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NCIA Inquiry into the Future of Voluntary Services

Working Paper No 16

Voluntary Services and Campaigning in Austerity UK: Saying Less and Doing More

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Foreword

This paper has been produced as part of the NCIA Inquiry into the Future of Voluntary Services. The Inquiry is specifically concerned with those voluntary and community organisations that deliver *services* in local communities, especially those that accept state money for these activities. These are the groups that have been particularly affected by successive New Labour and Coalition Government policies regarding the relationship between the voluntary and statutory sectors, and attitudes and intentions towards the future of public services. In this and other papers we refer to these as Voluntary Services Groups or VSGs.

It has long been NCIA's contention that the co-optive nature of these relationships has been damaging to the principles and practise of independent voluntary action. The nature and scale of the Coalition Government's political project – ideologically driven - to degrade rights, entitlements and social protections, and to privatise public services that cannot be abolished is now laid bare. This has created new imperatives for VSGs to remind themselves of their commitment to social justice and to position themselves so that they can once again be seen as champions of positive social, economic and environmental development.

Our Inquiry is a wide ranging attempt to document the failure of VSGs, and the so-called 'leadership' organisations that purport to represent them, to resist these shackles on their freedom of thought and action. But it is also an attempt to seek out the green shoots of a renaissance that will allow voluntary agencies to assert their independence and reconnect with the struggle for equality, social justice, enfranchisement and sustainability.

This paper is one of a number that has been produced through the Inquiry and examines whether and the extent to which campaigning has been affected within VSGs that have accepted the new norms of public and private sector funding. This paper has been prepared for NCIA by Mike Aiken, to whom we offer grateful thanks.

For more information on the NCIA Inquiry please visit our website – www.independentaction.net.

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Voluntary Services and campaigning in austerity UK: Saying less and doing more?

Part 1: Setting the scene

We start with some questions. To what extent are those VSGs providing services for disadvantaged groups also campaigning for those people's rights? How far are they presenting evidence - gathered from their day-to-day work with people facing poverty and destitution - to policy makers and the general public? Are they confident, able and assertive in 'speaking truth to power?' These questions form the starting point for this exploration of the campaigning role of voluntary services. Let's first set the scene.

Why is campaigning important now and what are the challenges?

Why is it important that voluntary organisations play a campaigning role? First, this is a time of austerity. The UK is not even half way through cuts in public expenditure, according to the Institute of Fiscal Studies, with 'only 40% of planned spending cuts' in place by the end of the 2013-2014 financial year (IFS, 2014:1). The same source tell us that there will be even greater reductions in the period up until 2018, which will imply 'cuts of more than 30% in "unprotected" public service budgets' (IFS, 2014:1). The budgets of local authorities, which provide important front line services to citizens and are a major source of funds for voluntary organisations, continue to face cutbacks. Provisional funding settlements for local councils as far back as 2011 showed 36 councils, taking a cut of 8.9% covering some of the country's poorest areas – Hackney, Tower Hamlets, South Tyneside and St Helens (Guardian, 2010). Yet, as the governor of the Bank of England, Mark Carney, pointed out, it was the world's largest banks that undermined the financial system, and *'their bailout using public funds undermines market discipline and goes to the heart of fairness in our societies'* (Carney, 2014).

Second, a fundamental change in the organisation of society is taking place, which has gathered pace since the 1980's and seeks to dismantle the post-war contract between the state and its citizens. It is a move from public provision to private markets; from collective to individual responsibilities. This national and international ideology, known as 'neo-liberalism' believes in *'free markets in which individuals maximise their material interests…and that markets are…to be preferred over states and politics…'* (Crouch, 2011:vii). It involves a fundamental shift in power and resources away from democratic governance to powerful elites residing particularly within transnational corporations (George, 2013).

Third, against this backdrop, we will not be surprised to find that it is poor people who have been, and will continue to be, at the sharp end of these savage cutbacks and the dismantling of public services. Real wages are continuing to fall while welfare cutbacks in the UK *'are more likely to hurt the poor than in other countries'* (OECD, 2014:2). Who is speaking out for them? Many local voluntary services are providing the last line of support for disadvantaged people. Yet data from NCVO (2014) points to the level of cutbacks affecting the voluntary sector: *'Between 2010/11 and 2011/12 total income from government to voluntary sector organisations fell by £1.3 billion in real terms… Social services organisations received £361 million less than the previous year.'* Whitfield (2014:25) argues in his analysis of opposing austerity that *'the attack*

on public sector unions, workers' rights and legislation to reduce the ability to take industrial, civil and community action, ran parallel with public sector cuts and privatisation.' We can add the provisions in the Lobbying Act (2014), which may effectively restrict or frighten voluntary organisations from campaigning activities.

The voice of voluntary action practitioners

Before proceeding, let's hear the voice of four practitioners - interviewed for this paper – who are all immersed in voluntary action. They provide important insights from their different standpoints[1].

A group of activists devoted exclusively to campaigning against public service cuts described difficulties collaborating or sharing with voluntary organisations. In their voluntary action, as unpaid campaigners, they noted that others were anxious about speaking out and suggested that contracting arrangements played an important role in this.

> *'…in our campaign [against outsourcing] – voluntary organisations were very nervous about saying anything which might compromise their ability to get funding… There should be an interlinking between the voluntary sector and the campaign – but it has started to shift in the last few years….it would have to be a very confident voluntary organisation today who would support a campaigning organisation….or, say, oppose austerity locally…'* (Fight Back).

They also noted the lack of links across the voluntary action spectrum – from campaigners to organisations. Meanwhile, a small network organisation, with no paid staff faced similar problems. For them, the aim was to influence local policy and also build links between citizens in convivial and shared spaces. They had encountered problems with both the local authority and private sector sub-contracted organisations - but now they also found it hard to work with what they described as 'mainstream' voluntary sector organisations.

> *'…we initiated a planning network - a loose group of some 20 residents/ activists/ community groups from around the borough…who all worked together for…an examination in public of the council's planning policy…We also made a number of attempts to "work with" the…local mainstream/council-funded voluntary sector organisation and it just wasn't happening - the ways of working are too incompatible'* (Local Citizen Action).

It seemed that the working methods of some larger local voluntary organisations were not always flexible enough to make collaboration possible. However, a chief executive of a multi-purpose centre in a poor area of London – with an annual income of around £1m also faced problems. He was struggling to deliver local services and engage with a local council, which had also faced severe cuts. Competitive contracting processes had caused additional local fragmentation and it was difficult to find routes to affect local policy and practice:

> *'The local authority has taken a hammering with cuts and the policy making framework is much weaker….so also any ability to influence the workings is also weaker… Then, the local authority wrapped its funding streams into one parcel and ran a competitive*

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[1] The names of these groups and organisations have been anonymised.

contracting service: we didn't win it so fell off the radar…[Now] we just do locally what mainstream providers can't provide… We've been more introspective…So now we work more on our own' (Bright Home Multi-Centre).

This speaks of the difficulty of influencing the local policy agenda and of a growing (unwanted) isolation in a setting where mainstream funding is largely derived from contracts. A trustee in a fourth voluntary organisation, which had made a strategic decision to not bid for contracts in order to maintain their independence, faced different challenges. They believed it was important to speak out to policy makers based on the evidence from their local work and had done so.

'…it is a democratic country...we are saying what we see…we have evidence…it's about being courageous and speaking out.' (Direct Help for Poor).

However they reported being bullied by government in a policy environment that was '*subtle and menacing'* and had been told to '*be careful.'*

These brief vignettes illustrate important and complex issues. A campaigner, an activist, a chief executive and a trustee expressed some of their different difficulties in gaining a voice for the people they are working with. We will hear more from these and other voices later on but they point to some important challenges: difficulties in trying to undertake campaigning in the current context; isolation and fragmentation; lack of linkages between people taking voluntary action; and fears of speaking out. There has never been a golden age of unhindered campaigning and perfect linkages. However, the situation appears to be getting worse just at the point when it needs to get better – to support the voice of those most affected by austerity. Further, some of the mechanisms being put into place (for example, competitive contracting and legislative changes) are creating an atmosphere that further restrains campaigning.

