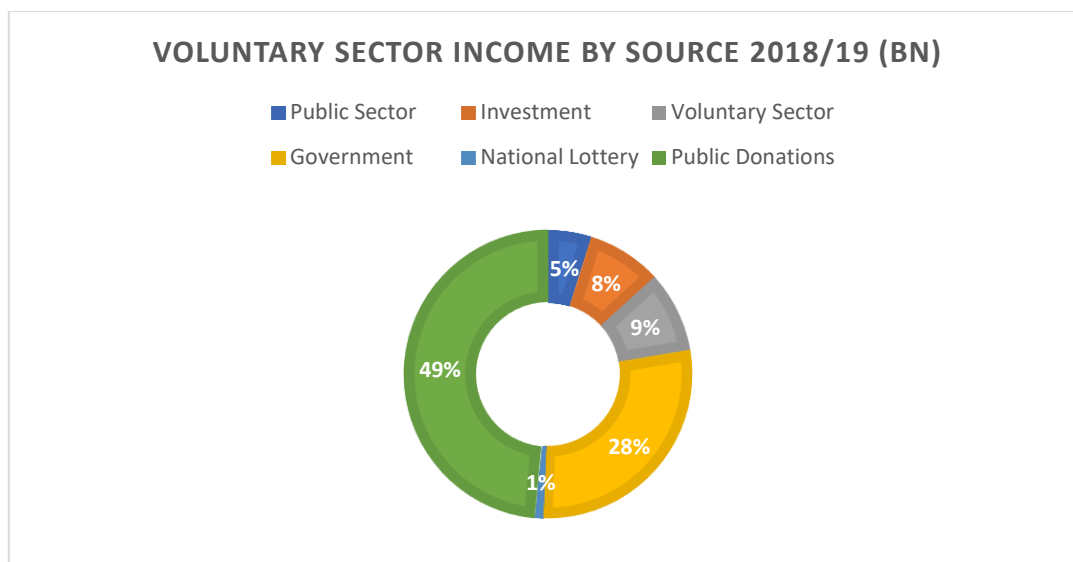
Source: NCVO, Charity Commission (2021)

Throughout the previous five years, although overall government funding remained stable, the demand for welfare services and subsequent voluntary sector spending on welfare and social provisions means that the overall proportion of income from the government actually fell from 37% in 2012/13 to 28% in 2018/19. The need to economise and get value for money initially led to a decrease in government spending, grants and loans to both the public and voluntary sectors.

Suppose we put this into a broader context: while the government is an essential source of funding for the voluntary sector, funding to the voluntary sector is only a tiny proportion of total government expenditure: 2% of 734bn (HM Treasury, 2018). Goods and services contracts to the voluntary sector constitute £12.4bn (6%) of the government's overall spend of £191.7bn and £2.9bn (5%) of a possible £57.4bn that they spend on grants and other subsidies.

Chart: Total income by size of voluntary sector organisation, 2000/01 to 2018/19 (£bn, 2018/19 prices)

Voluntary Sector Income by Size 2000/1 to 2018/19 (£bn)
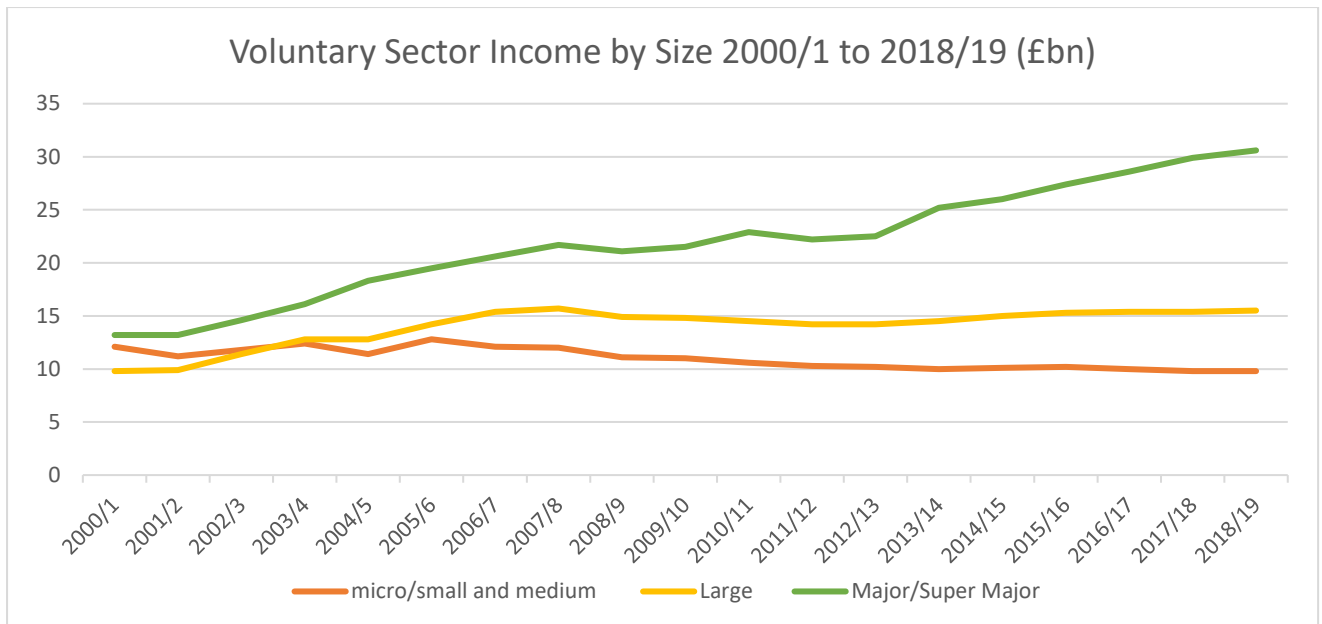
Source: NCVO, TSRC, Charities Commission (2021)

The chart above shows that while income levels for the different sizes of organisations were relatively similar in 2000/01, there was a significant increase for the larger organisations over the last twenty years, while for smaller organisations it actually fell. This disparity is mainly because only 10 per cent of voluntary sector organisations attract government funding, and that group mainly comprises larger organisations (NCVO, 2017). Large, major, and super-sized organisations tend to be in a structural position to bid for and rely on grants and contracts from other statutory bodies.

In recent years, the voluntary sector has experienced massive demand for its services to the point that organisations are now paying for many of them out of alternative (i.e. non-government) funds (Smith, 2022). Concerns have been raised within the voluntary and community sector as many organisations feel that due to their purely community-based orientation, they are best placed to provide the range of welfare and social services needed to support the welfare state (Wardle, 2021). Critics suggest that since the inception of neoliberal governments within the UK, the voluntary sector has been playing into the hands of the government's agenda of rolling back the welfare state. There is adequate funding to pay for

services via national insurance contributions. Still, these funds are being diverted and are not being used for their intended purpose. Therefore, the voluntary and community sector should withdraw their support unless the government adequately compensates them (Paxton *et al.,* 2005).

Left-wing economic and political analysts have suggested that providing contracts to the voluntary sector is simply backdoor privatisation of welfare services, and when, after continuous reductions in funding, they are no longer able to compete, the private sector will quietly take over (Powell, 2007). This leaves the voluntary sector in a precarious position as many workers and volunteers feel they are ethically unable to remove the services, as those at the lower end of the economic spectrum would be affected the most (NCVO, 2018). This clearly illustrates that the government's promise of working in partnership with the voluntary sector was simply the bait to hook the voluntary sector into its agenda. It is now abusing its financial power and political influence (with back-door privatisation a real threat). Unfortunately, with neoliberalism now deeply engrained within UK politics, these ethical and economic dilemmas will continue, enabling successive governments to take advantage of voluntary sector expertise and services until organisations are too exhausted to continue.

Voluntary Sector Expenditure

In 2008/9, the voluntary sector's total expenditure on grant-making, charitable activities, governance, and the cost of generating funds stood at an impressive £36.8 billion, with £15 billion of that amount paid for directly by state funding. However, by 2011, voluntary sector income fell by 3.6% (£1.4bn), with donations from individuals falling by £400million (6.2%), legacies by £415m (18.4%) and investments by £346million (9.7%) (UK Civil Almanac, 2017). In contrast, voluntary sector expenditure increased during the recession, peaking in 2009/10 at £37.6bn before falling by 2.2% in 2010/11, which can only be attributed to a reduction in the

level of income (UK Civil Almanac, 2017). In 2016/17, although the sector's total revenue increased by 2% to £50.6bn, it spent £49.7m or 96% of that income, with 86% going towards direct charitable activities (£34.7bn) and (£7.0bn) on grant making.

Chart showing the percentage of expenditure by Micro, Small and Medium Third Sector Organisations in (2018/19). This illustrates that 70% of their income is spent directly on charitable activities to support local communities. However, their ability to provide financial support through grant-making is lower due to their focus on vital community-based services. Compared to much larger organisations, the percentage of money spent on governance appears to be higher. However, this is because all organisations have similar overheads, but when income is comparatively lower, these costs still have to be deducted from an already restricted budget.
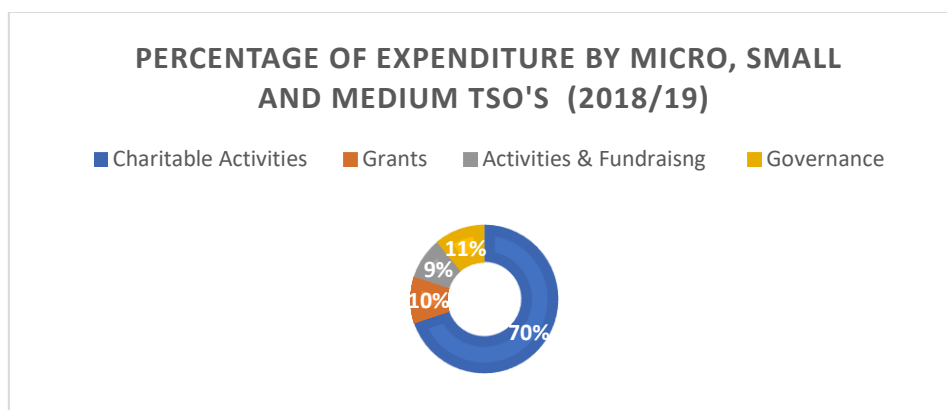
Source: NCVO, Charity Commission (2021)

If we compare this information with that of large third-sector organisations, we can see that they spend a similar amount on charitable activities and grant-making. However, larger organisations generally generate a more significant income, which increases as organisation size does. Therefore, the amount spent on governance appears to be lower. However, they are likelier to employ more paid staff than micro, small and medium-sized third-sector organisations.

Chart: showing the percentage of expenditure by Large Third Sector Organisations in (2018/19).

PERCENTAGE OF EXPENDITURE BY LARGE TSO'S (2018/19)

■ Charitable Activities ■ Grants ■ Activities and Fundraising ■ Governance

7%
14%
12%
67%
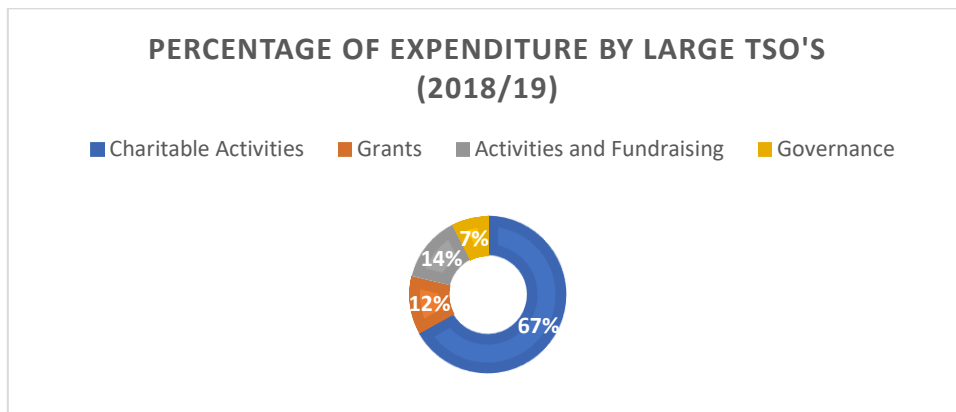
Source: NCVO, Charity Commission (2021)

Even amongst the Major and supersized third-sector organisations, most of their expenditure goes towards charitable activities. It also shows a slight increase in grant-making and a decrease in governance costs consistent with the trend for larger organisations. However, in terms of the money these organisations generate, even this relatively small percentage could amount to more than the annual income of most micro, small and medium third-sector organisations. There was also a slight increase in the amount spent on governance, which again is probably down to the organisation employing more people.

Chart: showing the percentage of expenditure by Major and Supersized Third Sector Organisations in (2018/19).

PERCENTAGE OF EXPENDITURE BY MAJOR & SUPERSIZED TSO'S (2018/19)

■ Charitable Activities ■ Grants ■ Activities and Fundraising ■ Governance

5%
17%
73%
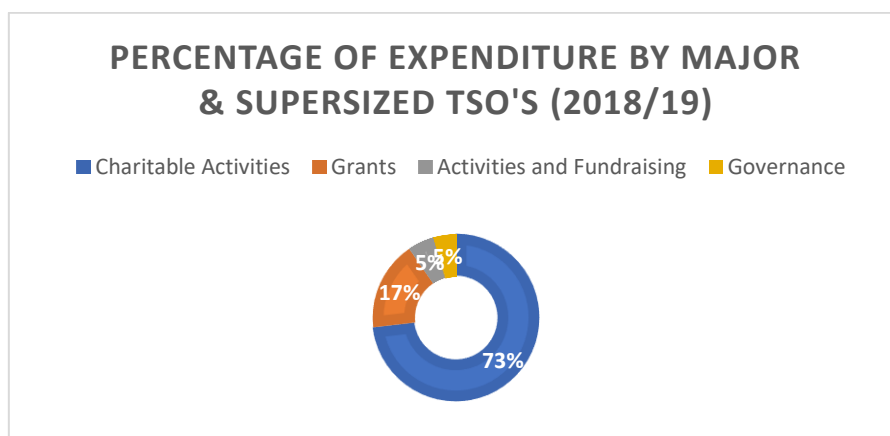
In 2018/19, the voluntary sector's income stood at £56bn, with an expenditure of £54bn (NCVO, 2020). In addition to national insurance contributions, over £50bn extra is ploughed into the British economy and used to provide various direct welfare and other auxiliary services. This money is essentially propping up state welfare and social services provisions.

The voluntary sector as an employer

The voluntary and community sector has experienced difficulties due to increased demand for its services, challenges securing funding, and uncertainty arising from austerity. However, the voluntary sector workforce actually grew by 20% between 2010 and 2019. In 2010, it employed 792,000 people, and by 2019, it had grown to employ 952,000, with 3% of that rise in 2018 alone (NCVO, 2019). Over a third of all those working in the sector are engaged in social work activities, which accounts for more than 295,000 employees. A further 110,000 work in education and approximately 106,000 in residential care (NCVO, 2020). This appears impressive. However, it is tiny compared to other sectors, such as the £27m working in the private sector in the UK.

The public sector employed over 7 million people in 2009. Unfortunately, government cuts in 2010 dramatically reduced their numbers to 5.4 million (Civil Society, 2012). Since 2009, 846,000 local government jobs have been removed, including 406,000 council employees (Greenwood, 2018). A further 500,000 jobs were moved into the private sector by the 2013 Royal Mail privatisation (Neate, 2013) and the transfer of council properties to housing associations in 2017 (Clegg, 2018). In contrast, central government employee numbers increased by 369,000 over five years to 3.1 million staff in March 2018. These numbers illustrate that cuts to local authorities have forced them to reduce their workforces in the key

areas of health, social work and education, the very areas the charitable and voluntary sector is being asked to support. If central funding to local government has been reduced to the extent that they have had to make these posts redundant, and the voluntary sector is being paid to provide the same roles and services at a substantially lower cost. In that case, we should ask, is there insufficient coming in from NI contributions to pay for them, or is there something else at work?

Although the public perception of voluntary and charitable work is often of generalists offering care, advice and support to disadvantaged people, many charities have specialised roles relating to their areas of concern. Organisations are made up of individuals with expertise in dealing with issues such as homelessness, child support, sexual abuse, conservation, specific disabilities or health conditions, debt crisis or animal welfare. Third-sector organisations' organisational and operational structures also mirror much of the private sector, with all the same support roles in areas such as HR, finance, back office, and PR. Many people employed and volunteering within the charitable and voluntary sector trained and gained professional experience elsewhere but now readily use their expertise within the charitable sector (NCVO, 2019).

Table: Contract type and length in the voluntary, public and private sectors, Sept 2020 (%)

Sector	Full time Position	Part-time Position	Permanent Contract	Temporary Contract	Don't know
Voluntary Sector	65	35	88	8	4
Public Sector	76	27	91	7	2
Private Sector	64	24	78	4	19

Source: NCVO, Charity Commission (2021)

Charities themselves have a reputation for being good employers, with flexible working conditions being one area of praise. Over 40% of employees are on a part-time, flexible, job-

sharing or temporary basis, which may be why two-thirds of voluntary organisations staff are women, who often prefer flexible working conditions as they tend to work around other family and social commitments. However, this does not make working in the voluntary sector an easy option, as expectations around professionalism and dedication often make them more demanding than other employers.

If we look at volunteering as a stand-alone pursuit, during 2017/18, an estimated 20.1 million people volunteered their time through groups, clubs, and organisations. Many of these volunteers use it as an opportunity to gain experience before moving into paid work. In 2020/21, this number fell to 19 million, 17% of the UK's population, a decrease from 23% in 2019/2020 (Civil Society, 2022). However, this reduction has been attributed to the COVID-19 pandemic (ONS, 2021). Nevertheless, that it remained as high as it did illustrate that even during unprecedented and unpredictable events such as a pandemic, the selfless dedication many volunteers provide to the voluntary and community sector with its massive provider power potential far exceeds the commitments of any other mass social voluntary movement. At the same time, however, these statistics indicate that the voluntary sector is effectively gaining 50% more in free human resources than any other sector, which is why the government wants to work closely with the sector. Economically, it instantly equates to a 50% saving in staffing costs and a 50% increase in output.

Other differences between the private, public, and voluntary sector workforce relate to the numbers of people employed and salary levels within the voluntary sector compared with those in the public and private sectors. Compared to the private and public sectors, fewer people are generally employed, and they tend to earn less for equivalent roles. However, some senior jobs in larger charities are well-paid (Civil Society Almanac, 2021). The workplaces also tend to be smaller. In 2018, 61% of voluntary sector workers were employed in workplaces with less than

50 employees, with 25% of charitable organisations having less than ten paid staff (Civil Society Almanac 2021).

Many paid positions within charities rely on grant-making trusts for funding different posts, which are rarely permanent, meaning that staff contracts are also rarely permanent, with short-term employment contracts ranging from as little as three months, sessional work, and up to 60-month contracts at best, leaving employees, even high-ranking employees with no job security (The Guardian, 2015). Job security is a massive issue in many workplaces that can seriously affect staff motivation and retention, as uncertainty can lead to instability (CLC, 2013). However, people are not merely attracted to charitable work for the salary or job security. Instead, it is the ethos of doing a role that is creative, has a sense of purpose, they believe in, and ultimately benefits people and society (RVS, 2018). Unfortunately, relatively small changes within the voluntary sector workforce tend to have a much more significant impact than in the private and public sector workforces. For example, if 50,000 people left the private sector and joined the public sector, this would tend to go unnoticed in private sector figures. However, within the voluntary sector, this would constitute a significant change. Chronic job insecurity can impact someone's personality, leading to a lack of commitment, workplace paranoia and an inability to perform their roles, ultimately resulting in inefficiency for the organisation (Wu, 2020). In addition, employees have suggested that this knock-on effect creates financial insecurity and uncertainty, leading to employees being unable to make plans socially and commit to mortgages or lengthy tenancy agreements, all of which affect an individual's sense of social identity (Tajfel & Turner, 1986).

In conclusion, the voluntary and community sector, or the third sector, is currently providing its services in what could be considered an auxiliary welfare state, funded and supported by the people, for the people. This is in sharp contrast to statutory provisions that, as the name

indicates, should be provided by the state and, in this case, paid for through national insurance contributions.

Regional Funding to local council authorities and the voluntary sector in the Northeast of England and particularly Sunderland

Regionally, the North of England has historically suffered higher levels of deprivation and poverty than the more affluent southern regions of the UK. Sunderland is no exception to this. The Northeast was part of the country's industrial backbone in the 19th and early 20th centuries, with coal mining and shipbuilding being the most significant industries in the region. However, the post-industrial North has retained its status as the poor relative in every sense of the word regarding industry, funding, and investment. The Northeast suffers disproportionately compared to the more affluent South in attracting state and private investments, new industries, welfare and social provisions and voluntary sector funding.
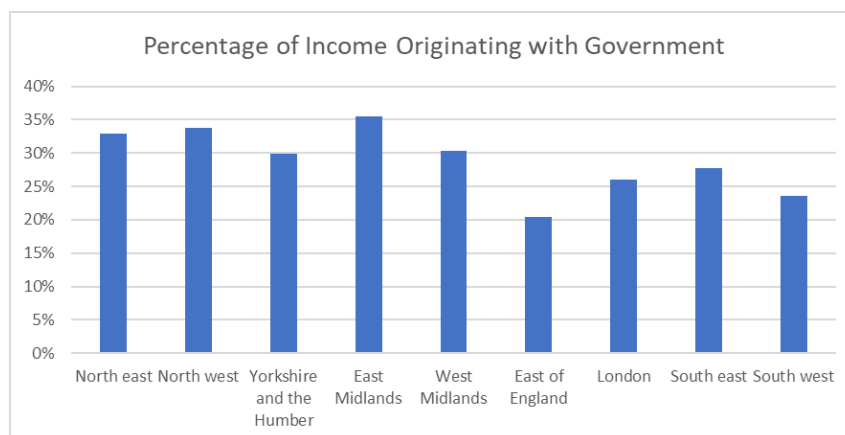
Levels of government funding to voluntary sector organisations vary by region and clearly illustrate that organisations in the Northeast are highly reliant on government (central and local) as a source of funding (Civil Society Almanac, 2021). However, since 2010, the hugely disproportionate cuts in public spending have significantly impacted the spending power of our local councils, ultimately affecting the local people and communities. Local Councils receive most of their funding from central government grants, which are used to provide a

comprehensive range of amenities and services within their area. Their spending power is the amount of money each council has available to spend during the year, from government grants, council tax, business rates, rents from the property it owns, charging for services such as theatres and leisure centres, grants from non-central governmental bodies such as the national lottery and the NHS. Since 2010, government grants to local authorities in the region have fallen by an average of 16% (instituteforgovernment.org.uk 2020). Unlike central government, local authorities are forbidden from borrowing money to finance day-to-day spending, so they must balance their budgets or draw down reserves to ensure spending does not exceed revenue. However, once they spend their reserves, they are gone.

As a region, the Northeast was dealt a massive financial blow by austerity, as by 2018/19, its spending power stood at only £1.6bn, compared to £2.1bn in 2010/11, which reduced at a rate of half a billion pounds per year (Ottewell and Kelly, 2018). As a result, the total funding gap across local government in the Northeast stood at £1.2 billion in 2019/20, and under current plans, this gap is expected to grow to a £1.3 billion funding gap in 2024/25 (TUC, 2019).

At the outset of austerity measures in 2010, many local councils had their central government funding cut dramatically. The table below shows the percentage of reductions each local authority continued to experience in 2018/19. Austerity was declared over in September 2019, but any increase in local government funding would not realistically occur until 2020/21 at the earliest.

North-East Region	Reduction of Central government funding to local government. 2018/19
Newcastle	27.5%
South Tyneside	28%
Sunderland	26.6%
Gateshead	24.4%
North Tyneside	20.1%
Northumberland	17.1%

These percentages were a massive blow, considering that from their available income, councils are still expected to deliver a wide range of statutory and non-statutory welfare, health, social and recreational services. The combination of budget cuts and increased demand for welfare services and social care means that many local authorities struggle to contract statutory services. These cuts include the already significantly reduced cost of welfare provisions provided by the voluntary sector, which has swiftly become the only custodian of social welfare and care services. Therefore, for local authorities to continue to fund these services, the government needs to adequately address the level of funding to both local government and the voluntary sector.

Services that do not have to be delivered by law have already suffered throughout England, with many libraries, planning and cultural activities dramatically reduced or closed (Centre for Cities, 2022). The Local Government Association, representing councils across England and Wales, supported this claim: "falling budgets and rising demand for social care and other services are unsustainable." (LGA, 2019)

Sunderland council was severely affected by the cuts, to the extent that it needed to draw down on its reserves, leaving it with little as a buffer against further cuts. Many council services were already scrapped, including the closure of 17 of Sunderland's 20 libraries between 2013 and 2018. Waste collections were reduced in frequency, and charges were introduced for removing large items. In addition, charges were introduced for applying for a PIP to pay for direct social care. A minimum council tax was introduced for those receiving income support. In contrast, there is no such charge in other local authorities, including the neighbouring councils of Newcastle, Gateshead, South Tyneside, and Durham. There were also reductions in childcare, Sure Start, elderly care, homeless provision, women's refuge and community centres, and the

closure of charities and voluntary sector organisations in Sunderland (Miller & Dickinson, 2019).

If we look at regional funding to the voluntary and community sectors in a time of austerity, the regional effects are felt quite differently. Of course, the voluntary sector cannot be immune to cuts, as under stringent fiscal challenges, the sector could seek to work more effectively and efficiently (NCVO, 2012). However, if the government's rhetoric were to be believed that "we are all in this together", then austerity's impacts would have been felt equally across the social, geographic, and sectoral lines.

From 2010 onwards, all local authorities were impacted severely by central government cuts to public spending, with many job losses and reduced or lost services. However, from the beginning of the financial crisis, it appears that in the business world, the vast majority of the largest businesses were able to ride out the economic storm and continued to benefit from lucrative contracts. In contrast, many micro, small, medium and large firms were more likely to experience a fall in revenue due to a fall in purchasing power. These economic conditions were mirrored in the voluntary and community, which also experienced a fall in central and local authority funding, with larger, more influential organisations attracting far greater funding from statutory sources than smaller and moderately sized organisations.

Chart: Employment estimates for each region in the North of England (2019)

| Percentage TSO's who Experienced significant Income change over the last Two years (North-East England 2019)	Rising significantly	Remaining the same	Fallen significantly	Total
Northumberland	16.2	74.0	9.8	265
Tyne & Wear	19.9	66.9	13.2	387
County Durham	16.3	72.9	10.9	221
Tees Valley	15.8	69.9	14.4	209
North-East England	**17.5**	**70.4**	**12.1**	**1,082**

(Source: Third Sector Trends in North-East England 2020: a digest of findings)

The chart above shows that some third-sector organisations in some areas of the North-East of England were a little more successful in raising income levels. However, organisations in these poorer areas are more likely to experience a fall in income and use up their reserves for essential running costs compared to wealthier areas. As a result, they are, therefore, less likely to invest in new activities.

The data also illustrates that almost ten years after the introduction of austerity measures, among the 1,082 third-sector organisations in the North-East of England, most have seen no increase in income in 2019. This may be due to larger organisations' national and international identity, media coverage, and the ability to fund advertising campaigns and funding activities (Chenhall et al., 2016). In contrast, smaller voluntary organisations have insufficient funds to advertise and promote their services, as their funds are typically provided for specific purposes, such as core costs or the delivery of a specified service (Maier & Meyer, 2011).

In 2013/14, as in previous years, funding from the government to the voluntary sector varied by size of the organisation, with large organisations receiving (42%) of available funding compared to only (16%) of small organisations (UK Civil Almanac, 2017). Another example of this can be seen in the statistics from 2015/16, which illustrate that the overall government funding to the voluntary sector increased slightly for super and major sized organisations, with all other bands seeing a drop in local funding, clearly reflecting the ability of larger charities in terms of resources and capacity to bid and deliver large scale public service contracts (Charity Commission for England and Wales, 2019).

Chart: showing the percentage of income medium, large, major, and super major third sector organisations received from the government in 2016.

Size of TSO and Percentage of income from government (2016)
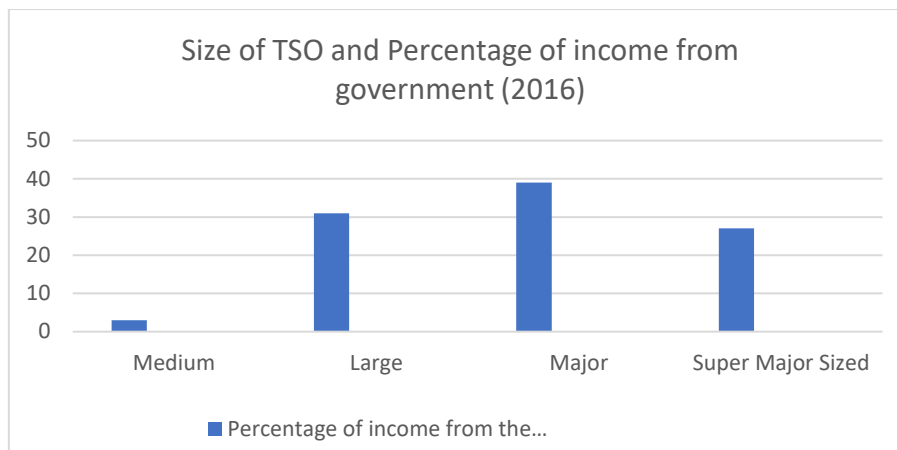
In 2016/17, statistics indicated that 39% of major organisations' income, 31% of large organisations and 27% of super-major organisations' income came directly from the government.   In contrast, the statistics for 2016/17 show that funding from public donations made up 59% of micro and small organisations' income compared to 41–47% for other organisations (NCVO, 2019). In 2018/19, this rose to 63% of all micro and small organisations' total income, while other organisations stood at an average of 50%.

Chart: Showing the percentages of income from various sources in 2018/19

VOLUNTARY SECTOR INCOME BY SOURCE 2018/19 (BN)
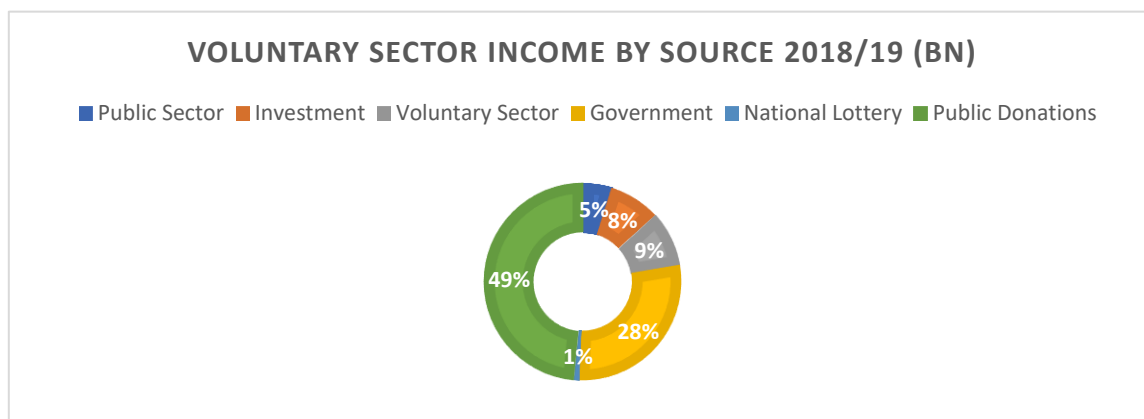
Source: NCVO, Charity Commission (2021)

This chart shows that half of the overall income of the entire voluntary sector is generated through public donations, with only a third coming directly from the government. However, only 10% of all charitable organisations receive government funding, which varies dramatically depending on the organisation's size. The inconsistency in the severity of the cuts

to local authority and voluntary sector grants from central funds was felt much more severely in some regions of the UK than others (Ottewell & Kelly, 2018). The ability of most voluntary sector organisations to attract government funding has remained problematic due to inherent structural issues. Consequently, the largest and supersized voluntary organisations have maintained their dominance in attracting most of the funding available from both central and local government. Furthermore, as London and the Southeast have the majority of these larger organisations, those regions attract the highest concentration of funding. This effectively left regions that were historically the most economically and socially deprived, such as the Northeast of England, at the lower end of the funding spectrum. This is influenced by the fact that central and local government funding initiatives to the voluntary sector are driven by the prevailing social and political issues of the time.

For example, from 2013 to 2015, crime reduction and training for the unemployed were key policy areas. In 2013/14, crime reduction initiatives received significant funding at £141m, and in 2014/15, the DWP provided £102m funding to the Shaw Trust to provide into-work initiatives. In that period, 47% of funding was allocated to organisations and umbrella bodies dealing with law and advocacy (ONS, 2017). In contrast, funding for all other micro, small, medium, and large organisations stayed either the same or decreased between 2012/13 and 2014/15, with the most common charitable activity across all voluntary organisations being welfare and social services.

In 2016/17, government funding priorities were again focused on employment and training, which received the highest proportion of funding at 49%. Social services and welfare provisions were contracted to the voluntary and community sector, which amounted to 45% of funding directly from the government (Civil Society Almanac, 2019). However, in 2018/19, funding allocated to many sectors remained static or had only marginally increased. Social
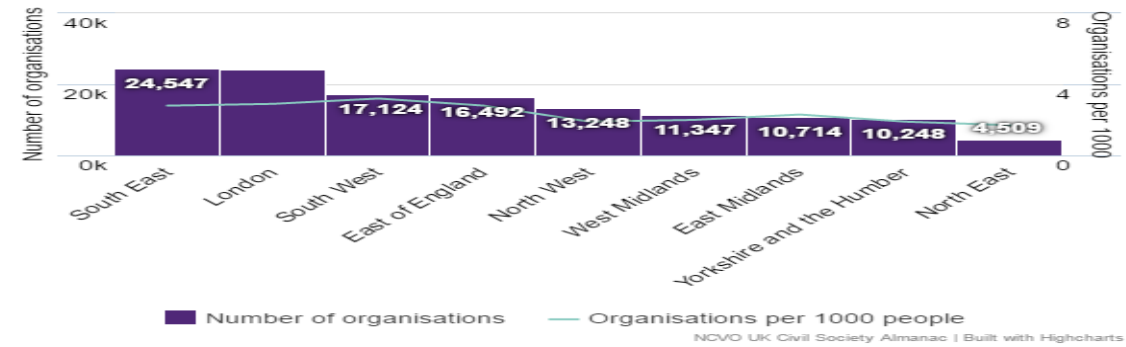
welfare provisions grew by 1.6%, significantly less than half of the historical growth rate and substantially lower than other comparable European countries (John, 2020).

In 2019, Theresa May resigned as Prime Minister with Boris Johnson replacing her. In his maiden speech, Johnson suggested that his priorities were investing a further £2.5bn in law and order, including recruiting 20,000 more police officers in response to a wave of knife crime in major British cities. He also announced a further £1.8bn boost for the NHS, with what should be a substantial amount filtering down to the third sector for the provision of services. However, as this amounts to far less than what has been lost due to austerity measures, it's unlikely the effects will be felt.

Although these cuts have been felt severely throughout the Northeast of England, here in Sunderland, the council's spending power has been cut by a third under the austerity programme. More than £290m has been taken out of their budgets, resulting in Sunderland Council reducing its employees by over 50% from more than 8,000 to less than 3,000 (Sunderland City Council, 2018). However, voluntary organisations based in the Northeast saw the most significant proportional fall in government income at 6% between 2011/12 and 2012/13.

The graph below for 2013/14 illustrates that the southeast had the highest concentration of charities in the UK, taking an estimated 49% (£18.4m) of the voluntary sector's annual income. Furthermore, over 63% (£64.8m) of England's voluntary sector assets are concentrated in London, which is in stark contrast to only 2-3% of all charities and voluntary organisations exceeding £1m for all other regions, with the lowest being in the Northeast of England.

Distribution of voluntary organisations across regions in England, 2013/14

Number of organisations — Organisations per 1000 people

NCVO UK Civil Society Almanac | Built with Highcharts

Although there is a disparity in the number of voluntary organisations operating in the Northeast of England compared to other regions, the voluntary sector remains a significant player in the region's economy. In 2013/14, 4,760 (3%) of the UK's Third sector organizations were operating in the Northeast of England with a combined income of £861 million. They spent over £817 million of that income, which is a massive financial contribution to the region.

By 2019, there were an estimated 7,200 third-sector organisations in the Northeast of England, with an estimated 38,250 employees, accounting for 3% of the region's workforce (Chapman, 2020). This amounts to a 50% growth in the sector in the region.

Table: Employment estimates for each region in the North of England (2019)

Geographical Region	Estimated Number of TSO's	Estimated full-time equivalent employees	Percentage of regional employment	Value of employee wages at median regional wage	Value of employee wages at 80% of median regional wage
North-East	7,200	38,250	3.1	£1,056,159,000	£844,927,200
Yorkshire and Humber	14,900	87,500	3.2	£2,457,000,000	£1,965,600,000
North-West England	20,350	115,000	3.0	£3,324,880,000	£2,659,904,000
North of England	42,250	240,750	3.1	£6,789,471,000	£5,431,576,800

(Source: Third Sector Trends in North-East England 2020: a digest of findings)

From this information, it could be assumed that the sector in the Northeast is thriving. However, most of these are micro or small community-based voluntary sector organisations that have arisen out of the need to fill gaps in social provision and the need that austerity has left. It is, therefore, reasonable to assume that austerity measures were a driving force for community and social mobilisation in the face of growing adversity and inequality. It is important to

remember that although the income and expenditure of voluntary organizations in the Northeast appear significant when offset against the levels of social deprivation, these amounts barely scratch the surface compared to the more affluent and significantly better-funded Southeast.

At the height of the government's Big Society rhetoric in 2012/13, the number of charities within the Northeast of England stood at 4,760, with an estimated 542 of these third-sector organisations based in the Sunderland area (Clark, 2023). However, with or without the rhetoric, which requires individuals to take action and come together as active citizens, it is clear that Austerity measures were stripping the very fabric of the welfare state. In response, the voluntary sector was reemerging to take a significant role in non-government provision and service delivery.

As local governments have limited resources but a wide range of regional issues to respond to while maintaining service levels, it is reasonable to assume that funding the local voluntary sector is a lower priority. In recent years, this has resulted in many voluntary and charitable sector organisations ceasing to exist due to a lack of funding. For example, more than 30 charities closed in the Northeast between 2011 and 2014. Of those that remain, 50% expected they would need to make redundancies, and 62% reported needing to use their reserves to survive (VONNE, 2016).

A 10-year study found that local authorities in the North-East experienced more severe cuts than in the rest of the country (Johns, 2020). As a result, the voluntary sector in the Northeast was dealt a double blow. Firstly, the region relied heavily on the public sector for financing, which amounted to 49% of its income. Secondly, the sector has experienced a significant increase in service demand due to welfare reforms, such as the bedroom tax and changes to disability benefits (Young, 2018).

One of the worst blows to the voluntary sector in the North-East was the collapse of Northern Rock, which donated 5% of its annual pre-tax profits, averaging £27m per year, to the Northern Rock Foundation. The Northern Rock Foundation, the largest corporate foundation outside London, focussed its charitable efforts within the region. However, after the bank was nationalised in 2007 and sold Virgin Money in 2012, the amount decreased to £7m per year before it closed in 2014. This chain of events massively reduced the income of many voluntary sector organisations, which lost a great deal of funding they had previously relied upon for multi-year staff posts and big capital projects.

The central government's objective of reducing unemployment has resulted in them focusing on funding large schemes, such as the Work Programme and Transforming Rehabilitation (2011). This has essentially frozen out small and medium-sized organisations from being able to compete for contracts. For example, the National Citizen Service has received criticism as it received more than £84m from the Office for Civil Society in 2013, money that could have achieved far more if local community groups had instead been given it (Young, 2014).

The competition for funding has increased dramatically. An account from Malcolm Fallow, chief executive of the East Durham Trust, stated: "There are lots of voluntary and community groups fishing in an ever-decreasing pond" (Third Sector, 2014b). Many local voluntary sector organisations have had to reduce wages and staff hours or replace staff with volunteers to survive. Salaries within the sector dropped by approximately 12% between 2009 and 2014, with the most significant fall of 18% for fundraising posts (Vonne, 2014). This forced some charities to work together to survive. The Big Lottery Fund has been propping up services, such as children's centres and Sure Start programmes previously funded by the state. At the same time, voluntary groups have taken over running libraries, community centres and childcare schemes.

Government policies, such as The Welfare Reform Act, had the biggest effect on individuals and subsequent impacts on the voluntary sector (Edminston, 2016). For example, benefit sanctions, the bedroom tax and cuts to disability benefits forced individuals to turn to the voluntary sector for food parcels, advice and support. Still, that support was put under increasing pressure by the rising demand.

A greater and greater proportion of funding to the voluntary sector has been via contracts to provide services. This arrangement favours larger organisations due to their organisational structure, but those organisations lack the local knowledge that smaller organisations with ties to an area have. This has resulted in less funding for local charities and poorer service for communities. Such is the level of discord amongst charities that new research suggests there is an increasingly dysfunctional relationship between the state and charities, with over half of charities surveyed indicating that they had been forced to reject contracts due to being unable to deliver a quality service within the budget offered (Butler, 2017). Two-thirds of charities indicated that they already had to use public donations to support the critical health and social services they were hired to provide. New Philanthropy Capital (NPC) warned that charities dependent on public service contracts were struggling (Britton, 2018). This evidence indicates that charities were subsidising public sector contracts. It also illustrates the extent to which austerity measures forced councils and the NHS to secure the cheapest contracts, driving down quality and financial sustainability.

Selecting charitable service providers with the expertise to deal with areas such as social care, homelessness, unemployment, and public health is of paramount importance. However, many large value contracts have instead been awarded to generalist charities on a cost basis at the expense of smaller specialist charities that could not compete financially (Stowell & O'Donnell, 2019). In addition, the Philanthropy Impact Organisation indicated that there are increasing

concerns relating to the public sector's unethical coercion of charities to subsidise the cost of contracts using donor funds as a primary condition of the award, leaving trustees conflicted due to their duty towards beneficiaries.

