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False Economy? The costs of contracting and workforce insecurity in the voluntary sector

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UNISON

Contents

Executive summary

1   The purpose of this project has been to gain insights into the direct and indirect implications of the insecure funding regime faced by the social care sector, with a particular focus on those relating to employment and service quality.

2   Respondents revealed an intensifying climate of competition and anxiety among workers and their representatives regarding future employment prospects. This situation was aggravated by uncertainties over Supporting People funding and the actual, and perceived potential, impact of new EU public procurement regulations.

3   There were mixed feelings about the impact, if any, of policies such as 'full-cost recovery', best value and The Compact in terms of ameliorating the financial pressures facing the sector.

4   Findings revealed that workers in participating voluntary organisations could be subject to all aspects of employment insecurity, but that the threat of job loss and changes to terms and conditions (particularly pay) were most acute.

5   There is continuing pressure on voluntary organisations to move away from providing pay and conditions based on NJC scales and this exists alongside clear signs of work intensification across the sector stemming from a combination of worsening staff-client ratios, changing user needs and increased administrative work.

6   There is some evidence to suggest that particular groups in the workforce could experience additional vulnerability, eg older workers and the disabled.

7   Small voluntary organisations are more exposed than larger ones to the threat of detrimental changes to terms and conditions. Indeed, the majority of smaller organisations appear to face significant threats to their survival in the current climate.

8   Views regarding the impact of the insecure funding environment on quality of care were mixed, but the majority of respondents from management, activist and worker interviews revealed significant concerns.

9   The aspects of the insecure contracting environment which most effected service quality were found to be:

   • greater demands on management time and resources

   • heightened bureaucracy associated with programmes such as Supporting People

   • reduced staffing levels

   • threats to continuity of care from employee turnover and falls in employee morale

10 It is recommended that UNISON:

   • attempt to clarify and monitor the impact of public procurement regulations

   • undertake further exploration of the costs of contracting

   • lobby government further with regard to the consequences of emphasising cost over quality in the quasi-market

   • lobby for greater acknowledgement of the impact of the reshaping of Supporting People services on service quality and workforce issues

   • campaign for the development of better quality standards under the Supporting People regime in order to counter the poor contracting practices of some local authorities

   • consider working more at national level with relevant employer organisations on issues of mutual interest

   • explore how the transfer of collectively bargained public sector terms and conditions to voluntary sector organizations could be improved, including via the introduction of relevant legal requirements

   • seek greater transparency and representation of employee interests during POVA committee hearings.

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1 Introduction

The purpose of this project has been to gain insights into the direct and indirect implications of the insecure funding regime faced by the social care sector, with a particular focus on those relating to employment and service quality. The report is split into seven substantive sections. The first outlines the context of the report and the precise research questions we were commissioned to address. The second provides a summary of the methodology of the research and profile of participating organisations. The third explores the climate, or contracting culture, within which these organisations operated in, with a specific focus on their relations with statutory funding bodies and the related issues of competition, the use made of longer-term contracts, and the influence of the Best Value and Supporting People regimes. The fourth examines the impact of this climate on employment issues and, in particular, the various manifestations of employment insecurity experienced by the voluntary sector workforce as a result of it and the way in which staff have reacted to them. The fifth investigates the impact of this contract culture on service quality, an investigation that encompasses the way in which it has been adversely affected by the scale of employment insecurity, trends in funding, and the bureaucracy and costs associated with current contracting arrangements. Finally, the last section provides some concluding remarks, discussion and recommendations.

2 Context

UNISON members within the voluntary sector workforce increasingly provide social services to some of the most vulnerable people in our society. This growth in activity is a direct consequence of almost 20 years of 'contracting out' of social services provision by central and local government agencies to the sector, encouraged firstly by Conservative and then Labour governments (Kendall, 2003). As a consequence, there has been significant employment growth in voluntary organisations, with the workforce being estimated to stand at 608,000, or 2.2% of the UK workforce by 2004. (Wainwright, Clark, Griffith, Jochum and Wilding 2006): a growth which offers potentially significant opportunities for further union expansion.

Studies have suggested that the closer relationship between the state and the voluntary sector has led to some far from positive outcomes for employment relations, with the greater dependence on government funding having led to reports of constant financial uncertainty in the sector due to the vagaries of funding priorities by public bodies (Russell, Scott and Wilding, 1996). As we proceed through to the current Labour era, these pressures are ongoing, as new Labour has continued to pursue the 'contracting out' culture introduced by the Conservatives (Kendall, 2003).

At the same time, there are some tentative grounds for believing that the financial environment facing voluntary sector organisations is becoming somewhat less harsh. Thus, the introduction of Best Value along with the 'Compact' are intended supposedly to promote a 'partnership culture' with the voluntary sector as opposed to relationships based on 'lowest price' competition that were the inevitable outcome of Compulsory Competitive Tendering (CCT) (Passey, Hems and Jas, 2000). In addition, as a result of a central government review of service delivery by the voluntary sector in the area of social care, 'full-cost recovery' has been introduced under which, in theory at least, voluntary organisations can include the incorporation of overhead costs within their bids for services and conclude longer three-year contracts.

The outcome of these initiatives is, however, uncertain as Best Value still places competition for contracts at the centre of the relationship between state and the voluntary sector (Passey, et al, 2000), and recent studies indicate that cost remains a significant factor in the award of contracts (Cunningham, 2004). Further, a recent investigation by the National Audit Office reveals a slow transformation of attitudes among the various parties in state – voluntary sector negotiations that is making the cultural change necessary to achieve 'full-cost recovery' difficult (National Audit Office, 2005).