Major challenges for voluntary organisations

A distinctive feature of VSGs is their capacity to advocate and campaign on social issues as independent agencies. VSGs can often facilitate and support a voice for disadvantaged people. However, from our discussions with practitioners we hear of at least four major, and interlinked, challenges:

- **Social needs are increasing** - reductions in welfare services for disadvantaged people combined with cuts to benefits or punitive sanctions for claimants;
- **Cuts to VSGs budgets and services - m**any of the organisations supporting people are having their budgets cut while the public sector is itself being destabilised and outsourced, mainly to private companies;
- **Contracting regimes –** VSGs are being forced into competitive contracting arrangements against private, or third sector, regional and national organisations, which may have little knowledge of the specific needs in local contexts;
- **Pressure to keep silent –** VSGs are confronted by implicit, or explicit, pressures to 'say less and do more'; they face gagging clauses in funding under contracting arrangements which threaten to stop them advocating and campaigning; and contracting for services may, step-by-step, co-opt them into complicity with the machinery of government; provisions in the so-called Lobbying Act, passed in January 2014, create an atmosphere in which it is difficult to speak out. The elements in this fourth area are the particular concern of this paper.

The aim of this paper

In this paper the aim is to explore:

- To what extent are voluntary services involved in campaigning?
- What are the explicit or implicit pressures they face in undertaking this work?
- To what extent are there links between different VSGs, and between them and wider voluntary action in order to facilitate this work?

Our particular focus in this paper is on the work of local VSGs because we surmise that they are in direct and daily contact with what is happening to people in Austerity UK. However, we contextualise this by also considering the work of their smaller and larger neighbours: on the one hand, smaller groups and activists engaged in voluntary action campaigning or networking and, on the other hand, much larger voluntary organisations. Our concentration is ultimately on the middle group because they are potentially gaining specific, rich, detailed and complex evidence about emerging hardship in given localities. This could provide powerful evidence to support the analysis and actions of activist campaigners, and offer larger organisations material to influence national agendas and policy. However, before going further, let's consider what we understand by the term 'campaigning'?

What do we mean by campaigning?

Campaigning is often associated with the work of large (national or international) voluntary organisations – whether charities or not – such as Save the Children, Oxfam, World Development Movement, Shelter or Greenpeace. This may be aimed at fundraising, policy change or shifting attitudes towards social or environmental issues. At this point it is useful to turn to a 'respectable' source. NCVO, one of the sector's umbrella bodies, points out that campaigning can involve bringing about changes in policy and can target a range of people including politicians (see Table 1).

Table 1: What is campaigning?

Campaigning is defined as: 'Organised actions around a specific issue seeking to bring about changes in the policy and behaviours of institutions and/or specific public groups…the mobilising of forces by organisations and individuals to influence others in order to effect an identified and desired social, economic, environmental or political change…Campaigning is how people, communities and organisations have created and continue to create a world that is more in line with their views of "the good society". This can involve targeting decision-makers such as politicians, civil servants, or directors of corporations, as well as behaviours and attitudes across a wider section of the population.'

NCVO (2011)

Campaigning, is understood in this paper as: a broad term to encompass a range of activities aimed at changing public policy, influencing attitudes and behaviours or seeking social changes. It is named in different ways including 'change', 'voice', 'advocacy'.

Are voluntary organisations allowed to campaign?

The short answer yes! First, it is important to recall that the UN's Declaration of Human Rights enshrines the right to freedom of association in Article 20 and the right to impart information and ideas in Article 19. This is a measure of the important role given to associations and freedom

of expression. In the UK, voluntary organisations, as self-determining associations, are part of this sphere. Second, worries about the 'right to campaign' sometimes arise within voluntary organisations registered as charities and which deliver voluntary services. However, the official position with respect to charities and campaigning, notwithstanding the de facto demise of the (non-regulatory) Compact, endorses this role. Morgan has pointed out that historically, from the 1970s, there was always a concern about 'how far charities' purposes *limited* the right to campaign' [emphasis added] (Morgan, 2012:73). Indeed for this reason, changes to the charity legislation *codified in* the right to campaign on matters related to a charity's purpose. The current Charity Commission (2008) guidance maintains that charities can campaign, and be engaged in political activity as long as it is not their core purpose (see Table 2).

Table 2: Can charities campaign and engage in political activity?

Charity Commission guidance says that: '…to be a charity an organisation must be established for charitable purposes only, which are for the public benefit. An organisation will not be charitable if its purposes are political.'

However: 'Campaigning and political activity can be legitimate and valuable activities for charities to undertake' Nevertheless: '…political campaigning, or political activity, as defined in this guidance, must be undertaken by a charity only in the context of supporting the delivery of its charitable purposes. Unlike other forms of campaigning, it must not be the continuing and sole activity of the charity.'

But: 'There may be situations where carrying out political activity is the best way for trustees to support the charity's purposes. A charity may choose to focus most, or all, of its resources on political activity for a period. The key issue for charity trustees is the need to ensure that this activity is not, and does not become, the reason for the charity's existence.'

Charity Commission (2008)

Some notes on key terms

Before proceeding to the next section it is important to indicate how we are using the other key terms of 'voluntary organisation', 'voluntary action' and 'activism.'

Voluntary Organisation

'Voluntary organisation' is used here as a general term to cover a wide range of organisations, including charities, associations and co-operatives, that are set up neither for profit nor by statute, following the familiar residual framework of 'neither run by state nor private enterprise.' Precise definition is a complex and contested area, beyond the scope of this paper. What is important for the purpose here is to understand '**large voluntary organisation or VSG** as shorthand for the biggest few thousand charities, which have incomes of over £5million per annum – many of which are household names. In this paper '**voluntary organisation or VSG'** is used to refer to medium and small charities with – roughly speaking - incomes below £5 million and below £100,000 (but more than £10,000) per annum respectively. Below £10,000 organisations are referred to here as '**voluntary groups'** or '**informal groups'**. The term 'voluntary organisation' in this paper is also referring to those working with disadvantaged groups, offering services or running activities.

Voluntary action

Lohman (1992:48) draws from Weber's account of 'social action' (any acts individuals do that have a subjective meaning for the person) in order to develop his account of 'voluntary action'. However, for simplicity here it will be sufficient to use the idea of voluntary action as *'activities of individuals…and collective or organised action…'* (Rochester, 2013:2). This emphasises that voluntary action is something (although not everything) done by voluntary organisations and groups, but also by individuals (such as activists or volunteers).

What is activism?

Activism, which in part overlaps with voluntary action, is a description of a person or people's characteristics in relation to social and political engagement. Hence the term points to people's involvement in grassroots associations which can be *'characterised as activism rather than unpaid help'* (Rochester, 2013:179). Alain Touraine, developed a significant social theory about the role of the political activist, analogous to sharpening a pencil, which entailed identifying *'the highest possible meaning'* of a struggle so as *'to isolate, among the various meanings of its action, the one which challenges the central core of the society'* (Touraine, 1983:7-8). NCIA's campaign to support activism, used in this report, frames the term more modestly – and more specifically - around the desire to:

> *'…encourage independent action that benefits local people. This could be action to improve services for older people, campaigns to resist cuts to local services or anything else that local activists have identified as necessary in their area'* (NCIA, 2014).

So, while 'volunteer' describes involvement in voluntary organisations, for many who are involved in campaigning groups 'activism' is a more usual term and emphasises a dynamic and active description of engagement in change processes.

Structure of this paper

The remainder of this paper is structured in the following way. In part two, we look at the research undertaken for the paper (including both desk-based work and empirical case studies). This evidence is analysed and discussed in part three. The final section, part four, draws some general conclusions followed by pointers for future action and research.

Part 2: Voices from the field

How the work was done

In order to fulfil the aims of this paper a range of activities was undertaken. The work was researched and written between March 2014 and October 2014. The themes are large and the paper small but, nevertheless, it is hoped that this paper will serve as stimulation to further study, deeper action, and wide debate by those engaged in VSGs, more informal groups, wider voluntary action and campaigning.

The work draws on the following activities:

- A short literature review;
- Desk research examining targeted web sites about VSGs and campaign organisations ;
- Collection of leaflets and pamphlets from a range of campaign meetings or stalls during spring 2014;
- One-to-one semi-structured interviews (face to face or by phone) – and some web-based investigations – with people in six key organisations chosen to represent different types of organisational/group characteristics;
- A group meeting in June 2014 to discuss focussed themes with over 20 NCIA colleagues – practitioners, activists and academics - with expertise in the voluntary sector from England and Scotland;
- Use of two supplementary cases undertaken by other collaborators (Rosie Walker and Penny Waterhouse) taking part in NCIA's Inquiry into the Future of Voluntary Services.