Some voluntary sector providers had returned contracts because they could not deliver value to beneficiaries due to insufficient funding (Britton, 2018). Andrew O'Brien, head of policy at Charity Finance Group, said: "This is an increasing dilemma for charities with some voluntary organisations making huge losses or subsidising as much as 16% of the value of public sector contract". (Butler, 2017) Kathy Evans, Chief Executive of Children England made similar comments: "…widespread losses are being incurred by charities that end up paying for underfunded public contracts, which is unsustainable for any organisation or service sector" (Evans, 2018). An example occurred in 2018 when the 4Children childcare charity went into administration. The charity was initially fuelled by a string of private loans but quickly unravelled when their activities became unsustainable due to insufficient income and government cuts.

As a voluntary sector Manager myself, working in a very small charity in Sunderland in the Northeast of England, I have first-hand experience of operating under the economic austerity measures imposed in 2010 and how the impact of reductions in funding have been felt by those working within the sector across the city. Most third-sector organisations in the North-East are very small, have limited income, and generally depend upon volunteers (Chapman, 2020). It is estimated that throughout the North of England, there are around 955,000 volunteers who give their time to manage organisations and deliver the work needed. These volunteers are estimated to provide a staggering 69m free hours of work, valued at between £565m - £940m per year.

Table: Estimated number of volunteers in the North of England and their financial worth according to volunteering hours worked.

Estimates of volunteer numbers and replacement values (North of England, 2019)	Estimated number of volunteers (2016 estimates in parentheses)	Estimate of hours worked (000s) (2016 estimates in parentheses)	Nominal financial replacement cost at National Minimum Wage	Nominal financial replacement cost at 80% average regional wage
North-East	154,000 (149,900)	11,088 (10,793)	£91,033,000	£148,442,000
Yorkshire and Humber	350,500 (340,700)	25.236 (24,530)	£207,188,000	£343,577,000
North-West	450,500 440,400)	32,436 (31,709)	£266,300,000	£454,686,000
North of England	955,000 (931,000)	68,760 (67,032)	£564,520,000	£940,178,000

(Source: Third Sector Trends in North-East England 2020: a digest of findings)

The proportion of this workforce found in the North East stands at 16.2 per cent, estimated to be around 154,400 volunteers, who deliver 11m hours of work, with a replacement value of between £91m and £148m. Economically, this is a vast amount of unwaged working hours that, if paid for, would contribute massively to the local economy and significantly reduce unemployment, especially as the North-East of England continues to suffer higher unemployment rates. ONS (2022) data shows that the North-East of England had the highest unemployment rate of any region in the United Kingdom for the three months to December 2021, standing at 5.6 per cent compared to the rest of the UK's unemployment rate stood at 4.1 per cent. If we then compared the unemployment rate in Sunderland to both the North-East of England and the rest of the UK in December 2021, then the situation is even worse as the unemployment rate in Sunderland was 6.9 per cent, compared to 5.6 per cent for the region and 4.8 per cent nationally (ONS, 2022).

Unfortunately, finding reliable statistics about the number of charitable and voluntary organisations in Sunderland has proven difficult, even after speaking to the local council, VCAS and other voluntary services. However, of those 7,200 third-sector organisations within the North-east, there are currently 389 micro, small, medium, large, and super-large, regional and national organisations listed as operating throughout the Borough of Sunderland and its outlaying towns and villages (Thomson Local Directory, 2021).

Table: indicates the geographical unemployment rates and estimated local, regional and national volunteering statistics.

Geographical Location	Unemployment Rate	Estimated Number of TSOs	Estimated Number of Volunteers	Estimated Volunteering hours provided	Estimated full-time equivalent employees	Value of employee wages at median regional wage
Sunderland	6.9%	389	8,492	6,114	2,123	£61,567,000
North-East	5.6%	7,200	154,400	11,088	38,250	£1,056,159,000
Whole of UK	4.8%	165,800	12,000,000	3,000,000	882,353	23.9bn

(Source: Statistics derived from Third Sector Trends in North-East England 2020: a digest of findings, ONS statistics 2022, NVCO, and UK Civil Almanac 2022)

The number of third-sector organisations in Sunderland accounts for approximately 5.5% of all third-sector organisations in the northeast of England. From the 154,400 volunteers working across the northeast, it is estimated that approximately 8,492 people are volunteering their time across the Borough of Sunderland. In the tables above relating to the number of TSOs nationally, regionally, and locally, there is an apparent contradiction. Firstly, apart from the initial fall in the number of TSOs after the introduction of austerity measures and the dramatic economic cuts that followed. There has been steady growth in the number of TSOs throughout the UK who are filling the void left by the reduced funding and scope of the welfare state. Secondly, if there is a definite and continuous need for these services, attracting many thousands of volunteers to fill what are essentially waged positions, it could be argued that if the volunteers were paid employees instead, it would positively contribute to the economic, personal, and social identities of these individuals as well as boosting the economy.

As with so many micro and small charities in Sunderland, the charity I work for helps some of the most vulnerable and marginalised individuals in society who have little or nothing. Unfortunately, therefore, we cannot charge for our services. As a result, we rely entirely on securing funding from various other grant-making organisations, charities, and trusts. Apart from my own salaried role, which is underpaid compared to equivalent positions in other sectors, the rest of our activities are carried out by a dedicated team of volunteers. We have 10 to 12 volunteers on rotation, with each volunteer increasingly giving up more of their time.

They initially started at around 2-3 hours per week, but as demand has increased substantially over the past ten years, many of our volunteers often work 6-9 hours per week. However, over the past two years, a decade of government cuts combined with a global pandemic has resulted in over a 200% increase in people accessing our services. The hours worked were impacted further by the pandemic when volunteers across the city, including at my own charity hours increased further to approximately 12-15 hours of their time per week, providing much-needed food via our foodbank and practical support, information, advice, and reassurance remotely and in person (NCVO, 2022)

As far back as 2012, when the government was rolling out its Big Society programme, responsibility was being tipped towards society for its own welfare, with the aid of small voluntary and community organisations (Defty, 2013). In this environment, devoid of adequate funding and a range of structural barriers, small and medium voluntary organisations lacked a voice in national and voluntary sector debates due to their size. Therefore, it was concluded that more flexible funding was required to sustain these organisations (IPPR, 2013). However, a decade on, little has changed. Vicky Browning, chief executive of ACEVO, said:

> "The government is taking the charity sector for granted. Since the first day of the first lockdown the government has relied on charities for help delivering food, medical care, mental health support, and housing support. It is charities that have stepped in to advocate for feeding hungry children. It is charities that have worked with the NHS to vaccinate over 20 million people in three months" (Browning, 2021).

This increased need for additional financial, food and social support is widespread throughout the city and, indeed, throughout the northeast, and this has placed a lot of strain on voluntary sector organisations and their staff and volunteers. However, even in the face of such severe cuts to local government funding in Sunderland, which resulted in the loss of over half of its workforce, Sunderland City Council has been working tirelessly to support voluntary organisations, bringing them together to foster partnerships and pooling resources where

possible. The Council has also been working in partnership with many small third-sector organisations to help alleviate poverty, the financial strain imposed by austerity measures, and, more recently, COVID-19. For example, it has provided fresh fruit and vegetables and financial assistance to food banks throughout the city, redistributing office furniture and IT equipment to third-sector organisations, providing out-of-school meals, and financial support for people needing help with energy bills or pre-paid account top-ups.

Summary

It's easy to assume that the voluntary sector, as a whole, is very well funded when talking of grants and contracts in terms of millions and billions of pounds. However, when put into the context of the ratio of overall public spending, it paints a very different picture, especially when we also consider the scale and scope of voluntary and charitable sector organisations involved in delivering a wide range of welfare and public services. However, in 2015, an updated spending review indicated that funding from the government would continue to broadly correlate with government spending, suggesting that the government would implement a further £18bn of cuts across departmental expenditure by 2020. Although the amount of central government funding is likely to remain stable, the additional changes and reductions to local authority funding, spending and service provision will likely have other impacts on the voluntary sector. It may mean that competition for funding will increase, funding will be lower for everyone, or TSOs will be expected to absorb these changes, resulting in either streamlining provisions or carrying out more work for the same or less money.

The gross discrepancy in the funding landscape illustrates that supersized organisations can secure large government contracts. Meanwhile, micro, small and medium-sized charities struggle to attract even smaller amounts and are attracting less now than at their pre-recession peak (NCVO, 2020). This is due to smaller organisations having structural, legal and ethical

issues with contracts, especially those involving payment-by-results, which are often unworkable for smaller providers (Bach-Mortensen & Montgomery, 2018).

Providing funding to the sector is not simply a one-way altruistic exercise of paying for services. For example, between 2013/14 and 2014/15, the government also generated an income from across the voluntary sector above its initial investment, estimated at £150m (NCVO, 2016), with the revenue generated increasing yearly. In addition, the third sector contributes substantially to the economy: "The UK charity sector contributes a mammoth £200bn in economic value to the UK each year, almost 12 times the official estimate" (Cipriani, 2020). Considering this is a social and welfare investment rather than a trading or market-led investment, it is a tremendous achievement.

Chapter Five - Identity and Human Costs of Austerity

Introduction

The 2008 global financial crisis and the subsequent introduction of austerity measures have undoubtedly profoundly affected the economic environment of the public and voluntary sectors within the UK, which has been well documented and reported over the past decade. My aim with this thesis is to go beyond the tangible economic realities of austerity and to explore the individual, personal, and human costs for those working in the voluntary sector. Voluntary sector workers speak of their roles and what they do in a very personal way, demonstrating an attachment. This indicates a form of identification with their work that could extend further than it might for a typical worker in the private sector. This resembles the social identification, categorisation, and comparison stages at the core of Social Identity Theory. I have used Social Identity Theory as a lens to explore the relationship between voluntary sector workers, managers and volunteers and their roles and, subsequently, to understand the personal and social consequences of austerity for those workers where they extend beyond simple economics.

Identity Theory

Social identity theory, in its simplest form, can be traced back over a century to William Sumner's (1840-1910) *A Study of the Sociological Importance of Usages, Manners, Customs, Mores, and Morals (1906)*, in which he states:

> "Each group thinks its own folkways the only right ones. Each group nourishes its own pride and vanity, boasts itself superior, exalts its own divinities, and looks with contempt on outsiders. Loyalty to the group, sacrifice for it, hatred and contempt for outsiders, brotherhood within" (Sumner, 1906).

Social identity theory arose from the idea that group membership can help people establish meaning in social situations, with group membership as a framework that enables people to

define who they are, their position, and how their role relates to others. It was initially developed and referred to as the social identity theory for intergroup relations, and its focus was to integrate the cognitive processes and behavioural motivations within group relations and conflict. However, it wasn't until the 1970s that social psychologist Henri Tajfel brought the theory of Social Identity to prominence. Tajfel's theory envisages that people tend to adopt certain intergroup behaviours based on perceived status differences, validity, and the overall stability of that status difference, with the added perception of being able to move from one group to another.

By the 1980s, social psychologists were concerned that Tajfel's theory had limitations. As a result, contemporaries of Tajfel, including John Turner, focused on the cognitive factors that influence how people interpret their position and behaviour in different social contexts and how their position would affect their perception and attitudes of others. From this, Turner and his colleagues formulated a complimentary collective approach to Social Identity called Self-Categorization Theory, which looks at behaviours regarding the self and social group processes. Therefore, when sociological researchers cite their work as having a social identity approach or perspective, they utilise and acknowledge the contributions of social identity and self-categorisation.

Social identity theory suggests that intergroup behaviours refer to the part of an individual's self-concept derived from their perceived membership of a group, institution, or organisation (Tajfel, 1974). This association exerts a desirable or even coercive change in an individual's behaviour by altering their self-identity through the perceived favourable social status or emotional attachment provided by the group.

Interpersonal and Intergroup Behaviours

Identity theory can be divided into distinct areas of interpersonal or intergroup behaviours depending on the focus of the research topic. Interpersonal behaviour is generally behaviour that is defined purely by the individual's character and interpersonal relationships that occur between two people. Intergroup behaviour occurs during group social interactions, with people continually moving from one to another throughout their personal and social lives.

An integral concept of Social Identity Theory is that individuals inherently strive to achieve a positive self-concept and social identity. In comparison, Turner's 1979 *'Self-categorisation Theory'* examines the in-depth cognitive nature of personal vs. social identities and the relationship between them. Therefore, applying Tajfel's social identity theory is preferable to assess the individual's behaviour and the social structural factors that influence it, although they remain tightly interlinked.

An individual's choice of behaviour is theorised to be influenced mainly by the perceived intergroup relationship, authority, and hierarchy the group holds and the ease at which the individual can attain high status (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). These social identities are often a valued part of the self. Therefore, in groups with less permeability, individuals often forgo their self-interest to maintain the self-perception that they are part of the group. However, in groups with more permeable boundaries (individual mobility), individuals are more likely to disassociate from the group and pursue individual goals and agendas that provide personal rather than group gain (Jetten *et al*., 2012).

Social identification with a group, institution or organisation often promotes pro-social behaviours. For example, when people closely identify with their group or community, they are more likely to assist them in their endeavours, such as supporting community fetes and fundraising events. This extends to in-group favouritism, where in-group members are unlikely

to act against their group, even if the group's actions, ideas, or behaviour are morally wrong, as this would create an inner conflict of their perceived membership. However, this tends not to be the case when individuals identify more closely with a subgroup (Melucci, 1989).

Psychological/Cognitive Processes

In Tajfel and Turner's Social Identity Theory (1979), three psychological or cognitive processes enable a person to evaluate and define their place in society as "us" or "them"; i.e. "in-group" and "out-group". These processes occur in a particular order: social categorisation - social identification - social comparison.

Social categorisation suggests that people are inclined to perceive themselves and those around them in terms of particular social categories, such as referring to a person as being a member of something bigger, like, the army or a politician, instead of simply being a unique individual (Melucci, 1989). This idea of solidarity can be traced back to Durkheim (1858-1917), who argued that collective identity helps create bonds between individuals through shared morals and goals (Walker, 2018).

Social identification echoes the idea that people generally do not perceive social situations as detached observers. Instead, their self-perception or identity reflects how they relate to other individuals and groups around them (Tajfel, 1979).

Social comparison is often an unconscious process by which individuals assess the comparative social status of a particular group and its members (Turner, 1986). An example would be that a nurse may have a higher social status or standing than a cleaner, but a nurse would have lower social status compared to a doctor. This illustrates that an individual's personal identity centres around their own self-knowledge and unique qualities, traits, and characteristics (Ridgeway, 1991; Webster et al; 2015; Ridgeway & Erickson, 2000).

An individual's social identity is created through the culmination of these three processes. In sequence, social categorisation, social identification, and social comparison inform individuals' decisions regarding the particular social groupings they feel they fit into. In addition, there are the added emotional dimensions and perceived statuses of group membership.

Social behaviour is primarily defined by the motivations and character of an individual (interpersonal behaviour), as well as the individual's group membership (intergroup behaviour) (Skinner, 1979 and 1989). Individuals appear motivated to seek out positive traits, behaviours and characteristics that represent their in-groups. However, this can cause them to focus on the negative aspects of out-groups and disregard their favourable characteristics (Amodio & Devine, 2006). The propensity to favour one's in-groups over relevant out-groups can distort truthful and appropriate communication and affect the distribution of performance, achievements and outcomes between in-group and out-group members.

Group Permeability and Social Mobility

The desire to create positive social identities through group association can lead to intergroup conflict. This can be seen in all social groupings, whether political affiliation or belonging to a particular sports group. As such, members of what may be perceived as the ruling, successful or advantaged group work hard to maintain and protect their position, while at the same time, the disadvantaged groups are also striving to improve their situation.

Individual mobility, belief systems, and group boundaries are permeable. An individual can move between groups and not be restricted by group membership when seeking position improvement (Armenta et al., 2010). Therefore, an individual's chances rely more on their life choices, achievements, and talents than their social groups. However, the social change belief system suggests that changes in social relations depend on those groups' varying positions when compared to each other (Levine, 1989). Therefore, the stability and legitimacy of the

groups tend to influence each other, and when differences between groups are questioned, the stability can be undermined.

In Tajfel and Turner's 'The Social Identity Theory of Intergroup Behaviour' (1986), social identity theory distinguishes between three strategies for social mobility and improving one's status: individual mobility, social competition, and social creativity. Individual mobility suggests that people can pursue positions of improvement irrespective of their group association or position. This individual-level solution can counter-act group devaluation. However, because a person abides by group norms, group membership does not necessarily result in de-individualisation, as a person's sense of self and the range of identities we assume work on many different levels (Reicher & Haslam, 2001). Social competition is an intergroup strategy that requires the group's combined efforts to improve joint performance or outcomes (Mummendey & Wenzel, 1999).

Social creativity is a cognitive strategy that requires the group to alter or re-evaluate its perception of its current group standing by incorporating alternative and creative elements to emphasise ways the in-group is positively distinct from relevant out-groups (Becker, 2012). It helps to maintain positive perceptions of the in-group, even if the group has low status. Over time, this can inspire group members to pursue position improvement for their group (Jackson, Sullivan & Harnish 1996). However, if this is not possible, to maintain legitimacy, it may be necessary to make comparisons against another out-group (Tajfel & Turner, 1986).

Threats to Identity

Identity exists in both the personal and social realms due to the array of personal and social identities we collect or create (Tajfel & Turner, 1986). These identities are complex and varied due to the multiple and often simultaneous roles modern humans engage in, be it a spouse, parent, carer, community standing or the plethora of career roles. Each role or identity provides

the individual with differing levels of status, authority, learned and lived knowledge and satisfaction. Conversely, people often also express dissatisfaction with some areas of their prospective roles but have no desire to abandon them due to the positive aspects of associating with that role or identity. Changes or threats to both personal and social identity roles are usually due to external factors. In the case of social identity, a range of threats can arise from individual or group behaviours, such as group status. Threats can occur when the perceived competence of a group is devalued or the moral conduct of the group is called into question. This can cause individuals to feel guilt or shame by association, even when they are not personally responsible for their group's behaviour. As a result, individuals can begin distancing or disassociating themselves from a particular group to avoid being adversely labelled.

Other group identity threats occur when a group is not recognised for its unique characteristics but is instead included in larger inclusive groups or organisations. For example, workers in a small company that is taken over in an organisational merger can reduce worker morale, loyalty, and motivation (Turquet, 2009). Acceptance threats often arise from clashes between individual socio-cultural differences and individual personalities when individuals feel that they fail to gain inclusion and acceptance from groups they consider they are natural members of due to culture, ethnicity, religion, or gender (Leary, 2005). Even within cohesive group settings, categorisation threats can also occur when individual personalities feel they are being treated as group members instead of on their individual merits (Amenta et al*.,* 2017). However, the extent to which group members act and react to perceived threats differs according to their psychological significance, commitment, and loyalty to their group (Turquet, 2009).

Social Identity and Job Insecurity

When people first meet, at some point during their conversation, people generally ask, "What is your line of work?" or "What do you do for a living?" Whether we are aware of it or not, stating our employment position is often an ideal way of defining our status in relation to others.

Social identity and status are core latent functions of work and employment (Jahoda, 1997). Therefore, when an individual's employment status is threatened, it can impact how they behave concerning that status and their well-being and overall sense of identity.

From a social identity perspective, employment can be seen as part of a social group, forming part of that individual's self-concept (Haslam, 2004; Turner et al*.,* 1987). Employment status provides the individual with an identity or social definition that defines their place in society (Tajfel & Turner, 1986, pp. 15–16). However, employment is more than simply group membership. It attaches substantial psychological and emotional significance, with an innate desire and motivation to be part of social groupings that provide positive status, security and legitimacy while simultaneously providing differentiation between in and out-groups. For example, employed (us) vs. unemployed (them), which again acts to elevate their status (Warr, 1982).

Individuals tend to display favourable behaviours and attitudes towards their in-group than those toward other out-groups (Tajfel, 1973). However, it is also important to remember that being employed is only one of the many social identities a person can simultaneously assume, such as being married, a parent, a carer, a volunteer, a member of a club or team, etc. These identities are not given equal relevance or salience to a person simultaneously, as they depend on the social context they are acting upon, ultimately deciding which is more salient at a given time (Tajfel, 1978; Turner et al., 1987; Haslam, 2004). However, in an environment where job insecurity is significant, the social identity as an employed person is particularly salient and threatened.

People rarely consider or reflect upon their employment status in everyday secure employment situations. Therefore, their social identity as employed will not be salient to them and is less likely to affect their attitude, behaviour, or well-being. However, suppose their employment

position becomes insecure or threatened. In that case, the individual is alerted to the threat of becoming associated with the insecure, unwanted social category or out-group (unemployed), contrasting to their secure social group (employment). In this situation, an individual's social identity as an employed person becomes more salient.

The process of identity salience can be initiated by various factors, including the changing status of an out-group (Ashford & Mael, 1989), in-group behaviours, dynamics, composition (Arnold et al., 2016), or even individual mobility (Turner, 1979). In a context where job insecurity prevails, the defining group-based line would be the border between employment and unemployment. Job insecurity involves the anticipation of unemployment as a core element; these perceived or actual threats to employment status as an identity will become salient and may highlight other layers of identity (Tajfel & Turner, 1986).

Individuals evaluate their status within a group setting, comparing themselves with what they consider a prototypical group member or perceived representative of that group (Turner et al., 1987). However, divergence from this prototypical member would signify a reduction in cohesion or belonging, which could ultimately threaten that part of their identity (Haslam, 2004). This applies to working environments where concerns over job security are not considered a prototypical element of being employed on a permanent contract (De Cuyper & De Witte, 2006). Individuals often define themselves by their work, and it could be considered part of who they are. Therefore, when their working position is insecure, they are more likely to feel less prototypical than other typically employed people, which would be perceived as a threat to that part of their identity as an employed person.

In conclusion, empirical research and theoretical reasoning have indicated that job insecurity will firstly trigger an awareness of one's employment status (salience), which will go on to highlight the precariousness of their situation or not prototypical and secure and ultimately

threatening their identity as employed persons. However, as in most areas of life, threats or perceived threats in any form often consciously or unconsciously initiate countermeasures or consequences to try and mitigate the situation.

Job Insecurity Threats and Consequences

Job insecurity is a significant life stressor (Naswall & Hellgren, 2007). Even a perceived threat to job security and the social aspects associated with employment can induce a range of negative behaviours and ultimately outcomes for the individual (Cheng & Chan, 2008; Gilboa et al., 2008). Threats to the self and social identity can manifest in various physical, emotional, and psychological effects that impact an individual's well-being (Haslam et al., 2009). A correlation exists between being unable to maintain valued group membership and poor health outcomes (Van Dick & Haslam, 2012). When individuals can no longer identify with their group, in this case, the employed population, they are more likely to feel that they no longer belong and feel socially excluded (Baumeister & Leary, 1995). This can induce stress, anxiety, depression, reduced immune system response and even increases the risk of suicide (Van Dick & Haslam, 2012).

Within the working environment, for individuals who felt that their position had become threatened and marginalised, separated from the prototypical group/employed members, loyalty would begin to wane. Those affected would not expend effort and display behaviours associated with the group, effectively disassociating themselves from the group. Suppose people experience threats to job insecurity and subsequently threats to their social identity as members of the group of employed persons. In that case, they are less likely to exhibit behaviour that supports the interests and norms of that group (Van Knippenberg, 2000). For example, one of the core values that is considered prototypical to employment is being seen to "work hard" (Furnham, 1984). However, if individuals do not identify sufficiently with this aspect of their role as employed, this can affect their job performance.

Van Knippenberg's 2000 review of existing empirical evidence connecting social identity and performance demonstrated that organisational/job performance could be affected by social identity as individual choice/action often overrides employment requirements (Van Knippenberg, 2000). Therefore, individuals who feel less attached to the "employed" group may be less inclined to make an effort on behalf of the interests of their fellow employees.

Theoretical support for the argument that increased job insecurity leads to a weaker identity as an employed person can be found in psychological research outside the social identity literature. Although not directly referring to social identity theory, Siegrist (1996) viewed employment as playing a pivotal role in providing status, in what he termed occupational status control, with job insecurity reducing control and a direct threat to one's occupational status. While many theoretical approaches neglect employment status as defining a social group, Social Identity Theory focuses on this as a core element, with an individual's attitudes, behaviour and expectations influenced by their position within their group (self-categorisation), group norms, and group status (social comparison).

Relating social identity to job insecurity makes group-related social behaviour easier to identify, as employment provides a particular social category membership, with attitudes and behaviours associated with that identity. While job insecurity also creates attitudes and behaviours related to the perceived threat to their working and financial position that comes with being in the unemployed social category. Within organisational behaviour literature, a psychological contract violation can also be explained with the help of social identity theory (Rousseau & McLean Parks, 1993). An organisation can function as a social identity-relevant category for an employee, on which social norms, rules, behaviour, and expectations are created. Therefore, organisational behaviour that violates these norms and expectations threatens the self.

In conclusion, social identity's focus on group membership salience and threats illustrates that job insecurity increases an individual's sense of identity as an employed person simply because it threatens to remove it. It also highlights that people who perceive high levels of job insecurity feel less prototypical in their employment status, reducing their identity as an employed person. To understand the specific changes in voluntary sector workplaces, it is necessary to first consider broader changes in working conditions in the years leading up to the introduction of austerity measures. These years were dominated by neoliberalism and New Capitalism, which had a significant impact on workplace culture. In the next chapter, I will introduce Richard Sennett's work, which, when combined with social identity theory, provides a mechanism to understand these changes and their effects.

Chapter Six - Richard Sennett's: The Personal Consequences of Work

Social identity theory originates in workplace studies, but its conclusions are broader than that single context. While social identity theory offers a well-suited toolkit for understanding the origins of identity within the voluntary sector, without a theoretical lens through which to understand cultural changes in the workplace of the voluntary sector, any conclusions about changes in identity would be speculative and lacking in theoretical backing. It was, therefore, necessary to utilise a theoretical add-on that could link workplace changes to identity. Richard Sennett's work on the influence and impacts of neoliberalism on the workplace was a particularly appropriate one as the responses to reductions in funding within the voluntary sector have often involved efforts to cut costs and to increase the productivity of those working there, often at the expense of the traditionally, people-centred approach. Social identity theory can be used to understand how people relate to their identities when they are threatened or challenged. Changes in a workplace culture could make people want to cling to that identity in the face of difficulty, but can also drive them away if the stress becomes too much. By implementing those changes, senior managers in the voluntary sector are adopting new capitalism's business-first approach, but that has the potential to threaten the sector's identity and purpose. In this chapter, I will explore those aspects of Richard Sennett's work that can be used to understand these changes in the voluntary sector, which might trigger the salience of voluntary sector workers' social identities.

Richard Sennett is a highly regarded contemporary sociologist with an impressive list of working credentials, including founding and directing New York University's Institute of the Humanities, chairing a United Nations Commission on Urban Development and Design, being President of the American Council on Work, and chairing the London School of Economics Cities programme. Sennett's works have mainly concentrated on the development of cities and

the nature of work in modern society. His works include "*The Corrosion of Character"* (1998)*, which explores how new forms of work are changing our communal and personal experience; "*Respect: The Formation of Character in an Age of Equality"* (2004)*, which explores the relationship between work and reforms of the welfare system; "*The Culture of the New Capitalism"* (2006) which goes on to provide an overview of these changes; and "*Authority"* (1980) which is an essay in political theory that addresses the tools of interpretation by which we define power as either a legitimate or an illegitimate authority.

As this thesis revolves around how austerity has been felt by those working within the voluntary and community sector in the North-East of England during the Tory-led coalition government's implementation of austerity measures, I consider that Sennett also provides valuable insight into the consequences felt by the workforce due to the neoliberal revival or new capitalism, which he alludes to in *'The Corrosion of Character'* (1998). This research illustrates the interlinked nature of sociology and economics and how political ideology changes can impact an individual's character or identity.

Neoliberalism and new capitalism have become synonymous with promoting competition, corporations, multinational enterprises and the globalisation of finance, production, and trade. To put Sennett's New Capitalism into context requires it to be contrasted with the form of social capitalism from 1948 to the mid-1970s. In that period, powerful unions, large-scale corporations, and the welfare state functioned as an overarching patriarchal protector against the inherent economic and social instability created by capitalist markets, which had, by and large, successfully diluted the social and economic risks through the provision of mass employment within their extensive and multiple levels of services. This form of social capitalism effectively ended in 1979 with the election of Thatcher's Conservative government and its subsequent adoption of Friedrich Hayek's neoliberal ideology. The clue was in the name. This new capitalism lacked any 'social' or 'we' element, emphasising individualism, self-

reliance, and a dramatic rolling back of state support and provisions (Doogan, 2009). This ultimately led to a lack of investment and the withdrawal of subsidies to traditional heavy industries, resulting in a massive decline in coal mining, shipbuilding, and agriculture, decimating communities reliant on these industries and dramatically increasing unemployment (Berry, 2015).

Even under Blair's (1997-2007) supposedly socialist government, little changed ideologically. New Labour embraced market economics and relied on public-private partnerships and private finance initiatives, indicating that neoliberalism or new capitalism was here to stay (Fairclough, 2005). This neoliberal sabotage of social capitalism effectively vilified socialism, the welfare state and support as nurturing dependency and suppressing self-reliance. As a result, the desire to be free from institutional constraints reduced the commitment to provide mass employment, led to a systematic dismantling of unions' scope and influence (Davis, 2021), weakened corporate institutions, and massively scaled back the welfare state (Morroni, 2018) which had for decades collectively and very successfully mitigated social instability and risk.

Neoliberal politics advocates freeing citizens from the shackles of the state and other institutions, endorses flexibility and versatility across working, management and production and implicitly promises to liberate workers from strict working time measures and disperse power to the workers. However, new capitalism requires people who thrive in flexible, insular environments devoid of stable relationships and shared social time (Sennett, 1998). The neoliberal pursuit of freedom and flexibility simply concentrates power structures and control into the hands of a small number of individuals. Any rhetoric of "setting us free" and the espousal of self-responsibility and teamwork is used to obscure this fact (Friedman, 1982).

Two generations later, this form of New Capitalism has successfully permeated society. There is now a culture of capitalism with shared, institutionalised beliefs. Moreover, those beliefs

have become so engrained that there is no stigma or mass outrage towards social inequality. As a result, the electorate has become numb to the government's open rejection of collectivism, intervention, subsidies, and welfare support in favour of free market forces.

Job Insecurity and Identity

During these turbulent political and socio-economic changes, Sennett turned his research towards studying peoples' experience of New Capitalism's flexible working conditions. He conducted this research in industry-leading and advanced corporations where their broader social significance provides moral direction and social regulation. He looked at how changes in their working relationships, management practices, and use of new technologies impacted workers' ability to manage their work requirements. Although Sennett interviewed a comparatively modest number of participants, his social critique used his detailed studies of people's experiences to reveal the hidden consequences of the new capitalist ideology. Sennett's qualitative research found that this flexibility created uncertainty and insecurity, undermining their character or sense of identity. Although insecurity is a subjective issue, he discovered that work-based changes removed objective criteria by which workers could assess their self-development, which impacted their sense of security, such as measuring the level of professionalism, competencies and skills base, stable working relationships, formal career paths, and the risk of redundancy.

Sennett's findings were supported by (Ashford et al., 1989).   A decade later, Burchell et al.'s 1999 research on subjective employment insecurity in the UK examined the perceived risk of losing valued job features. Burchell found that feelings of job insecurity in the late 1990s were higher than at any point since the Second World War (Burchell, 2014). However, based on employment statistics, job insecurity declined between 1997 and 2005 (Green, 2009). New Labour's promotion of capitalist ideals, with its propensity for profit margins and competitive working environments, introduced competitive contracts with more flexible, part-time,

temporary, and short fixed-term contracts and often transitionary working conditions and practices. On the face of it, this approach worked, as it increased the number of people gaining all types of employment.

However, Sennett's sociological discourse surrounding this new capitalism and its personal consequences as a political and social revolution highlighted an increase in workplace insecurity in what he describes as an "age of insecurity" (Elliott, 2022). This spectre overshadows employees' sense of stability, status, achievement, and motivation and effectively undermines or corrodes workers' sense of social and moral identity. Contemporary sociologists, such as Anthony Giddens, Ulrich Beck and Manuel Castells, support Sennett's stance on the "age of insecurity" The "age of insecurity" has been typified and intensified in recent years by neoliberal agendas, unregulated financial services, run-away inflation, increased living costs and global recession. These factors have resulted in widespread fears of reduced hours, redundancies, increased unemployment, in-work poverty, and the use of short-term, zero-hour and temporary working contracts.

Others looking at the proportion of workers on temporary contracts and threats of unemployment in the UK, EU and OECD from the mid-1980s to 2006 found no indication of an overall increase in insecurity (Auer & Cazes, 2004; Doogan, 2005; Erlinghagen & Knuth, 2009; Fevre, 2007). Strangleman (2007) criticised Sennett as simply being nostalgic for a bygone industrial age and that technological advancements had replaced old industries and created new employment opportunities.

In 2007, temporary employment in the UK stood at 12%. However, since the 2008 financial crisis, temporary employment has remained low and relatively stable, with 6.4% of those working (OECD, 2011). Economists suggest that job insecurity may follow capitalist economic cycles (Rodrik & Stantcheva, 2021). However, before Thatcher introduced this new form of

capitalism in the UK, the vast majority of industrial, labour-intensive apprenticeships and vocational careers were often considered to be at least stable, long-term and, in many cases, a job for life (Flores, 2012).

From his observations and research, Sennett suggested that the neoliberal ideology driving this new capitalism initiated fundamental changes across all political, social, and economic institutions, employment, and work-life structures (Sennett, 2006). Economic activity through employment is an essential platform for providing financial, social and personal stability, security and the ability to engage in other activities (International Labour Organisation, 2021). In addition, employment is essential for creating individual and social identities (Selenko, 2017).

Sennett's qualitative study used detailed interviews with workers and workplace studies over almost 40 years. It revolved around discussions that compared and contrasted differences between a father and son's accounts of their life histories and experiences, from education, class status, work, social mobility, etc. On examining their historical and experiential accounts, Sennett concluded that a general 'Corrosion of Character' existed between their respective personal, social, and economic working life stories. Sennett argued that within a single generation, new capitalism had created uncertainty, insecurity, and high flexibility, especially for those working in insecure, short-term contract positions. It acted to undermine workplace and employee motivation and security to the extent that it corrodes their sense of social and moral identity, integrity and individual intention that were not previously evident in society (Sennett, 1998). Sennett suggests that this is because people greatly emphasise their achievements, education, and careers to the point that the relationship between their work and identity has become closely intertwined.

Furthermore, empirical evidence from many countries indicated that throughout the 1980s and 1990s, the adoption of new capitalism across many countries was significant (Fulcher, 1995). The growth of new capitalism correlates with increased job insecurity and what has been termed the "'decline of the job", which is particularly evident among professional workers across the private, public, and voluntary sectors (Zoo, 2023). Sennett felt that using short-term, flexible time or unstable working practices impeded working relationships that require shared collective time, experience, motivation, learning, trust, and commitment (Kuhn, 2016). Sennett stated: "Flexible short-term working relationships overtly undermine trust by rewarding those workers who shift most seamlessly between contexts and colleagues." (Sennett, 1998: 110)

Sennett (1998) asserted that specialisation, expertise or following a particular career path often requires a select range of formal qualifications, skills, and competencies. Having gained them, employees expect to attain a high level of career progression, remuneration, status, and security (Minahan, 2021). In contrast, employers' preference for flexible working regimes that require employees to change roles constantly undermines the need for specialisation and career paths, demotivates and disenfranchises workers, as these roles or activities lack direction and purpose. Sennett voiced his subjects' frustration by paraphrasing their words: "You are always starting over" (Sennett, 1998: 84).

After reviewing large-scale quantitative data sets, Doogan and Fevre criticised Sennett for neglecting to provide empirical evidence to support his study, suggesting that his findings were mere "assertions rather than analysis" (Tweedie, 2013). There is often a disconnect between quantitative and qualitative studies (Foos, 2006). However, Sennett argues that quantitative data provides information that is often misleading. The statistics can suggest increased employment levels across all sectors without describing whether it is full-time or part-time, flexible, or of limited duration (Sennett, 2006).

In contrast, Sennett's qualitative interviews are multifaceted and explore people's real-life work experiences, including the pressures and uncertainties they encounter. Such stresses include those arising out of competitive short-term contracts, zero-hour contracts, reduced opportunities for career progression, and conflicts arising out of poor work-life balance, where work commitment overshadows the commitment to upholding family life commitments. Sennett contends this to be a conflict between good work and good character that typifies flexible working arrangements (Sennet, 1998: 31). These working conditions actively discourage close working relationships as weak attachments are a prerequisite for the easy movement of employees from one area or group to another. Kelliher argued that these flexible practices degrade the worker and give the tasks a menial status, undermining the craft or skill and any aspiration or motivation (Kelliher, 2013). However, Sennett argues that most craftsmen prefer "to do a job well for its own sake" (Sennett, 2009).

Across all sectors, different roles require different skill sets with varying skill levels and competencies. However, professionalism, specialism and craftsmanship require a high level of skill and time attained through repetition of one's craft to provide a high-quality product or service. Unfortunately, most working environments now demand quick profits, fast turnover times, and immediate results, so adaptation and flexibility are rewarded rather than gradual mastery.

Sennett's critique of flexible working conditions under New Capitalism concludes that these flexible working conditions can damage workers' self-identity or character. Zero-hours contracts decisively illustrate the temporality of these working conditions, as millions of workers are bound to contracts that force them to survive unwaged while not working but available on call at all times, in case work arises. Zero-hours contracts meet the employer's needs but clearly at the employee's expense (Harvey, 1990). Even after the advent of Universal Credit as a safety net to ensure a minimum income for those on zero-hours contracts, being

able to report hours and receive a benefit uplift is often problematic, with recipients frequently having to appeal payments, overpayments, and arrears (Figaredo & Basu, 2018)**.**

Since the birth of new capitalism, the profit-seeking animal has been allowed to devour workplace stability, security, and craftsmanship across public and private sector organisations. This quest for quick profits and reducing costs may have been easy to disguise within mainstream public service sector environments through reduced funding and a rolling back of services under successive governments. When 2008's Global Financial Crisis led to widespread redundancies, bankruptcy, unemployment and wage reductions across all working sectors, governments responded with austerity. The Conservative-Liberal Democrat coalition government sold the policy as the only road to recovery, where all would share the burden. Still, they implemented the most brutal, uncaring, damaging, and wide-sweeping public sector government cuts seen for generations, which hit the poorest the hardest. The measures were later revealed to be an opportunist attempt to implement further the neoliberal agenda of minimising state support and intervention.

As the country was coming to terms with the impact of the financial crisis, it was an arduous task to secure any employment. Employers were in a powerful position when it came to providing contracts and negotiating wages, with many full-time employees receiving part-time wages for full-time work. As economic recovery was slow and uncertain, employers quickly adopted an approach of flexible, short-term and zero-hour employment contracts, which only increased the levels of uncertainty and unpredictability among their employees.

Sennett suggested that the introduction of new capitalism altered the nature of corporate society, and implementing short-term employment relationships has created a conflict that is responsible for the "*Corrosion of Character"* (Sennett, 1998). Sennett argues that the absence of long-term working relationships erodes trust, loyalty, motivation, and mutual commitment.

Equally, short-term work experiences that drift from job to job compromise an individual's character, as a fragmented working life does not provide stability to one's life or character.

Critics argue that Sennett's work lacks solid empirical evidence and references to other such works. However, Sennett argues that he is presenting a qualitative philosophical and theoretical argument that is rich in content, deals with individuals' real-life experiences, and illustrates how the social organisation of work under New Capitalism is destabilising working relationships and character and that if it lacks statistical data, then researchers can find empirical evidence to support his findings elsewhere.

This research illustrates the interlinked nature of sociology and economics and how changes in political ideology can impact an individual's character or identity. Therefore, the application of both Tajfel and Turner's identity theory and Sennett's study into the Corrosion of Character and New Capitalism provide a framework for this qualitative ethnographical study, as this thesis revolves around how 'austerity' has been felt by those working within the voluntary and community sector in the North-East of England during the Tory-led coalition government's implementation of austerity measures.

Tajfel and Turner's (1986) social identity theory provides focus on the ideas and cognitive perceptions people hold about their personal, social, and working environment and how these perceptions influence behaviour based on these social descriptors to provide them with personal or social validation and stability, giving meaning to their social situations. This form of self-categorisation places the individual at the centre of social group processes. Therefore, changes or threats to an individual's position initiate a cognitive and behavioural response. Sennett's works complement social identity theory for this thesis, as they mainly concentrate on the nature of work in modern society and how the changes in relation to work, reforms,

power, welfare, and, in particular, the creation of a new form of capitalism provide valuable insight into the consequences of these changes on our communal and personal experience.

Chapter Seven - Methodology

Introduction

This Methodology systematically details my research aims and questions, epistemological approach and design, and positionality of the study. It continues with the various data collection and sampling methods, interview structure and reflective accounts, followed by a comprehensive range of ethical considerations, concerns and consent. It concludes with a look at the practical issues encountered during the interviews.

Research Aims and Questions

My research explores how austerity has been experienced and felt, in terms of the human cost, for those working in the voluntary and community sector within the North-East of England. How the advent of austerity has created several challenges that have impacted or influenced their social identities.

My work will achieve this by addressing the following research questions, which concentrate on key areas that affect both paid staff and volunteers:

- What are the experiences of third-sector managers and volunteers during the years of austerity that followed the financial crisis in 2008, and were those experiences a direct result of austerity?
- What are the effects of austerity on the staff and volunteer's social identity?
- What are the views of staff and volunteers on the government's rhetoric of austerity?

Epistemological Approach

Sociological research is often heavily influenced by the researcher's social or scientific interest, knowledge, and the setting of a particular phenomenon. As the focus of this research is how

austerity is felt by managers, staff, and volunteers within the charitable and voluntary sector in terms of their professional and social identity, it is essential to realize that it has political, social, and personal dimensions. Therefore, care must be taken to select the most appropriate epistemological approach as a philosophical tool that supports and guides the material conditions, practicalities, and direction of my research aims, objectives and research questions.