This study has been commissioned against this background of uncertainty, as well as the further fact that little is known about the human costs (in this case among UNISON members) associated with the current contracting culture. Traditionally, the provision of the extremely labour intensive services provided by the sector was widely assumed to be undertaken by a highly committed group of staff eager to serve a cause (Paton and Cornforth, 1992: Zimmeck, 1998). Yet, single case study analysis has revealed the emergence of growing tensions in the workplace (see Alatrista and Arrowsmith,

2004), while broader studies by the NCVO using survey data of employers in the sector point towards skill shortages caused by a low opinion of the sector as an employer stemming from perceptions of poor pay (Wilding, et al, 2004).

There is, nevertheless, at present, a lack of more broadly based research concerned with exploring directly how the current operating environment of voluntary organisations impacts on the working conditions of union members, as well as workers more generally. In particular, the degree to which this environment serves to generate forms of insecurity at work. The evidence that is available does, though, suggest that, in the face of financial uncertainty and pressure from funders, there has been a move to place a greater reliance on atypical forms of employment, such as temporary contracts, due to pressure from funders (Cunningham, 2001). Indeed, there are some suggestions that management in charitable organisations now are making greater use of flexible employment practices than their public and private sector counterparts (MacVicar, Foley, Graham, Ogden and Scott, 2000). It is therefore unsurprising that workforce figures reveal that 12% of the workforce in the sector are on temporary contracts, levels which are far higher than the public and private sectors, at 7.9% and 4.7% respectively (Wainwright, et al, 2006).

With regard to the impact of this insecure funding regime on terms and conditions, prior to the development of the quasi-market rewards were traditionally aligned to local authority scales (Ball, 1992), but since the early 1990s this has unravelled as competitive and cost pressures have intensified (Cunningham, 2001: Ford, Quiglers and Rugg, 1998: Knapp, Hardy and Forder, 2001: Barnard, Broach and Wakefield, 2004). Overall, it is estimated that the proportion of voluntary organisations still using such pay scales has declined to 20 per cent (*Remuneration Economics*, 2002). At the same time, a recent study of salaries has indicated that average earnings and salaries in the sector have increased at a higher rate than the Average Earnings Index and the Retail Price Index. This same study, however, also suggests that salaries in the sector will, for many, have lagged behind that of workers in public and private organizations since it reveals that, unlike other sectors, the voluntary sector has not had the capacity to award London Weighting or bonus schemes (Wainwright, et al, 2006: *Remuneration Economics*, 2005).

Meanwhile, another related focus of concern for this project is to use findings regarding workforce insecurity to gain an understanding of the degree to which they impact on service delivery by the sector and hence on how the changing nature of human resource management in it is affecting organisational performance.

3 Methodology

Phase one

The first aspect of the study involved an exploration of the impact of the contract culture on 12 voluntary organisations across the UK. Contacts were drawn from 12 voluntary organisations that recognized UNISON for the purposes of collective bargaining (six cases), or where UNISON had a presence (ie membership), but not full recognition. The 12 voluntary organisations covered a variety of services ranging from children's services (two cases), housing associations (two cases), community health (one case), adults with learning difficulties (two cases), mental health problems (one case) the elderly (one case), advisory centres for a range of vulnerable groups (one case), the homeless (one case), and services for disabled people (one case). Data from this first stage was drawn from several sources. The first involved contacting senior managers in each organisation, usually chief executives or senior directors with a request to complete a short questionnaire asking for background information on areas such as income, funding sources, duration of contracts, the management of funding applications, and workforce data. Face-to face interviews were then conducted from a series of prepared questions, but also probing for information as a result of the data supplied in the initial questionnaire. In parallel with this, qualitative interviews were held with one national official, and four regional activists based respectively in England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland and further interviews undertaken with five workplace activists and three branch officials. The purpose of these interviews was to get a broader UNISON view pertaining to trends throughout the sector in terms of the costs of contracting, and its link with forms of insecurity in the workplace and impact on quality of care. In addition, interviews were held with representatives from several employer bodies to aid the gathering of a broader view of changes in the sector.

Phase two

The aim of the second phase of research was to gain an impression of the impact of the insecure funding environment on employees. In doing so, it drew on the experiences of lay activists and employees at the workplace level in three of the above organisations. In order to gain the views of employees, focus groups were held among union and non-union members (one in each case study). Each group contained between six-12 employees. These focus groups enabled a greater focus on the human cost implications of workplace insecurity in the sector, especially, where relevant, around forms of insecurity relating to pay, changing job roles, working time and health and safety. They also enabled information to be gathered on how these forms of insecurity impact on worker morale.

The three organisations chosen for this part of the work were a small voluntary organisation in the area of children's services (nineteen staff), given the name Astro, which had one or two UNISON members; a large provider of services to adults with learning difficulties (600 staff), referred to as Merlin here, which had

recognition, approximately 40% density, a shop-steward committee structure and a consultative forum which also contained non-union representatives; and a user-led small/medium sized organisation (thirty staff) specialising in services promoting inclusive living for disabled people, which is given the name Telstar for present purposes and had one shop steward. All data from the interviews and focus groups from the two phases of research were taped and fully transcribed.

4 Perceptions of developments in the contract culture

The funding climate

On the basis of the interviews we were able to draw some insights into the general climate of purchaser – provider relations, although it must be borne in mind that the generality of these must, to a degree, remain uncertain given the small scale of the study and the fact that it did not encompass a longitudinal element.