Desk research: Summary

The desk research revealed and illustrated some emerging themes. Some large voluntary organisations were concerned about co-option and had considered how far they had stopped expressing broad messages to the general public aimed at changing hearts and minds (Friends of the Earth). Others had undertaken significant contracting work while the funds devoted to campaigning appeared small (Shelter). In some cases active campaigning was proceeding (Oxfam, WDM). For voluntary organisations engaged in welfare services, usually involving contracting processes, the space to develop local solutions seemed smaller, gagging clauses were in evidence and one faced an explicit challenge by a senior politician to 'do' and not 'say.' Some practitioners stressed the importance of contributing to debate within a democratic society. The importance of linkage with other organisations and campaigns was stressed.

Internal threats

Co-option and becoming institutionalised?
Not all the threats to campaigning activities are from external sources. We can start by examining the very large voluntary organisations. Senior figures from 'traditional' large campaigning organisations in the environmental field, for example Friends of the Earth, have been reflecting on their role. In particular, they have been considering the degree to which they had become semi-institutionalised into the policy structures. One senior staff member felt there had been *'over complicated and confused'* messages. There were dangers in their current closeness to policy makers that they were *'being invited to policy roundtables or expected to submit expert evidence'* rather than *'campaigning to win the hearts and minds of the public'* (Bennet, 2012: 56).

Read (2012:47) argued that many big names in the field such as the Nature Conservancy and WWF had *'seemingly been "captured" by corporates'* to an extent that they have tacitly accepted mining operations and land grabs. Meanwhile, an ex-employee of Save the Children, Dominic Nutt, argued on national television that his former organisation had held back from *'criticising British Gas price rises in order to avoid damage to their corporate partnership with the energy company'* and that he believed other voluntary agencies were compromised in similar ways (Nutt, 2014:12). Save the Children denied the accusation.

Campaigning or getting distracted by contracts?

Our own examination of the charity Shelter, reveals that with an income of just over £53.5 million in year end 2013 (and a significant degree of voluntary income of £24m) it devoted only £4m to campaigns and research – or less than 10% of its income (Shelter, 2013). Nearly a third of this 'National Campaign for Homeless People's' income, however, came from legal services contracts and other government funding – presumably for (important) service delivery. However to what extent do these (often highly prescribed) contracts affect the scale, content and balance with campaigning work? Rochester argues that:

> *'The concentration on service delivery as the main or sole purpose of voluntary action has undesirable effects. It relegates other historical functions of voluntary organisations, such as self-help, mutual aid, community development and campaigning or advocacy roles to the margin'* Rochester (2013:77).

Shelter remains an important campaigning organisation but how far has it been distracted and overtaken by government contracts?

Professionalisation

A generation ago Dartington (1992) feared professionalisation in the voluntary sector would lead to the emergence of a new class of expert managers of highly successful organisations out of touch with their users. To what extent do paid professionals – in contrast to activists - contribute to, or collude with, a muted campaigning role? How far do fears - about stepping out of role; being seen as unprofessional; revealing one's own politics and commitments; damaging personal career progression - lead to collusive behaviour towards government, corporations or authority? A brief insight into this issue comes from an investigation undertaken by Waterhouse (2005) which involved asking a large group of professionals for meanings associated with professionalism and protest. Words associated with 'professional' included *'calm, compliance, compromising, diplomacy, experience, expert, knowledge,'* while, on the other hand, the words associated with 'protest' included *'aggression, challenge, criminal, determined, insurgence, marching, trouble, violence.'* This opens a window into the way that professional codes of practice may offer stability and the enshrinement of rules but be unsuited to changing the status quo. However these insider codes may provide important levers when used in tandem with activists. This issue is not explored further here but does point to the potential role of supportive professional organisations, which is explored later.

Bucking the trend - WDM campaigning for change

Local branches of the international campaigning organisation World Development Movement (WDM), which is *'seeking justice for the world's poor'* (WDM, 2012:10-11) provide illustrations of local groups delivering petitions to their MEPs, lobbying their MPs, running stalls to inform the public, attending regional conferences. There is no silent voice here. WDM explain their rationale as follows:

> *'We're politically and financially independent. The majority of our funding comes from thousands of individual members and supporters. That means we're able to shine a light into dark corners and speak up for the marginalised when others find it uncomfortable to do so'.*
> WDM (2014)

They draw an explicit link between financial independence and a supporter base, which they see as vital in enabling them to provide a voice for the marginalised.

Lack of space to campaign?

Stepping back from the larger players, local VSGs have also been under pressure. Howells and Yapp (2013) concluded that funding from local government – including reductions and the specificity of contracting have led to**:**

> '…large scale outsourcing and the "hollowing out" of local communities in terms of a loss of skills, reduction in employment opportunities, weakening of support for community organisations and inhibition of the ability to develop local solutions for social care'.
>
> Howells and Yapp (2013:3)

This implies a reduction in possibilities for co-design and tailored local action – which was once the hallmark of many neighbourhood-based organisations like Bright Home Multi-Centre – in favour of standardised operations running at scale with little space for local experimentation or contextualisation. How far can VSGs heavily dependent on one funding source – whether from a state or private sector agency – avoid becoming subservient clients to their provider?

Explicit pressure: do more, say less

Brooks Newmark, the (short-lived) Civil Society Minister, explicitly addressed charity campaigning when he argued in 2014 that *'...what charities should be doing is sticking to their knitting and doing the best they can to promote their agenda, which should be about helping others'* (Pudelek, 2014). This contradicts, of course, the important but distinct roles of voluntary organisations in influencing government. As Cohen and Arato (1992) argued:

> *'…we consider the development of self-reflective and self-limiting actors able to influence political discussion to be highly desirable, as are political parties that maintain a high degree of openness to civil society without surrendering the prerequisites of effective strategic action'*.   (Cohen and Arato, 1992: 561-2)

The injunction to silence knowledgeable VSGs from talking about their experiences would be quite at home in any totalitarian regime seeking to crush independent or divergent voices. An account by Trussell Trust Chair, Chris Mould, to the Panel on the Independence of the Voluntary Sector, tells of the pressure placed on them to keep quiet by "people in power"[2].

Oxfam: not too big to challenge

Oxfam, which receives a significant proportion of its income from contracts with government departments, came under pressure in June 2014 when it released promotional tweets revealing its campaign 'A perfect storm.' This pointed to the extent of poverty in the UK and was based on its report 'Below the Breadline'. Conservative MP, Conor Burns, reported the tweet to the Charity Commission claiming it was 'overtly political' (Moseley, 2014). The Commission found that the tweet could have been misconstrued as 'party political' but accepted that the charity had no intention to act in such a way. Nevertheless Oxfam was forced to accept that there was a possibility of a misconception while arguing that 'when increasing numbers of British people are surviving on food hand outs, we have a responsibility to draw attention to their plight' (Moseley, 2014). This episode points to the way that even a large, traditional

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[2]http://www.civilsociety.co.uk/governance/news/content/17632/trussell_trust_chair_told_the_government_might_try_to_shut_you_down#.U5k71ny9KSP

'household' charity faces pressure when it speaks out.

Gagging clauses in contracts

One effect arising from voluntary organisations taking on public sector services is that they enter a legalistic territory ruled by contract law, which operates between 'commissioners' and third party 'agents' (e.g. a voluntary, private or public sector provider). In short, as Frederickson (2006) points out, a contracting out process:

> *'…adds layers of complexity to policy implementation. The terms hollow state, government by proxy, and shadow bureaucracy are all used to connote a separation between the financing of government services and the provision of services'*.

> (Frederickson, 2006:20).

Voluntary organisations in such structures may, quite literally, become 'agents of the state' in that they can be obliged to keep information or observations private even when their insights might help improve the service or conditions for local communities and individuals. For example, interviews given to the Face the Facts radio programme in 2014 by staff from voluntary organisations described the *'chilling effect'* of the contemporary environment for those of them engaged in contracting processes. These included testimony from women's organisations, community action groups and others about: 'gagging clauses' in contracts that were used to stop organisations speaking out or writing letters to magazines; direct threats that if a group were to *'continue to campaign, funds would go elsewhere'*; as well as the 'nod and a wink' approach to make it clear what was acceptable and what was not.