On the political stage, austerity is viewed as a **p**ositivist economic phenomenon**.** Positivism focuses on the ontological belief that reality is measurable and only encompasses what can be directly observed. (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Tashakkori *et al.,* 2021). Government rhetoric on austerity would have us believe it should be viewed in terms of cause and effect. The cause was the irregular global financial practices, which created a financial crisis, followed by the effect of the fiscal counter action (austere measures) to bring it back to equilibrium. (Patvardhan & Gehman, 2013).

From a sociological perspective, this ontological, deductive, external view of cause and effect is misleading. It is totally devoid of human involvement and broader social implications. In contrast, the epistemological perspective of constructivism provides an inductive approach that argues that knowledge and reality are not objective and exterior but subjective and socially constructed (Bergr & Luckmann, 1966). This perspective places people at the centre as conscious, purposeful social actors who interact to create related respective perceptions of reality, with continued social interactions becoming internalized, habitual, and reciprocal, and ultimately embedded or institutionalized as social knowledge or beliefs (Nickerson, 2013).

Constructivism is an active, contextualized process where people continually construct knowledge rather than acquire it. Each person possesses unique perceptions, interpretations and construction of knowledge and reality based on their experiences within a given environment. Individuals build on prior experiences and cultural factors, which they

continuously reassess through the processes of social communication and negotiation. This makes the constructivist approach an ideal qualitative approach for exploring how austerity is felt by those working in the charitable and community sector (Kozleski, 2017). The participants have prior knowledge of the unregulated banking practices that were the cause of the financial crisis and the government's extreme fiscal response that reversed state intervention. However, the effect in terms of the human cost of those measures has been largely neglected. This study concentrates on the effects by researching how austerity has been felt by managers, staff, and volunteers in the community sector in terms of their professional and social identity (Breitstein & Dini, 2011).

Social constructionism is flexible, fluid, and ideal for gathering conscious experiences, feelings, views, perceptions, and meanings. It focuses on how the participants understand and construct their social and professional identities, often reciprocal and negotiable ongoing processes. It also sits well with identity theory, which concerns notions of self and social identities and how individuals perceive and construct their societal roles, often based on group membership. In this case, those working and volunteering within the community and voluntary sector in the North-East of England during the time of austerity (Reid et al*.,* 2018). Personal narratives provide an ideal descriptive medium to explore how our identities are constructed, as they reveal how we perceive ourselves and externalize those roles to other people (Vaara *et al.,* 2016). However, we must not forget that it is a two-way process as narratives construct people, and people construct narratives from which they form their identities. Therefore, it is crucial to concentrate on the relationship between how austerity was felt or experienced and the effect, if any, it had on their social and professional identity by focusing on the participants' narratives of their role/practice, the resources available to them and how they are used.

The nature/nurture debate and other criticism of social constructivism state that those outside societies may not share observed reality, as people often act out their permitted roles, which acts to shape and control them and, therefore, an artifice of that society, which can often be predicted (Galbin, 2014). Young and Collin (2004) suggest that "social facts" are temporally, ontologically, and logically dependent on "natural" or "brute facts". Natural facts exist independently of language; thus, a "mountain" is a mountain in every language and no language; it simply is what it is, whereas, within social construction methods, some categories only exist because people agree to act as if they exist, such as position, money and citizenship. It is easy to see the logic in this argument when different societies do things differently within their cultural norms and social and belief structures.

However, Michel Foucault and Steve Woolgar, amongst others, have also used social constructionism to relate what science has typically characterized as objective facts to the processes of social construction. In doing so, they illustrate that human subjectivity also imposes itself on the facts we take to be objective through the medium of language, not solely the other way around, suggesting that every theory has merit in proportion to its explanatory powers (Davidoff, 2019). Unsurprisingly, the social constructionist approach has been widely applied to research within the voluntary and community sector, as the sector itself is a social entity that thrives on its socially responsive solutions to social issues. Additionally, it has been used as a tool for exploring and discussing representations of knowledge, thought processes (Jovchelovitch & Bauer, 2007), conflicts, control (Kreutzer & Jager, 2011), governance (Haas, 2015), values alignment (Harding, 2015), and social dynamics within society and within the sector itself (Chadwick-Coule, 2010).

Positionality

My position as a Manager, working in the voluntary and community sector, is intrinsically linked to my research in this area. Philanthropy exists in all cultures, where people come together to organize and collaborate for the betterment of society. However, it is fair to say that in an increasingly materialistic global environment, the divisions between rich and poor have increased exponentially. Unfortunately, empathy, social conscience and philanthropy as a professional pursuit are often spoken of as 'other' or third sector, suggesting a demoted status, an almost afterthought. That is, unless you're one of the many millions of individuals who require and depend upon their support, then their status is elevated to fundamental, critical, vital, and a lifeline.

I grew up in Iran, a country devoid of a welfare state or independent voluntary and community sector. My first experience of philanthropy came from my mother, who was very compassionate and caring and actively helped 22 Afghani refugee families living close by in Iran. Many local people would make fun of them and look down on these families as uneducated and low-class mountain people. In contrast, my mother would befriend the mothers, make clothes for them and their children, and provide food and meals for them. She dearly believed in and would talk to us about what I now know to be karma, paying forward and social responsibility. Ideas way ahead of what is currently socially on trend, which I feel I have unconsciously taken on board as my social norm. Although my family had a comfortable income and lifestyle, throughout my childhood and youth, I was actively encouraged and involved with supporting refugee families from surrounding countries who were fleeing from war, the Taliban and poverty. This experience gave me valuable insight into issues affecting people, such as illiteracy, poverty, disability, homelessness, and displacement, and how easily an individual's circumstances could change.

In Iran, the regime claims absolute custodianship over its people, with overarching patriarchal controls that actively suppress non-government-controlled voluntary engagement. It is highly suspicious of organizations promoting ideas of civil society. In 2016, the Iranian government required all non-profit organizations, before conducting any activities, to apply for a license through national, provincial, or county supervisory councils made up of government officials. These supervisory councils have complete control and actively monitor and supervise all activities carried out by non-profit organizations. They even make decisions about registration applications, areas of activities, board members, and fundraising methods. Strict legislation allows the Iranian government to selectively encourage associations that operate exclusively in safe non-political areas, such as education and health while criminalising areas such as human and minority rights and fundamental freedoms. As a result, Iranian non-profit organizations are government-sponsored GONGOs and must be approved by the government (Naim, 2009).

In the past few years, the government initiated a new form of philanthropy called nazr-e-farhangi (cultural vow), with deep financial and ideological ties to the Iranian regime. However, government sponsorship and control limit what organisations can do. A lack of transparency and accountability combined with fraud by charitable foundations, such as the Waqf Bureau, have damaged the reputation and credibility of these philanthropic entities and harmed public trust. This policy leaves these civic associations in a vague environment with no operating autonomy. Despite Iranians' appreciation for kindness and generosity, their material values, wealth, and individualistic ideology have outgrown trust, help and reciprocity, and they are reluctant to work together in groups, mistrusting others outside of their families. Instead, extended families often provide loans for each other in cases of health or financial emergency and to provide educational support for their children.

Without a welfare state, a comprehensive independent network of voluntary and community organizations has arisen. Government charitable relief exists from organizations, such as the Behzeestei committee, which provides support by feeding those in need. However, the qualifying criteria for such relief are incredibly stringent, and a significant waiting list exists. Today in Iran, philanthropy remains a personal, socially responsive, but quiet pursuit, which struggles to gain institutionalized status due to a mix of cultural issues, political policies and lack of infrastructure that actively discourage citizens from civic participation activities.

When I came to the UK as a student, I volunteered with Fightback Charity, where I gained first-hand experience of volunteering and later became employed as a part-time manager. I was initially very surprised to find that even in a wealthy country like the UK, the issues of poverty, homelessness, disability, and refugees still exist. However, in sharp contrast to Iran, the UK has a National Health Service providing universal free health care and many other state welfare benefits to support those in need. It also has a massive, well-organised, and structured voluntary sector independent from both local and central government and distinct from the public and private sectors. It comprises 165,758 voluntary organizations, generating an income of £57.7bn in (2019/20), with a workforce of almost 1 million people, two-thirds the size of the NHS workforce.

In contrast to the public and private sectors, the voluntary sector focuses exclusively on creating social impact and community change by providing essential services and resources to those in need. As an independent entity, the voluntary sector promotes democracy and equality through social and political activism and actively confronts areas of oppression, inequality, and unfairness, even when this means challenging government policy. However, even though the sector is independent, it is still closely affiliated via contracts with the public sector. Therefore, social, economic and political changes often adversely affect the sector.

Fightback Charity works with individuals and families from the most marginalized and vulnerable sections of society in Sunderland and the surrounding area. The assistance Fightback offers includes help with issues related to old age, disability, and physical or mental health issues. It is part of a much larger community of practice, including the wider Connect Network of churches, community projects, social support organizations and the national refugee network.

I have worked for Fightback Charity for over 15 years. During this time, I have personally experienced and observed the impact of reduced incomes, unemployment, job insecurity and loss of status amongst managers, workers, and volunteers within a range of community sector organizations as a direct result of the government's austerity measures. I have incorporated elements of my own experiences into my research, along with those of my participants, to demonstrate the commonality of the impact of austerity across the sector, which I feel is important to convey the depth of feeling and create a deeper understanding of this research. Highlighting this problem as a collective concern can catalyze future safeguarding against job insecurity and policy change. Critically focusing on austerity in terms of social and professional identity is important as instability impacts workplace interactions, employee relations and the organizations themselves. To address this problem, I have already attempted to influence and build financial, structural, social, and professional workplace resilience by attending third-sector forums, sharing areas of best practice, highlighting areas of concern, and advocating on behalf of smaller projects.

I acknowledge that my position as a charity manager may place me in a privileged position when conducting critical research in this area, as many of the participants share similar socio-economic backgrounds, which could be seen as a limitation of my data; conversely, it also enables me to gain access to a range of managers, workers, and volunteers from a variety of

different organizations. I base my research perspective on my role as a manager within a small community-based charity in Sunderland that struggled for survival during austerity. I witnessed the demise of other projects and the upheaval this caused for their employees and volunteers. I believe that greater government appreciation and protection of the vital work carried out by the extensive range of voluntary sector organisations is essential, as, in times of austerity, these very organizations keep the social fabric of the nation in motion. I frame my thinking on austerity to the experiences of myself and my colleagues. I often reflect on the social impact and personal sacrifices they have endured to maintain financial stability throughout my research.

Research Design

Research design is essential, as it helps the researcher to clarify the specific research questions. As I am exploring the human cost of austerity for those working in the community and voluntary sector, I decided that the most appropriate approach to frame the research design is through the lens of ethnography and by supporting this with my own auto-ethnographic insights. Ethnography as a separate discipline has a long history dating back to Gerhard Friedrich Muller (1705-1783). However, it wasn't until 1767 that the term was introduced into academic discourse. Ethnographic research is commonly used to study a comprehensive range of social, political, religious, and cultural groups and organizations. Ethnography is a type of social research that explores subjective cultural and social experiences. It involves examining the behaviours of people and groups in different social situations and then trying to understand the group's interpretation of this behaviour. Using ethnography will enable me to focus on how people subjectively construct their reality and knowledge through experience and reflection.

Ethnography is often used alongside other methodological frameworks, for instance, in an action research program of study where one of the goals is to change and improve the situation.

This ethnographical research will also include elements of auto-ethnography. For example, Karl Heider (1975) self-referred to the people he was studying. As the participants provided personal experiences that he linked to larger belief systems, he considered this to be autoethnographic. From this, researchers began to clearly state their positionality within the research to indicate how their presence as a (cultural insider or outsider) could potentially alter the group's behaviour (Darwin, 2020).   However, Brisola and Cury believed there was value in the researcher inserting their own experience, insight, and identity within the research they conducted using ethnographies of their own people (Brisola & Curry, 2016).

Conducting this research as a voluntary sector organisation manager enabled me to draw on, analyse, interpret, and compare my lived experience working within the voluntary and community sector during austerity with my colleagues and how austerity measures impacted my social and professional identity. In approaching this ethnographical research, I aimed to be holistic. I sought to provide a history and background of the area of study in question, including the participants' age, gender and working or volunteering positions. My study was interested in understanding the less tangible aspects of their working culture, such as their values and the "ethos" of their working environment.

All prospective participants who work or volunteer in the voluntary and community sector were asked to participate, and consent was gained (via consent forms).   A qualitative data collection method is employed as qualitative methods are more fluid and allow for greater flexibility by concentrating on gathering individual views, feelings, ideas, and perceptions from a first-person viewpoint (Somekh & Lewin, 2005) and rejects the notion that reality is objective and exterior.

Methods

This section will detail how the target sample was selected, their recruitment, and other issues relating to consent and privacy. It will then continue to discuss the data collection methods and the sources of the data, including semi-structured interviews, archival documentation, auto-ethnographic insights, and practical issues encountered during the research.

This narrative research employs qualitative data collection methods to understand the human cost of austerity on those working in the community and voluntary sector in the North-East regarding how they feel it has affected their professional role and social identity (Hampton & Duncan, 2011). The data was collected through qualitative semi-structured interviews, with recordings of conversations with participants. The participants provided detailed descriptions of their experiences, which enabled qualitative inductive analysis to extract individual meanings, perceptions, beliefs, and the modes of practice of their specific identity roles within voluntary and community organisations. I employed this type of naturalistic enquiry using qualitative methods because it gave the participants a voice and enabled them to be heard and reflect on issues that affected them socially and professionally. It was also the most appropriate method of exploring the participants' perceptions and feelings. It allowed an in-depth, detailed understanding of meaning, attitudes, intentions, behaviours and non-observable and observable phenomena (Cohen et al., 2011).

Sampling

Choosing a suitable sample for data collection is as essential as any other aspect of research and, therefore, must be a suitable representation of the phenomena you are trying to investigate. Qualitative research concentrates on meanings and ideas, is rich in content, uses smaller, carefully selected samples, is more natural and flexible, and works well with inductive research (Mohajan, 2018). Sampling is simply the process of selecting units (such as people or

organisations) from a chosen population of interest, and by studying this sample, it can provide a small-scale representation of a given population as a whole, from which conclusions will be drawn (Emmel, 2013). Non-probabilistic sampling methods include quotas, judgement, extensive, and convenience sampling (Sapsford & Jupp, 2006). However, as it is almost impossible to sample an entire population, nonprobability sampling techniques have been selected for this research. My area of study has been extracted from my work within the charitable sector, so my sampling method is a mix of 'convenience' and 'judgemental or purposive sampling'.

When conducting ethnographical research, the ethnographic researcher aims to gather what is relatively available in local, everyday, normative settings to research what people do, what they say and how they work. It is rich in detail and can identify patterns of social interaction and extract the personal perspectives of the participants. In this instance, it is convenient that, firstly, within my professional role as a Charity Manager, I have an extensive community of practice and, therefore, access to both managers and volunteers within the community and voluntary sector. Secondly, it aligns with my area of research on how austerity is felt by those working in the voluntary and community sector in terms of professional and social identity. At the same time, it is also judgmental or purposive, given that the subject matter directly relates to the purpose of the research, my position and the availability of participants selected at the discretion of the judge (myself) rather than just a random selection. This is also known as deliberate sampling because the participants have been selected based on the research requirements, with associated advantages, such as access to the sample group, cost-effectiveness, and efficiency due to excluding those deemed unnecessary, which reduces unrelated data.

I also feel that being 'human' involves being interested in what 'austerity' means in terms of how they experience it and feel it, which adds value to the research as in a time of 'austerity' the interview participants have first-hand knowledge themselves and a broader perspective gained from service users who experience material deprivation, unemployment, inequality, homelessness, and disability. However, there will always be disadvantages, such as an element of sampling error that could creep in, introduced by problems related to fieldwork, the nature of the data collection instrument and difficulties pertaining to managing large amounts of data (Sapsford & Jupp, 2006). Therefore, researchers must ensure that such errors are minimised while using sampling.

Participant Recruitment

Ethnographical research gathers participants and information from what is readily available in their normative settings. This approach would also be considered convenience and purposive sampling, as I work as a charity manager in the charity sector and have access to managers and volunteers with first-hand experience of austerity while working in the sector and how it has impacted their professional and social identity. I sent emails to around 30 people inviting them to participate in the interview, stating the purpose of the interviews, etc. I also approached a further 20 people whom I work with or see on a weekly basis. Those willing to participate were contacted again, inviting them to a pre-interview meeting to discuss the details of the proposed research. A total of 20 people were recruited by selecting a mix of managers and volunteers from various community and voluntary groups in the region to give the broadest possible range from this sector. The participants were allowed to select where and when they would like to be interviewed, which I hoped would increase the levels of participation. The participants were also allowed to ask any questions about this research project that may arise, and all questions were answered openly and honestly before the interview commenced to ensure they were happy to participate.

Figure 1: Table of Participants

Ref	Name	Gender	Age Range	Charitable/Community Activity
1	Robert	Male	59-69	Charity Employee
2	Georgy	Female	39-49	Charity Employee
3	Joyce	Female	39-49	Charity Employee
4	Diane	Female	49-59	Charity Employee
5	Alan	Male	39-49	Charity Employee
6	Kevin	Male	49-59	Charity Employee
7	Erica	Female	49-59	Charity Employee
8	Alison	Female	29-39	Charity Employee
9	Christine	Female	39-49	Charity Employee
10	Susan	Female	29-39	Charity Employee
11	Denise	Female	29-39	Charity Volunteer
12	Doreen	Female	49-59	Charity Volunteer
13	Ronnie	Female	29-39	Charity Employee
14	Chris	Male	39-49	Charity Employee
15	Mary	Female	65 plus	Charity Volunteer
16	Paul	Male	59-69	Charity Employee
17	Keith	Male	49-59	Charity Employee
18	Pauline	Female	39-49	Charity Employee
19	Margaret	Female	49-59	Charity Employee
20	Mahmood	Male	29-39	Charity Volunteer

Research Participant Consent

This research was conducted in accordance with the British Sociological Association's (BSA) ethical guidelines. Participants in the interview were fully informed and provided with as much information as possible regarding the purpose of the research to ensure they were completely comfortable with participating in the interview process. It was also made clear that participation was entirely voluntary, and they could withdraw from the research at any stage for any reason. In addition, it was also made clear that if a respondent didn't want to answer a question for whatever reason or end the interview at any time, they could do so without having to justify it. Participants were also informed that all interviewees would remain confidential and that the digital recordings were only for the purposes of the interview and would only be listened to by the researcher involved in the interview. No one else would have access to the recordings, in whole or part. It was essential to give this reassurance because the research was conducted in a specific locality (Smith, 2004). In addition, participants would be contacted before the thesis submission to confirm if any quotes from their interviews had been used and to verify that they are satisfied and agree that their comments can continue to be included despite total anonymity. Anonymity will be maintained via pseudonyms or coded names attached to any interview quotes in the transcripts, the thesis itself and any future use of quotes.

Risks/Concerns

Due to the nature of this type of social research, there is no risk or concern that the influence of the interviewing sessions will seriously cause any distraction to participants' work. Furthermore, the Interview methods used within this study were designed to assist the participants in giving their opinions and experiences regarding the human costs of austerity on managers, volunteers, and service users in this area. Therefore, this study could not be thought

of as modifying the participants' knowledge, thinking, attitudes, feelings or behaviour; accordingly, there are no associated risks involved with the study.

Privacy

All participants were informed that any personal information given, including the recordings of the interview sessions and other relevant personal information, would not be used without first obtaining consent from the relevant individuals. In addition, interviewees' names were replaced with pseudonyms to protect the privacy of those involved. At the outset, it was also clear that all participants' interviews, including the transcripts, recordings, and contact details, would be stored in password-protected files. Any information shared by the participants is treated as confidential and will remain confidential throughout, and after the study is completed, the data will be destroyed. This approach aligns with guidelines suggested in Valentine (1997), which indicated that confidentiality and anonymity of participants are arguably the most critical aspects of any research process. After consenting to participate in the research, participants were required to sign a consent form to officially establish that they were happy to participate in this social research.

Data Collection Methods

This section will examine the data collection methods employed in this study, including an initial pilot study. This trial run enabled me to make the necessary adjustments for the main interviews. The main study incorporated a "triangulation" of data, with the primary source drawn from semi-structured interviews, which was then supported by archival documentation (secondary data) and the addition of auto-ethnographic insight. This section will conclude with a record of any practical issues I encountered during the data collection process.

Pilot Interviews

I conducted two semi-structured pilot interviews with the Executive Chair of Fightback Charity and the Regional Officer Coordinator from Christian Aid. The interviews consisted of themed, pre-prepared, open-ended questions related to answering the research question. The pilot highlighted a need to revise some of the interview questions and increase the duration of each interview, as 45 minutes was not sufficient to cover the questions.

Semi-Structured Interviews

For this research, I decided to use semi-structured interviews. This form of interview works well with ethnographical research to understand the relationship between the human cost of austerity on the role/social identity of those working in the community and voluntary sector, as these types of interviews gather qualitative, textural data. The semi-structured interviews consist of themed, pre-prepared, open-ended questions related to answering the research question. I developed the questions following the literature review within the boundaries of the research. Semi-structured interviews should consist of concise, open-ended questions that elicit lengthy and descriptive answers, with questions often leading onto other related issues, rather than close-ended questions which result in yes or no answers (Longhurst, 2006). Questions must also be knowledge specific to the participants' language skills, cultural background, age and gender, etc., and must not be leading questions to avoid bias. This probing form of qualitative research (semi-structured interviews) allows the flexibility to change the order of questions depending on the direction of the conversation, as semi-structured interviews provide themes or questions that need to be covered, which can vary accordingly (King & Horrocks, 2010).

I informed participants that a recording device would be used during the interviews to record all questions and answers. At the same time, I took additional notes to fill in the gaps or add comments that could be transcribed later.

Semi-structured interviews have advantages over other research methods, as they balance the flexibility of an open-ended conversation and the focus of a structured ethnographic survey (Hobson & Townsend, 2010). In addition, they allow flexibility by allowing a free-flowing conversation between the interviewer and the participant. Interviews provide a research method that can fill gaps in the knowledge base which other methods cannot address, such as surveys and questionnaires. They can investigate complex behaviours and motivations that other methods, particularly quantitative ones, often overlook. Interviews are frequently used to investigate subjective data, such as opinions, experiences, and meanings, and offer a more powerful relevance to the participant. They are also helpful when working with groups because they can compare and contrast differences of opinion. One of the main advantages of semi-structured interviews is that because the questions provide open answers, they can often provide opportunities to highlight issues or areas related to the subject matter that may have been missed or previously seen as unimportant. They can also highlight questions that hold little relevance to the research question so they can be eliminated or refocused to reduce wasting time. Finally, identifying interviews as a method provides integrity, validity and respect for the thoughts and feelings of the participants and perhaps empowers them to have a voice. Information gathered during semi-structured interviews can move the innovation process from general topics (domains) to more specific insights (issues, factors, and alternative relationships) and create a foundation for further research.

It is important to note that the interview setting can adversely affect the quality of the collected data. Therefore, making the participants as comfortable as possible is essential (Patton, 2002).

This can be achieved by conducting interviews in familiar and welcoming surroundings at a venue and time chosen by the participant (most interviews were conducted at the offices where the participants worked). Promoting trust with the participants was partly achieved by already having a cross-network working relationship with many of them and by introducing myself confidently and discussing my academic and business background with the participants before the start of the interviews. It was also essential to build a good, friendly rapport with the interviewee through a mix of verbal and body language.

I selected twenty staff and volunteers from the voluntary and charitable sector. Each individual was chosen because they had ten or more years of working experience in the sector. This experience was necessary, as these participants needed to have witnessed many structural, institutional, economic, and behavioural changes before and after austerity measures were introduced, as well as first-hand experience of how austerity is felt or impacted upon their social identity. The average duration of the interviews was 60 minutes, which gave sufficient time to complete the interview fully.

Reflective Account of the Interview Process

Within ethnographical qualitative research, the researcher must reflect on their role in creating knowledge as an interviewer and any possible impact their presence or biases, beliefs, and personal experiences have on the research. This can be described as the "turning of the researcher's lens back onto oneself" (Berger, 2015). Therefore, the researcher must be aware of their position, constantly evaluating whether their presence or role adversely affects the research process. Subsequently, they should take appropriate steps to ensure that all external factors are minimised to prevent this from leading to bias or the imposition of their own experience onto participants.

Holstein and Gubrium describe how a researcher should always remain neutral and keep their involvement in the interview to an absolute minimum to avoid bias. They say that: "The interviewer must be an inert agent who exerts no influence on response by tone, expression, stance or statement" (Holstein & Gubrium, 2008). However, although this may be an essential requirement of quantitative research, it is an impossible position for those conducting ethnographical and auto-ethnographical qualitative research. This philosophy is supported by Seale (2004) and Holstein and Gubrium (2008), who each state that this is unattainable and unreasonable, and therefore, a qualitative interview should be viewed as an "interpretive and interactive venture" in which the interviewer's auto-ethnographical insights act as co-creator of new knowledge.

With this in mind and being conscious that the participants trusted me and gave up their time to talk to me, I did not want them to feel conscious that I was in charge of the interview. Therefore, I tried to keep the interviews as informal as possible. During the interviews, my main aim was to make my participants feel like they were having an everyday conversation and forming a reciprocal relationship with me (Taherdoost, 2022). I approached this by asking the questions in different orders depending on how the conversation developed, allowing the participants to control the flow and direction of most of the conversation.

For each interview, I attempted to keep the questions asked of participants as broad and open-ended as possible (Creswell, 2007). For instance, the opening question during interviews with volunteers allowed them to explain their narrative of why they do what they do, with a version of: "Can you tell me about what you see as being the heart of your volunteering job?". This question provides insight into their reasons or motivation for volunteering, what they hope to get out of it, personal satisfaction, and commitment. It also provided me with a direction for approaching the other questions relevant to the research (Flick, 2009; Bryman, 2016).

When interviewing managers, the questions usually begin with: "Can you tell me a bit about your professional background?" This broad question allows respondents to explain their opinions, roles, and responsibilities. However, it is essential to realise that volunteers often come from diverse backgrounds. There are both non-professionals and professionals who may have a wealth of experience and qualifications. Hence, their reasoning behind volunteering can often add an interesting and valuable dimension to the research.

Archival Documentation (Secondary Data)

Various archival documentation or secondary data were used as part of the data collection triangulation process, alongside the primary data obtained through the semi-structured interviews, with additional auto-ethnographic insights. The data sources include NCVO publications, documents, press releases, charity annual reports, journals, magazines, government publications, minutes of meetings, etc. Archival documentation allows me to draw on an extensive range of resources to construct a working framework, which helps to provide a direction for my research. It can also highlight gaps in the current research and help formulate my interview questions. Within this research, I have used secondary data to frame my thesis, create a foundation, give validity to the creation of new knowledge, and support or justify alternative points of view (Vartanian, 2010). Overall, the documentary material provides insight into how austerity is viewed and felt in different social, professional, and political arenas.

Data Documentation

The data collection comprised qualitative semi-structured interviews/conversations between the researcher (myself) and the interviewee. All interviews were recorded with the participant's fully informed consent (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005) to obtain a qualitative data recording for analysis. In addition, all audio recordings of the interviews are transcribed according to the

rules set by Flick (2018) for interviews carried out in the field of social research. All the interviews are transcribed verbatim (only after removing the person's name and any identifying organisation). However, as body language and non-verbal impressions cannot be recorded, taking written notes during the interviews was necessary. These notes were used to record the responses, including those requiring further exploration, emphasis on phrases and words, and unexpected themes. Any significant non-verbal features of the interview, such as pauses or laughter, will be included in brackets so they can be included in the analysis. To ensure that the recordings are transcribed accurately, all recordings are listened to a few times to remove any mistakes. The additional notes taken during the interviews will be used to help with the accuracy of the recordings, as required, should audio quality be compromised.

Data Analysis

The data collected has been analysed to see the human cost of austerity on those working and volunteering in the charitable and community sector and how this affected their sense of professional and personal identity. Qualitative analysis of the data involved a thematic content approach. This was achieved by selecting a suitable coding system using themes for identifying, analysing, and reporting within the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Themes can be selected in two ways: an inductive or bottom-up way or a theoretical or deductive top-down way (Boyatzis, 1998; Braun & Clarke, 2006). This thesis's themes were partly drawn from the literature (theory). Also, they emerged during the semi-structured interviews and were coded according to the research questions, providing an emic perspective (Haq, 2015). This approach falls into the category of theoretically driven coding as the themes use key data sections that relate directly to the research question (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

The type of thematic analysis a researcher chooses should directly relate to the datasets and the claims they wish to make. For example, a rich thematic description of the whole dataset will

give the reader a sense of the important themes. I chose this thematic data analysis method because of its approach to coding, which enables information to accurately reflect a whole set (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Within qualitative research, coding is: "the process of breaking down data into component parts, which are given names" (Bryman & Bell, 2007). Coding is essential to data analysis, allowing the researcher and reader to make sense of data (Guest et al*.,* 2012). I also provided extended direct quotations from the interviewees throughout the data analysis, as this gives the participants prominence within the research, allowing the reader to make their own judgments of my interpretations and make their own interpretations. The coded themes must precisely reflect the entire dataset's content. Unfortunately, some of the depth and complexity can be lost during analysis. However, an overall, rich description is preserved to give the reader a sense of the dominant themes within the dataset. This approach can be useful when exploring unknown views on a topic or part of an under-researched area, such as within this thesis.

I considered other analytical theme levels, such as semantic or explicit levels, where theme development reflects the clear content of the data with explicit face-value meanings (Boyatzis, 1998; Braun & Clarke, 2006). This also suggests a summarisation where there is an attempt to look at significant patterns, meanings, and implications concerning previous research. Finally, the latent or interpretative level involves descriptions, with data organised to show patterns and interpretation, ultimately drawing ideas from the patterns, their meanings, and implications (Patton, 1990) in relation to the literature review (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Various qualitative-assisted data analysis software (CAQDAS) packages such as Dedoose, NVivo, MAXQDA, QDA Miner, ti, CATA and Hyper RESEARCH are available. CAQDAS can help with transcription analysis, coding and text interpretation, abstraction, content analysis, recursive, discourse analysis, and grounded theory methodology. However, I

have chosen to forego using CAQDAS in favour of manual approaches to coding and analysis. Sinkovics and Alfoldi argue that researchers should stay close to their data and not rely on a computer package as they create unnecessary coding restrictions and can distort the analysis (Sinkovics & Alfoldi, 2012). They also argue that technology deskills and reduces the in-depth focus of a qualitative researcher. The researcher needs to be open to the subtleties and nuances of the data and react accordingly to small indications that might have significant implications. Several debates regarding their use suggest that CAQDAS is an inappropriate name as the software does not analyse; many programs are over-influenced by grounded theory (Galdas, 2017). Also, the software poorly serves some analytic approaches, such as conversation and discourse analysis (Myers & Edmondson, 2014).

The following diagram outlines the general approach to the thematic analysis used in this study and closely mirrors Braun and Clarke (2006).

Figure 2: Analysing Data Approaches

Transcribe the data

Initial coding

Search for themes

Review and name themes

Defining and renaming themes

Interview quote examples
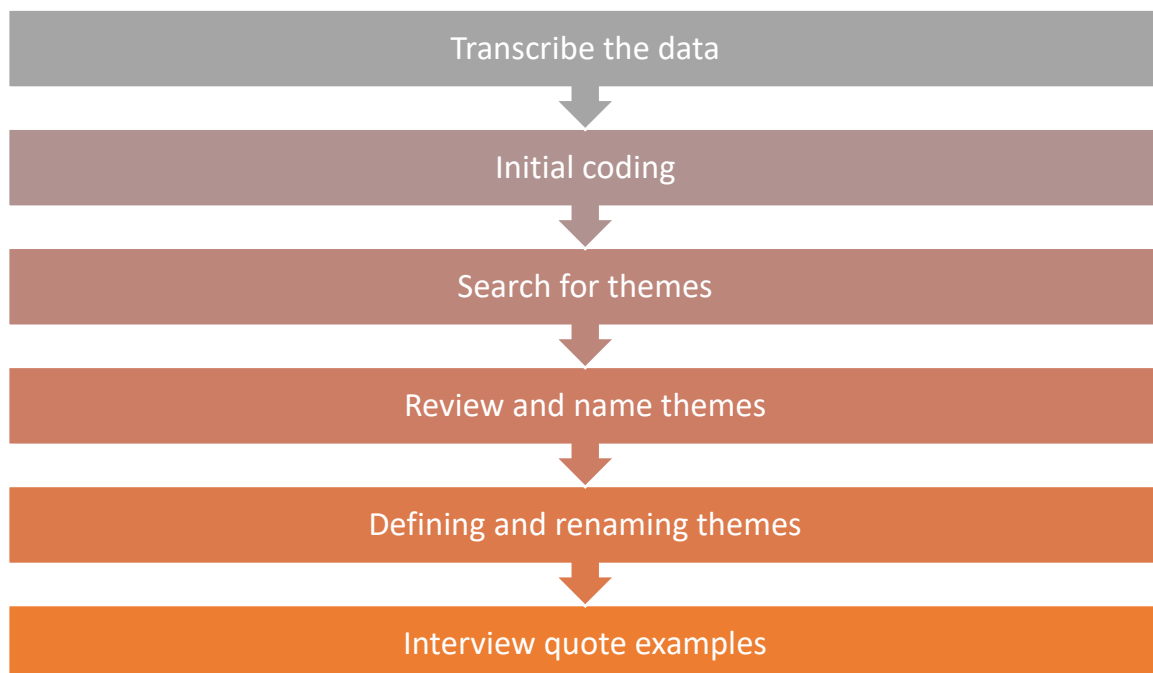
When processing and beginning to make sense of the data, the first step was to transcribe the recorded interviews. As some of my participants used slang, and others used strong language, I made sure to capture this as accurately as possible. Strong language can be an emotional response, so it is crucial to capture these moments as they go beyond the specific words and add a further level of meaning. This was particularly the case when the participants referred to government austerity rhetoric and the big society, which were especially emotive subjects. Having captured the responses, I carried out an initial coding exercise to identify high-level themes relevant to the research question. Those themes form the basis for my three analysis chapters: social identity, austerity rhetoric, and job security. This exercise was essentially structural coding (Saldaña, 2016). Structural coding is a process that involves identifying content or concepts which relate to the research questions and themes (MacQueen et al., 2008). **Appendix A** shows some examples of this first coding process.

I then performed a second coding phase, where I picked out common aspects within the responses at a lower level than the three themes. These include references to the Big Society, funding levels, workloads, and contracts. During this phase, I was also able to identify not just what the participants were saying but how they were saying it and what this might be saying about their emotional reaction to the question. This second phase is a form of pattern coding, which aids in developing key themes and identifying causes, consequences, and explanations within data (Miles et al. 2014). Using this approach allowed me to identify the more specific aspects of my analysis, for example, the comparison between austerity rhetoric and the actual impacts of the austerity measures. **Appendix B** shows examples of the second coding process.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations are at the forefront of any research proposal and often dictate whether research can legally and ethically go ahead. They are, therefore, an ongoing concern rather than

a checklist completed at the beginning of the study. Ethical considerations incorporate a number of important issues that organisations, researchers and participants providing the data must adhere to (Gomez & Mouselli, 2018). Before initiating the research, the researcher must discuss the intentions and the type of information with a supervisor. The researcher should also provide the institution and participants with an introductory letter explaining the research's purpose, boundaries, and potential benefits. If ethical considerations are correctly implemented, they should ensure that no harm is inflicted on anyone involved in the research, reduce bias, and improve the quality and validity of the research. Willing participants are provided with the correct information to allow them to make an informed choice, including gaining informed consent. Participant anonymity and confidentiality should be maintained. Interviews should not include personal information such as age, health, or financial information unless directly relevant to the type of research.

Research questions should concentrate on key themes related to the literature review (Lichtman, 2013). There are a number of inherent tensions within qualitative research as it is far more inductive, complex and fluid than those involved in quantitative research (Callahan & Jennings, 2002). Therefore, it is reasonable that more empirical and theoretical considerations and issues must be addressed before embarking on qualitative research. Problems often arise due to qualitative research involving more personally intrusive methods with a high degree of researcher-interviewee interaction (ethical interaction) and placing personal accounts in the public realm.

Research Bias

Within any form of research, bias can creep in from the respondent or the interviewer. Respondent bias takes on several forms, including acquiescence bias (or friendliness bias), which occurs when a participant agrees with a statement because they perceive the interviewer

as an expert or to complete the interview quickly (Busenbark et al., 2015). It can be avoided by focusing on the respondent's actual point of view. Social desirability bias involves participants answering questions they think will lead to being liked. However, allowing respondents to project their own feelings can minimise this effect (Randall, 1990). Habituation bias can be problematic and occurs when participants provide the same answers to questions that are worded similarly (Murphy, 2001). It can be due to boredom but can be avoided by engaging the participant in a progressive conversation and varying how questions are worded.

It is essential to realise that researcher bias can also occur. One of the most recognised and pervasive forms is confirmation bias. Humans naturally unconsciously filter relevant information, which can affect research when a researcher forms a hypothesis or belief and judges the respondents' responses that confirm the belief as reliable and relevant while dismissing evidence that does not (Silverman, 2020). Confirmation bias then extends into analysis, as researchers remember responses that support their hypothesis and points that disprove other hypotheses. Busenbark et al. (2015) suggest that researchers must continually re-evaluate their impressions of respondents and challenge pre-existing assumptions and hypotheses to minimise confirmation bias. Cultural bias can occur when assumptions about motivations are based on our cultural relativity. This is termed 'ethnocentrism', which is judging another culture solely by the values and standards of our own culture. To minimise cultural bias, researchers must move toward cultural relativism by showing unconditional positive regard and being aware of their own cultural assumptions (Galdas. 2017). However, total cultural relativism is unrealistic.

The order of the questions in an interview can influence the answers to subsequent questions (Jackson, 2021). While question-order bias is sometimes unavoidable, asking general questions before specific questions will minimise bias. Leading questions and wording bias can be

problematic in qualitative research. However, this can be minimised by avoiding elaborating on participants' responses, asking questions that use the participants' language, thoughts and reactions and avoiding summarising and paraphrasing participants' responses in your own words (Weinstein & Roediger, 2012).

Researcher bias is a contentious issue among ethnographical qualitative researchers as the proximity of the researcher to the issues they are researching is often seen as an advantage because the researcher implicates themselves in the research process and takes part in the construction of meaning (auto-ethnography). However, as there are multiple possible interpretations, it wouldn't be considered a bias, as being close to the setting, the interviewer has a privileged insight by virtue of being involved. This benefits those who share particular experiences and knowledge and are interested in meaning.

In conclusion, bias in qualitative research can be minimised by asking good-quality questions and remaining focused on sources of possible bias. This will enable a researcher to extract a participant's true perspective and ensure that the research maintains a high qualitative standard.

Practical Issues Encountered During Interviews

During the interviews, I encountered several practical issues. For example, arranging interviews at a suitably convenient time, especially when interviewing managers, proved challenging. Managers in the voluntary sector often have a full schedule of prior engagements. Their schedules are often subject to change, resulting in tight deadlines, limited opportunities, and rescheduling, which are often unavoidable as work commitments are prioritised. One participant had to cancel due to ill health, which took him away from work for a considerable period of time. Also, two volunteers went on holiday and forgot that we had arranged the interviews.

On a personal level, I needed to cancel a couple of scheduled interviews due to dislocating my wrist, which prevented me from writing (taking notes), typing and lifting equipment. Therefore, I temporarily put my interviews on hold until my wrist problem was attended to. In the meantime, I used the opportunity to read and update my literature. The COVID-19 pandemic and associated lockdowns also prevented me from holding face-to-face interviews. Fortunately, my interviews had already been conducted, with only a few follow-ups for clarification needed over Zoom. COVID-19 also posed other problems, such as reducing my ability to access libraries and restricting my freedom of movement. However, I managed to get around these issues by using a range of online journals and libraries and contacting people remotely.

Summary

In summary, this chapter provided a comprehensive and systematic illustration of the methods to be used when conducting this form of social research, including the research aims and questions, research philosophy, design, participant recruitment, participation consent, risks and concerns and privacy. It details my personal ethnography and positionality and how they relate to my thesis. It then looked at the triangulation of the data collection methods, including sampling, semi-structured interviews, a reflective account of the interview process, practical issues encountered during the interviews, the use of secondary data and auto-ethnography, documentation, and data analysis. It finished by looking at ethical considerations.

Chapter Eight – Analysis and Findings

Introduction

Although not everyone works in the voluntary sector for the same reasons, there is a large degree of consistency in the answers to why people have chosen to work for charities and other voluntary organisations. The positive benefits those interviewed describe also form a consistent pattern that contributes towards a clear sense of identity with several elements influenced by a sense of benevolence, selflessness and community.

As with any employment advert, charity jobs promote the positive aspects of what prospective employees can expect working within the charitable and community sector. However, whereas most job adverts concentrate on wages, hours, holidays, and what they expect from you, charitable sector jobs tend to promote the positive, feel-good aspects of the job itself, such as flexible working conditions, meaningful and rewarding working opportunities, where people can work by their values to address social and political disadvantage and inadequacy to name but a few.

Voluntary sector workers are generally less well-paid than peers in the private sector or could be unpaid volunteers, as many are. Still, they derive many other positive benefits from their work. Personal satisfaction and a sense of accomplishment from making a difference in people's lives are some of the most prominent. However, others are related, such as recognition from the broader community as good people working for the benefit of others. The sector also has a strong community of like-minded individuals in which workers place a real value.

Traditionally, the voluntary sector has always managed to steer independently between the public and private sectors, which has often been precarious. The voluntary sector's independent nature enables organisations to plot their own course. They can be self-governing and can focus

on creating social impact. As they do not distribute profits to shareholders, they can reinvest them into the community. However, as the voluntary sector has a limited ability to generate income, organisations are almost wholly reliant on funding from others. This funding includes grants from trusts and foundations, public donations, and local and national government contracts. While some have charity shops as an additional source of income, not all do, and they may not be a significant part of the organisation's funding mix.