Overall, around half of management respondents indicated that the last two years or so had seen a deterioration of the financial climate within the social care market place. For example, a chief executive from a large organisation providing services to those with mental health problems revealed:

> "It's been getting progressively worse over a number of years, but I guess this last year, the current financial year, the previous financial year have probably been the tightest we've experienced."

This impression was not limited to management staff but was also a feature of the responses obtained from activists and employees. In Merlin, for example, the senior union organiser remarked:

> "In the last year in particular, we went through a very bad patch…the last year and I would say the last six months have been really, really difficult for a lot of people."

This difficult environment manifested itself in a number of ways within these organisations. The chief executive of a large organisation which looked after adults with learning difficulties reported how one of their main funders had recently made a request for it to repay some of the money from a series of contracts. It was explained that this was not because the voluntary organisation had been overpaid, but because the authority was facing financial difficulties. Two of the smaller organisations, an advisory centre and another offering respite care, similarly reported how, with little notification, the last year had seen part of their core funding pulled, and subsequent efforts by the funder concerned to withdraw all of its financial support. In each case, financial disaster was only prevented by a series of protracted negotiations. The second advisory centre also revealed how recent years had seen a freeze in core funding.

The senior manager from one of our case studies (Telstar) described his organisation's financial situation in the following way:

> "We have been desperately trying to build reserves, we can't do that. We just don't have any security, and year after year it looks like we may be projecting a deficit and we just get by through the skin of our teeth."

Changes to Supporting People

Supporting People is a programme intended to provide a better quality of life for vulnerable people and help them to live more independently. It includes housing-related support to prevent problems that can lead to hospitalisation, institutional care or homelessness. It also helps to protect tenancies and aims to assist the transition to independent living for those leaving an institutionalised environment. Recent studies into the early impact of this initiative uncovered some significant problems with it in terms of funding (Sullivan, 2004: Audit Commission, 2005). To varying degrees these reports found that certain providers were felt to have been 'opportunistic' in relation to the opportunities Supporting People offered them to maximise their incomes. Moreover, they also found that some Supporting People packages were providing services which included more than housing related support. As a consequence, they therefore went on to call for a re-provisioning of services and a drive for efficiency savings (Sullivan, 2004: Audit Commission, 2005). In doing so, however, the reports acknowledged the risk that these changes posed to some voluntary organisations, given their reliance on Supporting People funding, and stressed the need to avoid them having to fund any subsequent losses of income from their reserves. They consequently further recommended that any redistribution of funds should take account of the difficulties organisations would face in reshaping provisions (Sullivan, 2004: Audit Commission, 2005).

Overall, the majority of respondents in this study revealed a series of negative consequences from these policy developments under Supporting People. These included reports of an increase in monitoring and auditing and, more specifically, a greater scrutiny of the degree to which organisations remained within the initiative's parameters of providing housing support costs to sustain tenancies as opposed to providing care. As money has become tighter, several organisational respondents reported how local authorities were also not providing inflationary uplifts in Supporting People budgets. Ironically, this was at a time when, according to another manager, local authorities were still insisting that many new services should come under the Supporting People funding stream, and were at times seeking to have some homes 'de-registered' and placed under the Supporting People services remit.

UNISON activists revealed similar concerns. For example, a regional organiser in Scotland reported how services were being cut by up to six per cent in a financial year. Another regional activist in Wales noted a similar intensification of cost pressures around Supporting People.

At the same time, certain caveats have to be raised in relation to these findings. One is that, as results will show later in this report, these changes to Supporting People have been variable with regard to their impact on funding, with several respondents reporting significant improvements in terms of job creation, growth of organisational reserves and service provision. Indeed, one management respondent from the housing support sector stated:

> "Anyone who says Supporting People has impacted negatively is ridiculous. Supporting People for organisations like us to moan about it is a bit like winning the pools and then complaining that you have to take the cheque to the bank."

Indeed, several union activists at regional level, as well as some management respondents, acknowledged the validity of the findings of the two aforementioned reports and argued that providers were to some degree paying the price for their past opportunistic behaviour with regard to Supporting People funding.

Intensifying competition

Most employer respondents indicated that they were experiencing an intensification of competition for funding. Respondents from the two advisory centres indicated how, for the first time, funders had introduced competitive tendering into some of their services. Those from children's services organisations, indicated an increase in competitive tendering compared with only a few years ago, and activists from the housing association branch outlined how in an era of intensifying competition and mergers they detected a change in culture among some employers that they dealt with, with one remarking:

> "It's becoming ever more cut throat, not just commercial, but kinda ultra professional. It's a grow or die business. It's almost like chasing contracts at the expense of all else…there's a real desperation, it's a bear pit out there."

Moreover, the senior management respondent from Telstar outlined how he was aware of several similar user-led voluntary organisations losing contracts for services to larger private or voluntary providers through undercutting.

In addition, several management respondents, and a representative from an umbrella organisation, also made reference to a new source of uncertainty arising from the introduction of EU public procurement regulations[1] and a lack of clarity and confusion among local authorities with regard to their implications. In particular, it was reported that while some authorities were arguing there would be limited impact, others were interpreting the regulations as meaning that there would be a need for the wholesale re-tendering of services, including those provided under Supporting People.