Voluntary Organisations keeping their mouths shut

The net effect of the above developments was that *'people would be afraid to speak'* argued Roger Singleton, a former director of Barnados now Chair of the Barings Panel on the Independence of the Voluntary Sector, reporting that *'organisations have told us they are going to keep their mouth shut'* (BBC R4: 2014). Other commentators have been assertive in stressing they had a contribution to make to policy debates and that speaking out is part of any healthy democracy. It is possible that some organisations may hold a deeper stock of 'soft resources' in terms of their internal value base. As Rochester (2013:226) argues, some associations have *'more extensive ideological frameworks'* such as *'…social movement and campaigning bodies, faith-based organisations, and youth movements…'* These may provide ways by which they can prevent mission drift away from their campaigning aspirations and keeping their mouths open.

Representative bodies, cuts and marketisation

Most – but not all - umbrella organisations have taken highly cautious paths in relation to criticising either the dismantling of the welfare state or reductions in spending on marginalised communities. An indicator can be found in the way that NCVO and the (anachronistic) 'charity leaders' agency, ACEVO, have uncritically absorbed – and propagate - the ideological narrative of 'welfare reforms' or 'public service reforms' rather than use terms such as 'cutbacks in services' or 'privatisation.' Indeed at times ACEVO's leader of 'charity leaders', Stephen Bubb, called for an acceleration of neo-liberal processes such as NHS privatisation via outsourcing to the third sector (Bubb, 2013).

The national umbrella organisation of local infrastructure organisations, NAVCA, has been more equivocal. Their chief executive, Neil Cleeveley, agreed that increased marketisation was *'retrograde'* and that austerity was damaging for the poorest in society and that *'…there is no cross-sector agreement on involvement in public service delivery…'* Burne (2014). Yet their current policy position is to seek *'increased involvement of voluntary and community action in delivering pubic services'* (NAVCA, 2014).

A different voice? The importance of linkage

Voluntary organisations speaking out with others
On a more positive note, another perspective is to consider ways in which VSGs and smaller community groups have been active in conjunction with others. There are instances where they have been involved in a more direct way in protests: as collaborators if not leaders. The campaign against the closure of Lewisham Hospital in 2012 (Whitfield, 2014:37) meant *'patients, doctors, nurses, other healthcare workers, trade unions, political and **community organisations** built strong support across London'* (emphasis added).

Linking organisations together
The People's Assemblies in different locations around the UK, from 2013, aim to build a movement against austerity with an *'emphasis on "joining up" trade unions, protest groups and to help mobilise people'* (Whitfield, 2014:46). Nevertheless, ways of organising can be very different across such coalitions of groups. Community groups, for example, or women involved in small groups may organise in more informal ways than traditional trade unions - although this is not always an insuperable barrier.

The example of the Keeping Volunteering Voluntary campaign
Another recent example of attempts at linkage is the Keep Volunteering Voluntary (KVV) campaign, which opposes provisions within the government's workfare programme to force unemployed people into 'voluntary work'. KVV (2014) argues that *'Workfare schemes force unemployed people to carry out unpaid work or face benefit sanctions that can cause hardship and destitution'*[3]. KVV has brought together international and national voluntary organisations, umbrella bodies, trade unions and local voluntary groups with communities and individuals across the nation to pledge a boycott of the 'Help to Work' and other workfare schemes. This case study shows how a campaign can galvanise change by creating a broad coalition against a specific programme. The full account is available as part of the NCIA Inquiry into Voluntary Services (Waterhouse, 2014).

Contrasting VSGs with other agencies
If we compare voluntary organisations to some other types of organisations we can note differentiation, at least at the rhetorical level. Some Trades Unions, for example, have issued detailed pamphlets or booklets to argue their point of view, in relation to the banking crisis (The Fire Brigades Union, 2012), alternatives to austerity or new visions for welfare (Public and Commercial Services Union, 2012; 2014), or against privatisation of probation by companies such as G4S and Serco (NAPO, 2012).

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[3] This would be likely to qualify as forced labour under international definitions: the International Labour Organisation, for example, cites the Forced Labour Convention of 1930, which states that forced labour is 'all work or service which is exacted from any person under the menace of any penalty and for which the said person has not offered himself voluntarily' (ILO, 2014).

In many towns, the Solidarity Federation (2013), a network of activists, has campaigned for the rights of workers in the hospitality industry through mutual support, collective action, and protests outside high street shops (such as Poundland) involved in the government's workfare scheme and has gained some success. Meanwhile, in one town, even the Chamber of Commerce organised a debate on low wages and then spearheaded a two-year campaign for the living wage via a campaign manager (VIVA, 2013:61).

A range of local anti-cuts campaigning groups in various branches of the social, care and health fields have emerged or grown in many urban centres (including Stop the Cuts, Welfare Campaigns, Housing Crisis, Defend our NHS, Black Triangle Campaign and [Stop] the WOW - War on Welfare). In some cases, people from VSGs have attended albeit in a private capacity. WOW, as one example, lists 'activists and supporters' of its campaign against welfare cuts but relatively few VSGs: SANE, the mental health charity, and disability networks are notable exceptions (WOW, 2014).

Campaign Central, the on-line resource supported by the Sheila McKechnie Foundation (2014), offers a picture of the diversity of organisational form involved in social change: from action driven by individuals and informal networks, to that of professionals housed in large national charities. Links between and across such diverse forms of social action can build critical mass and prevent fragmented effort. The barriers to this are likely to be the different ideologies and the different approaches of activists and 'professional' campaigners.

Renters' Groups and the Nationwide: different dynamics

There may be mixed signals from other initiatives. Rosie Walker's case study provides a fascinating exploration about the origins and dynamics of local campaigns by people in private rented accommodation or 'renters groups'. It shows some of the characteristics of activist-led groups and illustrates the issues when a well-financed national professional campaigning group 'Generation Rent' emerged, heavily funded by the Nationwide Foundation. It illustrates the way different campaigning tendencies can operate even in one local group. For example, it contrasts those activists keen to build a 'professional' campaign structure to achieve specific policy changes with key messages and those who give more value to the solidarity with a group who share communal identities, wishing to express dissent in more fluid ways. [4]

Professional organisations

At first sight, reference to professional associations may appear unusual within a paper exploring campaigning. However, Evers (2009) argued that there was a *'civic culture'* within welfare services, which suggested we could give some attention to the values and principles of professionals as they may, in certain contexts, be campaign allies. Contracting and outsourcing have affected professional workers in social work, police, probation and, since the Health and Social Care Act (2013), the health service – this has affected their terms and conditions, the environment in which they work and the way they interact with client or users.

Members of some professional associations in the health and social work fields have campaigned against cuts in public services – the Lewisham Hospital campaign cited earlier provides one example. The Social Work Action Network, which recently published a Mental Health Charter, provides another example. It brings together social work practitioners,

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[4] A full account of this issue is available as part of NCIA's Inquiry into Voluntary Services (Walker, 2014).

academics, and service users, and also seeks to campaign with trade unions. It points out how their commitments to social justice are undermined by marketisation processes (SWAN, 2014) The main guidance for doctors, 'Good Medical Practice' provided by the General Medical Council (2013) - a registered charity - states that patients needs must be given priority *'If patients are at risk because of inadequate…policies or systems…'* (GMC, 2013:11). The Royal College of General Practitioners ran a campaign 'Put Patients First: Back General Practice' in June 2014, which was supported by the National Patient Participation Group (RCGP, 2014). The British Medical Association (BMA) supported the campaign against ATOS – the company contracted to undertake work assessments on people with disabilities as part of the Government's welfare cuts. At the BMA's annual conference in June 2012 a motion put by the Black Triangle Campaign to scrap ATOS's current assessments was passed (Black Triangle, 2014). Other decisions have not always been so supportive of such issues. However, if GPs and social workers can sometimes find space to speak out and act publically against political policies and systems this raises a challenge for VSGs.

Fieldwork – case studies

To understand better some of the issues and dynamics operating in the field, interviews were sought with a range of people in specific groups and organisations to illuminate the key questions. Based on the desk research, cases were chosen covering different types of organisations using a purposive sampling technique familiar in case study research. The case study organisations were chosen to provide a flavour of: (a) their approach to campaigning; (b) their linkages; (c) the challenges; and (d) opportunities they faced. Small groups, VSGs and large VSGs were selected; also one professional association. The aim was to have one interview with a key informant in each type of organisation, more if people were available. Case study research cannot usually claim statistical significance but can illuminate important dynamics.