The global financial crisis of 2008 forced governments to bail out banks and implement other fiscal policies to prop up their economies and prevent the collapse of the global financial system. In the UK, in reaction to the crisis and the Labour government's perceived role, voters responded by electing the Conservative-Liberal Democrat Coalition Government, which would remain in power until 2015. The incoming Coalition government's response to fixing the economy was to embark upon some of the most savage public sector cuts the United Kingdom had ever experienced. However, they termed them austerity measures.

During times of economic uncertainty, the voluntary and community sectors are often dealt a double blow. First in terms of their own financial, funding and employment positions, and second because they are then called upon to assist those vulnerable members of society most impacted by public sector cuts.

Due to austerity measures or cuts, many charities have found their funding severely limited. At the same time, cuts in the public sector combined with a downturn in the economy led to soaring unemployment, which created a heightened demand for voluntary sector services. Levels of demand that the voluntary sector had not seen in decades created a twofold problem. They had less money and a far greater requirement to spend it. They responded by trying to protect services as best they could, but this meant challenges for those working in the sector in the

form of reduced staffing, increased workload, relocations and a general worsening of employment conditions.

All the while, the government was telling the country that everyone was in it together. The cuts were a bitter pill and a much-needed medicine to fix the economy. They encouraged volunteering through their Big Society slogan. However, as public support for the measures wavered, they turned with the help of sections of the press instead to a more hostile approach to messaging. They doled out blame to the unemployed, the disabled, refugees, and many others who relied on state support and painted them as burdens on the state.

This chapter explores why people have come to work in the voluntary sector and what intangible benefits working for these organisations give them back. It also provides personal real-life narratives relating to the challenges faced by staff and volunteers working in the voluntary and community sector during austerity. While looking at austerity and its impacts on the participants, it also explores how they relate to the political rhetoric of austerity, which surrounded their lived reality of the cuts.

Good works – Why the Voluntary Sector?

Being employed and generating an income are often primary motivators for gaining employment regardless of sector, as these provide financial stability and social mobility. However, identity theory suggests that other desirable contributory factors come into play once employed, such as in group association, akin to being given a metaphorical slap on the back for being part of a particular group. Therefore, individuals gain a significant sense of identity from the role and draw a tangible sense of benefit from it.

In the case of the voluntary sector, the desire to do good or to act with a social conscience is a major secondary factor. In some cases, it is even the primary factor, with workers choosing to

earn less to make a more significant difference. Self-identification and having a moral compass are powerful psychological motivators that drive some individuals to seek positions that correspond with their internalized moral identity (Krettenauer, 2020).

One of the participants, Paul, gave the following account of why he chose to work in the sector, as well as his thoughts on why others do, "I think people chose to work in this sector because you're the sort of person who wants to do something worthwhile that makes a difference to someone else." Here, Paul uses social categorisation when he describes voluntary sector workers based on collective motives, which he ascribes to them. His statement divides society into two groups: those who seek to do something worthwhile and the unspoken contrasting group who do not. This division is a form of social comparison demonstrating the value he puts on belonging to the former group, not the latter. He goes further, however, when he says, "I'm hardly going to make a difference to someone selling them burger and fries." Here, he is conjuring up the image of a stereotypical fast-food worker, earning minimum wage and contributing little to society beyond tax on their earnings. The second statement is an additional layer of social comparison, which re-enforces the first.

Another participant, Robert, gave a similar view while also looking to set the voluntary sector apart. However, his comparisons are more in-depth: "Public sector jobs are seen as easy, secure with decent wages". From Robert's social comparison, which frames the public sector as cushy jobs, we can infer that he considers working in the third sector to lack those aspects. He then said, "The private sector pays more, demands more, and attracts ambitious risk-takers who are more interested in securing a lifestyle". On one level, he is directly comparing the public and private sectors, with the private sector described as a more challenging place to work but with greater rewards as a balance. However, he goes on to say, "While the voluntary sector fights to maintain a social conscience and the vocational touch, like nursing. We contribute more to help

people and society; we don't strip wealth or damage communities, and I think people who work in the sector have a similar worldview". Similarly to Paul, he is creating a social categorisation of the voluntary sector based on its positive contribution to society, and he does this using a social comparison to both the public sector, where it is easy to work, and the private sector, which creates wealth at the expense of society. The subtext of Robert's words describes an implicit hierarchy of worthiness, which places the voluntary sector at the top, the public sector in the middle, and the private sector firmly at the bottom.

Susan echoed this sentiment: "The private sector are only concerned with selling something to people, but the community sector is helping people, the people's sector, workers are passionate about what they do, we deal with everything the public sector does and everything in between". She again uses a social comparison, contrasting the negative light in which she views the private sector's commercial mindset with the help her own sector gives to others. She also draws an allusion to the capability of those in the voluntary sector, which she views as greater than that of the public sector.

Christine also expressed the idea of the voluntary sector being more useful to society: "I genuinely feel the voluntary and community sector provides balance in society. Almost all other jobs are simply peddling someone else's wears, goods, and services, but don't necessarily contribute anything to the betterment of society". Her use of the word balance is an interesting concept. It suggests that society would swing in what she presumably considers a troubling direction without the voluntary sector. Christine's sentiments also mirror Susan's, with both of them holding a view that commercial goals are lesser when compared to those of the voluntary sector. She went on to provide a concise explanation of the purpose of the voluntary sector:

> "Most of the work in the voluntary and community sector is and does exactly what it says on the tin, giving your time for the benefit of the community whether you're paid or a volunteer."

The same social categorisation is present here, which is expanded upon in this case. While volunteers are giving up their time for free, Christine also suggests that the paid staff members are also. When combined with the views expressed by Robert, it creates an image of voluntary sector workers choosing to accept lower wages precisely because they want to make a difference.

Pauline's description of herself and her desires are more like what would be associated with the private sector: "I'm ambitious, competitive, I want position, excellent wages, and I want everything that goes with it." This social categorisation initially contrasts with those expressed by the other participants, who described the voluntary sector as paying less than the private sector. However, she went on to say, "I like to identify myself as someone who works in the charitable sector because I want the power to influence positive outcomes for other people". Even though she desires the rewards customarily associated with the private sector, when discussing having 'power' and 'influence' over the 'positive outcomes' she can make, she is tying those desires to the same ethos as the others.

A common theme runs through these statements, which were often focused on providing comparative accounts of the sector that firmly set the voluntary sector and themselves apart from the other working sectors. The language alluded to the private sector as essentially built on greed and only concerned with profit-making. In contrast, the public sector role was centrally placed with the somewhat restrictive task of serving the government's socio-economic and organisational needs. In contrast, the rhetoric surrounding the voluntary sector's role tends to elicit much softer and more benevolent language, such as vocation, social conscience, the betterment of society, and the people's sector. The rhetoric suggests that workers' perceptions of the voluntary sector are differentiated by its standalone pursuit of creating social wealth,

with those choosing to work within the voluntary sector possessing an innate people-centred ideology.

Investigations into the reasons people give for working in the charitable sector have also concluded that the ability to make a difference and gaining insight and perspective on the lives of others were the two most commonly reported reasons, which both feed into our perceptions of self and social identification (Reasons to Work for a Charity, 2023). Many intangible social rewards are attached to group membership and association, such as belonging, social standing, personal recognition, self-esteem, and respect from others that accompany working within the sector. In all working sectors, employers and working conditions play a pivotal role in employees' behaviour, promoting philanthropic values, positive reinforcement, and recognition (Vo et al., 2022).

Participants offered insight into this by providing valuable comparative accounts of their first-hand experience working in private, public, and voluntary sector organisations. These accounts illustrated that many voluntary sector workers possessed the same ambitions and attributes of wanting to earn a high income, seeking social mobility, promotion, and professional development that is generally associated with most public and private sector working environments. However, it appears their ultimate choice wasn't simply down to financial reward for work done, as there was an innate desire to make a difference and create 'positive' social outcomes. This is not to assume that because different sectors have different market-led, economic and social strategies, only the profit-orientated private sector can attract motivated, ambitious, and financially driven individuals. The factors that were influential in attracting people to join or remain in the voluntary and community sector suggest that the ideology of working towards the betterment of society is core to those decisions.

The positive aspects of an individual's working environment cannot be overstated, especially considering that most people work solely to generate income. Therefore, when people find a job they like, they feel like they have hit the jackpot and will do everything within their power to keep it. This general sentiment applies to people working and volunteering within the voluntary and community sector, regardless of the level of their role.

The feeling of satisfaction and accomplishment is what most people strive for in their everyday lives in one way or another: to contribute, to achieve, to win, to make a difference. For those working in the voluntary sector, this satisfaction comes from pride in what they do for the community. They often speak in terms of statements such as 'mission', 'vocation', 'proud', 'committed', 'blowing my own trumpet', and 'enriching lives'. These statements illustrate their sense of satisfaction driven by their ethics or moral compass. The word 'vocation' and the statement 'it is who I am' describe a need they feel to contribute to society and how working in the sector delivers that. These associations provide a positive mental attitude and a strong sense of accomplishment.

A clear and concise example was Georgy, who said: "I'm proud of what I do, it's like a mission, a vocation". Here, she is describing her role as more than simply a job. The term a mission refers to a sense of purpose, while a vocation is a term that originated in religion but has come to describe a job that is almost what someone is meant to be doing. When she said, "I'm happy to tell others I work in the charitable sector", there is an unmistakable sense of pride and an implicit suggestion that she wouldn't have that same pride working in most jobs. This statement goes back to comments such as Susan's and Christine's when they compared the benefits the voluntary sector gives society to those of the private sector: "I wouldn't want to do anything else; I get paid to actually help other people. How can there be a better job than that?" The use

of the word "actually" has an implicit meaning which is saying that the voluntary makes a difference, unlike jobs in other sectors.

Diane expressed a similar view and was equally exuberant about her pride, "I feel proud that I make a difference. If I'm blowing my own trumpet, why not? It's what I do, so why not be proud of it?" Diane is explicitly saying, 'It's what I do', placing herself firmly within that identity associated with performing acts for the betterment of others. Ronnie likewise said, "I enjoy being part of something else. I think what I do makes a difference. It certainly makes a difference to me anyway". Ronnie's comment, 'being part of something else', refers to group membership, another form of social identification. It also connects him to the broader social identity to which others in the sector have attached themselves.

Paul went into great detail about how he helps people and the sense of accomplishment it gives him, "I feel good about what I do. I get a sense of pride". He then described the fulfilment that comes from completing something, in this case, someone coming to him with a problem and working through it to help them. "…you get to see a process from start to finish, making sure someone has electricity and heating, food, sorting out debts, helping the suicidal, people with Alzheimer's, being able to make that change for them is priceless". This repetitive listing of the problems people come to him with, in an off-the-cuff manner, suggests either the question comes up often or that he spends a lot of time thinking about it. If the latter, then this shows him to be highly invested in his work and attached to the unwritten goals of the voluntary sector. He also spoke for the wider sector, not just himself, "I also get to be part of a community as well. We do a lot of good work. We're committed to its ethos of enriching people's lives".

Christine even went further, expressing a preference over other forms of employment, "I wouldn't want to do anything else. It's taken me years to get to the position. I know my job and do it well." Here, she emphasises the time she has invested in the role and the expertise she

has developed. She then goes on to say, "I have a good reputation, I mix with nice people, I help other people, I am contributing to society." She is drawing a sense of satisfaction from the respect she gains. It is unclear how much of that is due to being an experienced figure in the sector, how much is in response to her specific contributions to the lives of others, and how much is reflected glory from the sector as a whole. However, it is clear that she is attached to working in the voluntary sector and that it is tied up in how she views herself. Her subsequent comment reinforces this statement: "Yes, money is important, we all have bills to pay, but I would hate to be doing a menial job that just makes someone richer". Here, she refers to her previous comments describing other sectors as not adding anything to society. This repetition of her view that only the voluntary sector adds real value to society confirms that the positive impact on society is at the heart of her attachment.

Doreen is a volunteer and expressed the view that the reward is in helping people, so it doesn't matter that she is unpaid:

> "I know I don't get paid but I still consider it to be a proper job. If people ask me what I do, I always say I work for a charity, because that's what I do. It doesn't matter if I'm a volunteer because getting paid isn't the work, that's just the reward. I get rewarded knowing that I help people and I do a good job".

Here, she is going a step further than Christine did. Christine was very clear that the salary she takes from working in the voluntary sector is important. However, Doreen is almost dismissive of it. In referring to it as 'the reward' and then saying that her reward is the knowledge that she has helped people, she contrasts the motives of the voluntary sector with other sectors. She also draws a further distinction between volunteers like herself and paid charity employees. This social categorisation creates an in-group within the in-group the other participants have already described.

Doreen's answer continued:

> "I feel proud that I'm part of the charity. I am proud of working there and being able to helping people because everyone needs help at some time in their lives. I feel like I'm part of the charity now. I definitely feel that I belong there".

Like Christine, she expresses her attachment to the charity she works for. In saying, 'I belong there', Doreen is connecting to the idea of a vocation, which creates a solid social categorisation that is present among many of those I spoke to—those who identify with the ethos of the voluntary sector.

The sense of pride expressed by Doreen and Christine cuts across the whole sector regardless of whether the people speaking are managers, employees or volunteers. Beyond this purposeful sense of pride, many other aspects of a career in the voluntary sector draw those working there to it and influence them to stay in the sector. Unsurprisingly, groups of individuals with such a drive to help others have formed a strong sense of community within and between their organizations.

The Community of the Voluntary Sector

Throughout life, people make acquaintances, friends, and relationships within their particular social settings, beginning with childhood friends, neighbours, schools, and through to universities and working environments. These friendships often grow out of a common interest, activity, lifestyle or way of thinking that results in spending a significant proportion of their working or leisure time together. Such attachment is especially evident in working environments where colleagues who have worked together for decades often form relationships that extend beyond the working environment to form family friendships. This phenomenon suggests that employment extends beyond the simple ability to provide a service or product for a reward and that 'in groups', 'cliques' and 'social circles or networks' are often formed over time in formally structured environments when individuals make value judgements about their peers as to whether they are their type of people, of similar personality, with a shared outlook or interest in activities etc.

These positive aspects are evident in Robert's response: "In a way I consider myself lucky because I enjoy going to work each day. I really like the people I work with, which is rare these days". Here, Robert is using social comparison to distinguish between jobs like his, where people draw pleasure from their work and other hypothetical jobs where they do not. It is unclear whether Robert has specific counterexamples in mind or is instead creating a strawman based on the stereotype of nine-to-five drudgery. In either case, there is an attachment to the benefit he feels he takes from working where he does.

These connections and relationships have, in some cases, been established over many years, as expressed by Christine:

> "I've known some of my colleagues for over 20 years, we know each other's families, we are like family, we go out and socialize, it's like a community, you rarely hear that these days, that's long gone. I would hate to have to change my place of work at my age. I want to work here until I retire".

Christine is suggesting there is something unique, or at least rare, about the connections she has made during her extended time in the voluntary sector. Two phrases here, 'we are like family' and 'like a community', suggest stronger attachments than might be expected from someone talking about their job. There is also a fear of loss at the prospect of needing to find a new job, not because of the effort involved but because of what it would mean to leave it behind.

Ronnie's experience was very similar to Christine's regarding the length of time she has known her colleagues and her attachment to them: "Many of my colleagues are my friends. I've known a few of them for 20 to 30 years. Our kids know each other, we have regular nights out. It's the only social life I have. I certainly don't want to fall out of the loop". When she talks about her colleagues being not only her friends but that multiple connections exist between their families, she describes something that has moved beyond simply people who know each other through work. However., when she says, 'I certainly don't want to fall out of the loop', there is

an implication that if she did not work there anymore, those connections would fade or break entirely.

Keith also indicated that they had known many of their work colleagues for years, "All of my friends do similar jobs within the same network. We go for a drink at weekends and watch the football". While this is not such a firm attachment as Ronnie, he describes a social life that exists solely within the confines of the voluntary sector. His statement begs the question, how would someone in this situation suffer if they could no longer work within the sector?

Both Alan and Erica talked about gaining a social life as a consequence of being in the voluntary sector. Alan positively compared his experiences working with colleagues in the voluntary sector to his experiences elsewhere: "The attitude to work and staff are so much better. It's respectful. We talk to each other as people." He is making a social comparison here between the positive outcome of working in the voluntary sector and his past negative experiences from working elsewhere. He went further with this comparison, "It's the first job I have ever enjoyed, and look forward to coming to work. We even have evenings out, so I've gained a social life too." In saying he has 'gained a social life', he is saying he lacked one before starting to work in the voluntary sector, similar to Erica's experience.

Erica was quite open about her life before working in the voluntary sector:

> "I never had a social life before. I now go out every two to three weeks with people from work. I went to work dos with my husband but that stopped when he stopped work so I'm happy I have a little bit of a social life again".

Working in the voluntary sector gave her something she had lacked previously: a social life. She describes going out to work events with her husband when he was still working, but in a way that suggests little attachment. She talks about her social life in the voluntary sector much more enthusiastically, and she displays a sense of ownership, "I have a little bit of a social life again".

Volunteering opportunities provide volunteers with the same sense of belonging, friendship, and positive identity association as those formally employed within the sector. People have an inherent need to belong. Some people's circumstances make them gravitate towards people, groups, centres or institutions that provide them with an outlet or extended social network.

Denise was open about previous struggles with depression, and the impact it had on her social life, and also how volunteering has helped, "Volunteering has given me a new circle of friends, depression is extremely isolating, it distorts your sense of reality and normality, you lose contact with everyone and everything". The image of depressed individuals retreating into themselves and cutting themselves off from those around them is familiar and no less potent for it. There was a real sense of hope in the way Denise went on to talk about the changes in her life that have come from working in the voluntary sector, "I have friends to call and who call me just to chat. I'm part of society once more, I know it sounds strange, so when you feel normal again you cling to it because it's so easy to lose it". There is also fear in those words. The phrase 'cling to it' evokes images of someone draped over a log as it's washed down a flooded river. These social connections are the things that keep her afloat.

Doreen also spoke fondly of this aspect of working in the voluntary sector, "I'm a volunteer, but now and again, the staff and volunteers get together and go out for a meal as a treat or for someone's birthday, Christmas parties, etc., it's really nice". Doreen identifies herself primarily as a volunteer and then describes how the wider group of paid staff and volunteers spend time together. This statement suggests a divide does exist between the different groups working in the voluntary sector.

Mary's circumstances mean she is often alone, which impacts how she perceives her connections from working in the voluntary sector, "I'm in my 70s now, you know, I don't have anyone". When she talked about her colleagues, she went further than Doreen and others I

spoke to, comparing them to family and expressing how vital these relationships are in her life. "I've been volunteering for over 30 years. I've known the girls for years now. When I was in hospital, they looked after my house. We are like family now". She described the isolation her home life brings and displayed fear about losing the connections and activities her volunteering brings. "If I'm at home, I don't get to talk to anyone. Oh no, it's dangerous at my age staying at home and doing nothing". Her statement is fascinating as it also illustrates that as a standalone pursuit, volunteering extends beyond helping people and reducing social isolation, in that for some people, reciprocal social benefits fill a void. In this case, relatives or other close connections are absent.

Margaret gave insight into what working meant to her: "When my husband was away with the army, working was a way of doing something for myself. I made friends with the girls. I would have been very lonely if it wasn't for them". This statement shows attachment to her work and a sense of ownership when she says, 'doing something for myself'. It wasn't about earning money. It wasn't even about helping others. It was empowering to actually be working and not just living the stereotypical life of an armed forces wife.

Keith summarized the community aspect, "There was always a sense of community. That's probably why they call it the community sector".

This community aspect is not unique to the voluntary sector, but how the participants spoke about it suggests that it is a more pronounced feature to them than in other sectors. To them, it was a defining feature that gave working in the voluntary sector its human touch, which they felt was lacking elsewhere. From how they spoke about it, there was a clear sense of attachment to colleagues and the social connections they have built both in and outside the workplace.

People often place significant importance on maintaining the social contacts and identities they have gained through working. Therefore, they may internalise changes within the working

environment as threats. Long-term working relationships can result in enmeshment where the boundaries between people become blurred (Koretz, 2022), and individual identities lose importance. However, a tenuous working environment can also undermine the working environment and erode the social identities of both the employees and employers (Carr, 2021).

Keith expressed his fears about what losing his job might mean, not just for his income but for his social life:

> "If I stopped working, I would be home all the time, have no income, lose contact with my mates, no social life, especially if they are still working unless we all retired at the same time, it's easy to lose contact if you're not part of that circle anymore".

The phrase 'if I stopped working' suggests that Keith has no plan to retire any time soon, but by mentioning it later, he acknowledges that it is on the horizon. Keith previously said that his social life does not extend beyond those he works with, and this is where his fear of losing those relationships comes from. Maintaining their work-related social relationships and identities holds significant importance for individuals working within the sector. They perceive any threat to the longevity of their working positions as a threat to the associated professional and social identities working has provided them with.

The way the participants spoke openly about the social aspects and social identity working within the voluntary sector had afforded them portrays it as a working environment that is a catalyst for creating social and professional working relationships. These social dimensions and their associated identity positively increase employees' affiliation and commitment to their working environment.

These narratives show how the social dimension of working within the voluntary sector has helped to create or re-establish a social circle. It has reduced the sense of loneliness by providing a supportive community or network, which is a valuable substitute in the absence of close and extended families. However, for some people, a sense of belonging is more than just

making friends; it is about acceptance, and creating a circle of safety and protection. Mahmood's narrative is perhaps the most effective. It illustrates how volunteering for local charities helped him gain friends and encouraged a feeling of security:

> "I volunteer with a few local charities and get experience of how things work in England. I get to speak English with other English people, and I learn lots of things. I like volunteering. I learn English, get information. I have English friends, I have somewhere to go, something to do, I can get something to eat and drink if I want it. It makes me feel safe".

Volunteering has provided Mahmood with many things that have helped him to settle into a new life in the UK. There is an obvious benefit to Mahmood improving his language skills. There are connections, and most importantly to Mahmood, from how he ended his answer with it, almost like an exclamation mark was 'it makes me feel safe'. It became clear why he needed that haven when he discussed some incidents that had taken place since he arrived in the UK:

> "I feel relaxed here. I don't feel someone will threaten me, shout, or hurt me. I feel safer if I'm with English because if I go in the town with English, then I don't get shouted at or called f****** Muslim or P***".

Mahmood's experiences are sadly far from unique, and they have caused him to seek the protective associations he describes when he says, 'I feel safer if I'm with English'. These incidents are just one aspect of the difficulties Mahmood has faced. His account highlights his frustration at his situation as he cannot engage in everyday activities such as working due to his lack of status. Therefore, volunteering provides him with an alternative to paid employment while allowing him to participate in society, gain experience and make friends, suggesting the need to belong, fit in, feel safe, and be part of something is universal:

> "I come here to get away from war and I am still waiting to make my life here. I'm not allowed to work here, I don't have a work permit, and I don't have a national insurance number because I don't have any status here. I cannot get a house or a job or have my future. I have no passport. I cannot travel. In my own country, I was a panel beater and car mechanic. I volunteer to get experience of working here and to make friends".

Mahmood's perspective is very interesting as an asylum seeker in a foreign country volunteering within the community sector, as it has provided him with some physical and emotional protection. His use of the phrase 'I don't have any status here' can be interpreted in multiple ways. On the surface, it refers to 'refugee status', when an asylum seeker's claim is accepted, and they are allowed to live and work in the UK. It also reflects a broader context in which all asylum claimants find themselves, which is that of a tolerated outsider. The state allows them to be here while their claim is processed, but they are treated with suspicion and given a pittance to live on.

Volunteering allows him to belong to an in-group instead of being an outsider. Being surrounded by a small network of English people effectively enables him to re-establish himself within an organised setting while simultaneously providing him with friendship, a social network, and a feeling of safety away from threats and aggression. Those relationships bring a sense of normalcy and of working with colleagues.

Asylum seekers are forbidden from taking paid employment, but rather than doing nothing, an increasing number of asylum seekers and refugees participate in volunteering activities. They do this as a way of learning about the people and the country they now reside in, and they do so due to a need to join in and give back to society. Being displaced and lacking status would place an individual into an out-group. This would inherently act as a motivational driving force to seek out situations, institutions and associations that give them a sense of belonging to an in-group. Finding these attachments would ultimately help them to re-establish themselves and build an identity other than simply being an asylum seeker.

Other participants also found that the voluntary sector provided a much-needed refuge from difficult personal circumstances. Denise's story of how volunteering helped her to find a way of living with depression is another strong example of how it can help individuals living with

difficult circumstances. She contrasts how she feels now she is volunteering with her life before, "It also makes me feel good. I was sitting at home, depressed, not going out. I didn't exist, really, not publicly anyway, just another person on the sick, getting benefits. Now I'm volunteering, I feel like a person again." The phrases 'I didn't exist' and 'I feel like a person again' demonstrate both the loss of identity that depression can bring and the changes she has felt. She previously grouped herself with others who could not work, assigning herself to a negative out-group.

Beyond the close circle of social contacts within individual organisations and workplaces, the interconnected nature of the voluntary and community sector often provides workers with an extensive social and professional network of influence. In combination, this social and professional participation and influence outside the domestic setting offers a strong sense of personal achievement and a desirable social identity that extends much further than the initial working environment.

Pride, Status and Identity

Although this sense of community is a dominant theme regarding the rewards people get from the sector, others are significant. Although there are huge third-sector organisations of a scale equal to all but the largest private-sector companies, most are small. Within small organisations, there is scope for individuals to take on extra responsibility more quickly than in a larger corporate structure. This sense of responsibility, while it has the potential to be demanding, is also a form of reward. Susan expressed this clearly in one of her statements, "Let's face it, it's better to be known as being employed than being unemployed". She is not talking about her self-perception but how others view the unemployed. "It's difficult to get a job these days, let alone a good job that you actually like". This statement reflects the levels of unemployment after the financial crisis. It also shows a distinction between what might be required to put food

on the table and a satisfying form of employment. This account exemplifies the distinction between the employed in-group and the undesirable out-group of the unemployed. Having an employed status is preferable to an identity of being unemployed, and as individuals experience collective identity based on their membership of a particular group, the more desirable the group, the stronger the association.

She continued, "I worked hard to get where I am. I like my position; it has a certain amount of responsibility that goes with it, but I'm prepared to take that on board, so I want to enjoy and keep it". She describes responsibility as something she tolerates rather than an actual benefit of the job. However, she expresses pride in getting into the position, which is part of her strong attachment to her job.

Pauline defined herself by her ambition and what she wanted to get out of it, "I'm just naturally a very driven person, and I want to get to the top. I want good things in life, and I want to travel and enjoy myself". The repeated way she refers to herself shows that focus. Unlike Susan, she views responsibility as a positive and something she desires more of, "I'm committed to my career. I identify myself as a professional person. I like the responsibility that it gives me and the control, having an opinion and power to influence the decision-making process". Her identification goes beyond membership in the voluntary sector. She sees herself as a decision-maker, a professional and someone with influence. The language used by Pauline indicates someone who you would expect to seek a position within the private sector. She talks of a desire to progress upward and the rewards that come with it. However, she talks positively about her career, the power to influence and responsibility, giving no indication that she sees the voluntary sector as a stepping stone.

Ronnie discussed how long she had worked in the sector and referenced her responsibility and the ability to influence outcomes: "It took me years to work up to a managerial position. I have

power to make things happen. People listen to me." She draws attention to the time she invested in getting to her current position and wears it as a badge of honour. She calls it a 'managerial position', a social categorisation that lifts her above those who are not managers. She reinforces this by using the word power and the phrases 'make things happen' and 'people listen to me', which imply that were she not in a position of authority, they would not apply.

She is also protective of her position, demonstrating attachment to it, "Don't get me wrong, I'm not power-mad, but I suppose I don't really want to give it up to someone else. That sounds selfish doesn't it, let's say I have mixed feelings". Like Pauline, she sees her power and influence as desirable aspects of the role. At the same time, when she says, 'I'm not power mad', she is perhaps a little shy about admitting it and may feel conflicted. Her attachment to it is evident when she says, 'I don't really want to give it up', although again, she backtracks somewhat, fearful about how she comes across.

She went on to talk about the contacts that her role gives her and also more about her responsibilities, "As part of my role, I have to attend meetings, so I'm part of a much bigger network, and I know people from all over the North-East, actually from all over the country". Initially, she describes attending the meetings as something she must do. Still, when she talks about being 'part of' the larger network and the scale of that network 'actually from all over the country', there is a sense of attachment and pride.

Both Pauline and Ronnie are proud of their ability to influence and their responsibility in their roles. This combination and, with it, the ability to make a difference links back to why people choose to work in the voluntary sector; they seek to help others and make a difference.

Within the voluntary sector, there are both employees and volunteers. The reasons for working in the sector are often the same, and many of the benefits the individual takes from working there are also the same, with income or lack thereof being the real distinguishing factor.

However, there are other noteworthy aspects for the volunteers. Volunteers come from diverse social, ethnic, educational, professional and economic backgrounds. People become volunteers for a variety of reasons. However, most volunteers often bring a wealth of skills and knowledge, a willingness to learn, and, of course, to provide their free time for a particular cause. In return, they may expect to gain experience as a stepping stone to securing paid employment.

The volunteers' perspective is particularly interesting. They illustrate how the changing nature of an individual's lifestyle, opportunities, and social and health status can impact their ability to compete within the paid working environment. Ultimately, this impacts upon their own personal, social and professional identity. Volunteering is often used as a transitionary tool after an individual has been forced to move from employment due to illness or unemployment. Volunteering becomes a means of personal recovery, a way of re-emerging and reasserting oneself in preparation for re-entering the workforce. It promotes autonomy, provides a feeling of control, increases self-esteem and satisfaction, and can maintain or rebuild their social and professional identity.

Denise gave a volunteer's perspective on working in the voluntary sector. Her circumstances were at the core of why she started volunteering: "I used to work as a nursery assistant, but then I had some problems with anxiety and had a breakdown. I started volunteering to help other people in my position. It made me feel useful and valued again". This, as well as when she said, "I'm still contributing," shows that it is her perception of self-worth rather than the views of anyone else that volunteering is helping.

She talked more about her volunteering experience, "I look forward to coming to work. It has given my life focus". Denise has been able to use volunteering to bring stability to herself, and how she talks about it shows that it has become part of her identity. As we continued talking, she expressed her views on volunteers and paid staff and what distinction there might be,

"Volunteer's contributions aren't any less important than someone who gets paid for it". This is a common refrain from volunteers, who see their work as just as valuable. Volunteers do not base their identity on giving their time for free. It is about what they do with it. Denise expressed it as, "If people ask me what I do, I tell them I work in the voluntary sector". The key word is 'work'. She defines herself by what she does, not whether she is paid for it, as she went on to say, "I'm not embarrassed about being a volunteer, but I prefer to identify myself by the role and not the pay grade". Her social categorisation refers to her organisation's work rather than drawing a line between staff and volunteers.

These aspects of working in the voluntary sector paint a picture of a coherent identity, although there are different flavours. Over a lifetime, each person holds several different personal, social, and professional identities to suit the particular roles in their lives—identities such as child, partner, friend, colleague, manager, etc. When people introduce themselves, they identify themselves relative to another known person or their job or position. This way of speaking allows us to see the rough outline of that identity, and over time and through contact, we can fill in the details to get a clear picture of who they are in that role.

People maintain their social identity through employment, which defines their place in society (Tajfel & Turner, 2004). Identity theory suggests that an individual holds their professional role or status in high esteem and has a sense of worth, importance, purpose, and reputation. They link their overall identity to their employment status. There is particular emphasis on the type of role they provide or carry out. Identities are an internalised psychological process that enables people to compare and contrast their working environments, thereby portraying the best version of themselves. This identity gives them a sense of importance and the power to exert change, effectively adding value to their work. In totality, how people compare themselves to others and define themselves by what they do, their educational level, their skills,

the impact they have on others and their contributions express the culmination of their value and self-worth.

The interconnective nature of the voluntary and community sector often provides workers with an extensive social and professional network of influence and serves to reinforce identity. In combination, this web of participation and influence outside the domestic setting provides a strong sense of personal achievement and a desirable social identity that extends much further than the initial working environment. Consequently, there is an increased desire to maintain this position and continue to be associated with that professional standing and the network or sector it is situated within.

Georgy was very clear on how she views herself: "I have always worked and see myself as a professional person. I have worked in the sector for years in one role or another". She defines herself by what she has done in the past. As someone who has been employed for much or all of their adult life, this represents a highly desirable social characterisation. When she talks about her time in the voluntary sector, she uses the word 'worked', which links back to that first description of herself. Given the throwaway line "one role or another", the job's specifics seem less critical. There is a clear attachment to being employed, with less concern about what that role is. From her remarks about her career, it is explicit that, in her view, she is a professional and employed person.

Diane's comments reflect her sense that she is good at what she does, and people come to her because of that, "In a country of almost 80 million people, there are really only a handful of people who do this sort of work compared to other jobs". She considers herself part of a select group, and how she first tries to compare the small number of people doing what she does and the size of the country as a whole emphasises that. She went on to set out how she sees herself in a single sentence, "I have always worked in an advisory capacity. It's what I do best. It's part

of who I am. I'm the person people come to if they need advice". There is a social categorisation already in her first statement as part of the select group, and here, she defines that group as people who help others by providing advice. She identifies in a way that traces back to the idea of the wise woman or man, a trope that appears throughout Western history and culture.

Diane is protective of this role in society, "If I give the wrong advice or information, then my reputation is affected, and people lose trust in me". Loss of reputation is a direct threat to the identity she has created herself, but beyond that, there is a fear of losing the ability to help others. From how she talks about the prospect of being unable to help others, she takes a lot from the act itself. "People come to me distressed and go away calm. If that's not a worthy job, then I don't know what is." She puts a lot of stock in the direct impact she is having on others, and the worth she attaches to it is clear to see.

Based on the reasons people have chosen to work in the charity and voluntary sector, namely a desire to benefit society and the main non-financial benefits they take from it, the community aspect, it is possible to describe a worker/volunteer archetype. That is being a person with altruistic motives who is part of a community of like-minded individuals. Each participant has a professional identity, and this motivation is at the core of those identities.

Within the voluntary sector, the wide variety of working settings enables individuals to create or re-establish their own working identity. The constructed identity extends beyond any they possess in their home environment, such as mother, wife or child. These roles allow volunteers and employees to be visible as individuals in their own right, with an alternative public persona, such as colleague or manager, with an individual set of professional skills and knowledge. They then have a highly regarded 'personal identity' and are not simply gained by association 'social identity' or one concerning another person's status. For example, Pauline and Ronnie are attached to their management roles, and Diane attaches her self-worth to advising others.

For managers and workers alike, social and professional identities are closely intertwined, and individuals strongly desire to maintain their professional identities. For some individuals, gaining a professional identity provides them with an alternative persona and a clear distinction from their personal identities. This emphasis is especially evident at managerial levels, where they have authority, influence, control, and power within the working environment.

For some individuals, gaining a professional identity gives them an alternative persona and a clear distinction between their professional and personal identities. This professional identity is especially evident at managerial levels, where they have a position of authority, influence, control, and power within the working environment, which starkly contrasts the role within the home and domestic life. Interpretivist theory argues that we are all social actors, and we assume different personas that coincide with the various roles we enact throughout the day and throughout our lives. Therefore, simultaneously holding a range of personal, social and professional identities allows people to explore who they are and what they are capable of. It provides balance, personal satisfaction, control, and being the best version of themselves in each role. Some, such as Keith, see themselves mainly as their professional identity and define themselves in terms of it:

> "I've always been a manager in some capacity. I'm not the sort of person to sit around doing nothing. I don't have hobbies. I just work, always have done, couldn't stay at home, my wife always wants me to fix this, do that, build a garage, put up a new fence, I work, so I'm limited on what I can do. Now, you know why I have to stay at work. We obviously do the family stuff together, kids, holidays, mutual friends, but we're both very different people".

Is Keith's need to work preventing him from doing things around the house, or is he using it to avoid building fences and garages? In either case, he prefers to maintain his role as a manager over his other roles as a husband and a father. He talks about participating in family life as a set of duties or responsibilities, things he must do.

Erica described how her role in the voluntary sector contrasts with how she felt she was perceived before:

> "For years, I was a housewife and mother. It's something you're expected to do, and it's bloody hard work raising a family. You get no thanks for it because you didn't earn the money, even though you have spent all those years concentrating on making sure everything is running well for other people. Now I'm working, I'm not just a wife and mother, I have an income, I have an opinion that matters to other people, it's nice".

Erica shows pride in having been a housewife and a mother, roles which have always existed, and society routinely overlooks their contributions. However, this was not the case for Erica, who was angry at the lack of thanks she had received over the years. Now, however, she feels she is more than a housewife and mother, suggesting that even she unconsciously perceives those roles as lesser, driving her new sense of attachment. The phrase 'I have an opinion that matters' is telling and highlights the dismissal she felt when her identity was defined only in relation to others.

Not only those in paid and senior positions derive a professional identity from working in the voluntary sector. The volunteers don't see their work in the voluntary sector as a hobby or something to pass the time. It is work. Not only is it work, but they attach value to that work, no differently to someone like Keith or Erica. Doreen also described a similar change when she started volunteering, "My sons are grown and left home now, so I wanted to do something for me for a change." Like Erica, she previously defined her identity relative to the other people in her life; she was a mother. She continued:

> "So, I started volunteering, and I'm still here some eight years later. I love working there. It breaks my week up. I meet lots of people, I've made friends, I like being useful and having responsibility. I can't walk around the town without bumping into someone I know. I help people, and I can get help when I need it, too."

She begins with the social aspects, the people she meets and the friends she has made. These social contacts are substantial benefits of her volunteering. The references to being useful and

responsible and the phrase 'I help people' show that she feels she is getting more from volunteering than before.

Ronnie also made similar comments, "When I think about it, work is really an important part of my life. At work, people know me, I have friends, colleagues, I meet people, they trust me, I have a position". The phrase I have a position captures the core meaning of her statement. She believes that her work is a part of who she is now. She went on to say, "There's no gratitude for being a wife and mother. It's all taken for granted. At home, I'm just the wife, someone who cooks and cleans", which, when looked at alongside the previous statement explains why her position matters, it contrasts with what she feels is a lack of status in her home life.

When Margaret talked about her life before becoming a volunteer, she described feeling like she did not really exist outside the context of her husband, "It's easy to lose yourself when you're an army wife because it's all about supporting your man". This experience is similar to Doreen and Ronnie's stories, but Margaret's lack of a personal identity is even more apparent. She continued, "Now I'm not just half of a couple. I get to meet people, chat, I have a laugh with staff, volunteers and the clients". She is being more direct here, describing how she has her own identity rather than a shared or reflected one.

These narratives illustrate people's different identities and statuses and how most people have simultaneous identities in different settings. However, for some people, it was not simply that they gained an identity through employment. It was the association with working within the sector itself that provided them with status. It carries the public perception that the type of people who work within the sector are good people and gives them a certain gravitas that they feel they wouldn't necessarily have working in another sector. These experiences demonstrate that group identities are fundamental to volunteers' motivations and experiences volunteering

or working in the sector. Sharing an identity with other volunteers and staff promoted feelings of belonging, impacting their wellbeing.

Georgy described what working in the sector brings with it for her, "It may sound funny, but in a way, it has its own status because people do judge you on what you do, and they often see you as a decent person if you're working in a giving or caring role." She is talking about the perception of others, but it is also her perception of the sector. There is a social comparison in her narrative when she goes on to contrast the voluntary sector with the political sphere,

> "Politicians often say they work for the people, but when you look at the bigger picture, that's rubbish. They like the power, they like control, and they get well paid and lots of different expenses that other jobs don't get, and at the end of the day, they always mess things up."

Georgy has a clear negative view of politicians, regardless of party, and she uses it to draw out the positives in her own sector's contributions to society. She views the amount of money and other benefits politicians receive as unearned. Compared to the poorer wages the other participants described the sector as having, Georgy is placing the voluntary sector, and therefore herself, as more worthy of public respect.

Alison described her career and the responses she has had depending on which role she introduces herself using:

> "I'm a student nurse, but I'm working part-time as a community carer to support my studies. This is only temporary. There's a big difference between telling someone you're a carer compared to telling them you're a nurse or sister. Carers often have only basic training and qualifications, but people think of nurses as graduates and professionals".

She contrasts the status attached to nursing with that of a carer. Interestingly, this looks at the social hierarchy differently. Other participants ranked the voluntary sector above the public sector in terms of contribution to society. Here, however, Alison is describing a different perspective. The role of a community carer, while many would think of it as a public-spirited

and worthy one, is less established than that of a professional nurse who has completed their training.

Although there is a great deal of commonality between the individuals who tend to be attracted to or continue to work or volunteer within the voluntary sector, their reasons for working there vary. Some people have a clear and defined career path and use the voluntary sector as a temporary or intermediate job to gain experience, qualifications, and status on their journey to acquire their desired professional identity. Others have already achieved position, authority and recognition as their hard work and time served have earned them a degree of responsibility and status. These self-attributions of their employment status influence their self-esteem and self-confidence and also affect the prominence of their working and social identity (Harrod and Serpe, 2021).

The way individuals react to threats to their identity demonstrates the value they place on that identity. How individuals across the voluntary sector talk about the changes they have experienced further informs us about the professional and social identities of those working in the sector, which they derive from working there. It is reasonable to assume that uncertainty around a professional role can affect an individual's professional identity. Uncertainty can also affect their social relationships, networks and identities, as being a part of something and belonging is an intrinsic part of the human experience. People feel compelled to belong to or be part of larger social structures and networks.

Regarding both personal and social identity, becoming unemployed for whatever reason, whether due to being made redundant or because of illness, can effectively strip individuals of their status and dramatically reduce their social life and social interaction. Research has shown that individuals often use volunteering as a staged platform for gaining experience or re-entering the economic working environment. At the same time, the social aspects of interacting

with other volunteers and employees help increase self-esteem and well-being and create friendships (Mühlhaus et al., 2021).

Gaining, changing or losing one's status can impact people differently, depending on their personal perception, identity and worldview. People often perceive their domestic, home roles as distinct from their public, professional working roles. The domestic setting is often given far less credence than professional and working roles. After all, the domestic environment is confined to the home and family matters.