Measures to alleviate pressure on the voluntary sector

Respondents were also asked whether the government measures recently introduced to ease some of the pressures on the sector were having an impact. Respondents expressed mixed views with regard to the extent to which they were experiencing a move towards three year funding. Overall, only one of the respondents reported that a significant proportion of their funding from government sources was provided on a three yearly basis, with four organisations reporting no movement whatsoever in this direction. Indeed, two organisations reported how their funding was 95-100% provided on an annual basis and another revealed how 60% of funding continued to be supplied on this basis. The remainder indicated how funding could be broken down into contracts and grants that were renewed over a period of between one and three years.

However, this did not mean that managers had not detected some change in their relations with purchasers. For example, one management respondent, revealed how he could detect tentative efforts by local authority funders to bring in three year contracts, and acknowledged the prospects of an improvement in the organisation's financial position if this was successful. He stated:

> "To be fair to the city council, what they were doing was that I think it's a three year contract and whilst there are difficulties in the initial negotiations because of the newness of them, that has helped us."

The senior management respondent from Telstar, meanwhile, revealed how the organisation's main local authority contract was renegotiated in mid-2004 for a period just short of three years, and anticipated that forthcoming negotiations would lead to another three year renewal.

More generally, several respondents also mentioned that, on paper, The Compact (an agreement between a government department or local authority and voluntary sector organisation, intended to improve their relationship for mutual advantage) was a useful tool in terms of encouraging a move to three year contracts. However, they, in common with others, also pointed to the lack of enforcement measures in place to support this encouragement. It should also be noted in this context that another respondent was cynical about the value of such longer contracts given that, in their experience, they had little positive impact if the general funding climate was constrained and one or more of the years involved cuts in real terms.

The impact of Best Value

Best Value was to some degree heralded as a potential source of positive change for the voluntary sector (Hems, Passey and Jaz, 2000). However, only three of the respondents in this study had been involved in any Best Value reviews of services. While one of these felt the impact was overall neutral, the other two considered the experience to have been overwhelmingly negative because the local authorities had primarily focused attention on cost rather than quality. Moreover, one of these respondents indicated that they felt that the comparisons of unit costs that local authorities made between voluntary sector providers and there own internal services were grossly unfair as the latter largely did not include realistic estimates of management and administration costs, and therefore made the former look expensive in comparison. Given that similar types of comments were also made by respondents who had not been involved in Best Value reviews, it would therefore seem that the application of the principles of 'full-cost recovery' to the voluntary sector in its dealings with government funders remains limited. Indeed, one of the smaller organisations expressed significant frustration at having to pay for some of the under-funded management costs through drawing from their reserves.

[1] Respondents referred to the impact of the Public Contracts Regulations 2006 (Public Contracts (Scotland) Regulations 2006) which was introduced as a consequence of the Public Contracts Directive 2004/18/EC.

Among respondents who had so far had no direct experience of Best Value, opinions were mixed as to whether this was a good or bad thing. For several respondents this lack of engagement with the Best Value processes was a source of disappointment and frustration, as they felt they could be part of the solution to the sector's problems, given their emphasis on quality as well as cost, and the scope they thereby provided for non-commercial considerations to be taken into account in the award of contracts. At the same time, others expressed some relief at not being part of any Best Value reviews because they had heard from other providers that the focus was on 'hard outcomes' and cost.

In the light of the above observations about the current contract culture, the report now moves on to explore what its implications have been for workforce insecurity, service quality and union organisation.

5 Workforce insecurity in voluntary organisations

To begin, this report acknowledges there are several forms of insecurity beyond a threat of unemployment. These include, the insecurity employees experience through having their employment transferred to another employer, eg from public to voluntary sector, or vice versa, as a consequence of contracting (See Colling, 2002). They also include, income insecurity, concerns arising from altering job content, working time insecurity and risks to health and safety (work insecurity) (Standing, 1999).

Employment security

The regional organisers interviewed identified organisations with this study that had made redundancies because of the loss of significant contracts. Moreover, all but one or two of the employer respondents in this study had, in recent years, made redundancies in certain projects because of funding cuts and all of them reported how, due to insecure funding, they had experienced situations where groups of their employees had been under the threat of redundancy. In a number of these last situations this threat had encompassed the issuing precautionary redundancy notices to staff. In such situations, organisations usually attempted to retain key workers through a number of strategies, including, in larger organisations, internal redeployment.

Redeployment, though, was not without its problems. For example, a union activist in a larger organisation reported the case of a long-standing project with highly skilled staff that was closed down due to funding difficulties. In an effort to retain the service and staff, the organisation redeployed them. However, the workers were, albeit temporarily (six months), redeployed into posts which normally would have been undertaken by less skilled and qualified staff while being paid according to their existing grade. The union respondent pointed out that, as a result, the workers concerned faced a dilemma in terms of whether to stay with, or leave, the organisation:

"People are saying 'do I hang on here at the end of this three year contract in the hope that I can continue working here if another piece of work comes up, or do I jump ship because I don't know what is going to be around the corner.'"

He further observed that if they did chose to look for work, there was a question as to how potential alternative employers would regard their experience of prolonged employment at a lower grade.

It was also interesting to note the implications of regular redeployment on the degree of flexibility expected of staff in such circumstances. Several larger organisations were moving towards creating 'generic' care workers as the following quote from a senior manager in one of these organisations illustrates:

"We have got well away from any sense that they have a particular place of work or a particular boundary around what they will do. You generally feel that the core competencies of our front line workers are similar. So if you are a support worker in a care home you could probably be a good support worker in a housing support role and be a good one with

children and young people…we have encouraged that and felt that it was the right response to the external pressure."