Types of organisations studied

The range of organisations and groups is set out in Table 3. All names have been anonymised.

Table 3: Case study organisations and groups	
Type	**Name of example group/organisation**
Group A: Small / informal group: Local Community Network	
Informal action group	'Local Citizen Action'
Group A: Small/informal group: Campaigners	
A local branch of an activist campaigning group	'Fight Back'
Group B: Voluntary organisation	
Local community development multi-purpose service organisation	'Bright Home Multi-Centre'
Local infrastructure group	'Local Umbrella Net'
National help agency for disadvantaged	'Direct Help for Poor'
Group C: Large voluntary organisation	
Large service delivering charity	'Big Service'
Group D: Other types: professional association	
A local branch of a professional association	'Professional Association'

In practice it was hard to obtain access to organisations in group C, hence desk research via website searching was undertaken to provide data and informal contacts were used. The data from these organisations is presented under themes and is interspersed with thumbnail sketches of the organisations in separate boxes.

Overview: exercising or restraining choice and discretion?

The organisations examined in these cases offer some important pointers for further work. Smaller groups and networks (in Group A) had a much freer hand in their campaign activities when compared to those delivering services (in Group B). They appeared strong on political education, and analysis, both locally but also more widely. They were not afraid of the 'political.' Nevertheless, and perhaps partly as a result of this relative agility, they found it hard to make institutional links with voluntary organisations.

One Group B organisation was particularly affected by contracting processes, which made it harder to collaborate and affect local policy. One group talked about the democratic deficit and the need for the voluntary organisations to 'wake up'. Another organisation in this category had a high degree of independence from statutory funding which may have enabled it to act with some degree of independence in advocacy work – although it was still being highly pressured to not speak out.

We can make little direct comment about the Group C organisation. It was clearly 'contract heavy' and direct contact did prove possible. Nevertheless, they appeared more like a vehicle for taking on contracts than one that had a particular interest in campaigning. The market and institutional logic, which organisations like Big Services are eagerly pursuing, suggests that organisations like this will play a dog-eats-dog game. They will successively take over or merge with their contracting competitors until there are a few gigantic and dominant players as contracted state agents. We would be surprised if such entities devote any significant resources to campaigning for policy changes for their beneficiaries.

The professional organisation (Group D) did not represent one unified position from its members, instead its constituent parts were characterised by discretion and self-determination which could be used for social change and campaigning. Organisations like this may represent an arena where there may be scope to build alliances between service deliverers (Group B) as well as some Group A campaigners. Professional codes can muffle changes to the status quo but they may also contain elements, which have the potential to support wider change.

The cases raise an important point about choice and discretion. Even in highly controlled contracting settings knowledgeable, energetic and willing organisations may find some room to manoeuvre. Funding can, and does, act as a brake on the ability to campaign but all the examples of speaking out are associated with using – or finding room – to exercise discretion to do this. An important lesson is: how can organisations protect and extend the amount of discretion they have in order to use this with beneficiaries. Linkage and bonding with other organisations, who may appear unfamiliar collaborators at first sight, and with those operating at different scales may also provide some scope for extending and supporting campaigning.

Theme 1: Type of campaigning

In Group A, Local Citizen Action:

> *'involved drawing people and ideas together and helping people express collective positions, especially at 'assemblies'..... people taking part and speaking out at assemblies are not former party activists or public speakers but very ordinary people'* and they also talk of their work as *'developing and working out alternatives like at climate change camps.'*

Nevertheless, they don't formally call themselves a campaign:

> *'I wouldn't call it a campaign, no, rather an idea, the tag matters, but less than actions I think…the core idea is sharing or "commoning"…it took a while identifying what it was exactly!'*

Local Citizen Action organise events that *'are a mixture of reading group sessions, film screenings and discussions on a range of topics…'* and over the last few years, they have *'reported on and been, to an extent, involved in anti-immigration raids, anti-police violence stuff.'*

Group A: Small / informal group: local network
'Local Citizen Action'

Local Citizen Action is a network of local people in an inner city area. It has no funding but works from a reciprocal and mutual basis. There is a core group of around 20 people who are residents, activists and from community groups. They undertake a variety of activities which include: touring the neighbourhood fortnightly and using music, film, reading groups and discussions; providing places to 'free shop' by swapping or recycling goods; organising people's hearings on planning issues; defending open spaces threatened with development; and developing a local charter. It has also supported other groups on issues such as anti-immigration raids, and anti-police violence. The core people could not be easily called 'volunteers'; the term 'activists' fits them better.

Also in group A, Fight Back is an explicit campaigning organisation with a core group of activists in contact with over a thousand supporters and can mobilise over a hundred people to public meetings. It involves individual citizens and other local action groups and it has porous boundaries – members are intermingled with other campaign groups including one that is composed mainly of trades union members. However, it does not anymore have strong institutional links to the voluntary sector: '*People's background might be in the voluntary sector – so individuals may join but not organisations.*'

Group A: Small/informal group: Campaigners.
'Fight Back'

Fight Back is a membership organisation, with a local base. It has a mailing list of about 1200 local people with around 10 at meetings who could be called 'activists'. It receives no funding and its budget amounts to less than a few hundred pounds. Fight Back, has been engaged in fighting privatisation in the social welfare field. Its activities included public meetings which attract around 130 people; monthly newsletters; active use of social networking (including Facebook and Twitter as well as email lists and website); organising public exhibitions, instant demonstrations ('flash mobs'), marches, and actions together with workers whose service were under threat of being privatised.

Turning to Group B, Bright Home is a multi-purpose community based organisation. It undertakes advocacy at an individual level with clients but also collects issues together and so advocates at a community level. Due to its connection to the locality, it operates as an intermediary between statutory organisations and the community. It has engaged in some degree of co-design, particularly around alternatives to violence projects, operating from a 'show and tell' model. A senior staff member explained that Bright Home: *'…is a service delivery organisation – we'll try to use our experience from service delivery to influence wider networks…'* An example of this was in detached youth work in the neighbourhoods where they brokered informal meetings in local cafes between local councillors and young people to give them opportunities to have a voice:

> *'…young people in their late teens …they talked about issues for them – it was an exchange… young people had strong views on "stop and search" measures. Our brokering that meeting…opened up a direct route between them and local councillors.'*

Group B: Voluntary organisation
'Bright Home Multi-Centre'

Bright Home Multi-Centre is a multi-purpose, neighbourhood service delivery organisation, located in the top 10% of disadvantaged areas in England. It has been active for over 50 years and currently works in particular with young people and people with disabilities. It is a registered charity and had an annual income of just over £1.1 million in 2013 derived from more than 12 charitable trusts, Big Lottery, and statutory funding including (for example, Ministry of Justice funds) and local authority support from grants, service level agreements and contracts. Statutory income has declined by around 8% and now represents around 70% of income - over half of this comes from personalised budgets via the local authority. As well as direct service delivery, Bright Home is a lead agency on long-term neighbourhood development in local housing estates and is highly engaged with local action: over 500 people come to the centre each week while staff and volunteers attend over 100 meetings outside the building.

Nevertheless, as we saw at the beginning of this report, contracting processes have had the effect of shutting them out of some campaigning activities:

> *'A lot is dependent on the state of play of the local policy making infrastructure environment'* and *'...the local authority has taken a hammering with cuts and policy making framework is much weaker.'*

Organisations like Bright Home stand on the cusp between small community service groups and the larger voluntary service groups. Contracting processes have had a significant effect – both in terms of loss of income (when contracts have been awarded to other organisations with little connection to the local context) and marginalisation from local policy agendas (when new contractors are not interested in collaboration). Bright Home was also a member of a national federation and used this to push issues forward using a 'show and tell' approach:

> *'….we look to [the national federation] to take these more formal campaigns up based on evidence to be scaled up to a national picture – from evidence to policy.'*

Also in Group B, Local Umbrella Net was explicit about campaigning and has developed a policy to shape this work: it commits itself to support or start campaigns that fall within this remit. It has specifically campaigned against cutbacks to local groups particularly in the disability field. Attempts to pay voluntary organisations retrospectively – which would have undermined financial stability – were resisted.