Ronnie expressed concern about the prospect of retirement:

> "They say you are only of use when you are useful to other people. I certainly don't want that to stop with retirement. I suppose I could volunteer, but that's a huge step-down. I couldn't imagine volunteering and working under people I used to manage. Oh god, no, I don't think I could bear that".

Ronnie is pondering the idea of retirement in twenty to thirty years from the perspective of where she was then. She considers herself helpful to others and places stock in her position as a manager. The prospects of those changes are scary to her. To her, volunteering would significantly lower her status, as seen from the social comparison implicit in her words. She values her current position in the hierarchy of her organisation, so being managed by her current staff would diminish her status.

External Threats – Austerity Rhetoric

Although those who work within the voluntary sector are drawn from a wide variety of backgrounds, when you talk to them about austerity and the arguments used to justify those measures, there is a large degree of consensus. There is a majority view which contrasts the rhetoric of Tory austerity measures with the actual implications and impacts of those measures. Over the years, critics have argued that austerity measures were sold in a deliberately misleading way, designed to win over and placate the electorate into agreeing with an ideological desire to reduce the size of the state. This highly political and socially contentious economic strategy polarised the population regarding support for the measures and their effects on society.   Over a decade on, the ramifications are still being felt.

The term austerity and the use of phrases like 'we're all in it together' disguised the reality of the scale of the public spending cuts and tried to create a sense of social solidarity. However, most people now agree that it was simply spin, chosen to sell the idea of radical public sector cuts by disguising the impact of what was to come through softer language. Beyond this was the implicit notion that the harshness of the measures to come was justified and necessary for the nation's good. However, outside the media and government statements, the term austerity had little relevance to public experience and did not become part of everyday vocabulary. This portrayal contrasts everyday references to public sector cuts as the reasons people lost their jobs.

I asked some of the participants about their views of austerity, and most were dismissive of the term itself. Kevin's response is to the point, **"**Austerity, it just means government cuts". Susan responded similarly, "You mean government cuts. Austerity measures is just a softer term and gives the impression that it's necessary". Both quickly moved past the term austerity to what they felt it meant. They also used the exact phrase 'government cuts', giving it a harsher term

with none of the softening of the original euphemism. They also placed blame for the cuts and, by extension, their impact firmly with the government. They viewed the government as an external force imposing the cuts on the country. Denise's reply used that same term and demonstrated how the guilt for the negative consequences was pinned on the government, "When colleagues talk about low wages or job security, they blame government cuts".

The use of the term austerity itself was part of the narrative that emerged around how the cuts were imposed. Politically convenient euphemisms are not new, and while often effective across the country, they also tend to be reasonably transparent. Doreen's comments clearly link the term austerity and her view of why the government used it: "I don't know why they called it Austerity measures. It's just a posh word to make it sound better than it is." An aspect of identity shapes Doreen's comments, coming from a traditional class bias. The phrase 'austerity measures' is posh, or upper class, which has an additional negative framing from the perspective of a working-class area such as the North-East.

Alan expressed similar thoughts in more detail, again including the idea that it is not a term ordinary people use, "People never talk about austerity measures. I have never once in 9 years heard anyone use the word austerity measures outside the media or political debates on TV. It's absolute nonsense, political speak to dress up a disaster." There is less of the class aspect here, but there is undoubtedly a distinction between political or media speak and 'normal people'. He uses the term 'political speak' to imply that it is not simply more formal or fancy but actually serves a duplicitous purpose. With that recognition of deception came anger.

Using phrases like 'we're all in it together' also provoked a hostile response from many in the voluntary and community sector. The expression suggested that everyone across the social and economic spectrums would share the nation's burden equally. However, in practice, people from lower socioeconomic backgrounds were affected and suffered disproportionately from

the cuts, whilst the more affluent were able to buffer the effects of the cuts financially. For example, Robert comments, "It's a gimmick, bullshit, we are not in it together, it's the biggest lie this government has tried to convince the people of". Like with the term austerity, Robert reacts to what he perceives as deception.

Joyce also had similar views about the idea of a political euphemism, but she goes further and argues against the need for cuts at all:

> "It's hugely sugar-coated. It wasn't a means to an end. It wasn't necessary; we're not all in it together; it's the poor, those on benefits and the low-waged who would feel it the most, and well, it's 2019, and it isn't over".

She calls out how those on lower incomes faced the brunt of the impact of the cuts. She is identifying a group of 'the poor' who had the cuts inflicted on them. While she does not directly place herself in that group, she clearly identifies with them and speaks in their defence. Susan also felt that the rhetoric around austerity was dishonest, "It's a lie. They just wanted an excuse to make massive public sector cuts". This comment again reflects the idea that the government imposed cuts on the people, describing a division between the victims, i.e. society (us) and the perpetrators, i.e. the government (them). Susan also drew further lines, "You don't hear rich people complaining because it never affects them, only those who need to use public services, the unemployed, sick, disabled and low-paid workers". In Susan's narrative, there are three groups: the government imposing the cuts, the rich who are immune to them, and the rest of society suffering the consequences. There is also the suggestion that the low-paid and those reliant on the state were going to, and did, suffer the worst impact.

Ronnie echoed the familiar opinion as to the dishonest of the austerity rhetoric:

> "Austerity, it's rubbish, an excuse, the welfare state that is paid for by the people, for the people, so they are basically stealing money we pay in to use it on paying back debts we didn't make, how is that even legal?".

She argues that the government robbed people, using austerity as a cloak for those activities. This view goes much further than the other participants but still reflects a broad perception that the government lied to the people. This perception has hardened an existing divide: the rulers and the ruled, or perhaps an extension of the class system. Given the tendency for those at the top of government to come from privileged backgrounds, class will always be a factor.

These comments suggest that this sense of betrayal is not merely an isolated group response. Instead, it is a much larger social consensus in which the social change mindset throughout institutions, charities and community groups coupled with media reports suggests that this is felt nationwide. In this context, the government's rhetoric and hierarchical group relations are seen as unbalanced and dishonest. From an identity perspective, those who think they have been disproportionately affected or disadvantaged tend to adopt a social change mindset to improve their group's status through collective action or voting preferences, whether as an individual or an in-group member.

Lies and Deceit – The Imposition of Cuts

Public disbelief and anger about the impacts of austerity was palpable. As time passed, a different perception of what was happening became apparent: austerity measures were neither temporary nor equal regarding where the impacts fell. Instead, people viewed them as an ideologically driven agenda to reduce government spending across the entire welfare and social system. This perception can be seen in the response given by Robert, who stated:

> "The reality is far worse. We didn't make this mess; the banks did, and the government did by allowing them to go unchecked and then bailed them out with public money by cutting public spending to pay back debts, which were not ours in the first place".

Robert distinguishes between 'we', the bulk of society, and two groups of outsiders he feels are responsible for everyone else's hardships. He feels aggrieved by this, which is part of a hardening of divisions between people and their government. Christine directly blamed the

government while questioning their motives, "This isn't a temporary thing. This government has been the most callous, uncaring and frankly corrupt government I can recall". It is common for people to feel that governments are taking the wrong course of action, making mistakes, or, in some cases, don't know what they are doing, but Christine's comments represent a complete breakdown of trust.

These comments provide insight into the severity of the impact of austerity measures and the public's changing perception of the measures. Suppose the government deliberately employed austerity as a targeted rollback of the state's role and reduction of its financial obligations. In that case, as Christine suggests, it paints a picture of callous and disproportionate government policies. It also indicates a government that had a blatant disregard for its citizens and the electorate. This perception of the reality of the cuts and who they have impacted contradicts the rhetoric of collective struggle and the claim from David Cameron's 2009 speech that "we're all in it together".

Chris's comments referred to the Prime Minister, MPs, and other wealthy individuals as being a group who are inflicting harm while not suffering themselves:

> "I don't think the rhetoric matches the reality of the cuts. They played them down with we are all in it together rubbish. You are not in it if you're rich; You are not in it if you're the Prime Minister; You are not in it if you are an MP. You dish these measures out, and you probably benefit from them, but you're certainly not suffering".

Chris is taking the phrase "we're all in it together" and picking it apart in a way that suggests it struck a tone, and perhaps he has been rehearsing this for some time. He specifically points out the rich, the Prime Minister as the head of the government, and the MPs he views as guilty. These groups are all 'others' and can fit into an 'us vs. them' narrative, where the groups of 'others' inflicted pain on the people.

Joyce had identified a range of negative consequences of austerity, all of which fall on groups that are, for the most part, at the lower end of society and would have been considered marginal even before the cuts:

> "On the ground, austerity has never been equitable or fair. I have seen the fallout over and over again. Capping welfare and rents has increased homelessness, debt, mental health problems, suicides, working families on low incomes having to use food banks, but as far as the government are concerned, welfare money isn't earned, so they should be grateful for getting something for nothing".

She feels the government is not concerned about who the cuts will fall on or how they have applied them. When she expresses that 'welfare money isn't earned', it ties into society's growing attitude that those receiving benefits are less worthy. They are regularly demonised in the press and have become an underclass in recent years.

Ronnie set out to refute the phrase "we're all in it together" as well:

> "Those with limited flexibility in their incomes are suffering. In the past ten years, the government has deliberately, deliberately, allowed vulnerable people, the elderly, disabled people, families with small children slide into poverty. Many thousands of low-income working families are now on the breadline. We are clearly not all in this together."

This response is another that feels like it falls off the tip of the participant's tongue as if they have been saying it repeatedly every time they hear someone talk about austerity. There is anger in it, and repeated uses of the word deliberately leave no ambiguity that she thinks the reason the government has not shielded the vulnerable goes beyond negligence.

Christine also described a callousness on the part of the government, "If you don't have money and resources, they don't care. They are only interested in big businesses and the private sector and killing off those at the bottom through some sort of financial selection." Christine already described the government as 'callous and uncaring', and this goes further. She is drawing the same division between the government and society, which several of the other participants also did.

Many of the participant's narratives presented this view of the government as a hostile force. Still, Margaret, while forceful in her views on the government and the policy, did also acknowledge that ultimately the people elect the government, "We elect these self-serving scum bags into government, thinking they have our best interests at heart, they should listen to us, there's just no need for deliberate cruelty and neglect, not in a supposedly civilised society." She is perhaps suggesting that the coalition fooled people into voting for them, which fits with the idea of austerity measures being a deception.

Joyce described her expectations about the cuts compared to her expectations, "To be honest, I don't think anyone thought the government cuts would be so vicious". The use of the word vicious goes beyond negligence. A negligent government might have made changes without giving due regard to their consequences, but 'vicious' implies a knowing disregard for the harm the cuts would bring.

It has been argued, debated, and publicly stated on many occasions that the government and those of significant economic and social standing are perceived to be above the everyday social and financial struggles of the working and middle classes, with the government and these ruling classes defining and portraying themselves as the desirable dominant salient group. Therefore, it is reasonable to assume that this group will inevitably act to create policies that suit their ideology and interests. There may not be significant care for how policies will impact other groups; therefore, they can ignore the impacts in favour of implementing the policy.

Austerity rhetoric and the actual measures have created a hard division between those I spoke to and the government. They feel that rather than the cuts being a necessary economic adjustment, pain has been inflicted on those they care about, in many cases, due to ulterior motives. As people working in the voluntary sector tend to care about the society they are working to help, those they care about encompass a lot of individuals. The cuts hit those on the

margins of society and those with vulnerabilities hardest, and the voluntary sector is more likely to encounter those groups regularly. The participants see the government as a hostile force, almost as if the country was invaded and taken over, and their anger is no different. That it is an elected government makes it even worse.

This collective response to the government's hierarchical imposition of what is seen as deceitful policies under the guise of austerity measures has elicited many public protests and media coverage. However, individual protests and actions have provided little traction; therefore, group or social identity changes emerge as the most salient option for affecting change with personal opinions and actions performed on behalf of the group. Social identity leads individuals to categorise themselves and other salient groups into an 'us' versus 'them' narrative. In this case, 'us' is the people they care about, and 'them' is the hostile government implementing the cuts.

Self-categorisation based on group membership might be so salient that it can activate automatically even with subtle stimuli. This salience solidifies the existing social identity many voluntary sector workers already give themselves. Before austerity, they thought of themselves as the people in society who actually worked to help people and were suspicious of the effectiveness of the public sector. Now, they believe the government and, by association, the public sector are actively hostile, so that distinction has grown.

I'm Afraid There is No Money – The Impact of the Cuts

Austerity measures created exceptional circumstances for those working in the voluntary sector on several fronts. First, redundancies that occurred as a direct result of public sector cuts led to exponentially increasing unemployment across the country. Along with those direct impacts on public sector workers came the reductions in social and welfare services and provisions. These cuts to public funding also adversely affected the voluntary sector as government

contracts were lost, conditions were changed, or services were expected to be carried out at a significantly reduced cost. In many cases, this created turbulent working conditions as funding was not guaranteed to be renewed. Finally, the cuts to welfare benefits and other social welfare services forced millions of people to seek out alternative sources of social support. They turned to the voluntary sector, radically increasing the need for their services and adding pressure on their workforce.

The loss of 1.1 million jobs in the public sector, with no prospect of new roles, had created a tsunami of redundant workers looking for alternative sources of employment within the private and voluntary sectors (Clegg, 2018). These redundancies vastly increased the competition for a finite and shrinking number of jobs. In many cases, they would typically have been taken up by those already working within the sector looking for a better position or pay.

Robert's experience can be viewed as a summary of how the cuts affected society as a whole, and he used similar phrasing that many of the participants did when allocating responsibility, "The government cuts are to blame". Again, this separates the people suffering the impacts of austerity from those imposing it upon them. He continued, "What the hell did they think would happen when hundreds of thousands of jobs were lost and services cut to the bone? How did they expect services to operate, or people pay their bills and put food on their tables?" He is asking a rhetorical question, as he has already expressed earlier in the conversation, that the government was 'callous' and 'uncaring'. What he is really asking is, given that they knew the harm it would cause, why did they do it? He begins with a fairly technical question about services, automatically thinking with his voluntary sector identity, but then, as he talks about paying bills and putting food on the table, he shows a wider concern for the impacts across society.

He went on to describe how things have changed for individuals since austerity was introduced, "Not just people on benefits, working people like me, people trying to find work, it's so much harder now, there aren't the opportunities there were before, and too many people are going for the same job". How he phrases it emphasises how severe the measures have been in Robert's estimation. People on benefits might be expected to struggle if the government cuts spending, as they are direct recipients of that spending. However, as working people were also struggling, it was much worse. Robert describes fewer jobs and more and more people going for them, which was a common theme amongst the participants.

Pauline also gave her views on the impacts of the cuts, "It's obvious, government cuts equal cuts to jobs and services, but people who were working in the sectors or relied on the sectors suffer the most because they either lost their jobs or no longer have access to those services". Here again, she used the less polished term 'cuts', referring to the act rather than the political version of the motive for them.

Diane provided a narrative from the perspective of a longstanding voluntary sector service provider who has witnessed the effects of austerity measures daily:

> "The people who are affected are obviously the unemployed, the sick and disabled. But.
> We are also seeing people struggling who are working, on minimum wage, low paid
> jobs that are just over the threshold to get benefits, especially low paid agency worker
> and those on zero-hour, contracts".

Like Robert, she initially talked about the circumstances of those getting benefits before talking about everyone else. Her initial focus may be because voluntary sector workers initially consider those they help on a daily basis before others. She then discusses those you might place at the next level up in the hierarchy: people working but struggling nonetheless. However, she returned to those who were most in need and therefore suffered the most:

> "Universal Credit claimants left with no money for five weeks even if they were
> previously getting benefits, then forced to borrow from the DWP to fill in the gap, the

government is clawing back money from the poor. It's deliberate, it's cruel, and it is clearly discriminatory".

Like many of the participants, Diane called the government cruel, and she gave examples of that cruelty. She talked about the government trying to take money from the poor and used the word 'deliberate'. Her comments are another example of references to a hostile other in the form of the government and the creation of a division between us and them.

Although Alan did not go into detail like Robert or Diane, he believed that the rhetoric of austerity overlooked how it would actually affect people, "Austerity rhetoric concentrates on making savings but doesn't mention the costs to people. I see the effects of cuts". Alan's comments single him out for seeing past the rhetoric and knowing what is really going on. When he, Diane and Robert spoke of the harm they saw being caused by austerity, they were using their roles in the voluntary sector to demonstrate how they better understood what austerity was doing to society than the media and even the government. These comments are a form of social comparison that links to the idea of the voluntary sector comprising people who want to improve society more than the other sectors. They are saying that because of the kind of people they are, they can better see the damage that is being done.

There is a general feeling of disconnection regarding the rhetoric used for austerity. The government's promotion of the Big Society, with its claims of 'We are all in it together', does not reflect the financial impact experienced by the public sector, the people, or those who work in the voluntary and community sector. The perception of the communication of austerity policies and how the media presented them shows that while they may have appeared successful, there is a significant amount of scepticism and questioning of the motives behind austerity. In some cases, it extends to people who have suggested that the political, business and media realms engage in complicit collusion to steer economic and political change.

However, it also goes further, with some suggesting a deliberate plan to reduce the public sector for the private sector's benefit.

Keith was very vocal in making the argument that there was an ulterior motive behind austerity, "The only sector that has benefited from austerity is the private sector. It's all about the market, generating business. Run down the public sector so people buy into the private sector". He is singling the private sector out as not only an accidental winner from austerity, but he is suggesting that was always the point. "That's what austerity cuts have really been about. If you can find one person who has benefited from austerity other than the rich, I will eat my hat". In Keith's view, austerity was always about helping the rich at society's expense. He continued:

> "It's totally undermined the welfare state; they are moving us down the road of the American system, and it's not a new thing either. They tried it on under Thatcher but only took it so far, then Blair made further changes. It's been a process of changing how things are financed while changing what people believe".

In this extended statement, Keith is comparing the US system, and by extension the United States itself, to how things are done in the UK. He frames this in an explicit negative sense and then describes how various neoliberal politicians have altered the country. The connection between 'how things are financed' and 'what people believe' is interesting. He suggests that by changing the way the system works, people will eventually embrace the ideology behind it. The final part of his answer sums up how he feels: "Public spending is at an all-time low, the deficit is reduced, but on a whopper of a lie, supported by the Media, which the country has swallowed hook line and sinker". The public has been conned. The measures did their job, but they kept cutting, and the media are to blame for allowing it to happen.

Keith continued:

> "It was an opportunist response to the financial crisis. The government saw an opportunity to implement their market-led policies, and the media were complicit. Jobs aren't safe, benefits and the welfare state aren't safe, everything we take for granted can easily disappear, and I can see the welfare state disappearing in my lifetime all for the

> pursuit of money, basically an American-style country that only cares about making money."

Keith uses the phrase 'market-led policies', which refers to the neoliberal approach introduced in the UK in the 1980s. His talk of unsafe jobs and benefits and his fears for the welfare state are examples of the indirect effects of austerity. He views the cuts implemented so far as the first steps towards something more permanent that he expects to be more harmful. This perception has further built Keith's antipathy towards the government that implemented those policies.

The idea of a hostile government inflicting austerity evolved as I spoke to the participants, with several arguing a degree of complicity from others at the top of society. For example, Robert angrily stated, "I think the government along with powerful and influential corporations, such as the media, are all complicit in selling a lie, the idea that 'austerity' is necessary, and the bullshit of 'Big Society', its brainwashing people". Robert describes a powerful 'other' who threatens him, the social categories he places himself in, and the rest of society. He feels this other has been manipulating the rest of society, a concept that appears throughout history in different guises during times of difficulty.

Alongside the government's rhetoric of austerity with its need for financial restraint and sacrifice was the promotion of everyone playing their part by publicly stating that "we are all in it together". This politically charged rallying cry is an interesting and powerful concept that can be used in various ways to create or increase social cohesion. The idea was to suggest that while there would be pain, everyone would suffer, so at least it was fair.

Robert continued, "The poor, the unemployed and the low waged are in it together, rich people certainly aren't". He is again making an 'us' and 'them' separation. The people suffering the consequences of austerity are in it together. Here, he is talking about 'the rich' as the other. Given that the Conservatives are traditionally considered to be the party of the better off, and

Cameron and Osbourne are both viewed as coming from privilege, the rich can be taken to mean both the government and those they favour. He continued, "You can't tell me people are happy with this. They have no choice, " implying that the government imposed the policy on the people, and as he has already argued, by deception. He concluded, "We are not in it together. It's the biggest lie this government has tried to convince the people of". He refers to David Cameron's claims in a 2009 speech and elevates those words into a grand conspiracy against society. The claim may have been so effective as to backfire. In Robert's case, at least, it has created a significant degree of anger, perhaps more than if the messaging had been more honest.

As these comments indicate, for some in the voluntary sector, there is a perception that the rhetoric of austerity has become a prime example of combined political, industrial and media collusion, deception, and misdirection designed to brainwash, subdue, and quell forceful opposition. Joyce felt that there was an orchestrated messaging campaign: "I personally think the government deliberately bombarded and saturated the public using the media, TV, newspapers and speeches to present their grand lies". Her phrasing is reminiscent of the concept of saturation bombing, which involves bringing an overwhelming degree of force on a target to bring about submission. She suggests that such was the volume of the austerity messaging that the public inevitably gave way to and accepted the argument. She referenced propaganda, "As they say, the bigger the lie and the more often you hear it, the more likely people will believe it". She is incensed by what she sees as the deliberate manipulation of the public and is another participant who is talking about the government in terms of being a hostile external force:

> "That may sound controversial, but as far as I'm aware, I am still allowed to have an opinion unless free speech has been legislated against again. I wouldn't be surprised with anything this government do".

It is common knowledge that advertising wields significant power to shape public thought but can also influence people's identities (Bartholomew, 2009). Although media channels don't necessarily create identities, they do reflect them by providing diverse and contradictory messages that individuals use to validate their identities and ways of expressing themselves, thereby participating and exchanging ideas. However, the austerity narrative has gone relatively unchallenged, with much of the reporting treating the need for austerity as a fact rather than a political choice.

Although there may have been a degree of initial consensus regarding the need for austerity measures, disillusionment soon followed as the government rhetoric didn't match the reality of their actions. Moreover, rather than being a temporary measure, plans for austerity were mapped out years in advance, with fiscal policies becoming more harsh and inconsistent in their impacts. This led to suspicions of clandestine motives.

Erica admitted she initially supported the measures but later changed her view:

> "I used to think it was just to balance the economy, but they keep moving the goalposts. If there was a need to reign in expenditure, that need has long gone, but they haven't stopped cutting budgets because it was never a temporary initiative. It was always a government policy".

These comments align with similar views expressed by many participants that austerity was a policy in search of an excuse to use it. This view says that the government imposed the cuts on the country for ideological and profit-driven reasons. In any case, the outcome is that the government is now seen as hostile, an 'other' who threatens the participants and society as a whole.

Who Gets the Blame?

While the participants pin the blame for austerity squarely on the government, the political rhetoric surrounding the economic crisis laid it elsewhere. It focused on out-group identity-

based responsibility for the crisis, with those living in poverty and the low-paid as the unnecessary and unwanted consumers of public funds (Pantazis, 2016). The argument was that the state had spent too much, borrowed too much, and now needed to remedy that by cutting the money going to people who didn't deserve it. They created an overly simplified narrative for public sector cuts that focused on the identity of users of state resources as wasteful, unworthy, and taking money for nothing.

Keith, who from his earlier comments is highly sceptical of the messaging around austerity, felt that there has been an undercurrent of greed in the media since the 1980s, "Since the 1980s the government, companies, TV adverts and media have been brainwashing people into thinking money is everything. Then when it all went tits up, they need someone or something to blame instead of them." He is connecting the acquisitive attitude some feel has taken hold post-Thatcher and Regan to a concerted effort by politicians and the media. Then, he suggests that as people would link the financial crisis to that model's failure, they would employ a diversionary tactic.

> "Look at the news. To divert us from the damage the government is doing with the cuts, they focus on people shouldn't be paid not to work, the unemployed are lazy, even though they can't find a job, cut disability benefits because they are not earned, reduce housing benefits to remove the unemployed from inner London, it's all about not using public money."

To placate themselves from the impact of austerity measures, the government's rhetoric of "we are all in this together" soon turned into the rhetoric of personal responsibility. This rhetoric is a change from the idea of society as a whole shouldering the burden to each person being expected to be responsible for their situation and finances. It suggested that those with reduced resources should spend within their means and not ask for more.

It is a powerful argument, and it does reflect many of the policies employed under austerity, such as benefit caps and what became known as the bedroom tax. There was a demonisation

of the poor and a suggestion that benefits were unearned money. This concerted effort to play the blame game is overtly based on identity and alternative identities, outsiders, 'them' (in-group) and 'us' (out-group), on a national scale. It has been played out between the employed and unemployed (welfare recipients).

Media-circulated depictions of people faking homelessness are designed to divide public opinion, create doubt and reduce empathy for their situation. Suggesting that it is their fault if they are indeed homeless and not simply lying. This proportioning of weakness extends to the unemployed, who they portrayed as lazy and as being paid not to work. The depiction suggests they are not entitled to support, which provides the government with a legitimate excuse to cut benefits. This evocative language is designed to undermine the welfare system by validating notions of the unworthy and undeserving unemployed.

Diane expressed these thoughts, "It's quite remarkable because it's accepted that the county is in financial crisis and everything has to be cut back. The fact that we didn't have to bail out the banks seems to be forgotten". Here, Diane refers to an out-group initially blamed for the financial crisis. It did start with bank failures. She continued:

> "Occasionally, you would see independent reports about the effects of the cuts, increased homelessness, poverty, the need for food banks and the likes, but then more influential media outlets would report on groups faking homelessness and begging, creating doubt and suspicion around people sleeping rough, making them all out to be fake".

Her initial description highlights what she considers to be the important consequences of austerity. Then, she talks about 'the more influential media outlets' distorting the truth of austerity with fakery and misrepresentation. This narrative is another example of an external 'them' (the government) conspiring to threaten the 'us' (society). In the way she talks about the need for food banks and then discusses this conspiracy by the media, she articulates it as a threat to her identity within the voluntary sector.

Politicians and the media then extended the blame to other groups, such as immigrants, and this is an illustration of how the dangerous game of nationalism is being used as a tool to create divisions. This trend may be coincidental. However, those who are sceptical of the government's economic motives and political agendas are not blind to the way anti-European, anti-immigration, and nationalist rhetoric have been used. Fuelled mainly by public discontent, the issues of Brexit and revenue given to the EU considerably overshadowed austerity in recent years.

For example, Robert made a connection between the rhetoric surrounding austerity and the arguments employed to justify Brexit, "The government cuts, changes to welfare benefits and services is partly the reason people voted for Brexit, it was a protest vote because they want to find someone or something to blame for the state of the country". Robert suggests that austerity fuelled the anger that caused people to vote in favour of Brexit. In Robert's view, austerity harmed the country so much that people would vote for anything that would signal their dissatisfaction.

Keith had a different perspective, which is instead linked to the distrust he already feels for the government and extends to politics in general, "They sold us Brexit on lies, paying money to the EU, immigrants stealing our jobs and using our NHS". He refers to a nameless group as 'they' comprising everyone he feels is misleading the public, government, politicians, and press. He continues, "Purely a diversionary tactic, the bigger the lie, the more people believe it, it's so easy to blame other people so that people don't question their policies". This comment is very similar to how Keith described the austerity rhetoric. In his view, it was a grand deception designed to distract the public and allow sinister politicians to get away with their damaging schemes.

Much like Keith, Susan also expressed the sentiment that there has been a political need to create scapegoats:

> "After Austerity, they needed another villain, so they sold us Brexit as though all the UK's problems were because of Europe, one lie after another, and the media are so happy to play along, I don't think people believe or trust the government now".

Susan is linking the end of austerity to a need to create a new villain on which the blame for government failings can be placed or used as a distraction to keep the public from understanding and criticising government policy. Her statement that she can no longer trust reflects the attitudes of Keith and Robert as well. They have lost trust in the government's good faith, or their existing mistrust has worsened.

The public policies of austerity and subsequent nationalistic agendas are selecting narrow interpretations of social identity. Employing aspects of identity theory to legitimise notions of them and us effectively promotes exclusionary practices and racism. This diversionary tactic of divide and rule is reminiscent of corruption generally associated with third-world despots and extremist regimes.

As with every policy or agenda, those on the receiving end of the fallout of those changes or policies are often those who are already economically, educationally, or socially unable to have a voice and become casualties of the process. Unfortunately, one of the ugly effects of reduced resources is the proportioning of the blame, often on the people impacted the most, the defenceless and vulnerable. This blame can often lead to public displays of racism, attacks and murders, driven and fuelled by 'them' vs. 'us' nationalistic media reports. Yet, their experiences or alternative perspectives can provide fresh insight into how those policies and agendas affect minorities and how they are viewed internationally.

Mahmood's story demonstrates this. He provided a first-hand experience of how austerity and the atmosphere of selective victim blaming had impacted his life in the UK as an individual

from a minority background: "I would expect to hear people don't have enough money or food in Asian and African countries but not in Britain." Mahmood shares elements of identity with the other participants as a volunteer working for a charity, but because of his background, he also has a different perspective. The other participants have been in the UK for most of their lives, so they have certain expectations of this society. Mahmood's expectations are actually higher than those of others, and he sounds disappointed that a country with the UK's resources even has people in need of assistance from the voluntary sector. "Britain is a very rich country in the world, everyone knows, so why the people don't have any money? The government don't have to bail out the banks". He continued:

> "When people have no money, it's people like me, asylum seekers, refugees, foreigners. We get the blame for no money, we get shouted at f…Paki, f…Muslim. I have been attacked a few times, badly and went to hospital. I got spit on my face like a dog, and a bottle hit off my back and shoulder. It's not safe on my own, and at night, near groups of people, I got pulled in a back street, they punched me in my head, and my shoes taken. Lots of times, I get shouts at me telling me to go home and stop stealing English jobs".

Mahmood's experiences of racism are far from unique and reflect individuals seeking to assert their own identity at the expense of others. They placed their identities above that of Mahmood and people in similar circumstances and deemed them undeserving of the pittance of help they received from the state. These have been influenced, without a doubt, by the continuing demonisation of immigrants, refugees and asylum seekers in the right-wing press. They also form part of a wider campaign to denigrate those receiving state support.

Mahmood's abuse came from members of the public, but the pervasive nature of the scapegoating meant that it wormed its way into the institutions intended to support us. Due to austerity, there has been a noticeable change in attitudes within some statutory organisations. The systematic reductions in public spending across an extensive social spectrum have radically reduced services and rights and effectively left swathes of people who rely on welfare services to seek out alternative sources of support. These cuts have dramatically affected those

left to pick up the pieces. However, many have been driven to adopt insular, self-protectionist mechanisms to maintain employment or position. At the same time, those who have become adversely affected have become apathetic and desensitised to the social world around them. This sadly paints a picture of broken Britain and goes on to suggest that apart from the lack of help and support for the service users, it's the services themselves that are in dire crisis, as statutory services are expected to operate on reduced revenue while struggling to cope with an increase in clients.

For example, there were increases in reports of ill-treatment, lack of respect, abuse, and unwarranted sanctioning from DWP and Jobcentre staff towards unemployed job seekers and people with disabilities. These are widespread enough to suggest institutional changes and attitudes towards welfare recipients, implying that public sector workers have been instructed to remove as many welfare recipients as possible to cut costs. They were doing this by making the experience of interacting with the DWP so negative that people would be reluctant to apply for support and instead secure any form of employment. Disability is often a static and unchanging label, so for individuals with disabilities, it is likely that they will remain as continuous users of welfare resources, so some may view them as perpetual burdens on the state.

Diane described the experiences her clients have had with the DWP:

> "In the past decade, I've seen many clients who have been abused by DWP and Jobcentre staff. People with mental health problems, substance abuse and learning difficulties are being treated appallingly, being reported, sanctioned and deliberately excluded or making trouble for them. I feel there has been a deliberate reduction in funding for advocacy, mediation, or representation so that people cannot challenge the system".

This narrative paints a picture of public sector workers viewing those they are meant to serve in an adversarial way instead. There is an us and them mentality in this, with DWP and job centre staff viewing people seeking help from the state with scepticism and mistrust. Given the

scale of the job losses in the public sector, many may be former public sector workers. Erica

also described a hostile system, one which makes even those undergoing cancer treatment jump

through hoops to receive support:

> "The changes to the benefits system basically force you into applying for any job
> available, so when you get one, you try and keep it. My husband worked all his life and
> paid into the system but took early redundancy because of being ill. The DWP made
> him jump through lots of hoops to qualify for benefits. He was still undergoing
> chemotherapy but was still expected to take any work on offer or be sanctioned. It's
> quite ruthless. When you see how vulnerable people are, you have no idea what the
> government's cuts have done to other people unless you are working in the area and see
> it. It's bloody disgusting. It pisses me right off".

It is now common knowledge that private companies contracted to assess people with

disabilities' fitness for work were put under immense pressure by the Department for Work and

Pensions (DWP) to find claimants ineligible for out-of-work disability benefits (Kulakiewicz

et al., 2022). In 2015 alone, over 20,000 people with mental health issues had their benefits

sanctioned following Work Capability Reassessments. This abuse of power indicates

institutional prejudices and discrimination aimed at individuals less likely to rebuke unjust

authoritarian behaviour (People Receiving ESA Due to Their Mental Health More Likely to

Be Punished Than Helped Into Work, n.d.).

Doreen also provided a personal reflection on her encounter with the DWP:

> "I have to go for regular medicals to prove my illness. I am waiting to be transferred
> onto universal credit, which scares me because you lose five weeks money and don't
> have a choice. I feel like I'm being punished for being ill. In a country that has a welfare
> state, it's a strange way to treat people. Maybe they are trying to kill off the sick,
> disabled, people with learning difficulties and those who need help from the state. That
> sounds terrible, doesn't it? But it does make you think about why they are doing it".

The reference to 'a country that has a welfare state' is reminiscent of Mahmood's comments

where he could not comprehend a rich country not looking after its people. In Doreen's case,

she cannot believe that the country cannot help people like her, so there must be some reason

the government does not want to. All three of these narratives link back to how many

participants have come to view the government as a hostile external force as a consequence of the way austerity was sold and implemented.

On a domestic level, subliminal victim blaming through political and media communications has permeated to the extent that distorted and fake news has become endemic. Unfortunately, these perceptions have far-reaching consequences as attitude changes are often internalised and institutionalised, resulting in harmful, hardened, pushy attitudes and reactions to specific groups and those in need. In extreme cases, service users are identified as members of the out-group, as needy, a burden, undesirable, and underserving users of public money.

The Voluntary Sector to the Rescue

Overall, the rhetoric surrounding austerity measures, the Big Society, and the phrase 'we are all in this together' proclaims and supports the notion of self-sufficiency and self-reliance, which in layman's terms is indirect government-speak for 'don't rely on us'. However, if this is a conscious unravelling of welfare provision, the government can no longer be relied upon. What will be provided, who will provide it, and who or what can we rely on?

It appears that at this point, in the absence of funding and a large scale-down in welfare and public services, it is the voluntary and community sector. The voluntary sector is synonymous with creating social wealth and helping people in times of need. Those within the sector are on the front line in delivering services for people experiencing homelessness, those with mental health issues and those living in poverty. They, therefore, have direct first-hand experience of the impacts that austerity measures have had and continue to have on society. As a result, there is a sense of infuriation felt by voluntary sector workers towards policies that deliberately or negligently inflict suffering.

Christine described this phenomenon:

> "When something terrible happens to someone, people go, oh, that's terrible. What they really mean is, I'm pleased that's not me. We don't think about it until it happens to us. Public sector services are at breaking point, and many clients end up seeking help from the voluntary sector. We deal with the real-life tragedies. We have the uncomfortable conversations, their suffering, struggles, it's a real eye-opener, believe me, some really nasty shit happens to good people".

Christine's comments explore the gradual impact of declining service provision. The public at large would not notice something was wrong until it began to impact them specifically. The canaries in this particular mine are the more vulnerable parts of society who rely more directly and regularly on state support. They are the first to be impacted, as she has seen in the increased requests for help.

As she continues and talks about 'real life tragedies', she shows an emotional attachment to the plights of her clients. This is not just a job for her. She really cares about them. Susan also indicates a degree of concern for those her organisation helps that goes beyond the mundane delivery of services:

> "We deal with hidden emergencies, people in crisis, homeless, destitute, debt problems, addictions, poverty, food banks, advice centres, people with learning disabilities, physical and mental health problems, all the different social factors and issues that affect people's lives. These people are either falling through the net, being discouraged to seek help or are being turned away from statutory services, so in one way or another, the third sector picks them up".

She talked about 'emergencies' and 'crisis', showing that to her, these are not minor issues but matters of survival for the people experiencing them. Due to the nature of their work in the voluntary sector, those working there have greater insight and sympathy for the struggles and experiences of their clients and service users, who often tend to be those at the lower end of the economic spectrum.

Many of those clients are benefits recipients, and the impacts on them have been compounded, as the government's cost-cutting initiatives have been aimed at reducing welfare spending. These cuts have resulted in reduced state benefits and related welfare support, such as housing benefits, with the introduction of 'the bedroom tax' (Moffatt et al., 2015). In addition,

introducing universal credit essentially stripped all welfare claimants of five weeks of benefit. Also, benefits sanctions became much harsher as efforts were made to reduce the number of people claiming.

However, it wasn't just the most vulnerable sections of society affected by these changes. Hundreds of thousands of working families, even two waged families, were experiencing significant hardship, demonstrating that the impact of austerity was cutting across many of society's lower and middle social and economic strata. This is reflected in Diane's story:

> "You don't have to be on benefits to feel the cuts. Working people are using food banks because they can't make ends meet, but the government would have us believe that if you need to rely on food banks, then you're spending money on luxuries, and you need to learn to budget".

Diane again refers to the government as a hostile entity, suggesting in the phrase 'would have us believe' that they are trying to alter how society thinks about financial hardship. Her comment indicates how those on benefits were blamed for using too many of the state's resources. It also uses the idea of the deserving and undeserving poor, where even the previously 'deserving' working poor are now being grouped in with the existing underclass of the unemployed.

While Diane's comments were general and reflected on society as a whole, Doreen provided a personal narrative of how austerity measures had impacted her, "Bedroom tax forced me to move out of a three-bedroomed house I had with my sons into a small high-rise flat". Doreen is a volunteer, and given how the 'bedroom tax' affected her, she must be experiencing circumstances similar to those seeking help from the voluntary sector. This narrative demonstrates the blurred line between those providing support and those needing it. She continued to give some insight into how the cuts have affected local services:

> "The rents and council taxes have increased, libraries, citizen's advice, playgroups, community centres, and old people's homes have closed. Rubbish is now emptied every

two weeks. You're charged for large items of rubbish removing rats and wasp nests from council properties. Councils have scrapped school uniform grants. Prepaid Gas and electricity meters are used because people can't afford to pay bills, and when they run out, they stay cold and use candles; it's dangerous. This is just the tip of the iceberg".

Doreen's description shows that her expectations of what the local public sector should do differs from the realities of what it still can as a result of the cuts. While these are important services, they are not matters of life and death. These examples demonstrate a move away from a society where the state exists to solve people's problems. Other examples, such as the increased use of pre-paid utility meters for those in debt or on low incomes, represent more significant threats to health and well-being. As Doreen describes, if people cannot top up the meter, they go cold in the winter.

Being at the forefront of dealing with the fallout of the austerity measures, those working in the sector have come to understand the depth of feeling and despair many of their clients experienced. Paul described how it has built over time, "It has definitely got harder in this sector over the years, cuts to benefits, housing, services, people are in debt, depressed, using food banks and even clothing banks, it's chronic, it really is". Paul starts by describing how hard it has been for the sector, but he is really talking about how hard people have found it to live with the impacts of austerity. His perspective as someone who helps people with these problems gives him insight, and much like the other participants, his identity derived from working in the sector influences him to care deeply.

Margaret explained simply how the cuts have increased pressure on the voluntary and community sector, "Cuts across the public sector means more people needing help from the charitable sector". She views this with a sense of inevitability, as the voluntary sector will have to come to the rescue, there being no other choice. This comment reflects the moral stance of many of those working in the sector because, of course, if people need help, the sector will help them.

These comments demonstrate how the voluntary sector has become increasingly relied upon in the wake of austerity. Alison described the increase in workload her organisation and those like it were experiencing, "The amount of work has increased because the public rely on us to cover much of the work that was previously carried out by government welfare agencies." Alison's comment shows that she considered the voluntary sector's role was transforming from a complementary service provider to a safety net instead.

When it comes to a lack or absence of public welfare provisions, it has traditionally been the voluntary and community sector that has been there to pick up the pieces. In a country like the UK, which has a well-established welfare state, the role of the voluntary and community sector has generally been to complement the gaps in social provision. The sector has also traditionally played an important role in the front-line delivery of many welfare services, acting as an extension of the public sector in some areas.

However, others thought that their status as a sector that already worked in partnership with the government, combined with the very public rhetoric of the 'Big Society', meant they could maintain welfare services without funding the public sector. Alison continued by describing how she had that view, at least to begin with, "I mean, how is that fair, or even a partnership, how can you be expected to provide and increase services with less money? We have been seconded into the government's austerity policies with not enough funding to deliver them". There is frustration in Alison's words, as though the state has given up on helping people, but someone still has to do it. There is also resentment about her sector being dragged into something many disagree with, expected to help alleviate its consequences, and not even being provided the means to do so.

This increased demand for help inevitably brought with it an increase in costs at a time when the voluntary sector itself was feeling the pinch. As Christine described, "The cuts have been

massive across the entire public sector, but many of the voluntary sector's services are supported by local government who simply don't have the money anymore."

There is social and political awareness in the sector of government policy regarding the voluntary and community sectors. The prevailing view is that the government feels in the absence of public and welfare services due to austerity measures, the voluntary sector will step in to help. This consensus view feeds into a broader sense of scepticism of government policies, austerity measures and the big society. As a result, there is an air of disappointment and anger, the cause of which is two-fold. First, for what is seen as abandoning those dependent on the welfare state. Second, for the trickle-down effects on the voluntary sector and its workers, who are under increasing pressure to respond to social needs without adequate funding, staff and resources.