One of the representatives of the umbrella organisations in the sector meanwhile made some interesting, although speculative, points regarding the future vulnerability of staff to TUPE transfers and all the risks that they entail. In particular, this individual reported how a recent contract issued by a local authority stipulated that in the last year of a three year contract voluntary organisations would not be allowed to redeploy staff to other parts of the organisation. The argument advanced by the local authority to support this approach was that it protected quality of care by preventing 'asset stripping' by the voluntary organisation prior to tendering through removing the best staff from the project and the replacement of them with less skilled employees. However, an obvious implication of this type of contract for staff is that they could find themselves undergoing a change of employer, along with the concomitant anxiety and disruption, and being employed in an organisation that might not have the commitment or capacity to deliver the level of service they were used to delivering.

For the smaller organisations in the study, however, it was usually not possible to redeploy staff when funding was cut. They had to react instead with more draconian measures. For example, in one of the two previously mentioned small organisations that had had their core funding threatened, which provided an advice centre, all the staff were given notice that they might be made redundant at the end of the six month notice period provided by the funder and they were additionally placed on a four day week for a four month period and paid accordingly, ie a 20% reduction in salaries. Similarly, in the other small organisation concerned, a provider of respite care, the senior manager felt that continuing attacks on its core funding in the forthcoming year could lead to the partial or complete closure of its services.

The situation in Telstar had been slightly more fortuitous and management reported how recently they had reconfigured services in response to changes in funding priorities on two occasions. On each occasion, an employee's position was under threat, but in relation to two of the three workers involved redeployment was possible, with the third accepting redundancy.

Even in the larger organisations, internal redeployment was not always an option, with the result that re-tendering could lead to a changing of employer via TUPE transfers. Several serious issues were, furthermore, reported by some voluntary organisations in relation to the employment of staff transferred into local authorities as a consequence of the latter taking services back in to in-house provision – a situation that seemed mainly to occur in relation to children's services. One respondent spoke of meeting a degree of incredulity among local authority representatives that they had TUPE responsibilities in such circumstances, with the consequence that the voluntary sector partner found itself acting in an advisory role to the authority. Others reported how following a transfer, staff were offered jobs far below their qualifications, eg a qualified teacher was given a job in a toy library.

Employee reactions to employment insecurity

Management's perceptions of the reaction of employees to the range of situations outlined above were mixed. In some cases, they reported how there was a remarkable degree of loyalty among their employees manifested through their decision to stay on through the period of uncertainty. Other respondents believed there were certain types of employees who clearly saw this as 'part of their job'. However, others revealed how employees experienced significant anxiety in such situations and chose to leave their employment before they were made redundant or went through a TUPE transfer.

Activist and employee interviewees were more likely emphasize the aforementioned anxieties. From the employee interviews in Merlin, one respondent, an administrator, indicated how her department had recently had the threat of redundancies hanging over them. She stated:

> "In recent months, we have made two admin posts redundant and I think there was a brief period before that when we did not know which ones they were and you wondered is it you?"

Similarly, from Astro, another worker commented:

> "It stresses the whole organisation out, because you know if one of your colleagues is about three weeks until her contract runs out, you see management running about trying to raise money and everybody feels that, and feels the stress and that just reminds you that this is going to happen to me in six months, three weeks, whenever."

Another Support Worker from Astro spoke of employees feeling helpless in such situations and a project manager in the same organisation stated:

> "It's a terrible position to be in…there is all the anxiety of 'how am I going to pay the mortgage, what am I going to do about my children, how am I going to look after my relatives.'"

More generally, there was profound unease among staff with regard to what one described as the 'sword of Damocles' hanging over them and individuals reported how it was usually the case that they had to wait right up until the last minute before they found out that they definitely were able to remain in employment. Many of these respondents were single women who highlighted how if they are thrown out of work there was no partner or family to sustain mortgage or rental payments.

Increased insecurity for vulnerable groups

Unsurprisingly, our findings revealed how some groups among the workforce were even more vulnerable in this climate of insecurity. For example, data suggested the possibility of age specific issues emerging with regard to such insecurity. Management indicated that younger members of staff used short-term contracts to gain experience in their organisation to eventually move onto a post in a public or voluntary organisation with a longer tenure and felt that, at least in the past, they saw insecurity 'as part of the job', and were prepared to be mobile. At the same time, however, several respondents from the focus group at Astro outlined how age could be a source of additional anxiety in this insecure environment, as the quote below illustrates:

> "I am not twenty-eight anymore you know nobody will give you a job anymore in your fifties. So if you have got a one year contract you have got your nails chewed to your elbow, and it's dire, it affects everything you do. My contract ended in 2005 as far as I was concerned, so the year before I was looking and although I am well-qualified I have applied for a lot, but haven't got one I am too old."

Similarly, several older respondents from Telstar reported such concerns. One male worker stated:

> "To a certain extent because I am a bit older than the others, I think if anything happens now, what am I going to do, I mean I am sixty, not many are going to employ sixty year old staff."

Telstar was a user-led organisation, and the majority of the respondents from the focus group were disabled people. These individuals provided several illustrations of the additional vulnerability they faced in the prevailing insecure funding climate. For example, some of these respondents reported how in contrast to the situation in Telstar, previous employers had shown little commitment to providing the necessary adjustments and aids and adaptations to facilitate their employment. As a consequence several of the respondents felt threats to their job security held additional risk and anxiety because of the persistence of discrimination in the labour market for disabled people which would make the finding of another job extremely difficulty. Moreover, even if they were successful in finding another job, they feared there would be less of a commitment by any alternative employer with regard to the provision of adjustments etc. One female employee stated:

> "It frightens me a bit because I think what am I going to do if don't have a job here. Where am I going to next? What am I going to be like? What kind of support am I going to have in that job, or lack of support in that job and how am I going to manage? That is quite a scary prospect."