A senior staff member pointed out:

> 'We have a campaigning policy so we'll campaign to support the interests of the community and folk - within a charity status…So if a group is deprived and suffering we'll represent them/ or as a general group we would all support and campaign against cuts in the public sector.'

Group B: Voluntary organisations
Local Umbrella Net

Local Umbrella Net is a local infrastructure organisation based in a small town and registered as a charity. It appears unusual as a local infrastructure organisation with a specific campaigning policy. It had an income in the year ending 2013 of just under £100,000 with 8 staff (most part time) and over 20 regular volunteers. Its income has decreased substantially over the last two years but currently grants - from district and county councils and Big Lottery - provide about three quarters of the income while the remaining quarter comes from donations and legacies. There is no recorded income from contracts. Its activities aim to help local people organise together so they can have an influence over decisions that affect them and it aims to support volunteering. It hosts a traditional range of community activities from local history and heritage to community network meetings and has a highly active website. There are strong and regular connections to networks of church groups, trade unions, disability groups and other local networks. The work is underpinned by principles of empowerment, collective action and common learning which are to inform working methods.

Elsewhere, Direct Help (Group B) works across the UK and has engaged in campaigning, sometimes behind the scenes. It describes itself as an organisation that raises issues of poverty and social justice and the effects of austerity as well as delivering direct help. This element of its work is addressed both to politicians and the public and it speaks of raising political awareness about the issues it is engaged in. It is clear about the reasons why direct and emergency help to poor people is needed. These include: people losing their job or being ill; there being delays in benefit payments; falling into debt; increasing costs of winter heating; or people suffering from domestic abuse. One senior figure in the organisation pointed out that one aspect of their approach was to use the evidence from their work to identify changes so that improvements could be made:

> '…we are involved in aggregating information from community projects – we collect data on needs and causes of problems…we believe it is very important to ask questions about what is going on with our client groups so we can identify over time when changes in welfare benefits have made significant changes to people we work with…using data and understanding…so you can put things right.'

Group B: Voluntary Organisation
'Direct Help for Poor'

As a faith-based registered charity that is less than 25 years old, Direct Help for Poor had an income of just under £2 million in the year ending 2013 and a very high degree of 'voluntary income' with donations, for example, amounting to nearly 45% of its total income. It employed nearly 50 staff and over 700 volunteers and works in just over a thousand localities around the UK. Its work involves direct support to disadvantaged people for their basic needs. The organisation had taken a policy decision, well before the Coalition Government came to power in 2010, that it would not enter the contracting and commissioning culture in order to maintain its independence.

Direct Help tends to describe itself as an organisation directly working to alleviate poverty. Nevertheless, it collects data about the needs of the people it is working with and regards it as an important part of its role to present this evidence to policy makers and the media. The faith based nature of the organisation,

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> (which may provide important networks of intelligence and influence), and the high degree of voluntary income suggests the potential for independent action is high.

A second aspect of this work was giving a voice to disadvantaged people:

> '…we go to the media and get them into people's houses…it's important that we counter the media message about "shirkers"…to give a voice to people to tell their story.'

In addition, a third thread of this activity was seen as contributing to debate as part of civil and democratic life to '*counter balance the narrative*' by speaking out:

> '…it is a democratic country...we are saying what we see…we have evidence…and there are alternatives…it's about being courageous and speaking out.'

A very different perspective appears with Big Services, our large voluntary organisation in Group C which, despite its size, offers no evidence on its website that it engages in any advocacy on policy issues related to its client groups. The work appears to be simply focussed on providing services for individuals in social, health, housing, education, training and employment. Its board of trustees is almost exclusively composed of people from the private sector. It has grown through merging with other organisations, bidding for more services in a market of social goods, and expanding its 'business' into different regions.

Group C: Large voluntary organisation
'Big Services'

Big Services is a national charity based in the south of England formed from a series of mergers just over a decade ago. It is proud of the fact that its annual income has increased from £4 million in 2002 to over £100 million in a decade. By means of comparison, this charity's annual income – mainly from government contracts - means its budget is already half of the revenue spend of the local authority of a medium sized English city (with a population of, say, a quarter of a million people). It has benefited heavily from gaining contracts from outsourced public services in various fields. Big Services is easily in the club of 1,900 'biggest charities' category.

The Professional Association (Group D) pointed out there is no consensus on many social issues across the association: *'it is very divided and very diverse, people with opposite political points of view and "vested interests."'* However, some members in local branches were prepared to campaign and link with other local groups, and take part in protest marches.

> 'There was a question of whether [we] could have a strike [over legislative changes in parliament], so could [we] only strike on terms and conditions…? But thousands of us did march against it…. That's a good example of something we did…We can put political motions to the annual and regional meetings – [one person] had a motion passed about the danger of privatisation and the threat to the provision of care…Some of us are in the Coalition against the Cuts.'

Group D: Professional Organisation
'Professional Association'

Professional Association is a very well respected professional association – composed of highly trained and well-paid specialists in the care and welfare field. Nationally, the association was by no means able to speak with one voice and 'people have very different philosophies: some will say they are a scientist, some will say they are social activists…'. It is a national association with local branches throughout the country.

Theme 2: Linkages between organisations

To what degree do the organisations examined build linkages between themselves and others in relation to campaigning?

Local Citizen Action (Group A) has strong local links with other action groups and there is supportive joint work '*…links just happen, if I come across someone doing something good, interesting, worth supporting, I'll get in touch.*' There is less linkage with formal organisations. They have been in direct conflict with the local council and contracting organisations over planning issues and have even taken them to court. '*Local authorities end up having less power both ends – they are very controlled by government yet also not locally rooted…*'

Fight Back - (Group A) was keen to develop links with voluntary organisations but found nowadays the links with the voluntary sector were very slight. '*…there should be an interlinking between the voluntary sector and the campaign – but it has started to shift in the last few years…*' They found '*a problem with the community sector - people with "an agenda" are not wanted because that is not part of the way to do things nowadays.*'

In Group B, Local Umbrella Net were involved with many thousands of small groups and organisations in the town and five broad networks, which were seen as 'listening posts' for intelligence about local concerns. Collaboration and building coalitions is a high priority and a specific strategy. There are also allies both inside and outside the voluntary sector:

> '*Allies could be staff in the Local Authority of elected officers, or retired, not working, members of Trades Unions or local people with a vision for wider community action…They want to defend public services. Allies can be across the political spectrum and sometimes issue-based…*'

For Direct Help for Poor (Group B) collaboration in campaigning was an important part of their work – with local partners, large national voluntary organisations such as Oxfam, anti-poverty groups, faith groups, and statutory organisations. For Bright Home (Group B), the contracting role had damaged collaboration and weakened routes into community advocacy:

> '*We didn't win it, so fell off the radar*', and '*…the people who won – there is no sense of them wanting to work with us, they came from outside [the town]*' '*…and legalistic frameworks got in the way of collaborative working.*'

In Group C, Big Services' links appeared to be with other 'professional' organisations delivering services rather than with local advocacy or campaigning groups.

Theme 3: Challenges for campaigning

What are the current challenges facing different organisations in the current climate?

In Group A, Fight Back found that certain voluntary organisations had been more involved in the campaign in some capacity – even publically - two to three years earlier but this had declined: '*they were getting involved in tendering…we decided to call it a day because those organisations were relying on – embroiled in – tendering.*' As mentioned earlier they argued that: '*…it would have to be a very confident voluntary organisation today who would support a campaigning*

organisation….or, say, oppose austerity locally…… it would be very difficult [for them]…' They also argued that the current environment did not favour political or ideological discussion 'if its political – it is seen as disturbing and not right – politics has replaced sex as the thing that can't be named' and in relation to campaigning they argued that voluntary organisations engaged in '…self surveillance, "we don't do that"'. What did happen was that 'people talk just about a personal experience – however we can build from that.'

Fight Back also noted that when voluntary organisations did take over services they may have cut wages and conditions, in the same way as their private sector counterparts, due to contractual constraints and were becoming increasingly corporate organisations, although there were nuances.

Local Citizen Action Net (Group A), found it hard to engage with local mainstream/council-funded voluntary sector organisations, 'we made a number of attempts…and it just wasn't happening.' It seems that the valuable work of this group could not easily be received by the more 'professionalised' voluntary organisations.