Chris also described the way that the voluntary sector is taking up the slack from the cutting back of public services, "With public spending cuts, the services travel down to the next social provider, which is all the charities and community groups, in the hope that most of the work gets done at no cost to the government". He is taking a cynical view, which suggests the government does not care about cutting services because the voluntary sector won't be able to ignore those needing help. His attitude is unsurprising, given how austerity has influenced attitudes to the government. He continued, "So now the 'third sector' is carrying statutory sector work, and the government want austerity measures permanently so we are more like the American system". This comment is another reference to the USA with a negative tone, which carries an association between their smaller state version of government and the motives attributed to being behind austerity.

Alan also suggested that the voluntary and private sectors will have increased involvement in social provision, "It's simple, the more the public sector shrinks, the more voluntary sector and

private sector end up taking over". The distinction between Alan's comment and many of the other participants is the way he brings the private sector into it. Many of the participants talk about the private sector with a sense of disdain, considering them to be motivated only by greed. The idea that they might get involved in areas the voluntary sector would consider their remit may concern the participants.

In the aftermath of the economic crisis, it is unsurprising that many voluntary sector workers and managers have voiced anger, bewilderment, and frustration at what they see as the wholesale destruction of a once proud and world-leading welfare state. The language used to portray their dismay of government policy, with references to vicious cuts, implies the agenda carries within it a social cruelty and callousness, if not a malevolent intent designed to inflict harm and subordination.

Some feel that the voluntary sector was not partnered with the government but was more like an unwilling victim. They saw the sector as working in an environment of increased need against a financial backdrop of reduced funding. The transfer of services from the public to the community domain can be seen as a deliberate and ideologically driven act by the government. One that probably will not be reversed as it effectively permanently removes another layer of social responsibility from the state. For the voluntary and community sector, this is a precarious situation as the community sector could be seen to be complicit in carrying out the austerity and 'Big Society' agendas, as these measures have increased competition and may be interpreted by employees as aligning with the private sector's capitalist ethos.

From a social identity perspective, this could pose a significant threat to the identity of the voluntary sector itself. The sector has been inadvertently drawn into delivering the government's political agenda while at the same time delivering the welfare services that the state will no longer provide to continue to protect those in need.

Jobs in Crisis

Although the voluntary sector has been expected to take on many of the public sector's responsibilities, austerity has resulted in the closure of many small community-led groups and the loss of swathes of talented, dedicated volunteers. Many feel personally victimised at being a casualty of the cuts. They describe the government's rhetoric of working in partnership with the sector as misleading and distracts from a more insidious privatisation agenda. Others in the sector express views that the business world is simply continuing to infiltrate and take over the public and voluntary sectors in the way it has for decades. Changes in response to the financial crisis were merely another opportunity to create private profits.

The government's austerity cuts to public spending resulted in 70% of charities seeing an initial increase in demand for their services, which continued throughout the period of austerity. However, as most of the sector's funding comes from public donations, contracts and services, it was inevitable that austerity cuts would have a knock-on effect in terms of public donations and funding to the sector. The massive increase in public sector redundancies, reductions across the benefits system, and other impacts of working conditions reduced the public's ability to continue to support the charitable sector. Since the introduction of the austerity measures, government contracts with the voluntary sector have been reduced by £2.3 billion. Combined with the increase in demand, this has resulted in a £4.6 billion annual shortfall in the funding the sector needs to maintain and deliver its services (Davies, 2015).

Those I interviewed provided some interesting insights into the perceptions of the cuts to funding that had been felt within the voluntary sector in the Northeast. The personal narratives indicated that many of the participants felt a sense of shared social identity. They actually were all in it together, being part of something bigger, with like-minded people, fighting and working for the betterment of society. However, for those working within the sector, this was also

overshadowed by the fact that workers thought their respective positions were not secure. Throughout the sector, there appeared to be a familiar mantra of fear, lack of funding, and struggling to cope with demand and to provide enough help where needed.

Ronnie's account describes the struggles of those organisations, "Over the past ten years, since the government started cutting public funding, the sense of panic among charities and community groups is palpable because no one wants to lose their job". She is linking cuts in the public centre to the future of the voluntary sector. As someone working in the sector for a long time, she would be expected to understand how voluntary sector organisations are funded. She continued, "Every network meeting it's the same story, every organisation, charity, project, community hub, self-help group, you name it, money, funding, they are all struggling in one way or another". That the participants automatically link spending cuts and their employment may help explain the overall hostility they feel towards the policy.

Susan described first the impact on funding, "The cuts to the public sector were massive, and it did have a knock-on effect on the voluntary sector, especially with small charities. At first, we took a knock in donations and then other sources of funding." Her explanation mentions donations, which will inevitably fall when fewer people are working and those who might have taken cuts to their income. Other funding sources will include grants from local and central government, which started to reduce due to budgets being cut. She connected the direct funding pressures to the higher demand for services the sector saw: "On top of that, we were left to plug the welfare holes with no extra money. It's basically forcing everyone to work harder for free or get out." Susan also suggests that the voluntary sector has no choice but to help people. It is their mission, so they will soldier on despite the lack of funding.

From an identity perspective, almost any group can function as a social category if it enables differentiation between 'us' (in-group) and 'them' (out-group). Even on the most superficial ad-

hoc criteria, individuals still showed more favourable attitudes and preferential behaviour towards their group than towards the other group. References such as 'every organisation' suggest a commonality of reduced funding reports that is not just confined to a few charities or community groups but a familiar and shared experience across entire networks.

Voluntary sector workers are not oblivious to the economic realities and impact of reduced funding, as they deal with social deprivation and people in poverty daily. They, therefore, recognise that resources are at exhaustible levels, with services, wages and job security being affected. The level of frustration is evident as the voluntary sector is forced to contend with simultaneous roles of being a victim of reduced funding while also being the hero and coming to the rescue of society. However, there is an underlying anger directed at what they see as government abuse of charitable resources by having to replace statutory provisions.

Erica described the impacts on funding and also expressed deep anger at those she blames for them:

> "(My organisation) rely on public donations to fund community support and care homes that really should be provided by the local councils, but if people have less money, they don't have money to give, then income is reduced, so they end up reducing staff, hours, services, homes, take your pick, something has to give. Typical Tory government, they see welfare as a drain, working in the sector really opens your eyes, they have no idea how vulnerable some people are, or they simply don't care, it pisses me right off".

Erica clearly believes that neither her charity nor any other should be responsible for the delivery of accommodation and care, and there is anger in how she talks about it. Her charity provides these services because local councils are neglecting their responsibilities. However, because of the funding pressures on the voluntary sector, they won't be able to help everyone. This troubles Erica, who expresses the problem as an appeal to someone, perhaps the government, to take note and do something about it. That her following comment is an attack on 'typical Tory government' suggests she sees the futility in such an appeal. Her comment is

further evidence of how austerity and previous actions by Conservative governments have irreparably damaged the voluntary sector's trust in that political party.

In the decades before the financial crisis, consumerist market practices were gradually introduced into the voluntary sector through competitive contracts, slowly changing how many voluntary sector organisations were expected to operate. Since the early 1990s, increased competition and changes in government policy have replaced traditional grants for voluntary sector service delivery with procurement contracts, leading to what has now become known as 'the contract culture'. Over the years, these contracts have become widely used to increase competition across public sector services.

Since 2010, contracts have been used to deliver the government's welfare reforms agenda under the guise of austerity. The use of contracts has reduced funding amongst the many organisations and charities that are unable to compete for contracts and rely solely on donations and grants to be able to deliver their services. Consequently, many voluntary sector organisations closed, and those that remained were often forced to reduce staff, hours, and services or merge with other organisations to survive. Keith expressed particularly scathing views of the changes within the voluntary sector:

> "The recession and the cuts really did hit us hard, but we really felt the changes way back under the Blair government when they started expecting the voluntary sector to act like businesses. It really put a spanner in the works, especially for small local charities like mine who can't make money from helping people, and it goes against the whole ethos of what we do. These huge charities are really just businesses now; they have hundreds of employees, and when you see how much their CEOs get and how much of the income they generate goes on 'administration', you know it's all about the money".

This comment shows how Keith identifies closely with the traditional ethos and methods of the voluntary sector. His narrative illustrates a sense of loyalty to the charitable sector and the work it does on the ground at a local level. However, inherent in this narrative is a feeling of betrayal of the charitable ethos, where he suggests that business has infiltrated the sector, as these

supersized charities readily incorporate market-led business and working conditions. This comment is a social comparison in which his description of the huge charities as more like businesses can be inferred as meaning they are no longer authentic parts of the voluntary sector. His comparison represents an erosion of the sector's character as the focus is now on the pursuit of money as a lucrative business venture for many of the largest charities.

There is a view that in recent years, and especially since austerity began, there has been a deliberate attempt to transform the voluntary sector by incorporating private-sector practices. Examples include changes to funding, employment contracts, working hours and employer expectations. It could be argued that organisations need to adapt their operations to survive. However, these changes negatively impact workers and are perceived as threatening their security and, ultimately, their unique, socially responsive and independent nature. These changes are not an entirely recent phenomenon. The introduction of the contract culture and flexible working conditions can be traced as far back as the Thatcher government with the promotion of competition and the replacement of voluntary sector grants with contracts (Albertson & Stepney, 2019).

There is an awareness of this amongst those working in the sector for many years. For example, Doreen's comments:

> "I often think that the third sector has been hijacked by private sector managers who are restructuring the sector to work like a competitive business, and now we are purposely kept on tenterhooks, so we accept more responsibility without wage increases".

Much like the narratives that talk about the government as a hostile outside force, here Doreen is speaking of 'private sector managers' in the same tone. Those in the voluntary sector already think of the private sector as less worthy than their own, so the idea of people from that sector telling voluntary sector workers how to do things is deeply unwelcome. When this is combined

with funding pressures that threaten the positions of those workers, there is a threat to identity, which can undermine their well-being.

Keith also described the changes seen in the voluntary sector in recent years, starting with changes dating back to long before the financial crisis, "It's not just down to the recession and austerity, restructuring, funding contracts instead of grants started way back under Tony Blair's government". This comment takes a slightly different turn than most other narratives in that the blame for changes in the voluntary sector was not laid solely on Conservative governments. However, it is still a government forcing changes on the sector, so it is met with similar levels of negativity, "Expecting the entire voluntary sector to generate their own incomes isn't achievable because many can't make money from helping people who don't have any". This is another reference to the incompatibility of private sector methods with the voluntary sector. The way it is phrased questions whether the people implementing the policy fully understood what they were doing. Keith talks about these changes from the perspective of an experienced voluntary sector manager, and the implication from how he speaks is that only someone who works in the sector can understand it.

He also expressed views about the voluntary sector struggling to cope with the pressures from extra demand, "Unfortunately, because of the ethos of the voluntary sector, they feel they have no choice to extend their services to protect the people, so the government effectively has them over a barrel". This description of the ethos of the voluntary sector drives them to want to help others and reflects similar comments by Susan and Erica. He also suggests that the government is fully aware of the giving nature of the voluntary sector and is happy to abuse it. The ill will towards the government is even more prominent in his last comment: "Personally, I would match or even increase the public sector costs to teach them a lesson in greed". It is a flippant remark, demonstrating his frustration with the state of things in the voluntary sector. What was

once a community-focused endeavour has gradually changed as changes to funding have forced charities to fight harder for their survival.

Competition within the sector has increased over the years, and many of those working within the sector have seen how the changes brought about through austerity are an extension of those that started under Thatcher and continued under Blair. This more business-orientated approach to generating income within the sector changed the demands on organisations and their staff radically. The changes included a greater demand to 'prove a need exists' to maximise income by attracting performance-related funds.

Paul described his experience through 20 years in the sector, "For at least 20 years, funding has been about proving your worth, numbers, getting bums on seats, performance targets, you can't attract funding if you can't prove a need exists". From one perspective, it only makes sense that there won't be funding for something that does not need doing, but the way he phrases it suggests this is more than a simple tick-box exercise. His listing of the various elements of need and delivery that must be proven indicates that the demands have grown and grown. This build-up of the administrative hurdles that must be cleared to access vital funding frustrates him. It also shows an adversarial relationship, with funding doled out with great reluctance only when a need is undeniable.

He also commented on perceived inequalities in funding, "But in my opinion, the cuts are felt more in some places like Sunderland because of how funding is allocated outwards from central locations". Central locations can be taken to represent London and other large cities and central government. The comments draw on identity in several ways, initially in the form of the North-South divide, where the North is always the poorer relative. It also suggests a big city versus small city or town element. Finally, it continues the idea of government as outsiders, imposing

their will on the people. This narrative creates a defensive mentality amongst workers in the sector in areas like the North East.

Ronnie's narrative described a similar experience to Paul regarding funding: "The voluntary sector is more business-like now". This comparison between the voluntary and private sectors appears often, implying that the change is for the worse. Many voluntary sector workers view the private sector with suspicion and consider its way of doing things counter to their own ethos. She continued, "it's not about who we see, but about how many we see, numbers through the door, hitting targets, basically jumping through hoops to justify our positions and our funding". Her description suggests quantity over quality. It doesn't matter whether you help someone, as long as they are ticked off and the next person brought in. She also echoes the idea of having to 'justify our positions', which Paul also describes. Given the strong sense of purpose in the voluntary sector, the idea of having to prove to someone else that they are doing good work must be insulting. It is, therefore, understandable why such changes have been met with frustration, anger and, in some cases, hostility.

That frustration has been felt more by those from smaller organisations, as Doreen described, "In our charity, everything is dependent on funding, but there's lots of charities applying for the same money…. no funds equal no wages. The government wants charities to generate their own incomes". Smaller charities often struggle to attract enough money from the general public to carry out their purpose, especially those working in unfashionable sectors. Again, 'the government' are referred to as the other, that outside force imposing difficulty and hardship on the voluntary sector. The final sentence shows more frustration at the idea that after everything else, they now want charities to generate an income as well.

She continued with a comparison to other parts of the sector, "Big charities like Cancer Research and the British Heart Foundation can advertise on TV, and people will give them

money because it's likely they will need their help in the future". Cancer and other health charities have an advantage in some regards as we are more likely to directly identify with their causes because of our own lives or those we know and love. Doreen made the comparison to her own charity, "We help asylum seekers and people with physical or mental health issues, which isn't very popular, and we can't charge for services from people who don't have it, so we just scrape by, nothing works without money, it's common sense". She makes a social comparison between large and small charities within the sector. While the ethos of the voluntary sector exists in both, the different experiences of their workers suggest there may be two distinct groups rather than just one.

The large research-based health charities have innate advantages that many charities and community groups do not. They are much more likely to attract central and regional funding from NHS trusts and people who feel they have a vested interest in supporting them. This generosity contrasts with the small local charities they think they may never use and are therefore less likely to be drawn to support. For example, Doreen's charity supports asylum seekers, which, given the hostile attitude toward refugees, asylum seekers and other immigrants, will make attracting funding an uphill struggle. After all, most people know someone who has had cancer, if they have not themselves, but most of the UK's population cannot even imagine needing asylum in another country.

As the needs of society and the provisions on offer change, individual charities will come and go, while others while find their focus changes. However, in recent years, austerity measures and other competitive changes within the working environment have prompted a significant shift from providing quality people-centred services to a more quantity-first approach of seeing as many clients as possible to justify funding requirements. Both Paul and Ronnie described the need for organisations to justify their funding. This extra burden has increased pressure on

employees to achieve quotas without giving them additional time, resources, wages or budget. This pressure has created uncertain economic circumstances for those individuals, as their jobs depend much more on performance than ever.

Mary talked about the changes she has experienced, "I've worked and volunteered in the voluntary sector for decades, mostly women's support groups and refuges". Mary feels that her many years of experience in the sector give her significant insights into how it has changed, and she gives her assessment, "Many of them have come and gone, but it's certainly not because they didn't do a good job". Mary is distinguishing between the metrics you might use to judge a business and those you would apply to a voluntary sector organisation. In the private sector, a company that has ceased trading would be considered a failure. However, that need not be the case in the voluntary sector. Mary's comments prompt other questions about those organisations beyond their balance sheets. How many people did they help? How many lives were made better because of their efforts?

She continued by talking more about her organisation, "My work is about making connections, taking time to make people feel safe. Unfortunately, things have changed. You don't have time. It's all about proving your worth as a service provider". Her statement contrasts the aspects of her work she considers valuable with what those outside the sector think matters. Her identity is invested in helping others and making a difference, so she feels that the government and other funding bodies do not understand. They care about making charities prove themselves when it is not that simple. There is sadness in the phrase 'unfortunately things have changed'. When she says, 'You don't have time', the implication is that the activities required to gain and retain funding get in the way of helping people.

The approach to funding that now exists in the sector often conflicts sharply with its ethos of providing a qualitative, people-centred service. However, it could be argued that austerity

forced many organisations into survival mode by having to 'jump through hoops' to justify their existence. Most small and medium-sized charities are operationally unable to generate income, as their primary customers come from some of the most economically deprived areas and have little or no money to contribute. However, voluntary sector workers' sense of pride and drive to create social impact can only be depended on so far in the face of the demands for more and more. Driving an unwilling workforce to align with privatized practices will eventually lead to disillusioned workers, who will ultimately give up despite their desire to help others and move on.

For many people, this crisis was simply round two of the government's political agenda. They were using the opportunity of a financial crisis to shrink the public sector and promote self-reliance to revitalise competition. However, this created an environment where many small and medium-sized voluntary sector organisations could not compete for a gradually shrinking set of funding pots. Reduced funding forced many charities to increase the use of short-term employment contracts, with employment opportunities being directly linked to successful funding applications. As a result, there was an increasing sense of transience within the sector.

Voluntary sector organisations are not immune to the effects of global economic crises, so their organisational practices and processes are also financially driven. In response to a loss of funding, organisations restructure and centralise essential services, forcing them to close offices and stretch their resources. To try and fill the gaps left in statutory provisions over what is essentially a sizeable geographical periphery. When those who have worked within the sector for over a decade reflect upon the changes since the introduction of austerity measures, they suggest that the cuts had affected the smaller, regional voluntary sector groups to a greater extent than the more centrally located and larger organisations.

Alison described how government cuts have created an uncertain economic environment resulting in reduced funding and the consequences: "As a manager, I've seen funding decline over the past decade, restructuring, streamlining, relocating, downsizing, you name it". Alison identifies herself by her managerial role, which she uses to add weight to her observations and demonstrates how it is embedded in her sense of identity. The phrasing, which starts by establishing the timespan before she lists the different changes, suggests that they did not arrive all at once. There was a succession of changes, one after the other, as it got progressively more challenging, and organisations had to trim away more and more, which was a common theme amongst the participants.

Paul described the financial decisions organisations have needed to make in response to austerity, "It's a fact that it all comes down to money in the end, and austerity measures have forced many charities to make cost-cutting decisions, and when relocating or down-sizing is your only choice, then you have to do it." While Mary judged organisations on the people they helped along the way, Paul put more emphasis on survival. After all, to keep helping people, you have to exist. However, he is not describing it like you might an inevitable change to which there is no choice but to adapt. Austerity measures have forced, he says, the charities to make those decisions. Implicit in that statement is a suggestion that it did not have to be that way.

He also considered the survival costs, "But it's also a risk too because it's very difficult to re-establish yourself and retain your usual clients if you have to relocate." There is an attachment to 'your usual clients', which is an interesting one. It is not just about helping as many people as possible for Paul; after all, if you move the organisation, but there are still people in need of support, the good work can continue. This link implies that during the act of helping others, social connections are made, which persist, and losing those connections is something to be mourned.

For larger organisations, closing offices was a way of continuing to deliver services while reducing costs. Fewer people might be helped, and some areas would go without, but it was a way that the organisation itself could keep going. Kevin worked for an organisation directly funded by the government and had direct experience of the necessary steps taken when funding was reduced. He started by describing the impacts on the sector as a whole, "In the past ten years, I have seen community groups cut staff and services or disappear completely because they cannot get funding". Kevin is approaching this from the idea that the demise of a charity or community group is the fault of the bodies that should be funding it. He sees the funding as an obligation to be met because people need help, so the money should be there to help them.

He continued with a specific case: "A prime example, the Refugee Service in Sunderland was a charity that was funded by the government but was closed due to the cuts in favour of keeping the Newcastle office open". This example is making a distinction between two historic rivals in the North-East. Newcastle was historically a city, and Sunderland was a town for most of its history, only gaining 'city status' in 1992. Even within regional identities, there are conflicts between groups, which can influence all aspects of life. In Kevin's example is the idea that Newcastle's Refugee Service was deemed more worthy of the funding because of where it is, as Kevin himself concluded, "It stands to reason, I suppose… a bigger city with more people".

The effects of a single organisation closing down were not limited to it. Other organisations felt impacts as a result. Much like how the voluntary sector felt compelled to pick up the slack from the shrinking public sector, organisations such as Kevin's stepped in to fill the gaps when organisations closed their doors. He continued, "It's charities like mine that now do the Refugee Service's job, and we see clients from Sunderland and South Shields, even Middlesbrough and Darlington, and all on a shoestring, which isn't easy". They were being stretched, and in Kevin's view, the area they were asked to cover was too big for their available

resources. Resources would be hard to supplement given the difficulty in raising funding to help refugees and asylum seekers, "It's a large area and the negative press about asylum seekers makes it incredibly difficult to get funding and competition between charities for the same funding pots is high".

Since well before the financial crisis, the right-wing press demonised refugees and asylum seekers (Cooper et al., 2020). As the impacts of austerity grew, the targeting worsened. This portrayal will have compounded pressures on organisations focusing on helping refugees and asylum seekers, but they were by no means the only ones to find their resources squeezed. Kevin summarised the problem and ended with an open question, "People need jobs, voluntary sector jobs are reliant on funding, and people continue to need help from the voluntary sector. What can you do?" The question of what can be done is an expression of exasperation. It implies that funding problems cannot be fixed within the voluntary sector. Jobs can go, and services can be cut, but that would pile more misery on. Those voluntary sector workers would become more unemployed people queuing up for help. The statement 'people continue to need help' goes to the heart of the voluntary sector's ethos. As long as people need help, they need to be there, helping people.

Kevin's experience indicates that despite supposedly working in partnership with the government, the voluntary sector is struggling under the weight of increased work for less money. This financial pressure is forcing it to adapt and take precautionary structural and operational measures. However, in terms of the social identity of voluntary sector workers, mergers, downsizing, reorganisation, new technologies, and new physical dangers increase the sense of threats within an organisation, creating uncertainty and insecurity. This uncertainty in turn, increases job insecurity and reduces the sense of belonging. The dis-associative effect of job insecurity has far-ranging consequences in terms of social and professional identity, which,

when lowered, affects organisational behaviour, absenteeism, motivation, and retention of employees.

Margaret also made distinctions between charities of different sizes, "The charitable sector depends on funding, less money means small groups and charities are affected first, but they are usually the ones that are working with the poorest people in the small communities and villages". She connects the fate of smaller organisations to that of the people they help. The poorest suffered the most tremendous hardships under austerity, and because the charities that support them also suffer, it just worsens it. There is also an element of city vs. village here. Margaret's comment implies that large charities help people in cities where the money is, but small charities exist on the fringes, helping those the large charities do not reach.

There is palpable despair for employees working in smaller towns and cities, if not panic, caused by the voluntary sector's need to employ centralization measures since the cuts were introduced. Individuals describe how they have become hypervigilant about things they perceive as threats to their financial and job security. At the same time, to some degree, the rhetoric used to frame the threats to their working sector is one of resignation and victimization. This resignation perhaps stems from previous loses of traditional industries in the region.

Susan described the reaction to rumours or suggestions of organisational changes, "There's instant panic at the hint of restructuring because we know places like Sunderland, the smaller towns and cities are losing their offices and hubs to bigger centralized locations like Newcastle, Manchester, Birmingham and London". Instant panic does not suggest a considered and thought-through response. This response is a gut reaction, born from that hypervigilance to the suggestion of changes that might impact stability. It hints at a recent past filled with a series of minor changes in the sector that have transformed expectations and worn away what optimism workers had about the future.

Susan's comments about the locations where offices remain can be linked to similar comments such as those from Kevin and Margaret, which tell a story of smaller organisations in less central areas being closed down as funding retreats back towards the centre. Threats from restructuring and closing branches are only one part of the story. Many other smaller, community-based projects and organisations cannot make the necessary changes and are often the first victims of austerity measures. Without having access to additional funding and being unable to change, there is no alternative but for the organisation to close its doors. This situation is reminiscent of the 'Inverse Care Law', which, although belonging to the field of medicine, is applicable because there is a distinct lack of care in the very communities that need it the most (Lakasing, 2017).

The perspective of someone who might be considered in some circumstances to be from an outside group often sheds more light on a subject than the perspectives of insiders. Their view could also be regarded as external and objective, therefore more balanced, less biased, and more credible. Some of those I spoke to were keen to draw attention to their origins, specifically not being English. This would suggest membership of an outside group when talking about Sunderland and the Northeast. Kevin described the region's charity sector from this perspective: "I'm not English. I worked in London for years, and now I'm working in Sunderland. Capital cities like London attract big businesses and charities and keep the jobs there because all the things that feed into them are there". Kevin does not only have the perspective of an outsider to the North-East but also that of someone who has worked for 'the enemy', so to speak. As a consequence of the North-South divide, London is viewed by many in the North-East as a competitor that tends to win more often than it loses. It is from this perspective and position of understanding that Kevin speaks when he describes how larger organisations will think about restructuring: "The North-East only have smaller branches of the

big charities, except for homegrown charities, like Greggs Foundation and Northern Rock, so if Charities need to economize, they protect their central locations and close smaller offices".

There is a growing consciousness of the plight of the North as an often overlooked and deprived area of the UK. From this starting point, statements suggesting that funds raised in the region should be used within and not elsewhere are unsurprising. However, they indicate a defensive stance in the face of job insecurity. Paul commented, "If you live in Sunderland, your money shouldn't be helping people in Birmingham, Edinburgh or London. That doesn't help you and your community. Remember, we're already the poorer North. We need to concentrate on our own needs. There's plenty of money available in areas to support their own." His comments place the in-group (Sunderland) against the out-group (other regions), and phrases like 'our own needs' and 'we're already poorer in the North' signal a clear preference for his region over others.

He explained how his approach could work, "That way, it keeps funding at a local level, for local communities' groups, delivering local services to you, kids, the elderly, its common sense. Big charities won't be happy, but people only support them if their cause affects them personally anyway." This view demonstrates a possible breakdown of the collectivist ideas that underpin the welfare state, with voluntary sector organisations from other regions perceived as competitors for resources rather than fellow travellers. While the sector as a whole can be thought of as having an ethos and an identity, if it breaks down into regional versions of itself, fighting over crumbs of funding, what will happen to that identity? Is this a consequence of austerity or an inevitable extension of the more general regional disparities in the UK?

It has been well documented that the North East of England continues to be disadvantaged in terms of employment opportunities (Walker, 2020; Holland, 2023; Trust, 2021). Levels of inequality and poverty are higher, while resources and funding are much lower than in the more

affluent South of England. However, in terms of voluntary and community organisations, even though there is a greater need for them, most are medium, small, or micro grassroots organisations. Many of these organisations partly rely on local government support, so in light of the austerity measures, they know their position and the precariousness of their working environment.

Kevin expressed this himself: "The government cuts affect poorer areas more. The further North you go, the more you feel the changes. If the North-East's local councils lose money, so do voluntary agencies, so they get twice the cuts, so it makes them poorer again." Kevin's remarks indicate an immediate connection between the poorer areas and the idea of the North-South divide. He is viewing the North and the North-East specifically as getting less than areas in the South. This idea of the North being the junior partner to the South is then reflected in his following comment concerning parts of the voluntary sector, "Smaller voluntary groups come and go quickly because there are so many of them fighting for the same pots of funding, while the larger organisations have to fight for contracts, these are very difficult times." Both types of organisations are struggling, but while the larger organisations may need to try harder to get funding, the smaller organisations are actually failing.

Regarding job security, the economic wealth of these large and supersized charities has not succumbed to the effects of austerity measures and continues to provide a secure working environment for their employees. Joyce's account of her time working for such an organisation describes this, "I have worked in the voluntary sector for 20 years for a large national charity. Yes, there have been changes, cuts and closures, but where I work is pretty safe compared to smaller charities, so I'm not really worried".

Joyce's comments are a very matter of fact, individualistic, detached stance. It acknowledges that job insecurity exists in the sector, but as Joyce works for a large national charity, there is

no personal impact. She, therefore, feels no emotional attachment and does not indicate perceived threats. This illustrates that job security is often linked to income and funding, which are substantially higher in large and supersized organisations than in small and medium-sized charities. However, in the North-East and Sunderland, in particular, the vast majority of third-sector organisations are micro and small independent charities or community groups unable to compete financially. It is, therefore, reasonable to assume that job insecurity is experienced to a greater degree amongst these small organisations.

Changes to funding contracts within the voluntary sector often meant that workers were on contracts with an equally short term themselves. If the organisation's contracts were not renewed, neither was their position. When funding was renewed, workers would often have to reapply for their positions, which could be open to other applicants, too, so there would be no guarantee of keeping the job. Due to the increase in job seekers and competition, alongside the limited promotion opportunities, there was a heightened sense of job insecurity among employees. Everyone felt they could be next, which acted to demoralize and demotivate staff and volunteers.

From an identity perspective, this suggests that the sense of social identity and self-fulfilment gained by remaining employed continues to drive employees. However, the financial and social impact of austerity measures are not confined to those who became unemployed. As the reactions to organisational changes evidenced, the fear of unemployment was also strongly felt in the sector.

Fear and Insecurity

Across the voluntary sector, there was a marked change in working conditions in response to the government cuts. These directly resulted from decreased funding and a sharp increase in demand for their services. In turn, this affected the ability of employers to take on new staff

and increased the utilisation of zero-hours and fixed-term contracts. As a result, services were under increased strain, and workers and volunteers were experiencing unease, apathy, and a loss of job satisfaction. The recognition for a job well done was being eroded, and there was an overwhelming sense of burden as those in need clamoured for help from the remaining service providers.

Robert described the impact on job security:

> "Workplaces are affected, employers are reluctant to take on permanent staff, so many zero hour and fixed term contracts. There's no job security or incentive to put down roots or devote your efforts to the job, work that isn't guaranteed from week to week, absolute nightmare".

Robert is describing a fear of being unable to plan a future and having no incentive to do so. This can mean that without some certainty, buying a home, starting a family, or ultimately committing to a life is impossible. He also talked about being unable to 'devote your efforts to the job', which can be more simply rephrased as 'what's the point?' Why devote your energies to an employer who won't commit to you? This suggests a limit to how far the voluntary sector ethos can take someone. They may want to help others, but they won't put up with absolutely anything to do so.

In Robert's comment about zero-hours contracts, he is responding to a fear brought about by how the private sector has used zero-hours contracts to benefit from having a pool of available on-call workers without the need to provide any job security. The moves by private sector companies into areas previously the responsibility of the public and voluntary sectors have created a level of unease within the voluntary sector. The widespread use of zero-hour contracts in the private sector has allowed companies to adopt a take-it-or-leave attitude towards employees who express dissent.

Alan's comments demonstrate this attitude toward workers deemed easily replaceable, "I've seen an increase in private companies taking over public sector care homes with zero hours and minimum wage, they are very passive-aggressive, you're easily replaceable". This is not a description of their use in the voluntary sector. Still, it demonstrates that their use in areas that overlap with the voluntary sector is enough to provoke expressions of concern. His description of this form of employment contract suggests they dehumanise workers like any other commodity, which is far removed from the community aspects of the voluntary sector.

These changes to working practices and the threats of becoming unemployed undermine one's sense of identity, as people are driven to create positive concepts of themselves. These self-identities are influential and often based on membership in particular social groupings, many centred around employment and social standing. Self-concepts often confer self-esteem. They sustain and reinforce social identities while emotionally affecting and reflecting people's attitudes and behaviours towards their particular in-group and the opposing out-group. However, suppose an individual's employment position is threatened. In that case, the desire to remain in the in-group (employed) can create workplace tensions and lead to undesirable confrontational and competitive behaviours. Therefore, these attitudes also reduce job security, employee retention, motivation and loyalty.

Georgy described these circumstances and how they have impacted her, "For most people, the financial reality of austerity is far worse; for others, it makes no difference because they are high earners, so they can ride it out." She distinguishes between the haves and the have-nots but puts 'most people' into the have-nots category. Her statement suggests she does not consider that only those in the lowest income bracket are suffering. Many are, including herself:

> "I only work part-time, so my income is made up with working tax credits, and I pay less rent if working hours increase by just 1 hour. I wouldn't qualify for working tax credit, and I couldn't afford to pay childcare fees, full rent, full council tax, etc".

It is interesting how she phrases this: She works, but only part-time. There is an identification with being someone who works as if she is trying to prove that she is not one of the undeserving poor. Perhaps the complicated series of hoops she has to jump through to qualify for the help she needs has reinforced that idea subconsciously. This scenario would explain her subsequent comment, "I have no flexibility, but I have to learn to live within my means". Is this an acceptance of the reality of her circumstances or an internalization of the government's rhetoric demonizing those on benefits who do not work, advocating a tightening of everyone's belts?

For the majority, even low-paid work is preferable to unemployment, which carries its stresses of constantly looking and applying for positions to prevent welfare sanctions. From an identity perspective, our sense of fulfilment and identity is derived from the comparisons we make with others, and employment plays a significant role in that process. Work identity provides us with status, intellectual stimulation, and financial security. Therefore, changes to our work can alter how we are perceived and which group we identify with. The in-group would be the employed in this case. Therefore, maintaining employment is preferable to being associated with the out-group of being unemployed. However, with the prevalence of low wages, short contracts and often long unpaid hours, it could be argued at what cost?

Diane described her situation:

> "From my perspective, I can't take the risk of being unemployed. There is no safety net for people like me who are forced to stay in low-paid work or risk losing everything. My wife works part-time while the kids are young. We are both very conscious of the fact that, financially, we are not very stable, so we had to cut back until my wife can go back to work full time, too. We shouldn't have to struggling while in work. I should have a decent standard of living, be able to have a social life, go on holiday and pay the bills."

This narrative shows that the safety net does not provide the kind of protection it was once designed to do. There is a fear that becoming unemployed means having nothing. Diane also

expresses outrage that even one and a half salaries are insufficient to have a 'decent standard of living'.

Voluntary sector workers report that a once relaxed and relatively safe and secure working environment is now experiencing levels of uncertainty and nervousness never felt before. Although the sector has always relied on funding rounds, the increased competition for ever-decreasing funding pots has ignited a sense of insecurity and is raising workplace tensions as the stringent financial restrictions have taken hold. This insecurity is especially evident among the many part-time positions common within the voluntary sector.

Part-time work is often desirable for working mothers with children as it allows them to balance work with family obligations. However, for others, part-time work is not a choice. It is the only work they can get. They often feel forced to take what is on offer or risk being sanctioned by the job centre. Unfortunately, this tends to be low or minimal waged, with employees relying on tax credits to prop up their income. For all those in low-income employment, the impact of the financial squeeze is felt substantially more than by those in the higher income brackets, and as a result, it significantly reduces their options. The pressures placed upon the sector affect working social identities, as it strains their working relationships and employee's work/life balance, ultimately impacting their motivation and retention.

It is often noted that voluntary sector workers proclaim that an ethos of the sector is to increase social wealth. Those attracted to the sector are thought to have something almost akin to a vocational calling. Once working within the sector, they often cite a sense of belonging as one of the reasons for continuing to work within the sector. Even with all the positive work they do and the rhetoric of camaraderie, a disproportionate number of voluntary sector staff are still paid below a living wage. Many remain comparatively lower paid than both public and private sector workers. Considering that many of the sector's workers are operating against a backdrop

of low wages and a sector with reduced funding, it is reasonable to assume that these factors only undermine job security in combination.

This disparity appears to be intensified in particular geographical areas, such as the North-East of England, which has experienced a massive 30% reduction in the voluntary sector workforce since 2010. For those who remain employed within the sector, the contract culture and the restrictions imposed by time-constrained funding rounds have severely limited the sector's ability to provide permanent employment opportunities. This has resulted in the voluntary sector relying heavily on fixed-term short contracts linked to funding rounds. Many in the sector share stories of changing their jobs regularly, with no element of choice. The reference to the length of tenure is of particular importance, as the advent of austerity cuts has decreased the duration of contracts, with some being as short as six months and the norm being eighteen months to three years.

Employees have stated that they must constantly reapply for their positions when funding expires, and new funding rounds are secured. However, in many cases, the original position is not renewed, forcing them to seek alternatively funded positions within the sector. Going from one role to another limits their promotion opportunities, makes planning difficult, and paints a picture of a working environment with high uncertainty and insecurity. These comments illustrate that they perceive a significant threat to the future existence of their positions, which can result in employees being reluctant to attach or invest themselves within their organisation. It also demonstrates that job insecurity impedes working relationships, belonging and identity.

Kevin described his employment history and how the nature of work has changed for him:

> "Before the government cuts, my longest job in the sector was seven years, and that was my choice to change my job… now the average about three and I have no choice in it. I'm now four months into a two-year contract".

In Kevin's estimation, seven years is a long time to stay in one role, and had circumstances been different, he would have expected it to be longer. This description indicates that he feels the voluntary sector was a place where you stayed somewhere as long as you wanted. How things work now, with short contracts forcing change on employees, contrasts strongly with that idea. When he says, 'I have no choice in it', this is an unambiguous expression of his negative feelings about how things have changed. The reference to 'government cuts' appears again in Kevin's answer, showing that he blames the coalition government for his present circumstances.

Chris's employment history still demonstrates stability in the sector, "I have worked in the sector for decades in one role or another". The phrase 'in one role or another' implies she did change jobs. Still, the casual way it is stated compared to the emphasis on 'for decades' suggests that, ultimately, she views her employment history as a source of stability. However, that has changed, as she described, "I'm now 18 months into a two-year post. It's unlikely it won't be renewed." She is approaching the end of her contract. She sounds confident, acknowledging that there is a threat to her job security, "But you can't take anything for granted, so you have to keep your eyes open."

There is an acknowledgement of the general level of uncertainty, almost a creeping doubt. On the face of things, she is pretty optimistic about her contract but is aware that things are worse than they were. "There's lots of staff moving around just to stay employed. It's really stressful and difficult to plan ahead now." It is unclear whether this is her experience of stress or if she is describing the general mood. However, in either case, the environment has begun to chip away at her confidence in her job security.

Alan's comments also described an environment where people's circumstances change: "This is my fifth job in 16 years…. I'm eight months into an eighteen-month contract." Five jobs in

sixteen years is an average of three years in each, but the way he phrases his comment suggests that while he has previously changed roles every few years, the frequency has increased. There is an implicit frustration with how things are.

Over the years, changes have occurred in how the voluntary sector is funded through the use of contracts, loans and fixed-duration grants. Many large contracts to the voluntary sector were provided through statutory sources. The funders responsible for the grants included central and local government, the police, probation services, NHS trusts and local councils. However, the use of contracts effectively locked out the majority of smaller charitable organisations and projects. Loans were another option, but only by changing to a community interest company (CIC) was it possible to access them. Voluntary organisations and projects that could not do this remained totally reliant on grant-making foundations and donations for their funding.

Over time, each voluntary sector organisation began to navigate this new way of obtaining funding. While the financial crisis and subsequent austerity slashed the available funding for all charities, it hit the smallest the hardest. This reduction in funding significantly increased competition between smaller organisations. Managers suggested that fundraising activities were often precarious, complex, and time-consuming. Projects struggled to fulfil funding criteria and requirements, while any funding rejections could effectively prevent an organisation from reapplying for up to two years.

Paul described his perception of the scarcity of funding and pinned the blame again on the government: "Government cuts have had a huge effect on funding the charitable sector. It's difficult to get funding now. It's not guaranteed." Before the financial crisis, funding still had to be applied for, but Paul's comments suggest it was almost a formality. Only now that there is no certainty of success is it worth commenting on.

These finite funding pots became prized awards that could make or break a project. However, Managers also indicated that a cycle of employment and reemployment was directly attached to funding rounds. Funding ranged from as little as six months to five years, and there was no guarantee of securing further funding. This situation presents problems around recruitment and retention of employees, as well as new barriers for those wanting to move into working in the sector.

The challenges for voluntary sector organisations were accumulative and varied, with austerity measures simply compounding existing pressures. This is evident in how much of the voluntary sector operates; the large and supersized organisations are often centrally located within major cities and can generate significant income. However, many smaller organisations are on the fringes and tend to operate in small towns and villages. They, therefore, find it significantly harder to compete for sufficient funding.

These issues and struggles are common throughout the voluntary sector. However, as with all areas of life, some organisations struggle to attract empathy and support for their cause more than others. This difficulty can be due to various factors, such as prejudice, negative public perceptions and hostile media reporting. When it comes to attracting funding, the stigmatisation of asylum seekers, for example, creates additional challenges for organisations that help them. Those who claim asylum are often portrayed as coming here to take from the state, so the general public views them as outsiders. This perception conflicts with the reality that until asylum seekers are granted asylum, they have no recourse to public funds.

Mahmood has volunteered with organisations that help others in his situation and has seen first-hand their struggles. Obtaining narratives from individuals from this diverse group offers a unique and more external, objective account when compared to reports from those working and having a vested financial interest in securing their position:

"I have been volunteering for ten years. I have seen what the government cuts have done. The Refugee Service in Sunderland was open 3-4 times a week before the cuts, then it was cut to one day a week, then they didn't have money to pay staff, so it was run by volunteers, then they didn't want to pay for the building, and it closed and now only in Newcastle. The same happened to the Red Cross in Sunderland. They had lots of staff, now only one each and use volunteers because they don't have enough funding."

His story shows that in the face of the cuts, this organisation made successive attempts to keep going, reducing operating hours to make what they had go further. Then, they switched to using only volunteers, not needing to pay wages. Finally, they had to consolidate branches together to keep going. Each step demonstrates that the organisations wanted to keep helping people, as their ethos pushes them to do so. Unfortunately, they could not maintain services with no money. His words demonstrate a sense of frustration as he sees organisations that make a real difference to people like him falling away.