Interference in the recruitment and discipline of employees

The majority of management respondents indicated that they were extremely unwilling to accept any external interference in issues relating to recruitment and discipline. Despite this, union activists, although acknowledging that these incidents were rare, did note some issues of concern. Firstly, in the housing association sector a branch official had heard anecdotally of cases where local authorities had refused to renew funding of specific projects if certain individual's remained employed. In addition, one activist revealed how external funders could add to the insecurity of individuals that were threatened with redundancy. The activist's employer had a 'management of change' programme in place to ensure, as far as possible, the redeployment of staff. This meant that anyone under threat of redundancy could have prior consideration for any vacancies that came up in the organisation, ie an interview before the job was opened up to wider competition. However, some funders were beginning to announce that in any negotiations for new services the organisation could not automatically take on staff from a service that was being closed, and that posts such as project manager would have to be subject to open competition from the beginning. The rationale for this move by local authorities was thought to be their desire to avoid taking on another organisation's 'cast offs'.

Another possible emerging phenomenon related to the Protection of Vulnerable Adults Regulations (POVA) 2004[2]. Here one regional activist saw widespread and intensifying problems emerging for members because of the application of these regulations in England and Wales. In particular, this respondent reported that members disciplined for sometimes quite minor offences were having their cases referred to the POVA committee. One of the consequences of such a referral could be the prohibition of that person working in the sector for up to ten years. While such an outcome was seen as rare, there were reportedly an increasing number of lengthy suspensions from work leading to a great deal of stress, insecurity and isolation for those members affected. This sense of insecurity was also aggravated by reports that members had very little, if any, input into the deliberations and the union also had difficulty obtaining copies of relevant minutes from meetings. It was also reported that in some cases an individual member will be cleared of any wrong doing, but the POVA committee would ask for that individual to undergo more intense supervision and monitoring of activity and performance. Another activist described the difficulty a union would have in representing a member of staff in these conditions by stating:

"It's almost like, it's not quite the same as the anti-terrorism law, you know the tribunals take place behind closed doors and the defendants aren't allowed to see the evidence against them. It almost feels like that when you are trying to represent somebody in that situation."

Insecurity in pay and conditions

Eight of the organisations still linked their pay to NJC rates. The retention of this link was, though, in several cases problematic. Several of the smaller organisations, for example, felt that the continuation of linking pay to local authority scales was essential to retain competitiveness in the labour market, but also pointed out that its maintenance was dangerous since the annual uplift from their funders usually did not cover the full cost of local authority increases, with the result that several of them need, on occasion, to draw from donated voluntary income and reserves to cover annual pay rises. The chief executive of one organisation, for example, stated in relation to this that:

"We are starting to run at a loss now and you don't know how long you can do it because you know the reserves are there for a purpose for redundancy and stuff like that. If things don't improve there will be a reduction in service, but eventually that reduction cannot reach a certain level beyond which you can't operate. In the long term this might actually destroy us…we are quite small. We are very vulnerable."

In Telstar, the senior manager reported how while the organisation had recently been able to redeploy certain staff because of funding changes, in one case this was to a junior post. Moreover, because the organisation could not indefinitely fund such a post at a higher salary, the individual had to take a pay cut. More generally, the organisation had in recent years also cut provision for sickness benefits.

Larger organisations were also vulnerable to changes to pay and conditions. One workplace activist reported how, at the time of the interviews, the housing association in which he was employed was proposing to move away from NJC scales. If these proposals went through, because no 'red circling' would occur, support workers would move five points down the NJC scale and the rest of the staff two points. According to the activist, management's rationale for this proposal was based on the assumptions that competition for Supporting People funding would increase in the future, making the organisation's attachment to NJC scales uncompetitive in the market.

A manager from a housing support organisation similarly reported how discussions had occurred at board level regarding moving from NJC scales because of the risks of deficits arising as a result of inflationary uplifts from funders being insufficient to cover increases in them, although no action had so far been taken in this direction. More generally, in UNISON's housing association branch, the respondent reported how she feared that this type of move would be common across the sub-sector given the continuation of cuts in Supporting People and, indeed, it was reported in one housing support organisation how management had recently proposed to appoint new staff on non-NJC rates of pay.

Other larger adult organisations were similarly reducing staff terms and conditions. In the case of a provider of services for children, adults and families with learning disabilities, for example, cuts in

[2]*Respondents referred to the impact of recent implementation of Statutory Instrument 2004 No. 2070 Care Standards Act 2000 (Extension of Protection of Vulnerable Adults Scheme) Regulations 2004.*

Supporting People funding had led to reductions in employees' mileage allowance and a capping of sleepover allowances, with the latter having been imposed across the whole organisation, rather than just Supporting People Projects, in order to protect the organisation's strategy of avoiding variations in terms and conditions of staff across the same grade. In addition, this same organisation had secured union agreement to a pay freeze.

Another large organisation also revealed that, because of financial difficulties, it had agreed with the union to implement a pay freeze and also significantly cut back on its NVQ training provision because of problems with resourcing it. Meanwhile, several organisations, including that mentioned in the previous paragraph, reported how they had changed the rules regarding access to their occupational pension schemes because local authorities did not help fund this benefit.