In Group B, Bright Home had suffered from the knock on effects of contracting processes and had become isolated '…So now we work more on our own.' In effect they had been shut out of a role through the change in resourcing structures. For Direct Help for Poor, the challenges to campaigning roles were of a different nature. 'Yes, it is harder without doubt…it is subtle and menacing.' They had faced 'bullying…on more than one occasion' from significant political figures:

> '…in private, one-to-one…they say: "be careful"' …They have power, access to media organisations, they have money and connections….There were attempts to undermine people in our organisation.'

It appears that for some organisations speaking out in the current climate requires more than good evidence: it requires some bravery.

Theme 4: Opportunities for campaigning

Are there any good opportunities for campaigning at present?

Fightback (Group A) found some new forums to gain support for future campaigning and trade unions: '…the People's Assembly is very open…and older charities like War on Want and we go to trades union conferences…' Local Citizen Action's (Group A) work involves drawing people and ideas together and help people express collective positions, especially at 'assemblies': 'people taking part and speaking out at assemblies are not former party activists or public speakers but very ordinary people' and they also talk of their work as 'developing and working out alternatives like at climate change camps.' They call their film and discussion work 'political education …capitalism seeks amnesia…so we're reclaiming our own history and experience - to say it in grand words!'

Local Umbrella Net (Group B) sought to act as a 'a bridge between national and local' via the Community Network, and Bright Home (B) also undertook some work with a national umbrella organisation. Local Umbrella Net also stressed the importance of supporting the public sector since a demise of the local authority is also the demise of local democratic accountability and

the possibility to influence local events. Nevertheless, a challenge was the lack of awareness among voluntary organisations of the growing democratic deficit:

> 'The voluntary sector needs to wake up and see who its allies are and wise up...it is the beginning of the end of local government...services are contracted out and there is no accountability... What is the role for local elected members in that case?...Voluntary organisations need to...oppose it and politicise it – among all parties.'

Direct Help for Poor, which had explicitly declined involvement in contracting processes, stressed the importance of VSGs remaining independent of government:

> 'It is speaking truth to power – independence is very important...if you are not independent you can't speak out.'

For the Professional Association (Group D), despite a lack of national consensus on many campaigning matters constituencies within this association did not feel it was problematic for them to voice their opinions. This may be partly because of its hybrid nature, functioning as an association for its members' interests in relations to pay and conditions. At a local level, branches of the association seem to be able to express views publically with relative freedom.

Part 3: Understanding the signals

What does the exploration in part two tell us about voluntary organisations and campaigning? Let's take a step back to think about a broader framework. We will do this in two stages. First, we remind ourselves of Knight's (1993) two-part division of voluntary organisations into either 'vision-based' or 'contracted' types. Second, we examine several different expressions or tendencies relevant to an exploration of VSGs concerned with social welfare services.

'Vision-based' or 'contracted' voluntary organisations?

Over 20 years ago, Knight argued we should distinguish two types of voluntary action and considered it unrealistic to combine both in one organisation. The first would be:

> '...authentic voluntary action, prophetic, vision led, reformist, independent of government, pursuing independent energy for moral purposes...it is the primary or 'raw' energy that the human being uses in pursuit of the social contract' (Knight, 1993:xvii).

We will call this, for short, the 'vision-based' approach. The second type of organisation would be:

> '...part of the wider social economy. It acts philanthropically on sub-contract from the state. It is organised through not-for-profit companies that must conform to certain agreed criteria...the state oversees performance and pays for work done on the basis of independent evaluation...' Knight (1993:xvii).

Let's call this the 'contracted' approach. Using Knight's frame we could expect to make a simple assessment that Group A organisations (small / informal groups) would be close to the vision-based approach, while some Group C organisations (large VSGs), would be expected to fit very

neatly into the contract-based approach. This would suggest why the intermediate organisations in Group B – particularly those delivering services to communities - would face a struggle (as indeed Bright Home did). They are neither fish nor fowl. Therein may lie their strength but also their possible extinction. Is their trajectory towards mimicking private corporations, with whom they are unlikely to ultimately compete at scale? Or do they hold to their hybrid fish/fowl nature and offer something crucial that is not the habitat of group A or C organisations, namely: *a service, which acts for collective social justice by using its knowledge to demonstrate alternative provision and challenge root causes*. They will become an endangered species if Knight's two-part division turns into a common reality. However, we can take the analysis a stage further by considering a wider range of motives and aspirations behind voluntary action, and by implication, campaigning activities.

Different expressions of change

The different tendencies, distinguished here, all overlap to some extent and, within any given organisation or campaign, they may be combined with one or other dominating at different times.

Tendency 1: Inspiration and initiation

There is, first, the 'inspiration and initiation' tendency in the role of initiating social change (Wolch, 1990). This is about creating the themes for change, or developing and promoting ideas about the way the social world could be constructed differently. Beck, referring to the role of small grassroots activist groups, suggested:

> *'The themes of the future … have not originated from the farsightedness of the rulers or from the struggle in parliament — and certainly not from the cathedrals of power in business, science and the state. They have been put on the social agenda … by entangled, moralising groups and splinter groups'* (Beck, 1997:19).

It may also be about inspiration: to *'produce a narrative of what a good society would look like'* (Knight, 2011:127). Groups associated with social movements tend to be associated with this tendency and can focus on the politics of identity – autonomy, identity, and the democratization of social relations outside the 'polity' (Cohen and Arato, 1992:509). As they point out:

> *'…movements may not simply want to acquire rights (important though this is) but also change the social landscape [for example]…'undoing traditional structures of domination, exclusion, and inequality rooted in social institutions, norms, collective identities and cultural values based on racial and class prejudice'.* (Cohen and Arato, 1992: 208)

Some activists, for example, stress the importance of consciousness-raising, or analysis of the political or social forces at work, or conviviality of association, in alternative ways to the mainstream. The ideals and vision of Local Citizen Action from Group A fit this tendency well.

Tendency 2: Expressive tendency

This is closely linked to the 'expressive' impulse (Kendal, 2003:12) associated with freedom of speech in the liberal democracies. At the most basic level this campaigning may involve persistently writing to newspapers or on-line chat rooms to put forward opinions or ideas and

articulating what is wrong in policies or services. This can also include artistic expressions of dissent when, say, mental health users or homeless people show the conditions or feelings they experience or place a sculpture or mural in a public place. It can be about the seizing of *'claimed spaces'* (Gaventa, 2007) in which to assert a viewpoint or demonstrate an excluded group's existence. Again, Local Citizen Action from Group A can lay claim to exercising the expressive tendency as can Fight Back, for example, with their flash mobs, to draw attention to issues.

Tendency 3: Protest and policy change

This tendency, draws a more explicit support for 'protest' or 'political campaigning' through the role of voluntary action and activism the aims of which are to:

> *'…safeguard equitable arrangements, or to challenge and change public policies or practices, spending decisions or commercial practices that unfairly disadvantage people, perpetuate inequality and discrimination, or fragment and undermine communities…action by community groups, individuals, informal networks and by service-providing voluntary organisations which address material pressures faced by local people'* (NCIA, 2014).

This can involve political advocacy, direct action, individual and community advocacy aiming to change root causes or specific pieces of legislation. This tendency can give greater emphasis to *'the politics of influence'* on civil and political society and being task focussed on gaining a specific policy change rather than *'the politics of identity'* (Cohen and Arato, 1992:509). An example of these two contrasts emerges in the case of the local renters groups discussed by Walker (2014) as part of NCIA's Inquiry: some activists were strongly committed to assert their life style and commonality (identity) with each other and express dissent while others were more strongly drawn to professional campaign targets (influence).

Both our Group A organisations play a role in this tendency. However, the Group B, organisations Bright Home Multi-Centre, Local Umbrella Net and Direct Help for Poor – all in different ways – are strongly operating in this arena. They are seeking to draw attention to specific injustices and address 'conventional' public policies and practices. The Professional Association was also active in this area.

Tendency 4: Advocacy (individual and collective)

This tendency is closely linked to 'protest and policy change' – it involves 'advocacy', which has in the past been used to talk of the rights of individuals or 'client-level advocacy' Kendal (2003:144), typified by one-to-one work, for example, in housing advice centres. However, individual advocacy, can also work *'to change the root causes, which create individual problems'* and provide *'support which provides for challenge and change'* (NCIA, 2014:1). 'Advocacy' is now also used in relation to collective interests: *'…to refer to lobbying and campaigning activities by voluntary and community activities working with, or on behalf of, local communities in an attempt to influence public policy'* (Cairns et al, 2010:194) drawing on the work of Schmid and Barr (2006). Again, Group B organisations operate strongly in this arena as well as our Group A organisations to some extent. Professional Association also undertakes this work to some degree by drawing on members' experience.