Job insecurity implies a threat to an employee's current position or role or a potential adverse change in working conditions for an employee. Threats to job security have been recognised as a major cause of employee anxiety and stress. It can have significant implications for organisations regarding employee motivation, retention, productivity, trust, and loyalty.

Unfortunately, most studies concentrate on the effects of job insecurity in terms of reduced employee motivation and performance within a company, suggesting they are more concerned for the company and its profits than the employees themselves. However, the impact of job insecurity affects all sectors by altering employee behaviour and can act to discourage those who might have otherwise been recruited. The experiences of those who have worked in the sector for extended periods show how organisations have dealt with austerity and how those actions have impacted their staff.

As organisations tried to manage under financial pressures, job losses were inevitable, with real human consequences for those workers. In everyday secure employment situations, people

rarely reflect upon their employment. They get on with their jobs, as their social identity as employed is not salient to them and is unlikely to influence behaviour, attitudes, or well-being. How individuals approach or offset threats to their job security differs depending on how they view their respective positions.

Managers provided a narrative of individualism, protectionism and high ambition, taking a self-deterministic stand-point. They suggest that they hold responsibility for securing and remaining employed by acquiring a high level of qualifications and skills to mitigate the effects of government cuts and other outside forces to some extent. Whether conscious or unconscious, the perceived threat to job security has prompted some employees to instigate protective measures to make themselves as indispensable as possible. The focus on the self as the vessel for change and responsibility is devoid of any notion of collective struggle or class consciousness. It was utterly distinct from the sentiments of 'we're all in it together'.

This self-focus is often the primary mechanism or drive for self-advancement, success, and self-realisation. It illustrates that their professional, personal, and social identity is closely intertwined with employment status. Pauline described her experiences as a manager, starting with changes in the sector, "As a manager, I've seen funding decline over the past ten years, restructuring, streamlining, relocating, downsizing, you name it." Pauline immediately affirms her identity as a manager, using it to add credence to her description of funding changes and the sector's reaction to them.

Much like Kevin, she attributed much of the blame to the government for what was happening, "Government cuts have had a huge effect on services and jobs." These statements all reflect a perception that something has been inflicted on the sector. Especially when linked to descriptions of the negative consequences, such as the challenging employment circumstances many in the sector faced:

"You still see lots of jobs advertised, but it's mainly re-advertising posts when current contracts are due to end, so you get the same person applying for their own position again, which makes it difficult for those entering the sector to get a job".

This description is reminiscent of a treadmill. Employees have to keep applying for the same position they already had. Putting in more effort every year or two just to stay in the same place. The changing nature of funding has also changed the relationship between employees and their organisations, "It is competitive, and employers have the upper hand because they can simply replace you, but it's like that in all the sectors." She is talking about voluntary sector organisations, many of them charities, in the way you often hear private sector businesses described. The private sector is assumed to be cut-throat with a more disposable attitude toward their workers, but it starkly contrasts with how the voluntary sector is commonly thought of. Employees are being pitted against each other, presumably as reducing funding begins to limit the number of new contracts when old ones end:

"You don't have a right to just any job. You have to work for it, be good enough to get it and be good enough to keep it. It's basically up to you now. It's about what you have to offer employers. You have to get yourself educated, training, experience. You have to make yourself as indispensable as possible."

The participants described the ethos underpinning the voluntary sector as a community of like-minded workers and volunteers dedicated to helping others. While there was always a need to balance budgets, Pauline's narrative suggests that job security is now no different from the private sector. Her comments paint a picture of survival of the fittest, where there is no job security and commitment to helping others is not good enough anymore.

Pauline has adapted, "It works. I've seen plenty of people go, but it's kept me my job. Ultimately, everyone has to be out for themselves to get where they want to be." Pauline's attitude when talking about the voluntary sector did not paint her as a selfish individual. She was as committed to the ethos as anyone else. However, her ability to cope with these pressures may lie in her ambition:

> "I'm ambitious, I work hard, got qualifications, experience, skills and training, I'm committed to my career, my aim is to become a CEO of a major charity or organization. I'm not going to apologize for it. There's no point having a dream if you don't aim high".

Pauline's narrative contains individualism, commitment, drive, personal responsibility and ambition. She only makes a passing reference to government cuts linked to job insecurity. Her narrative contrasts sharply with that of other managers, workers, and volunteers, some of whom are equally qualified and highly skilled. This comment suggests that Pauline may speak from a somewhat different ideological perspective than most others in the sector. She still wants to help others but is far more invested in personal advancement.

How an individual deals with hardship is connected to their identity. Pauline put her energies into developing herself to survive in her career, driven by her identity rooted in her ambition. Others were influenced more by their connection to the voluntary sector's ethos. Paul, for example:

> "When funding runs out, you try your best to keep going in the hope that some more comes along. I've actually worked unwaged for a few weeks. Some people do it for months waiting for funding because it's such a hassle to go to the job centre and sign for what might be only a couple of weeks."

Paul suggests that the reason for keeping going is linked to the struggle that comes with signing on, but it is hard to imagine someone in the private sector becoming a volunteer for several weeks until there is more money to pay them. The suggestion that employees continue working and often increase their working hours while forgoing wages is not unusual.

There is a strong link between moral identity and pro-social action whereby the level of commitment to their role transcends financial gain to the point that they are willing to sacrifice their financial needs for the greater good. In this case, it is for the good of the people they represent and the good of the charity. Working for a charity may hold sufficient gravitas and status, so the professional and social identity attached to the job prompts employees to remain

employed for as long as possible, even without adequate wages. In contrast, the stress associated with being identified as unemployed and the related process of applying for benefits can also act as deterrents.

Paul's comments describe a desire to avoid stress, with volunteering for a few weeks being preferable to dealing with hostile Jobcentre staff. Stress is a prominent consequence of the propensity for short contracts resulting from austerity. The situation often means that old posts are lost, and new posts are created, even when the work is precisely the same, with the same wages. For the employee, however, the frequency of losing, skipping, and changing their working titles does little for their sense of stability or security. It creates an air of expendability among employees.

The transient nature of these contracts causes stress and a feeling of powerlessness, but for many, ultimately, an acceptance of the lack of existing opportunities, which can be seen in Christine's accounts of her working experience in the voluntary sector, "In 7 years, I've had three different job titles, same work, same wages, but re-contracted on fixed term contracts. It is stressful, but locally, there isn't much of a choice, so you take what you can get." This statement might initially mirror Alan or Carol's comments about moving from job to job, but it is even more of a treadmill. Christine has had the same job three times over, with periods of stress and worry sandwiched in between.

Erica gave an expanded account of her working experiences pre and post-austerity, which demonstrates the extent to which the use of short contracts and, consequently, job insecurity has increased, "I'm 56 years old, I've always worked, I worked continuously as a secretary for the council for almost 20 years, then I started working for (my organisation) about 11 years ago." Before she joined the voluntary sector, Erica knew the stability of a public sector job and then found something similar in her organisation. Then came austerity, "In 2011, they cut the

numbers of clerical staff because of cuts to funding, so I then started working in their community care homes."

She stayed within the same organisation but had to move into a different role and then found herself moving from position to position as money dictated the changes:

> "I've had five jobs since then on short, fixed-term contacts, twelve months here, two years there, that sort of thing. (My organisation) is a large organization, but even they have cut back on staff, so sometimes your contract isn't renewed, and you have to either find a job elsewhere or wait for another position, and it's often in another care facility."

She paints a picture of uncertainty for herself and those employing her. They do not know where the money will come from and whether it can be replaced, so they react by moving people around or ending their employment. This uncertainty creates a feeling of precariousness for the individual, working in a job that might soon vanish. The consequences when it does lead to a desire to cling on to employment with everything they have:

> "Three years ago, my contract finished, and I was unemployed for four months, a lousy four months in almost 40 years of working, and the job centre work coach made me feel worthless. I had to give them every detail of my income, outgoings, savings, filling in forms and going backwards and forwards for over a month for £76 a week. He treated me like I was a scrounger. Never again, I would take any job rather than sign on again."

This statement echoes Paul's fears of dealing with the job centre and explains why he would prefer to volunteer and wait it out. Erica considers herself a worker. After all, she has worked her whole adult life, but as soon as her circumstances changed, the system viewed her as a burden. She was given help, but only reluctantly after proving she needed it.

Erica's experience is rich in detail. Using the words 'made to feel worthless' suggests that the identity as an employed person who assisted others had been stripped away, as being unemployed reversed their status from being a helper to being helped. The word 'scrounger' is a highly undesirable label with social and political undertones that has commonly been attached

to those seen as able but unwilling to engage in employment and, therefore, seen as living off the state. A tone that has only harshened since austerity was introduced.

Interestingly, this negative encounter had an unexpected consequence. Along with the combative treatment from the job centre, the stereotype and associated identity of being unemployed motivated her to re-enter the workforce as quickly as possible. The way she spoke also demonstrated a desire to remain in the employed identity group at any cost.

Corrosion of Workplace Culture

Since 2010, employers have begun to demonstrate a clear preference for this transient working environment, emphasising short-term and zero-hours contracts. This preference may have arisen partly due to allowing employers more flexibility to hire and fire on an ad-hoc basis and, therefore, skirt some responsibilities as an employer. This level of flexibility can benefit some workers who prefer or can only work certain hours. However, for others, it is a significant source of workplace anxiety.

Workplace stress acts as a significant de-motivator that can significantly affect workplace productivity, and working in a constant state of stress can cause physical and psychological harm. As Kevin and Christine described, regular turnover of roles is a significant source of stress at home and in the workplace. It also creates a false impression that employment opportunities are plentiful. Seeing lots of jobs advertised is typically a sign of a thriving economy. Still, in reality, there has been a 30% reduction in voluntary sector jobs in the North-East of England since the introduction of austerity measures. Ronnie described this:

> "Lots of jobs are advertised in the sector, which gives the impression there's lots of opportunities. It's an illusion. It's all about funding rounds. When one lot of funding stops, the job it funded ends, then when funding is secured, they advertise for the post again. The person who left the old post will obviously apply to fill that post, and if it's in the same office, then they are going to get it because they already know what's expected, and they don't need to be trained for it."

In Ronnie's view, the person who previously held the job might be a shoo-in. Still, the overall reduction in voluntary sector jobs suggests that there will have been numerous occasions where two jobs ended and only one was re-advertised. The other participants spoke about competition, which will inevitably create stress. The fear of losing an income is a powerful motivator, but having to go head-to-head with a colleague would do no favours for the atmosphere in the workplace. Ronnie also says 'when funding is secured', but narratives such as Mahmood's concerning the refugee service tell a story in which that funding does not always come, so jobs are lost.

For those who had worked in the sector for decades, there was a clear sense of disillusionment from the changes that have occurred over the years. The temporary nature of work and the lack of opportunities demotivate and disenfranchise employees and deter career-minded and skilled job seekers as there is little chance of promotion. There is also a feeling of helplessness and frustration at how the private sector approach influenced the voluntary sector. Some suggest this is deliberate action on the part of the government, while others say that it is a matter of financial necessity that arose from austerity measures.

Maintaining a social and professional identity promotes a sense of psychological capital whereby the psychological strengths of hope, efficacy, resilience, and optimism are empirically linked to improved job and life satisfaction and help to create optimal functioning individuals. The voluntary sector has prided itself on its ethos of creating and increasing social wealth, generating a steadfast and supportive workforce. However, these changes are in danger of corroding the sector's character and, in turn, reducing a person's sense of loyalty, identity and belonging. Over time, this would not only affect the quality and quantity of the work but also threaten the stability, longevity and identity of organisations, charities, and the sector itself. Margaret, for example, concedes that the changes have influenced her opinions of the sector:

"Chasing after contracts is not my idea of a good job. It's not secure. How can you expect to climb the ladder in a temporary position? If you don't feel secure, why would you want to give it your all? I certainly wouldn't. If I was just starting out, I wouldn't stick to the voluntary sector. I would be looking for higher wages and a permanent job in any sector."

It is unclear whether Margaret is purely speaking about her career or thinking more broadly about her colleagues. In either case, it suggests a limit to how much the voluntary sector can expect its employees to put up with. The desire to do good and help others is a solid motivating factor for voluntary sector workers, but it is not the only one. If the sector is to continue making a difference, then it will eventually need to attract new workers. Christine's narrative reflects what many others have said, and they show a sense of frustration at the use of short-term contracts and the difficulties posed for those trying to enter the sector:

"I've had three different job titles, same work, same wages, but re-contracted on fixed-term contracts. Some contracts can be as little as six months to a year. It's either a trial or reliant on further funding. Imagine being young and trying to get your foot in the door."

The description of repeatedly changing contracts for what is the same job ultimately is familiar from my discussions with the participants. It demonstrates this is a widespread problem across the sector. The lack of long-term, permanent contracts was commented on by other participants as well. Diane described the overall change in the sector, "Almost everyone I know is on a short or fixed-term contract." Georgy also commented, "Long gone are the days when you used to sign a contract and that was it…. now jobs have a fixed term, nobody likes them, but here we are, so much for progress, eh." While Christine, Erica and Paul each expressed frustration at the contract situation, Georgy appears to have moved past that to reluctant acceptance. Given that rents, mortgages and other essential expenses now take up a significant proportion of a worker's monthly income, it is not unreasonable for an employee to expect a certain amount of job security. However, given the alternative, they may accept the situation and do their best to live with it.

Those who have worked in the sector for decades speak of a time before contract culture and the recent introduction of austerity measures, when the sector quietly existed and operated independently. It worked unhindered and separated from many of the effects of market forces. It could be argued that the austerity measures and secondment of the voluntary sector as a replacement, low-cost service provider effectively lifted the veil and increased their exposure to the public and private sector market forces. These changes left the sector open to pressure from the government and the market, while at the same time, employees are reporting an increase in work-related stress and job insecurity. Keith was one of those who described this:

> "The community sector just sort of existed quietly under the radar and got on with the job. How long your job lasted wasn't an issue, but money runs everything. These short fixed-term contracts are the norm now; it's finite, and in your face, so I keep my eyes peeled because I need money and a job's, a job."

Keith does not say he has yet been impacted but is clearly concerned. His comment that he keeps his 'eyes peeled' demonstrates a level of concern that if his job is not presently threatened, it soon will be. He also emphasises that while voluntary sectors are motivated by helping others, they still need to pay the bills.

As far as voluntary sector workers go, the impact of funding changes on the voluntary sector goes far beyond the introduction of short-term and zero-hours contracts and the need to maintain employment. They describe how they feel that there is an element of deceit and coercion into working longer hours for less money and even unpaid. Some refer to working full-time hours for a part-time wage. This narrative alludes to the propensity for low wages and an unwritten expectation for employees to provide more work for less money within the voluntary sector.

Joyce described this in her account and suggests an element of deception in reporting job figures: "According to the press, 30,000 full-time jobs have been created, but they don't tell

you they only have a part-time wage." Austerity has exacerbated the level of distrust some in the voluntary sector have for the press; this is another example. Joyce feels that they are deliberately misleading people by suggesting many new jobs. Rolling contracts have contributed to this illusion, but Joyce thinks that the actual quality of the jobs is also being lied about.

Christine was also sceptical about new jobs in the sector and felt significant damage had been done: "I've worked in the voluntary sector for over 26 years. From my perspective, the sector has suffered a lot due to government cuts. Yes, I know jobs have been created, but mostly are just part-time, and plenty of full-time posts have been lost, too." She is using her time in the sector to support her claims about how things have changed and suggested that as a long-serving voluntary sector worker, her expertise is more significant than those who claim things are better. This comment suggests she has encountered press coverage or government claims that the voluntary sector was growing stronger and felt compelled to dispel those myths.

Christine expressed anger at the changing nature of her employment. Initially, she blamed employers, "What pisses me off is the stealth approach they use down-sizing, reshuffling staff, relocating. Do they think we're stupid? A bit of honesty wouldn't go amiss?" Her complaint seems to hinge on the idea that employers are dishonest about how hard things have gotten in the sector. Closing branches and laying off staff appears less objectionable to her than trying to hide it.

Keith believed employers had embraced temporary contracts for sinister reasons, "Temporary contracts allow employers to control employees. If you don't fit in, they don't renew your contract, then a new post appears with a different name, sometimes for less money or more hours, no questions asked." Several participants referred to jobs being re-advertised when new funding became available. Still, Keith was the only one to suggest that the process was also

being used to remove inconvenient staff members. Regardless of the truth in the accusation, this demonstrates a significant erosion of trust between voluntary sector employees and the organisations they work for. Keith chose to describe the voluntary sector with reference to its community aspect, but this demonstrates a breakdown of that feeling.

There is now more of a distinction between staff and employers, an us vs. them that has arisen as a consequence of austerity. Keith continued, "It's silently eroding workers' rights and has the unions over a barrel. It's like we've skipped back a century." He references the idea of Victorian factory owners in the time before trade unions who overworked and underpaid their employees in dangerously unsafe conditions.

In recent years, employees have claimed that there is a lack of communication and openness, which is undermining their reputation as a trustworthy and reputable sector. The undertone of growing resentment towards not only the use of fixed-term contracts but also the employers themselves for choosing to use them is breeding mistrust, which can severely impact public perceptions of the sector.

Short-term funding and the wave of short-term contracts it created did not just increase the feeling of job insecurity. When set against a backdrop of reduced funding and higher demand, it was also inevitable that employees would be subjected to increased workloads, which only fed into employees' suspicions of employer manipulation, coercion, and deceit. Ronnie provides a very similar narrative regarding working hours:

> "It's not fair when the same job is advertised the same pay but increased hours. It's stunts like that that cost us trained staff because quite a few have gone to the private sector because the wages for the hours worked are better."

Ronnie is also accusing employers of re-advertising a job to make changes that benefit them at the expense of their employees. Much like Keith, she distrusts 'them' for what they are doing

to their staff. The idea of people moving to the private sector, despite it lacking the qualities that attracted them to the voluntary sector, suggests a tipping point has been reached. Pauline suggested that things in the voluntary sector were no different to other sectors, "I'm not worried about job security. It's the same in all sectors." If this is the case, then the image many have of the voluntary sector being a more caring workplace has been demolished by austerity.

Robert suggested that people might start to leave before they are asked to, "This is why people are jumping ship if they get the chance, taking their skills and experience with them. The sector will have to spend a lot of money on retraining." He also described the impact on staff retention and his view on how that will impact organisations. It will have dire consequences for the sector if it costs organisations more to train new staff when they already have less money. Robert's reference to 'jumping ship' suggests that these experiences are everyday within other voluntary sector organisations. As a result, their sense of loyalty, belonging and professional identity within the organisation is being eroded, often resulting in reduced employee productivity and retention.

This loss of loyal staff can have devastating consequences for the sector. If there is a perception that it lacks job security or opportunities to advance, people may simply use it as a stepping stone and a place to gain experience before moving on. If staff frequently move on after only a short time, organisations will never be able to replace the knowledge and expertise of long-term staff who retire or move on for other reasons. Robert also described this stepping stone phenomenon, "The wages aren't great, so young people usually come in for experience and go, but we can't afford to train new staff all the time".

There have always been low wages and job insecurity in the sector. Still, introducing austerity measures has simply compounded the issue in such a way that it has overridden an individual's traditional ethical attraction to the sector. Thus, employees with sufficient skills, education and

competencies may be prompted by situations that induce insecurity to seek new jobs. However, the implications span beyond simply affecting the organisation regarding employee commitment and retention, as job insecurity also has emotional and psychological aspects relating to belonging, group membership and identity.

As austerity measures left a gaping void in welfare services, the government quickly turned to the voluntary sector by promoting the 'Big Society'. This rhetoric angered some volunteers who felt they were being portrayed and used as a free source of labour. This assumption has negative connotations for the voluntary sector. It can act to discourage volunteers into the sector as well as undermine the ethos of what the sector is trying to do. From a financial perspective, in the short term, if maintaining services is the main agenda, without the finances to support them, volunteering is a viable and the most economical option. However, from an employee's perspective, increasing the use of volunteers in times of fiscal frugalness could be perceived as a threat to their job security. It could possibly create internal tensions and resentment towards volunteers from employees.

As a volunteer, Denise has a different perspective on paid employees in the charity sector, and she has a somewhat sceptical view on the drive for more volunteers:

> "There has been a big push in recruiting volunteers into all of the sectors, call it civic duty, keeping busy or just gaining experience. I think one of the main reasons companies and the voluntary sector are recruiting volunteers is because they can get work done for nothing. If they want to save money, then isn't that the best option for them?"

While Denise is keen to highlight the benefits of volunteering, she is deeply suspicious of the motives behind the Big Society. Voluntary sector organisations were forced to reduce paid positions in response to funding cuts. However, if they can replace those lost jobs with volunteers, why not save even more money and replace everyone with a volunteer? This

comment again demonstrates the loss of trust in the relationship between those working in the voluntary sector and the organisations they work for, paid or not.

Although dedicated volunteers are the backbone of the sector, when volunteering was advocated by the same government that instigated austerity, the drive was primarily viewed as promoting free labour. Conversely, in a precarious economic climate, promoting the need for this free labour has increased the sense of threat to the job security of those already working within the sector. This perception is described in detail by Doreen:

> "The cuts have reduced the amount of workers in local charities here in the North-East because there is less money to pay wages. I think that's the main reasons the government focused on recruiting volunteers, so they can get people who are not employed to work for nothing. People working in the sector feel threatened that their jobs are not safe, but I suppose on the plus side, the charity can still carry on with its work."

Doreen is assigning a sinister motive to the government, consistent with how the participants came to view them in the wake of austerity. She also makes a distinction between organisations and their staff. Previously, there was a more robust link when the organisations and staff were united by purpose and ethos. However, now she thinks of the charity as one thing, and the staff have become workers, just like in the private sector.

If we did not already know the ethos that drives the voluntary sector, it would be reasonable to question why organisations would choose to take on a massively increased workload in response to public sector cuts. In hindsight, this drive to fill the void may have placed their own workers at a financial and social disadvantage and inflicted undue stress due to increased working hours and low wages.

Stress and Wellbeing

It is reasonable to assume that 'financial insecurity' and 'job security' are explicitly linked, as without a regular income, people cannot participate in or finance their everyday activities and

commitments. Financial insecurity was once viewed as something that only affected those who were unemployed, sick, elderly or those who worked in specific unpredictable fields or industries. However, it is now much more widely experienced, with even the likes of nurses and teachers needing to rely on foodbanks and other charitable support. Seeking 'job security' is often viewed on purely economic grounds, but job insecurity is frequently the primary cause of work-related stress. Employees worry about the prospect of becoming unemployed for reasons that go beyond the reduction in income.

Maintaining a good work-life balance has become of increasing importance over the years to reduce workplace burnout. A good work-life balance is achieved when your emotional, mental, and physical resources (including your time) equal the demands placed upon you, including your goals, obligations, and responsibilities to yourself, your family, and your community. Unfortunately, modern, fast-paced working environments, with increased competition, hours and workloads, can lead employees to chronic stress and burnout. Chronic stress is one of the most common health issues in the workplace, causing fatigue, irritability, mood swings, depression, and anxiety. Severe stress and burnout can also lead to physical consequences such as hypertension, digestive troubles, chronic aches and pains and heart problems. All of these can lead to decreased work performance, absenteeism, and trouble at home.

Conditions had deteriorated significantly by 2015, such that 93% of those working in the public and voluntary sectors were stressed because of their jobs (Hardy, 2015). Since austerity, there is a feeling within the sector that working conditions have changed to the point that they are impacting the workers' family and social lives. Hours have increased due to the number of people seeking community support and help. In turn, the amount of administration grew, with paperwork having to be taken home at the end of the day, as it couldn't be completed within

office hours. It is felt that there was an unwritten expectation for workers to work extra unpaid hours, as there was no other way of meeting deadlines and keeping on top of their workloads.

Alongside these in-work changes is an acknowledgement that the threat of unemployment (job insecurity) is also creating pressure on employees to deliver more. Overall, this suggests that the excessive workload is tipping the scales of the work/life balance and ultimately interfering with workers' personal and social lives. This strain is evident in Robert's experiences, "Most people in the sector do extra hours, unpaid, paperwork at home. the numbers of people we see has increased, and we don't have time to complete the paperwork." He is not only speaking for himself but also his observations of the sector as a whole. The commitment of those working in the voluntary sector would lead you to expect some degree of extra work. Still, the distinction here is that it is becoming expected and necessary. There are also starting to be consequences, "The increased workload was putting strains on family life and other outside commitments."

Susan also described a similar situation, "I regularly work extra hours just to meet deadlines or take work home, and I don't get paid for it." This is not putting in extra time to try and make something better or to help someone else. There were not enough hours in the day to get through everything that had to be done.

Ronnie also described being expected to work unpaid hours, through breaks and also the impact it has had on colleagues, "I do longer hours, many unpaid, but I'm expected to do them because we're not allowed paperwork to pile up, so we often work through breaks or have lunch at our desks or take work home." The organisation will not tolerate work going undone, even though there is more work than there is time in which to do it.

It impacted the atmosphere in the workplace and began to change how it felt to work there, "Colleagues get stressed and bitch at each other. It feels like we have been hijacked and

expected to work like a business, accept more responsibility but without any wage increases." This attitude from an employer is far removed from most people's image of friendly charity organisations that are more hobby than work. While that image was undoubtedly false, to begin with, there has been a shift towards a more hard-line working environment more typical of the worst aspects of the private sector. Ronnie made the connection to the private sector in a way that suggests her identity as a voluntary sector worker was being threatened by private sector ways.

Christine complained about her changing hours and held the unions responsible for lack of action on their part, "My issue is working full time for a part-time wage. How is that acceptable? Why aren't the unions jumping on it." It is not unheard of for people to work unpaid overtime in the private sector, where it might not be paid, but it will eventually be repaid through bonuses or increased promotion prospects. However, this is a long way from the voluntary sector.

After initially blaming the unions for not standing up for voluntary sector workers, Christine re-directed her anger, "Oh, Yes, I forgot, the f……… Tories destroyed them and took away their power." This is another problem for which the government is to blame. The unions may have been 'destroyed' in the 1970s and 1980s, but there is a party connection between the government then and the government that imposed austerity.

Working environments and conditions that deprive employees of their breaks and lunchtimes are not something one would associate with the voluntary sector. It is illegal and can be stressful, exhausting, demoralizing, undermine working relationships, and induce undesirable behavioural patterns. However, workplace stress is often difficult to identify until it manifests into physical, emotional, and psychological symptoms. The pressures placed upon employees are significant, and job insecurity can pervasively affect those who experience it. It can also

affect relationships with colleagues, as people who feel their identity is being threatened are more likely to turn against others (if that helps their own status) while at the same time identifying with others who experience a similar threat.

When work is in short supply, such as in the North-East during austerity, peoples' awareness feeds their sense of job insecurity. This job insecurity prevents workers from expressing their discontent to their employers for fear of losing their jobs. Such fear is especially true with short-term contracts, as lifting one's head above the parapet could result in a contract not being renewed. Even those in managerial roles feel that their jobs are not secure, and there is pressure on them to take on extra work and responsibilities.

Those working in the sector are focused on trying to stay employed. Meanwhile, employees are being stretched to the limit and possibly doing the work of two or more people, with the voluntary sector becoming fragmented and stretched as it tries to plug the holes in welfare provisions. In combination, these reports of job insecurity, extra hours, low wages, and strains on family life and outside commitments indicate that the expectations and workloads placed on employees have increased to the point of damaging working relationships and disrupting the work-life balance.

Susan described how her work/life balance had changed since the introduction of austerity measures:

> "It's difficult to get a job in Sunderland these days, let alone a job that you actually like, but even mobile working has increased. I worked from York to Durham, and I'm now working between York and the Berwick Borders offices. It has increased my workload, we have strict deadlines, spending has to be justified, which means lots of reports, so we are pretty flat out. Staff complain amongst themselves but rarely complain higher up in case their contracts aren't renewed. It's basically an unwritten threat. Even managers don't rock the boat."

If even managers are afraid to say something when working conditions have deteriorated to this level, the working atmosphere has become completely toxic. This fear demonstrates that workers, volunteers and managers who previously would have identified as part of the same group as those higher in their organisations now see senior figures as the opposition. This situation has undermined the previous community that existed in their workplace.

Working environments that push employees beyond their limits with excessive working hours and insufficient breaks are destabilising their workers' work-life balance. This is occurring to the extent that it can manifest itself into physical or psychological ailments. Such problems can then translate into repeated and prolonged periods of absenteeism. Diane suffered health problems as a result of her workload:

> "I had to take time off because of severe headaches. The first time, I was off for almost four months, then after that, it was a couple of weeks here and there. I had all sorts of tests, but in the end, it was put down to work-related stress because of all the long hours I was working."

The increased workload and associated time constraints can also significantly impact the service being delivered. Dealing with clients with complex issues, when under heightened pressure due to workloads, potentially puts both clients and employees at risk. Overworked staff and managers can often result in procedural failures, such as sufficient staff supervision, which should be provided to reduce physical, emotional, and psychological overload. Mary observed this in her organisation during the austerity years:

> "It's the pace of work, and some of the people we deal with can be really stressful, not enough time to deal with issues, and there's a lack of supervision to discuss issues or what's going on with colleagues, it can make you ill, physically and emotionally exhausted."

Mary's reference to the people they work with may be related to the difficulty of individual people's situations. The nature of the individuals working in the voluntary sector means they are more likely to be empathetic. With that, they will inevitably take some of their clients'

emotional baggage onto themselves. Even under normal circumstances, dealing with a troubling case will take time to recover from. Still, it will take its toll when they come thick and fast with no time for a breather. As Mary said, they will become 'emotionally and physically exhausted'.

There is a clear sense that those in the sector blame the government cuts for the increase in workloads, working hours, and staff sickness. The voluntary sector, which once attracted employees due to its ethos and more family-friendly work-life balance, is now beset with the same struggles workers left other sectors to escape. This suggests that the voluntary sector is under threat of losing its people-centred approach and distinctiveness, which can lead to a sense of loss and detachment from those working within the sector. Alison moved into the sector to be able to spend more time with her family compared to in her old role elsewhere, but now sees the sector moving in the wrong direction:

> "I moved into the voluntary sector to get away from working my nuts off, making money for rich companies. It had a relaxed pace and had a personal approach to helping people. Plus, the hours were decent, so I got more time with my family. Since the government cuts, the workload has increased. It's heavy, more people to see, less staff equals less time per client, and that's without the normal staff sicknesses. It's losing its people focus. It's what makes the sector unique."

Alison's reference to 'making money for rich companies' again links back to that distinction between the private and voluntary sectors. The participants have often shown a distaste for the motives they attribute to the private sector. Here, Alison sees a connection between those motives and how it is to work in a private sector organisation. Post austerity, which she again sees as the government inflicting changes on the voluntary sector, she thinks that the voluntary sector is becoming more like the private sector. To her, that simply means a worse place to work.

Organisational change as a way of delivering efficiency and profitability is a crucial concept in private sector companies, and for some, the prospect of change brings innovations and opportunities. However, since 2008, for many workers, especially in the public and voluntary sectors, the suggestion of organisational change is often met with trepidation. It has connotations of reorganisation, redundancies, cost-cutting and mergers, which are full of unpredictability and uncertainty. Since the introduction of austerity measures, employees anticipating significant organizational changes also experienced increased job insecurity, which has been the reality for many people employed within the public and voluntary sectors.

Within the voluntary sector in the North-East, there is a high level of uncertainty and lack of control amongst workers. In a reduced economy, finances dictate everything, and cost-cutting initiatives are often essential for the survival of a business, charity or service provider. Savings are often achieved through the centralisation of services. However, relocating services can cause significant disruption for employees, resulting in redundancies, downsizing or an inability of staff to travel greater distances for work. For those who can continue working, relocating and reestablishment issues can also affect charities, employees and their clients. Reorganizational changes pose a significant risk to the survival of smaller charities and organisations due to the disruption of services relocating causes, as well as clients not being able to access services further afield and may choose to seek alternative services locally.

For many well-established professionals, there is a perception that following the financial crisis, the golden era for the voluntary sector, with its abundance of opportunities, stability and contentment, is over. The new, more demanding working practices create a disconnection between the organisation and staff. If we apply a social identity perspective to the organisational context, the negative impact of these changes undermines employee commitment and sense of belonging.

Ronnie's experience tells this story and makes comparisons between present-day austerity and the political and economic climate of the 1970s, "I have been working in the community sector for 40 years. I've seen plenty of changes over that time, but in the past few years since the government cuts, it's lost something". Ronnie has often referred to how long she has been working in the sector and uses it to build herself up and add weight to her words. That she feels the need to do so suggests that she fears the reality of the changes in the voluntary sector is not being communicated.

She tells the story of the good times, "The 90s and 00s were pretty good, plenty of opportunities, your job was yours unless you wanted to move up or move on, and you got to know your colleagues and your clients." This description paints the picture of the community that the voluntary sector during those times. People were there to make a difference and benefitted socially from working closely with like-minded people. The phrase 'unless you wanted to move up or move on' implies a significant level of autonomy and a lack of pressure.

The good times were quite unlike what austerity imposed, "When the government started cutting public services, the services had to be replaced in some way, so services were somehow transferred onto us." She suggests that the voluntary was forced to pick up the slack when the state retreated from its responsibilities. With that extra demand came extra pressures and consequences, "It's not the same now. It's impersonal and rushed. There's a lot more clients and less staff." Impersonal has a connotation of treating their clients like just another commodity to be dealt with and moved on, with minimal human interaction time. It is, therefore, unsurprising that the community of the good years doesn't exist anymore.

Finally, Ronnie drew on her years of experience to compare to a previous period of hard times, "It's like being back in the 1970s, high unemployment, low wages, and no job security. Nobody had any money then, and no one has any money now. Even working people are struggling to

get by." Here, Ronnie focuses on the financial implications of job insecurity and austerity measures. People's incomes are no longer sufficient to cover living expenses, and low-income families are considerably worse off than ten years ago. The gap between low-income families and the minimum standard of living has widened significantly.

This raises the question of where this leaves those who are effectively living with and enduring in-work poverty. Voluntary sector workers who provide service to the socially and economically deprived don't expect themselves to face in-work poverty. Humans are emotional creatures who thrive on social, financial and employment stability. They often adopt protectionist behaviours when their financial, social, or professional identity is threatened by external forces such as unemployment, as the financial implications and stigma attached to unemployment remain undesirable.

Diane has also experienced financial hardship due to austerity despite being in a household with two incomes, "I can't afford to be unemployed. I have commitments and a mortgage." This statement almost talks about unemployment as an option to be considered, which may suggest an implicit bias that those who are unemployed are choosing to be. She continued, "We rarely go on holiday. We budget for everything: clothing, gas, electricity, and food. Our social life is non-existent, and we both work. Austerity is hitting working people, too." Here, Diane is making the distinction between working people and the unemployed, implying that things must be really bad for those with jobs to struggle.

Susan provided a similar narrative regarding the need to remain employed:

> "I have financial obligations, my income is average, and my partner only works part-time. We have to work because we have a mortgage, we can't survive on one income, and to be honest, I really don't want to be on the receiving end of the services I provide to others".

This demonstrates the distinction between those working in the voluntary sector and those they help is starting to blur. Previously, there was a solid identity formed around being a person who worked and being a person who helped others. Inherent in the idea of being a working person was being able to support yourself. With wages not being enough to live on, where is the line between a working person who needs state support and an unemployed person who needs state support? After all, the rhetoric surrounding austerity paints everyone receiving benefits as a drain on society.

As a result of changes imposed under the banner or austerity measures, the benefits system has grown more complex. For example, Georgy described her situation regarding childcare costs and tax credits:

> "I used to work full time, but now I'm working part-time. I'm lucky. It works for me because I get working tax credits on top of my wages, so I can still work while my son is at school and be home when he finishes. To be honest, I can't afford to work full time, I have no family, I'm a single mother, and the wages aren't high enough to pay for childcare".

Financial stability is an essential element of modern life, but unfortunately, there is a thin line between being eligible for state support and not. For example, two-person families often find themselves on the wrong side of that line. Maintaining employment against a backdrop of low wages usually means two wages are necessary to meet financial commitments. However, working for low wages can demoralise and reduce worker satisfaction as the benefits one would generally expect from working, such as enjoying additional social activities, are not affordable. This struggle is often termed as in-work poverty. It pushes economic insecurity to sufficiently high levels, making financial planning extremely difficult and affecting self-realization and social identity.

People within the voluntary sector's stories regarding the effects of austerity measures are often drawn from their personal experiences in relation to how the changes within the voluntary

sector have affected them. For example, changes to contracted working hours have reduced wages and take-home pay, while they are unofficially expected to work unpaid working hours to cope with demand. These changes impact their work-life balance and create additional stress at work and home. In addition, with redundancies in the public sector, an air of unease was created amongst those working on fixed-term contracts within the voluntary sector. As a result, there was dramatically increased competition and a desire to reduce spending from those employing them.

It must be an incredibly difficult situation for voluntary sector workers who are there for the betterment of society and to help those in need but are themselves falling foul of the economic realities of austerity measures. The government has often used in-work poverty and the financial stresses surrounding low wages and job insecurity to fuel resentment. A division is created between those working and struggling and those not working but seen to thrive on benefits and other support. At their conference in 2013, the then Conservative Chancellor of the Exchequer, George Osbourne, announced 'no one will get something for nothing' and that 'the long-term unemployed should undertake work in return for their benefits' (Osborne, G, 2013). This rhetoric was another example of diverting attention away from in-work poverty and making another group out to be the problem. From an identity perspective, studies show that unemployment and financial insecurity are instrumental in heightening feelings of division between 'them' and 'us'. They are often central driving factors in the prevalence of victim blaming, extremism and racist views. Abandoning those unique ideals and working practices can result in disillusionment and reduced loyalty from staff and volunteers. Employee retention can suffer. In extreme cases, this can lead to adopting discriminatory rhetoric and behaviour toward their previous positions.

From an identity perspective, threats to job security can impact an individual's collective identity based on their membership in a group, such as employment status, and the individual's desire to remain in the salient group (employed). The saliency of this membership can be activated automatically, even with subtle stimuli such as the rhetoric surrounding austerity. These signals can cause them to adopt behaviours that maintain a positive social identity with the dominant in-group, even if this means abandoning a previously desirable group to join another.

Keith's story shows frustration and a possible change in stance towards those in need in society, "I think job insecurity keeps everyone on their toes. I have a mortgage, council tax and bills." He is suggesting that job insecurity can be motivating. This view is reminiscent of the Victorian attitude to the poor and is undoubtedly a more conservative attitude to welfare, "My taxes pay others more in benefits than I get in wages because they get their rent and council tax paid to. I'm all for helping people, but my family and commitments are my first priority." He is not entirely taking the position that people receiving benefits are a drain on society. Still, his understanding of housing benefits and the tax system appears to have been influenced by the same misinformation campaign.

These comments illustrate that individuals often revert to a stance of self-protection in response to reduced resources. Internal organisational, structural, and operational changes and their associated social and economic stressors frequently lead people to identify reasons for these changes. However, political rhetoric and media spin have altered the public's perception of many of those who receive state support. The rhetoric surrounding austerity has denigrated many groups, both British subjects and otherwise. Attitudes to UK ethnic minority nationals, international students and their legitimate rights to work are questioned.

The demonisation of refugees, and asylum seekers in particular, means that even their selfless acts of volunteering are now viewed as an act that threatens the job security of others. The motives behind the rhetoric that has led us here are murky, to say the least. In the extreme, it may be designed to induce more sinister and dangerous reactions, such as racism, as it vilifies those who are seen as different or foreign, often resulting in vicious physical assaults and verbal abuse. This type of victim blaming has been used throughout history as a scapegoat or diversionary tactic for economic recessions, job insecurity and social decline.

Victim blaming and the consequences of this type of rhetoric are evident in the experiences of Mahmood, who gives up his free time to help others:

> "I'm a volunteer and a foreigner, so I'm seen as a threat. I have been attacked a few times badly and went to hospital. I got spit on my face like a dog. I had a bottle hit off me on my back and shoulder. I got pulled in an alley, punched in my head, and my shoes taken off me. Shouts at me, telling me to go home and stop stealing English jobs".

Mahmood's story illustrates that the divisive rhetoric of 'them' and 'us' can be taken to the extreme, manifesting itself into racism that has become so ingrained that someone whom they can visibly identify as an ethnic minority, even when engaged in volunteering is also perceived as a threat.

Summary

Those working in the voluntary sector were often attracted to do so for reasons comparable to the sector's ethos of creating social wealth. Many of the participants stated that they possess a desire to give something back and to contribute to society. Although it is necessary to gain an income from our work, by actively seeking out and choosing this line of work, an individual would be considered to have an altruistic outlook on life, and it is this personal ideology that drives their vocation. This study also highlighted that for those working and volunteering in the voluntary sector, the work was a reciprocal endeavour, as the non-monetary rewards were

the driving force for both workers and volunteers, as they acquired a strong sense of personal satisfaction and accomplishment.

In terms of identity theories, working in the sector provided the prospect of gaining different forms of identity. For some, working and volunteering in the sector was an attractive proposition for those entering the world of employment as it enabled them to gain the hands-on experience they needed to build or create a stable, long-term social identity. Other participants indicated that working and volunteering within the sector had allowed them to acquire new or additional identities or redefine those they already held. It gave them a voice, opinion and status as they moved from the domestic realms of being a housewife and child-rearing to gaining meaningful employment. This illustrates that the concept of 'identity' is multifaceted as working and volunteering impact the personal, professional and social dimensions of our lives, indicating that we also possess multiple identities simultaneously.

The study also demonstrated that the social dimensions or social identity gained from working and volunteering within the voluntary sector were held in high esteem, as almost all of the participants indicated that the interpersonal relationships, friendships, and associated social activities they had were a direct result of their working environments which for some had spanned decades. How the participants addressed the implications of losing these connections because of losing their jobs or retiring reinforces their level of attachment to these social aspects and the identities they derive from them.