Problems in relation to staff terms and conditions were also reported in relation to TUPE transfers. A key issue here was the situation where a transfer involved workers on better terms and conditions than existing staff. This was reported to not normally arise in the case of transfers from private sector providers but to be potentially an issue where staff had previously been employed in the public sector. One organisation in adult services, for example, reported how this latter situation had arisen in relation to a children's services organisation and led to some extremely difficult consultations with existing and new staff, while a union activist in another one made reference to how the transfer of managers from the public sector had proved to be highly problematic. There was also significant fears associated with the transfer of pension responsibilities of incoming staff from the public sector especially as several of the organisations had recently had to make changes to their pension entitlement for existing workers.

Employee reactions to changes in pay and conditions

Overall, there were concerns relating to the sustainability of employee morale in these conditions of income insecurity. The chief executive in the aforementioned organisation which had implemented a pay freeze and changes to sleepover allowances stated:

> "Up to that point we had goodwill with the shop stewards and generally with the staff which allowed us to get that kind of agreement, without any serious objections. My feeling now is that, that is not a bottomless well that we can go back to and draw on, and we already know that if we have to make other efficiencies of that kind…I think we will not find the same goodwill."

The focus group in Merlin gave us some insight into the impact of this form of insecurity. The opening response to the question on pay to the group was one of lots of ironic laughter by all participants, before the mood turned more sombre. A Support Worker who was a union member stated how he believed there to be 'a feeling of helplessness among staff'. This was seen to have stemmed from a lack of real influence over external funders and a lack of established collective bargaining which was able to deliver a workable 'going

rate' for the sector. He also pointed towards increasing frustration with an environment where it was felt by staff that those that worked in the voluntary sector never received the same cost of living increases as local authority counterparts.

Within Telstar, while respondents acknowledged they were not working purely for money, there were some frustrations regarding the constant uncertainty over whether staff would receive any pay increase in the current funding environment. In Astro, respondents spoke of how even when they were given rises, this failed to maintain their living standards. One worker commented:

> "You never get a raise, apart from the 1.9%…I have been here for four and a half years and you know the cost of living has gone up a lot more than the yearly 1.9%. You may not be taking cuts, but in real terms you are taking a cut because everything has moved on but your salary hasn't."

Some of the older employees in Astro, again, revealed how they felt particularly disadvantaged because they had less opportunity to move to get a higher salary because of a perception that they would not be marketable enough. Evidence of further age-related vulnerability was revealed in Merlin. Here, the project manager who was interviewed pointed out how her own staff team were young and had no chance of getting on the property ladder on their current salaries. The other participants round the table further commented that they would not choose a career in the sector if they were young because of the lack of financial stability or a decent living wage.

There was also a strong sense that the issue of pay was strongly related to the way in which care for the vulnerable was itself undervalued. A female member of staff within Merlin stated:

> "There is only so much they are willing to lets say put up with for the lack of any better terms. I find even lately that some of the people who are leaving because they are thinking well being a support worker is a stressful job, it's a lot of work and a different type of stress to other types of work and to be honest they can [get] that type of money at Tesco. And if I am honest, if I was here on a long-term basis, I couldn't afford to keep this job because it's not competitive."

In general discussions, participants in the focus group also commented how the salaries were not keeping pace with rising mortgage costs, higher fuel bills etc. Most alarmingly for management in Merlin (whose current turnover levels were estimated at 25%), when respondents were asked whether, if they had a choice, they would be in their roles next year, the majority outlined how for various reasons, including redeployment, retirement and dissatisfaction over the balance between pay and effort, they had serious doubts.

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Work intensification

To begin, some respondents were cautious regarding reporting extensive work intensification in their organisations due to funding insecurity. Instead, some respondents emphasised the role played by changing service user needs. For example, a chief executive of a mental health organisation reported how in recent years the type of service user being cared for by his organisation had changed and become more demanding. In particular, he made reference to a growth in dual diagnosis cases which involved people with both mental health and drugs/alcohol problems. Somewhat similarly, a regional UNISON activist described how some services are simply redesigned to take account of people's changing needs and that this might culminate in a reduced service with fewer staff, because the service user had become more integrated into the community.

Yet, while acknowledging the relevance of these points, evidence did suggest that intensification occurred across all grades of staff as a consequence of insecurity in funding levels. For example, an activist indicated how changes in a service user's needs could lead to problems when local authorities did not respond to requests for further resources to provide required extra support. Similarly, another workplace activist drew attention to how her workload had increased as a result of a local authority requiring that the organisation where she worked take on more demanding clients in return for continued Supporting People funding.

More generally, a Support Worker respondent from Merlin commented:

> "It gets to the point where there is no fat, it is so lean. You just need one little thing to go wrong."

At the same time, it was also clear that the workloads faced by staff in the sector could vary. For example, a housing association branch activist noted how under Supporting People funding staff-client ratios could vary considerably, in part as a result of differences in the financial position of authorities. The respondent pointed out that this could mean the difference between an individual in one borough having twelve clients, whilst in another a worker at the same grade could have as many as 20: illustrating the variability of experience across regions from reconfigurations in Supporting People, as well as the differing perceptions of local authority funders regarding the level of funding required to provide good quality services.