Tendency 5: 'Show and tell'

Closely related to the last category, a fifth quite familiar area, involves VSGs combining services with advocacy – we could call this 'show and tell'. Undertaking an innovative or demonstration project in a disadvantaged area can show what can be done to ameliorate disadvantage elsewhere. There are plenty of examples here. The early work of Thomas Coram provides an historic example working with orphans and seeking to change policy (Pugh, 2007). Women's refuges also worked in this way. Rizzo (2010:220) argued that when Gay activists in the USA began to undertake services combined with political activism the organisations *'reached a level of sophistication, influence and stability that the activists of the 1970s had failed to attain…'*; they began to adopt political activism as they went on *'to establish legal and welfare aid groups'* to combat the effects of AIDS. The settlement and social action centre model in the UK provided one variant of the familiar model of welfare services + local community advocacy + policy pressure.

The 'show and tell' tendency provides social innovation based on evidence and experience from people facing disadvantage and implies some co-operation and co-ordination with, and attempts to influence, local and national government. The idea of 'additionality' to state services following Beveridge's 'Voluntary Action' (1948) still informed to some extent, from the 1990s, 'partnership' working and local multi-disciplinary 'strategic partnership boards'. Such an approach can also be witnessed in current ideas of co-design and co-production (Pestoff, 2013; Beresford, 1993).

To be meaningful, the nature of this work – the 'services + advocacy' model - is rooted in localised negotiations between local statutory bodies and local VSGs in order to influence local service design. However, organisations working in this arena have now become highly subject to colonisation by contracting processes for outsourced public services, increasingly through the involvement of agencies with no, or little, knowledge of local needs and services. This has left locally based VSGs, such as those Group B organisations discussed in the last section, stranded and isolated. Organisations like Bright Home Multi Centre - which attempted to mix Knight's 'contracted' and 'vision-based' approaches, faced particular pressures in using their intelligence and position to pursue social change. Even Direct Help for Poor, which avoided contracting processes, faced what it described as bullying to stop speaking out.

It is also worth reminding ourselves here of the broader issues at stake. VSGs, voluntary action and activism represent important safeguards for the civil and democratic society. Is this role being too easily discarded or suffocated? NCIA argued for:

> *'A commitment to working co-operatively with others involved in local struggles, and to challenge competitive and divisive relationships; a willingness to have a dissenting and critical voice in the interests of community needs; siding explicitly with local people on local issues, even if at the expense of being unpopular with authorities'* NCIA (2011).

However, arguably, there has been a cultural history of self-censorship among voluntary organisations. Knight (1993:31) argued even before 1979 there were unspoken agreements about *'inappropriate roles for voluntary bodies…'* and *'voluntary bodes tended to police themselves…'* Where can we find challenges to these 'unspoken boundaries' in the current context?

Part 4: Wither campaigning?

This paper has looked at the current context for the campaigning role of VSGs – and their near neighbours (small informal groups, large VSGs and professional associations). The case study vignettes offered a snapshot of some of the challenges and opportunities facing these constituencies. This should provide a spur to a deeper investigation, and crucially, vigorous discussion within the sector concerning the campaigning role. This is of crucial importance, not just for VSGs but for the contribution to democratic life. As Cohen and Arato (1992) pointed out:

> *'The combination of associations, publics, and rights, when supported by a political culture in which independent initiatives and movements represent an ever-renewable, legitimate, political opposition, represents…an effective set of bulwarks around civil society…',*
> (Cohen and Arato, 1992:474)

This final section poses some questions for the future.

To what extent are voluntary organisations involved in campaigning?

On the basis of the examination undertaken here, we can see that campaigning – in the broad terms discussed in Part 1 – continues to take place. Small informal groups and activists appear to still find pathways into 'expressive', 'inspirational' and 'protest' tendencies. However, there is little cause for complacency. In particular, the Group B organisations seeking to combine services with advocacy - a mainstay of rooted local voluntary action on social welfare issues for disadvantaged people - were facing severe strain. There were also indications that some larger VSGs - particularly those that were 'contract heavy' and directly delivering social welfare services – were less interested (or less forthright) in campaign work for disadvantaged people.

What are the explicit or implicit pressures they face in undertaking this work?

The Group B organisations faced multiple challenges to their campaign roles. Most of them certainly faced reductions in capacity due to cutbacks. However, a number of other pressures were arising for these VSGs:

- Direct effects from commissioning processes - if they do not gain contracts they are hampered from engaging in delivery work which would give them data and evidence from which to base their advocacy;
- Restrictions on what they could say if they are in receipt of contracts – due to confidentiality and gagging clauses;
- Indirect effects – they can be excluded from collaborative efforts with other organisations which had won contracts due to contracting regulations;
- Less 'space' to campaign – local authorities, for example, have been heavily cut and 'hollowed out';
- Subtle or explicit pressures, 'nods and wink' or direct comments about future funding;
- Mission drift and 'contract fascination' – pulling them away from roles as advocates, and closer to the interests of commissioners;

- Self-censorship and fear – a coercive atmosphere aided by government statements, legislation, and legal aspects of contracting processes – leading to over-caution;
- 'Political' narratives and 'people with an agenda' are frowned upon and even considered 'ideological' – meanwhile contracting/outsourcing and severe cutbacks for disadvantaged people are accepted as 'normal' not 'political' and part of 'understanding new realities' amid the lack of alternative narratives.

Are there links between voluntary organisations, voluntary action and activism?

On the basis of the examination undertaken here, there seem to be many gaps in linkage. This may not be entirely new, however, it appears that in these austere times lateral links between activists and campaigners, and VSGs need to grow rather than contract – while respecting that these different constituencies play distinctive and different roles. We noted:

- Difficulties in communication and joint work between VSGs and the small informal and campaign groups;
- Contacts between VSGs and trades unions or professional groups at local level appeared exceptional rather than normal;
- VSGs in some fields appeared ready to lend their support or endorsement to campaigning activities (some disability charities for example) but many others remained silent;
- Away from the small informal groups there seemed little interest in 'political education' broader understandings of social processes and examining the causes of, and building alternatives to, austerity.

Propositions for debate

The above points could serve as propositions for debate and action. Alongside these it may be worth encouraging reminders of the importance of campaign work as part of a civil society role:

- Voluntary organisations, voluntary action and activism play an active role in a democratic society and this could be understood as their organisational responsibility and ethical duty rather than a 'maverick intent';
- The 'show and tell' role provides a vital ingredient of evidence, providing opportunities to speak with authority and legitimacy to policy makers and civil servants – enabling the voice and experience of the most disadvantaged to be heard in the corridors of power and elsewhere;
- Voluntary organisations, voluntary action and activism have played roles in the past as active agents of change, shaping the future and standing up for unpopular or unnoticed causes – how can that spirit be harnessed and amplified?

If the campaigning role is stifled who will provide the evidence to those in positions of power to affect changes? Who will support disadvantaged communities to have their own voice? To end this paper, Fight Back's pessimistic scenario may provide a salutary warning about the future of those voluntary organisations involved in the provision of services:

'The worrying thing is public sector disintegration – ex local government services are now done by the voluntary sector…those people are all on zero hours contracts… So the welfare state becomes privatised. But the voluntary sector is also privatised' (Fight Back).

In which case VSGs look set to be 'saying less' in austerity UK.

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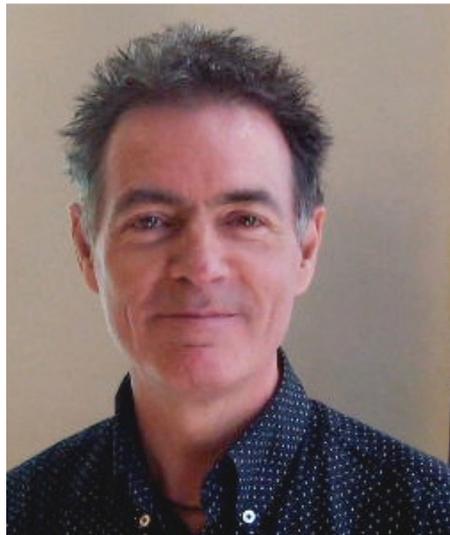
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