The austerity measures introduced in the aftermath of the 2008 financial crisis massively reduced public spending, which resulted in increased unemployment and lower funding for the voluntary sector. At the same time, demand for charity services was growing, dramatically impacting the sector's workforce. Austerity was implemented with little regard or thought about how welfare and social services would be provided in an economic environment without

adequate funding. The government hoped this economic and service void would be filled by adopting a business-orientated alignment of the financial and operational procedures of the voluntary sector. At the same time, they were accelerating previous policies of replacing traditional grant-making with competitive bids and contracts, in what has become known as the 'contract culture', often at a much-reduced cost.

Due to the individuals they interact with, those who work in the voluntary and community sector are keenly aware of the effects of the government's austerity policies. The rhetoric of those in the sector is of resilience combined with anger and dismay. However, there appears to be a stark contrast between the rhetoric of austerity measures and the actual reality of the cuts as they are felt on the ground, especially by those in low-wage, low-income families and those forced to rely on the welfare system. What was initially promoted as nothing more than a fiscal response to an economic crisis requiring a tightening of the public purse resulted in the decimation of the public sector workforce along with the services they supported by eliminating, reducing or outsourcing local government, social and welfare services.

The public's perception of the government rhetoric that followed suggesting "we are all in this together" and the promotion of the big society was perceived as a grand lie to deceive the public into accepting the measures. It was viewed as nothing more than an attempt to gain hundreds of thousands of free working hours through volunteering. There was also an unspoken agenda of removing the responsibilities of the state and placing them firmly on the shoulders of the voluntary sector. This betrayal has only undermined the government's credibility amongst those working in the voluntary sector, resulting in what can only be described as political indifference and apathy towards the government and a general distrust of authority.

A decade after the economic crash, introducing austerity measures has only served to compound economic disadvantage and increase debt amongst the low-paid and unemployed.

Ten years later, most of those in the sector now view the austerity rhetoric as a tool of political influence to drive policy, economic and social change. Unfortunately, in response to the government's reforms and cuts, the reductions in funding and increased workloads, the voluntary sector itself has had little option other than to introduce organisational changes to survive, such as relocating, down-sizing, redundancies, and centralisation, which has impacted upon employees work-life balance, motivation, retention and sense of identity within the sector.

The participants indicated that they felt like they were walking a tightrope. On the one hand, organisational change is often viewed with trepidation due to the likelihood of staff layoffs. Still, the prevalence of low wages and availability of work in the region often inhibit professional progression, limit opportunities and act to trap employees geographically. Approximately 37% of voluntary sector workers are part-time, and since 2010, the Northeast of England has seen a 30% reduction in the voluntary sector workforce. However, for an individual, income, position and status carry various personal and social dimensions that inform the sense of personal and social identity. Therefore, these threats to job security can affect any or all of these dimensions. Overall, job insecurity can be insidious, as only when it is taken on board as a threat to personal or social identity does it manifest into something more. At this point, people react, leading to a lack of commitment, a breakdown in employee relationships/conflict, undesirable behaviour, increasing work-related illness and absenteeism.

This reliance on short-term contracts prevents employees from putting down roots, reducing motivation and retention as employees constantly search for more secure positions regardless of sector. However, the reliance on funding bodies for staffing is fuelling the propensity for short, fixed term and zero-hour contracts, with contracts and wages matching the amount of funding received. When coupled with the sector's propensity for low wages, these contracts only increase the sense of job insecurity and undermine the ethos, commitment and social identity that traditionally attracted employees to the voluntary sector. The participants also

indicated that since the austerity measures were implemented, the increase in competition, understaffing, long working hours, unpaid overtime, and increased workloads have impacted the good work-life balance traditionally associated with the sector.

The voluntary sector's persistent struggle to benefit ordinary working-class people could pessimistically appear to be a lost cause when you consider that it is set against a backdrop of consumerist, liberalist capitalist greed. Even as the narratives unfolded, what struck me the most was how austerity measures and changes in government policies had adversely affected those working in the voluntary sector in Sunderland. Also, how prevalent the issue of job insecurity has become within the voluntary sector to the point that workers appear to be in a constant state of uncertainty, anxiety and stress caused by a decade of unsurmountable pressure. Job insecurity is an alienating experience, as even the perception or fear of losing their jobs is enough to reduce their identity as employed, even though they are still in work. Many of the narratives allude to job insecurity as a real and constant threat, which is felt in various ways, such as the reduction in funding and working positions being tied to individual funding rounds with varying durations from as little as 12 months.

Chapter Nine - Discussion

Introduction

Studies of austerity have focused on the political and economic dimensions of government policy and the effects on those at the lower end of the social spectrum, including the increase in social division, poverty, unemployment, and homelessness. The sequel to these measures was The Big Society, which effectively seconded the voluntary sector as a proxy welfare provider in the absence of a rapidly diminishing welfare state. It could be assumed this was a mutually beneficial arrangement between the government and the voluntary sector. However, this was simply the transfer of responsibility, with the government never relinquishing any statutory, administrative, or economic power to the sector.

The voluntary sector struggled to increase its capacity to provide essential welfare services without the additional funds and people to support it. A unique situation was created in which staff and volunteers working to help those at the lower end of the economic spectrum were now being affected by austerity measures in much the same way as those they were helping. Therefore, understanding the challenges created by the financial crisis, austerity measures, big society, and rollback of the state is essential to organisations with a stake in the voluntary sector. Those changes encompass working conditions, contracting, and funding. Organisations will benefit from reflecting on them when refining their strategic approach, including staffing, operations and resource use. Such efforts will help them to maintain their independence and control.

Austerity brought insurmountable reductions in public spending, which increased adversity on several fronts. These brutal cuts drove down wages, reduced employment opportunities, and altered employment contracts favouring short-term and zero-hours contracts, ultimately adding to job insecurity. The voluntary sector felt these measures on several levels. Increased

unemployment and reduced or absent public sector services dramatically increased the demand for voluntary sector services. Then, the government focused on securing alternative low-cost service providers and expecting them to do more work without increased resources and competition for positions, funding, and employment contracts. The cumulative impact of these events stretched resources to such an extent that the delivery of services was seen in terms of quantity over quality for organisations.

Workers and volunteers in the sector see their role in terms of their desire to do good. It is a vocation rather than simply a job, which forms a significant part of their social and working identity. This study explores how the funding pressures, threats to job security, changes in contracts and working conditions placed upon the sector by the scale of austerity measures have affected those working there. It elaborates on how this has undermined the voluntary sector's unique working environment, ethos, and vocational element. It also analyses how the changes threatened and impacted the well-being and social identity of those working in the sector.

This chapter will discuss my three research questions relating to the experiences of third-sector managers and volunteers during the years of austerity to assess whether those experiences directly resulted from austerity. First, the experiences of third-sector managers and volunteers during austerity. Second, the perceptions and reactions of those working in the voluntary sector to the coalition government's austerity rhetoric. Third, the impact that austerity had on staff and volunteers' social and professional identity.

After discussing the research questions, this chapter will move on to other, more general discussion points. I will articulate the contributions to knowledge and practice that the study can make. I will also explore the study's limitations and possible avenues for future research.

Experiences of Third-sector Managers and Volunteers During the Years of Austerity

The personal narratives gathered from my participants provided some exciting revelations relating to the experiences of third-sector managers during the years of austerity that followed the financial crisis. The coalition government's austerity policies directly responded to the deficit and debt levels brought about by the Global Financial Crisis. They embarked upon massive cuts to public spending, resulting in the loss of 1.1 million jobs and a general increase in unemployment across all working sectors (Clegg, 2018).

The effects of austerity on the charitable sector were twofold. Massive numbers of former public sector employees flooded the jobs market. They were forced to seek alternative employment, with many looking towards the voluntary sector. As the effects of the recession hit, there was also a loss of consumer and business confidence, with consumer spending falling dramatically and less money circulating in the economy. In response, the government implemented a public sector pay freeze, which had a knock-on effect on other sectors.

Across the country, the economic slump reduced spending power and prevented many businesses from hiring new workers. Those who did take on new workers often did so using short-term contracts at lower wages than before the financial crisis. This broader picture is consistent with the study's participants' experiences, who often moved from one low-paid contract to the next to remain employed while having limited job security.

Austerity not only increased competition for jobs at all levels within the sector. It also reduced opportunities for advancement and promotion. The participants spoke of increased competition limiting their opportunities to advance, which mirrors the evidence from other research. Cunningham et al. found that increased rates of unemployment caused by austerity, coupled with limited duration contracts and fewer advancement opportunities, exerted an unspoken

pressure upon workers, essentially forcing them to hold on to their already precarious positions (Cunningham et al., 2017).

Decades of changes in how grants, contracts, and loans are distributed among the voluntary sector have made it increasingly difficult for organisations to compete for funding. Government grants that were often non-repayable were replaced with contracts and loans designed to increase the sector's obligations to the government. In addition, they were binding the sector to market-led working practices, such as pricing contracts based on the number of people seen (quantity) and not the quality of the service (Walton, 2014). Although the changes occurred over time, these changes have been a source of irritation amongst charities, as managers have indicated that attempts to bring the sector into the market under the guise of partnership undermine the sector's independence, autonomy, and ethical identity (Silvestri, 2009).

These changes in contracting conditions linked employees' positions indirectly to the duration of these contracts and loans. The study's participants echoed the sentiments found in research by the Third Sector that these short-term and zero-hours contracts have been responsible for increased job insecurity within the sector. Voluntary sector employees were caught in a never-ending cycle of applying and reapplying for positions as funding rounds ended and new funding was secured (Thirdsector, 2014). Austerity simply increased the pressure by reducing the availability of funding. Workers had to choose between working for free, effectively volunteering until funding was renewed and their contracts, or unemployment. For those who chose the former, the fear of engaging with a hostile benefits system was enough to persuade them that it was better to wait it out.

After contracts ended, workers often found that where new positions were available, they were lower paid than the old ones, had fewer hours, or were not there at all. This situation created uncertainty in the workplace and financial insecurity (Cunningham, 2017). Some of the

participants felt this strongly enough that they expressed a concern about being able to plan for the future at all. It also affected their motivation, transforming formerly devoted exponents of the voluntary sector's ethos into jaded individuals questioning the merits of exerting any effort in the workplace.

An individual's identity is bound to their ascription of a particular social category or role and the meaning and value of that self-categorisation (Abrams & Hogg, 1988). Within the voluntary sector, the ethos of increasing social wealth attracts like-minded people into working for and with its organisations. Therefore, they will likely attach considerable meaning and value to that identity. Prolonged periods of financial uncertainty cause disturbances in social identity, as employees cannot plan long-term, which can alter behaviour patterns and lead to reduced psychological well-being (Godinic et al., 2020).

With reduced public spending and unemployment rising due to austerity, the demand for help from the voluntary sector increased substantially. At the same time, the government reverted to promoting the voluntary sector as an alternative welfare provider, but with no extra money to pay organisations for the services they were expected to provide. This combination of higher demand and stretched finances meant that the sector would inevitably struggle to accommodate the volume of extra work. Furthermore, the government's austerity measures created unprecedented financial pressures that could be perceived as coercive in their intent, as Big Society rhetoric expected the charitable sector to rapidly restructure and reposition itself in this increasingly challenging funding environment. The voluntary sector found its operational resilience severely tested, undermining its social and professional identity as an employer that provides a supportive, flexible, well-balanced working environment (Smith, 2015).

The participants described how austerity measures brought about various workplace issues, which meant they were not helping people in the way they wished. In response to increases in

the number of clients they were expected to see, organisations limited the time they could spend with each client. In their opinion, this reduced the quality of the service they could provide and, for some, was reflected in a feeling of letting down clients to whom they had developed professional and personal attachments. Voluntary sector work has always prided itself on its culture of attracting civic-minded individuals and creating an atmosphere of belonging. Organisations took pride in their high quality, face-to-face, person-centred services, which sharply contrasts the needs of the market and private enterprise. Sennett suggests that this form of modern capitalism 'radiates indifference' and portrays system failures as individual ones, with no shared narrative and no shared fate (Sennett, 2006). He suggests that under these conditions, the individual's character corrodes as the employee's working identity is undermined, with the worker questioning, "Who needs me?"

Workers also indicated that they often worked through their breaks and lunches. They had to work unpaid overtime or take work home. These actions were necessary to cope with the increased volume of work. There was far more work and less time to do, with some employees and volunteers reporting that they regularly did not meet their target quotas due to increased demand and time constraints. These pressures were affecting their working relationships with colleagues and their home life.

In short doses, periods of intense activity are manageable, but if they persist, they change the workplace dynamics. The participants described how the atmosphere became tense, with conflict starting to emerge where previously there was a positive sense of community. Divisions also began to emerge between workers and their organisations. They spoke of management in hostile and suspicious tones, blaming them for trying to turn the workplace into something more akin to the private sector.

Individuals experience collective identity based on their membership in a group and often hold their working environment in high regard (Tajfel and Turner, 1986). Continuously working under increased pressure disenfranchises workers and can lead to lower employee retention and loyalty (Gibbons and Hilber, 2022). This reduced employee loyalty equates to an erosion of the identity the employee attributed to their working environment (Tajfel and Turner, 1986).

Previous research and participant comments indicated that most of those working within the voluntary sector are not doing it primarily because of the wages. Wages are often higher elsewhere. However, the working conditions and ethos have traditionally been the main attraction of the sector. Participant narratives corresponded with reports from the wider voluntary sector that previously attractive working conditions, unique to the voluntary sector, had changed to the point workers felt physically and mentally overloaded (Milbourne and Cushman, 2015).

Continued workplace pressure can also impact employees' health and well-being, thus increasing employee absenteeism (Thomas, National Institute of Health, 2020). Creating a supportive and shared social identity in the workplace delivers various benefits to the individual and the broader group. For example, it can create a great sense of purpose and motivation for contributing to the team's success. Failure to do so, however, will lead to a gradual attrition of the sector's most valuable experienced staff.

Staff and Volunteers Views of the Government's Rhetoric of Austerity

The data gathered from my interviews showed a consensus around the coalition government's introduction of what they termed austerity measures. The participants agreed that it initially seemed like a reasonable, well-thought-out, and logical response to reduce public spending and lift the country from the global financial crisis. However, as with almost all government policies, the devil is often in the detail, and certainly was in the case of austerity. To promote

and sell the policy of austerity, the government seconded the services and sang the praises of the voluntary sector. While concurrently promoting the idea of The Big Society and the need for people to become active citizens. They encouraged volunteering for the good of society using a people-centred slogan of "We are all in it together". These rallying cries were designed to create public support and promote the idea that people power, sacrifice, and endurance would lift the country out of recession. Unfortunately, austerity measures, the big society, active citizens, and the claim of "we are all in it together" were soon revealed to be nothing more than political spin. The targeting, extent, and longevity of the cuts to come did not match the rhetoric. As time passed, the veil of deceit was lifted, and the severity of the public sector cuts began to affect levels of unemployment, as well as the availability of benefits, housing, and welfare support and services.

When I asked the study participants their views on austerity, they all expressed similar sentiments that the term austerity measures was a sugar coating, a less objectional and offensive term for government cuts. They felt that this choice of language was a political spin to win over the electorate. However, when we discussed the slogan "We are all in it together", the participants were visibly annoyed and angered by the level of deceit in that they sold a distorted image of what they wanted to do and why. Rather than simply policies created to reduce the UK's financial deficit, they were an opportunist attempt to introduce neoliberal policies of devolving and redirecting government responsibility for welfare. This deceit towards the electorate illustrates that the government had absolutely no regard for the people who voted for them. The political landscape mirrors capitalism's need for productivity potential. It favours transient, superficial, and adaptive markets over grounded, introspective, and specialised workers, with politics and business branding revolving around presentation and appearance rather than knowledge, truth, specialism, and competency (Sennett, 2004 and 2006).

The cuts predominately affected people at the lower end of the economic spectrum, with cuts to welfare benefits and housing illustrating their agenda to minimise the state's role. Individuals and families who had previously gotten by on low but sufficient incomes without being reliant on benefits were also pushed into poverty. Many two-income families also struggled with increased costs while the more affluent in society who did not need public services were untouched. The sense of betrayal, anger and disbelief amongst the participants was palpable. The participants felt that the government deliberately sold the idea that society was collectively facing the pain of austerity to disguise and sell its neoliberal agenda. They had strong opinions regarding the measures and believed there was no accountability for the suffering and hardship the government brought upon the people. Especially as their actions directly affected almost 10 million working-age recipients of welfare benefits and saw significant reductions in the incomes of working families (Oxfam.org, 2013). The study indicated that among staff and volunteers, there was a consensus that the cuts were callous, with no concern for their impact on the public and charities alike. This lack of government accountability increased their perceptions of a detached, controlling, and oppressive relationship, with participants viewing their actions as not just neglect but deliberate harm.

When talking to the participants, there was always a prevailing undertone in how they spoke about the government. We mainly spoke explicitly about the Conservative-Liberal Democrat coalition government, but that tone extended to any government. For some participants, there was always a level of distrust towards authority. Still, it was clear that austerity rhetoric and the Big Society had eliminated almost all remaining trust and goodwill. To the participants, the government were a hostile, antagonistic force. Even in the best possible light, the government's actions were uncaring and neglectful. To others, they were considered outright malicious.

Another area highlighted during the study was how the rhetoric surrounding government cuts was deliberately orientated towards the welfare cost as the single most costly government expense, burdening the state's finances. As a result, the welfare bill and benefits were an easy target. Reductions and caps to benefits and housing were implemented, while claiming benefits was increasingly difficult and unpleasant. At the same time, a hardening of media reporting and political rhetoric associated with unemployed people receiving welfare payments emerged (Fletcher et al., 2016). The caricature of benefit claimants as lazy scroungers getting something for nothing become a prevalent part of public discourse (Jensen et al., 2016).

The participants described, from both personal and second-hand encounters, how dealing with job centre personnel after the introduction of austerity was negative, degrading, and off-putting. They were made to feel like unworthy scroungers. Publicly portraying the employed as desirable and supporting the national effort to lift the country from the economic crisis was a conscious decision. The inevitable consequence is that the unemployed are seen as undesirable consumers of welfare resources and part of the problem. Many of the staff working within the voluntary sector also thought this rhetoric was pitting communities against each other. They described a divide-and-rule tactic that saw those working but struggling to make ends meet because of austerity measures, feeling resentful against unemployed benefits recipients. This hardening of attitudes towards benefits recipients, in terms of 'them' (those on benefits) vs 'us' (taxpayers), was a deliberate ploy to gain support for their hard-line rolling back of the welfare state.

The government's rhetoric of the big society and the promotion of volunteering through the concept of active citizens was met with trepidation by the voluntary sector. Organisations and those working in them were apprehensive about the future new working relationship they would find in the wake of the massive reductions to public spending and the government

rhetoric towards the sector. However, in practice, the reality of this affirmation and flattery proved to be nothing but political spin and a publicity stunt. The truth was that the government's promotion of the voluntary sector was another cog in the wheel of conducting its austerity agenda. The government could not simply announce that it did not want to fund the welfare state or that it did not consider providing a welfare state to be the government's responsibility. Such an announcement would have been electoral suicide.

Instead, the economic crisis provided the perfect opportunity and cover to introduce this agenda covertly. It gave them a cover for implementing austerity measures and allowed them to use the big society to offload their welfare responsibilities onto the voluntary sector. However, they overlooked how the voluntary sector would respond to being turned into a de facto welfare provider without any extra funding to pay for it. There was outrage within the sector as the local council funding that had supported countless micro community-based projects and voluntary organisations for children's activities and older people stopped, forcing them to close. Elsewhere, other small and medium-sized organisations and charities were inundated with clients requiring support. The interim CEO of the NCVO, Sarah Vibert, suggested that leaving the voluntary sector to pay for these extra services and activities depleted their existing funds, placed unprecedented pressures upon the voluntary sector and its staff, and ultimately undermined voluntary sector workers perceptions of the government or working in partnership with them (Vibert, 2021).

Both managers and employees in the sector have expressed a sense of betrayal by the government. Neoliberal and, ultimately, capitalist ideology contradicts entirely that of the voluntary sector, which has an ethos of providing a quality service that increases social value. For this reason, and given the series of broken promises made by the government, it is inconceivable that the voluntary sector could even consider that the government's intermittent

rhetoric of working in equal partnership could match the reality. The government has never relinquished any power to the voluntary sector, and its actions towards the sector are consistently about asserting dominance over a subordinate. Each new partnership sees the voluntary sector relegated to simply providing alternative welfare provisions, with every subsequent government of all parties failing to give the sector the status and recognition it deserves (Schaechter & Loftman, 1997).

The power of authority organises and propels itself through notions of identity, and simultaneously, identity is constructed according to the interests of power. In this case, the government asserts its national, lawful, and financial status. Therefore, relinquishing power or authority to the voluntary sector as a partner was never on the agenda; instead, attempts were made at restructuring and repositioning the voluntary sector within the capitalist market. Some government departments were wary of, and in some cases, actively hostile towards, the voluntary sector. This hostility may suggest that their actions were designed to reduce their independence and take power/control from the sector (Vivert, 2021). However, power and authority can also be defined by the cohesion of people's collective identification and reputation for good and increasing social wealth, which the voluntary sector clearly has. Therefore, these repeated intermittent attempts by the government to court the voluntary sector, seeking to bring them into the capitalist marketplace and to do the government's bidding, could be viewed as professional jealousy. Alternatively, the government may perceive the voluntary sector's level of autonomy, independence, and excellence as a threat, as it exposes financial, social and welfare incompetence and mismanagement.

The Effects of Austerity on the Social and Professional Identity of Staff and Volunteers

The third research question relating to "the effects austerity has had on the social identity of staff and volunteers" provided further insight into the human cost of austerity. The impacts on

individuals' identities showed most clearly how it had been felt by those working within the sector.

The public sector is an extension of the government and the state and is the largest employer in the UK. It acts at the behest of the current elected administration and, ultimately, the electorate. The private sector is accountable to shareholders and has a primarily financial motive. The charitable and voluntary sector is often considered the original social welfare sector. It has a rich history of philanthropy, education, housing, poor relief, and welfare provision spanning centuries, aiming to drive social change and make the world a better place. It is theoretically independent of both the private and public sectors. However, the voluntary sector often finds itself on a parallel path to that of the public sector, with local authorities providing funding to the voluntary sector to run social welfare, health, education, and housing services (Olsson, 2008).

The charitable sector's ethos of working towards altruistic goals tends to attract inspirational people who want to volunteer, with volunteers tending to hold similar motivations and beliefs. Volunteers themselves come from an array of different backgrounds and bring with them an exciting mix of life experiences. These volunteers are not motivated by money but instead are interested in creating social wealth and wanting to live by their values. Therefore, their behaviour and social group membership or identity are closely intertwined with their work (Tajfel, 1986; Gronlund, 2011; and Grey, 2020).

Charitable work is hugely motivating and can give a deep sense of fulfilment and job satisfaction, often the main driving force attracting workers to the sector. However, the extreme cuts to the public sector also reduced funding to the voluntary sector, inevitably affecting contracts and employment. For employees, this brought instability on many levels within the voluntary sector, a severity many had never encountered before. Voluntary sector workers

know that working within the sector is a trade-off between the intrinsically satisfying value of the work and the less impressive wages compared to other sectors. Still, they opt for the ethos, flexibility, and job satisfaction levels it provides.

However, the availability, frequency, and value of funding to the voluntary sector created significant concern for those working there. Fears about funding inevitably began adding pressure on employees at all levels. Insufficient funding, increased working hours, reduced opportunities and flexibility, overburdened the sector, and decreased job security. Threats to job security are often underestimated in their effects on employees, as this insecurity is not confined to simply financial worries but extends to personal, social, health, and professional dimensions. The participants experienced fear of losing connections to their colleagues and, interestingly, also to their clients, with whom they had developed strong attachments. There was also a concern for losing their sense of purpose and usefulness. Many of the participants used their job roles to define their identities, the most common of which was being 'a manager'. The fear of losing these positions and connections was wrapped up in how they spoke about the fear of unemployment. Therefore, prolonged job insecurity not only increases the salience of employee social and professional identity, but at the same time, it also acts to undermine those identities (Tajfel, 2006).

In his Culture of New Capitalism, Sennett argues that the private sector sits well with New Capitalism, with its never-ending demands for change, development of new skills, managing short-term relationships, and the need for employees to migrate from task to task, job to job and place to place (Sennett, 2006). The private sector attracts a certain kind of individual who can prosper in these unstable and fragmentary social conditions. In contrast, although austerity has beset the voluntary sector with these same working conditions, the sector is ill-suited to deal with it. The work concerns communities, face-to-face, on-the-ground, people-centred

services, with invested volunteers and employees. The overall ethos of the sector is not suited to impersonal, financially motivated private sector conditions.

This type of job insecurity is not organic and is challenging to navigate (Selenko, 2017). It was thrust upon the sector and threatened the social identity of volunteers and workers, affecting their well-being and job performance. Opportunities within the sectors have always been comparable, as you can do almost any corporate job for a charity, with many job roles providing variety and accumulating skill bases within these roles (NCVO, 2023). Within the voluntary sector, there was generally flexibility, job sharing, and compressed working hours, with 20% of all charity jobs being remote (YouGov, 2015). Workers could juggle other social, life and family commitments, giving the sector the advantage of promoting a good work/life balance. However, the external threats imposed upon the sector by austerity measures have increased demand for jobs out of financial need but, at the same time, reduced the sector's attractiveness.

Various personal, social, and professional identities comprise the self and exist in a hierarchy of salience (Stryker & Burke, 1980). When these identities are threatened, they are regarded as low importance or transient. At the same time, those that affect work, finance and power are internalised, involve different aspects of the self, and are given a high degree of salience. In an unstable economic environment, employees with family, responsibility, and financial commitments seek to secure long-term employment as this security helps maintain their status. Being employed and the status it provides is of particular importance to identity. Therefore, remaining in work is essential in avoiding the dissonance and loss of identity caused by unemployment (Tajfel, 1986).

Charities, both big and small, are creative and innovative, making more with less and exist to move the world forward and make life better. Micro and smaller charities tend to be grassroots, community-based, and often unable to specialise. However, they provide workers with various

activities and opportunities to expand their skill set. Although their running costs are often minuscule compared to medium and larger voluntary sector organisations, they are also highly vulnerable to financial insecurity. This is because they are usually funded through grants directly from local councils and are not positioned to accept funding contracts (NCVO, 2022). However, on the plus side, charities are far less likely to take risks when expanding and, therefore, less likely to suffer financially compared to companies that focus purely on profit (Utley, 2016).

Charities are value-driven, prioritise ethics over profits, and value people and their ideas and passions. This ethos is core to the social identity of those working in the sector. Social interaction is a big part of a charity role, as this working environment fosters strong working relationships, great opportunities to make friends and personal and career development. However, from the emotional rhetoric explored within this study, it appears that these working practices, which resemble what Sennett referred to as 'flexible capitalism', are in opposition to that of the voluntary sector's localised, hands-on, people-centred delivery (Sennett, 1999).

The uncertainties that New Capitalism's austerity measures bring into the voluntary sector include a propensity for short-duration contracts, workplace individualism and a reduction of teamwork, coupled with the absence of trust for and commitment by the government to work in equal partnership. These only promote instability and scepticism of government policies and motivation within the sector. (Sennett, 1998: 138). These factors erode the job security of those working in the voluntary sector, which damages their social and professional identities and does tangible harm to their well-being.

The participants each emphasised different aspects of the intangible benefits that workers in the voluntary sectors gain. For some, it was the community and social aspect, with their work-life providing much, or even all, of their social lives. For others, it was the first time they felt

they had an independent role outside the home. Being a manager and having the ability to influence the situations of others gave some of the participants a sense of prestige. For one participant, Mahmood, volunteering gave him a sense of safety when his life in the UK as an asylum seeker was plagued by racist abuse and attacks.

Threats to job security due to austerity not only threatened the incomes of the paid voluntary sector employees but threatened to rob them of those intangible aspects, too. If the organisation Mahmood volunteered for closed its doors due to a lack of funding, he would lose the haven from hostile parts of the local community. Not being able to call herself a manager would take away Ronnie's sense of pride in her achievements. The loss of their workplaces would deprive many of them of the colleagues and clients whom they think of as friends and, in some cases, represent their entire social circles. The fear of losing these things has led to heightened anxiety and will have exacerbated the stress already being felt due to the change in working conditions.

Contribution to Knowledge

The following section provides an outline of the contributions this thesis offers. There have been various studies into the effects of austerity on specific groups, such as the unemployed, the homeless, people with disabilities, and individuals with mental health issues. There are also investigations into the effects of austerity on funding to the voluntary sector in terms of closures and funding issues. However, this qualitative empirical study examines the personal experiences of how austerity has been felt and experienced by workers and volunteers within the voluntary sector in the North-East in terms of their social identity. It has explored why both workers and volunteers are attracted to the voluntary sector, with both volunteers and workers individually and collectively demonstrating that it is the sector's ethos and the sense of belonging and community it promotes.

The study has shown that the core social identity attributed to those employed in the voluntary sector is comparable to that of the group identities that are fundamental to volunteers' motivations and experiences of volunteering (Gray, 2020). It is evident from the wide range of people volunteering their spare time, including the employed, unemployed, and retired. This association provides them with a sense of purpose and creativity by becoming part of something greater than themselves, mentally stimulating and motivating their sense of social identity (Stets, 2000; Tajfel and Turner, 1986). It also demonstrates that even those in paid employment within the sector, due to the comparatively lower wages, can be thought of as giving something up to help others. Voluntarily sacrificing earning potential for the benefit of the wider community.

The participants also gave an insight into how austerity, the government's rhetoric to justify it, and The Big Society were received within the charity and voluntary sector. Those working in the sector were not blind to the changes it experienced because of austerity measures. However, they felt that the rhetoric of austerity was nothing more than a distraction tactic, a political masterclass in flattery. It was praising and elevating the voluntary sector and its volunteers for their volunteering endeavours, which did not match the reality of what they were expected to encounter and to do. The austerity measures were far more brutal in their execution than the rhetoric had suggested. They created a veritable tsunami of people heading to the voluntary sector looking for vital support for their social and economic woes, well beyond the standard capability of the sector to handle. The accounts of those I spoke to show a consensus belief that the government's austerity claims were dishonest and deliberately misleading, as the actions did not match the rhetoric.

This study also highlighted how changes to funding and the associated funding pressures concerning working contracts, wages, hours, and working conditions took a toll on workers

and volunteers. The changes altered their work/life balance to the detriment of their well-being. The demand to do more with less also caused management within charities and other voluntary sector organisations to put pressure on staff to turn cases around faster just to get them done, thereby reducing the qualitative ethos of the sector.

Theoretical Contribution

My work has shown that economic decisions do not just affect people's finances; business decisions can affect people far beyond the immediate impact on the workplace. They also affect how people see themselves, their group memberships, and their sense of belonging. Applying Social Identity theory to the voluntary sector gives a new insight into how those working and volunteering in the third sector see themselves and others. This identity is a driving force behind their career and life choices and collectively explains the actions of the voluntary sector. Combining Social Identity Theory with Sennett shows how the change in the culture of a group, in this case, a workplace, can act to divide that group. In doing so, it destroys the original group identity and creates a new one. The old collective identity of the voluntary sector, which united all those working and volunteering from top to bottom under a single sense of purpose, no longer exists. It has now split due to changes in culture and working conditions, with workers and volunteers seeing senior managers as a hostile out-group.

This study examined a wide range of secondary data and literature surrounding the historical creation and timeline of the voluntary sector, along with a political timeline of creating a welfare state and subsequent governmental changes to legislation and working with the voluntary sector. Combining the two aspects allows the reader to understand the historical significance of the voluntary sector's independence to its achievements and the development of the abilities of its workers. It allows us to understand how important that independence is to the identity of the voluntary sector, its purpose, and its drive to help others. In addition, by

understanding the political agendas that inform public policies and the subsequent introduction of austerity measures, the reader can understand and apply context to the effects this has had on the voluntary sector, its workers and volunteers. We can gain an appreciation for how politicians make use of the voluntary sector while restricting voluntary sector participation in decision-making processes.

For example, organisations are working to increase service delivery or to 'help more people' even at the expense of their own workers' wellbeing. The sector feels it exists to help others, and in the face of increased demand, organisations will put up with a great deal to do so. It also provides possible explanations for why the voluntary sector has appeared to go along with policies like austerity and participate in initiatives like the Big Society even when the political ideologies of the government appear diametrically opposed to the ethos of the voluntary sector. The identity of the voluntary sector causes it to consider the trade-off, working with a neoliberal government opposed to the idea of welfare because it allows them to help more people in the short term, but sacrificing its ability to help more people in the long-term.

Contribution to Practice

This study could interest managers in various settings with a similar workforce and a vocational desire to do good, such as the NHS, social services, community social care providers, or teaching establishments. Settings like these often experience similar issues with increased demand, staff retention, reduced investment, long hours, and low wages. When combined with other threats to job security, there could also be a similar impact on social identity, undermining the well-being of their workforces. Therefore, understanding how these issues affect staff and volunteers can enable managers to introduce strategies that reduce job insecurity and positively promote their social identity and desire to continue working in that sector.

Limitations of the Study and Future Areas of Study

There are limitations to any form of social study; in this case, the nature of the study only captured the participants' experiences up to a certain point in time. Still, austerity continued up to the start of the 2019 pandemic and beyond. It then continued in a different form beyond that. Its impacts did not stop when I last spoke to my participants; their responses will not reflect the changing nature of people's circumstances. Multiple follow-ups with the same individuals over an extended time will give further insights into how this prolonged period of austerity has affected them, the sector and society.

My study focused on those with experience working in the sector over many years through multiple governments and different approaches to funding services. I aimed to give a comparison of before and during austerity. Still, it is plausible that my participants' experiences were influenced by how long they had worked in the sector. Widening the study to include those who came into the sector during austerity may also provide insight into how their experiences differ from those who had worked there for years before the onset of austerity measures.

The study focused primarily on paid charity employees, with only a few volunteers. This restriction was because, as the paid employees of the sector, they were more directly impacted by changes to contracting, funding, working practices, hours and wages. Therefore, any loss of income would be more poignant regarding the wide-ranging effects on their identity. However, as volunteers are also a significant proportion of the voluntary sector, speaking to more volunteers about their social identities could have provided an opportunity to contrast the findings with those of paid employees.

Research into the participants' backgrounds could have provided more specific insight into why the workers and volunteers decided to work for the voluntary sector. For example, it would

have been interesting to establish their educational and economic circumstances (affluent vs. less affluent). Does someone who grew up with more have a different perspective on the sector's welfare role than someone who would have potentially been reliant on those services?

This study was limited to a single city in the North-East of England and its nearby areas. The North-East is recognised as a particularly deprived area of the UK but is not homogenous, with some areas suffering more hardships than others. Going further afield to other towns and cities in the region would elicit a more comprehensive range of experiences. A larger sample could have illuminated whether the broad consensus of views was specific to the city I sampled or applicable throughout the region and sector. In terms of sampling, purposeful, convenience sampling worked well given my time constraints, as it was impractical for me to travel from town to town and city to city to conduct interviews, and lack of funding prevented me from paying the travel costs of participants travelling to me for interviews. Therefore, I relied on readily available participants.

I also feel that confining the study to one geographical location provides a more focused analysis. However, this may bring particular idiosyncrasies that would not apply to other deprived areas and may not reflect the experiences of those working in the sector in areas with different levels of affluence and opportunity. For example, the political and economic North-South has existed for centuries. The North-East of England experienced the eradication of its coal mines and shipbuilding decades ago, with very little investment and regeneration to replace them. Politically, this region's cities have a strong socialist outlook and plenty of experience of having adverse and austere conditions imposed upon them. Therefore, their views of austerity measures are already coloured and reinforced by the divisions in wealth under which they already live. Widening the study to look at other parts of the country will

allow researchers to draw out those aspects that may be common to all while also enabling differentiation of the impacts on people from different backgrounds.

Austerity measures may no longer be the preferred term, but the successive Conservative governments that followed Cameron and Clegg's 2010 coalition continued to keep levels of public spending low. The global catastrophe of the COVID-19 pandemic started to change public spending policy, if only for a time, in the form of the furlough scheme. Still, there has been no return to the generous funding of the pre-austerity years. The pandemic created more pressure on the voluntary and community sector, first during the lockdowns and then later as demand for services increased. Then, with the cost of living crisis, the pressure on the voluntary and community sector grew even more pronounced, with many who would never have needed welfare services now using food banks and other forms of support. The pandemic also brought about the most significant change in the working environment for decades: the mass move to home-working. Revisiting my original participants for a series of follow-ups would give insight into whether these different events also impacted job security and if that translates into any social and professional identity changes.

Appendix A: Examples of Structural Coding

Quote	High Level Theme
Austerity, it's rubbish, an excuse, the welfare state that is paid for by the people, for the people, so they are basically stealing money we pay in to use it on paying back debts we didn't make. How is that even legal?	Austerity Rhetoric
Those with limited flexibility in their incomes are suffering. In the past ten years the government has deliberately, deliberately, allowed vulnerable people, the elderly, disabled people, families with small children slide into poverty. Many thousands of low-income working families are now on the breadline. We are clearly not all in this together.	Austerity Rhetoric
Over the past 10 years, since the government started cutting public funding the sense of panic among charities and community groups is palpable because no one wants to lose their job, she then went on to say. Every network meeting it's the same story, every organisation, charity, project, community hub, self-help group, you name it, money, funding, they are all struggling in one way or another.	Job Security
The voluntary sector is more business-like now, it's not about who we see, but about how many we see, numbers through the door, hitting targets, basically jumping through hoops to justify our positions and our funding.	Job Security
Lots of jobs are advertised in the sector which gives the impression there's lots of opportunities. It's an illusion. It's all about funding rounds. When one lot of funding stops the job it funded ends, then when funding is secured they advertise for the post again, the person who left the old post will obviously apply to fill that post, and if it's in the same office then they are going to get it because they already know what's expected and they don't need to be trained for it.	Job Security

"It's not fair when the same job is advertised the same pay but increased hours. It's stunts like that that cost us trained staff, because quite a few have gone to the private sector because the wages for the hours worked are better"	Job Security
"I have been working in the community sector for 40 years. I've seen plenty of changes over that time. But in the past few years since the government cuts, it's lost something. The 90s and 00s were pretty good, plenty of opportunities, your job was yours unless you wanted to move up or move on and you got to know your colleagues and your clients. When the government started cutting public services, the services had to be replaced in some way, so services were somehow transferred onto us. It's not the same now, its impersonal and rushed, there's a lot more clients and less staff. It's like being back in the 1970's, high unemployment, low wages, and no job security. Nobody had any money then and no one has any money now, even working people are struggling to get by.	Job Security
I do longer hours, many unpaid, but I'm expected to do them because were not allowed paperwork to pile up, so we often work through breaks or have lunch at our desks or take work home. Colleagues get stressed and bitch at each other. It feels like we have been hijacked and expected to work like a business, accept more responsibility but without any wage increases.	Job Security
It took me years to work up to a managerial position, I have power to make things happen, people listen to me, don't get me wrong I'm not power mad but I suppose I don't really want to give it up to someone else, that sounds selfish doesn't it, let's say I have mixed feelings.	Social Identity
When I think about it work is really an important part of my life, at work people know me, I have friends, colleagues, I meet people, they trust me, I have a position. There's no gratitude for being a wife and mother. It's all taken for granted. At home, I'm just the wife, someone who cooks and cleans.	Social Identity

Appendix B: Examples of Pattern Coding

Quote	High Level Theme
Austerity, it's rubbish, an excuse, the welfare state that is paid for by the people, for the people, so they are basically stealing money we pay in to use it on paying back debts we didn't make. How is that even legal?	Perception of Austerity Measures
Those with limited flexibility in their incomes are suffering. In the past ten years the government has deliberately, deliberately, allowed vulnerable people, the elderly, disabled people, families with small children slide into poverty. Many thousands of low-income working families are now on the breadline. We are clearly not all in this together.	Reality of Austerity Measures
Over the past 10 years, since the government started cutting public funding the sense of panic among charities and community groups is palpable because no one wants to lose their job, she then went on to say. Every network meeting it's the same story, every organisation, charity, project, community hub, self-help group, you name it, money, funding, they are all struggling in one way or another.	Funding impact on the voluntary sector
The voluntary sector is more business-like now, it's not about who we see, but about how many we see, numbers through the door, hitting targets, basically jumping through hoops to justify our positions and our funding.	Impacts of lower funding on Culture
Lots of jobs are advertised in the sector which gives the impression there's lots of opportunities. It's an illusion. It's all about funding rounds. When one lot of funding stops the job it funded ends, then when funding is secured they advertise for the post again, the person who left the old post will obviously apply to fill that post, and if it's in the same office then they are going to get it because they already know what's	Impacts of lower funding on Job Security

expected and they don't need to be trained for it.	
"It's not fair when the same job is advertised the same pay but increased hours. It's stunts like that that cost us trained staff, because quite a few have gone to the private sector because the wages for the hours worked are better"	Impacts of lower funding on Job Security
"I have been working in the community sector for 40 years. I've seen plenty of changes over that time. But in the past few years since the government cuts, it's lost something. The 90s and 00s were pretty good, plenty of opportunities, your job was yours unless you wanted to move up or move on and you got to know your colleagues and your clients. When the government started cutting public services, the services had to be replaced in some way, so services were somehow transferred onto us. It's not the same now, its impersonal and rushed, there's a lot more clients and less staff. It's like being back in the 1970's, high unemployment, low wages, and no job security. Nobody had any money then and no one has any money now, even working people are struggling to get by.	Impacts of lower funding on Culture
I do longer hours, many unpaid, but I'm expected to do them because were not allowed paperwork to pile up, so we often work through breaks or have lunch at our desks or take work home. Colleagues get stressed and bitch at each other. It feels like we have been hijacked and expected to work like a business, accept more responsibility but without any wage increases.	Impacts of lower funding on Culture
It took me years to work up to a managerial position, I have power to make things happen, people listen to me, don't get me wrong I'm not power mad but I suppose I don't really want to give it up to someone else, that sounds selfish doesn't it, let's say I have mixed feelings.	Sense of attachment to role
When I think about it work is really an important part of my life, at work people know me, I have friends, colleagues, I meet people, they trust me, I have a position. There's no gratitude for being a wife and mother. It's all taken for granted. At home,	Source of identity drawn from role

I'm just the wife, someone who cooks and cleans.	

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