Another UNISON activist revealed how it was common for funding decisions to lead to a restructuring of management's role. This in some cases would lead to a reduction of front line managers, to be replaced by other managers from another project or region assigned to a particular project on a part-time basis. At the same time, in such restructuring, it was reported that certain front line support staff could be upgraded to Senior Support Workers and take on some managerial functions.

In one housing association a whole grade of deputy manager posts were made redundant in projects, along with the loss of some front line workers leading to intensified workloads for those remaining. To exacerbate the situation, it was pointed out how these deputy managers were previously responsible for covering for absence, but no such cover now existed beyond the remaining staff.

Similarly, a project manager from Merlin who had experienced a restructuring of her role stated:

> "I am managing two projects…and to be honest I was delighted I was looking forward to the challenge because I have been 15 years in the same project, but now the reality has hit home now I am actually doing it."

A related concern in these intensified management roles was raised by the senior management representative from Merlin who acknowledged the difficulties experienced by isolated, overworked and stressed project managers who were denied needed support, such as personal training and development, because of insufficient resources. The same respondent also highlighted how in several cases newly promoted managers were approaching the organisation to go back to being a support worker because they could not cope with the intensity of their new roles.

The senior management respondent in Telstar similarly indicated how workers had to be multi-skilled and flexible to provide support to each other across the range of services. This view was, in turn, partly echoed by the workplace union official interviewed, who spoke of how there had been a significant intensification of his workload in recent years, which was in large part responsible for the problems he was having finding time to deal with union matters.

Another regional organiser and several employers noted that intensification of work could be a particular problem in administrative roles. The plight of administrative staff was vividly brought to life in some of the exchanges within the focus groups. Management in Merlin had recently had to make economies due to funding cuts and, in an attempt to avoid a direct impact on service users, had decided to reduce resources to certain administrative functions. One administrative worker noted that this usually meant redundancies and that while this was stressful enough, once they had occurred the remaining employees were then required to absorb the responsibilities of the people who had lost their jobs, with no extra reward. Another respondent in the focus group was extremely emotional when she stated:

> "I am coping at the moment…to be quite honest I am not sure how it's going to go. I actually feel quite stressed…You know it was a full time job now I am doing seven days work. Seven days to fit into five…you hear somebody is not being replaced and then you then think am I going to be taking this on as well?"

What was also significant from the exchange of views in this focus group was that such intensification of administrative and management work did not simply go on at project level, but could also touch on the senior echelons of management. One senior manager from Merlin reported:

"It is almost as if we are going backwards. I have absorbed basic administrative type tasks because there isn't sufficient pick up in the admin team, so my role is going backwards instead of forwards."

Another manifestation of this intensification was revealed in a children's services agency. Here, there was some speculation that reassessments of the work of certain projects by local authorities were leading to qualified staff being replaced by unqualified staff. In some circumstances a manager indicated that this was sometimes, in turn, followed by 'a dumbing down' of the service. However, a union activist from the same organisation, nevertheless, revealed suspicions that the boundaries between 'qualified' and 'unqualified' were being blurred and that, as a result, the union was monitoring changes in contract specifications to ascertain whether unqualified members were being asked to take on the responsibilities of qualified workers. Moreover, similar concerns were expressed by activists in two housing support organisations that trainees were at times taking on the work of qualified staff.

The regional official from Scotland, meanwhile, expressed the view that some inspections of services in his region started from the premise of making cuts of around 4%-6%, or, alternatively, expecting providers to increase services by 4%-6% with the same level of staffing. He stated:

"Organisations will say well this is my cake and it's the same size cake as last year, but I will still have to deliver what I did last year, plus whatever I have been given to deliver extra."

Against this background of increasing workloads, in Merlin it was revealed how continued pressure to do more with less was leading to high absences and even greater strain on those remaining, with some projects running on half their staffing level due to absences and the fact that the funding environment placed restrictions on the ability of an individual project manager to call in relief staff.

Increased bureaucracy

There was also evidence that increased bureaucratic demands from funders were adding to this intensification of work. For support/project workers in two of the case studies there were anxieties about coping with extra administrative burdens demanded by funders as part of monitoring exercises. One respondent noted:

"The support worker not only now goes and looks after that person, but has to record every single thing they are doing, how long they are doing it for, what does that come under?"

Again, Supporting People projects were characterized by this problem, with respondents at all levels providing illustrations of the intense bureaucracy associated with working under this funding stream. One activist who worked in one of these projects noted:

"You have to do three monthly support plan reviews and support plans, you've got needs assessments which have 20 odd questions, which themselves can trigger 20 forms, we have got health and safety assessments, you've got risk assessment. So potentially for every client every 30 months you could be doing possible 10-30 forms every three months for every client."

Astro workers highlighted how such intensification of paper work was driven by the monitoring, auditing and target setting of funding bodies.

Undermining health and safety

Unlike other studies (see Cunningham, 2005), the issue of lone working/under-staffing did not pose significant concern among the majority of management respondents with regard to health and safety, as they were reasonably confident of their risk assessment and lone working policies. There were health and safety issues which raised concerns. Some management respondents revealed incidents where funding shortfalls meant that maintenance was not being undertaken as regularly or that certain pieces of safety equipment, such as sprinklers, were not being installed as rapidly as they should, with obvious health and safety risks to service users and employees alike.

In a children's service organisation a management respondent pointed out how a shortage of funding was making a local authority reluctant to examine changing needs in a particular project. Here, one service user with autism was living in a residential home with other users who were seen to be quite noisy. The manager revealed how this was causing the service user some distress, and that the organisation felt that the individual should be moved to a quieter residence. Moreover, the service user was beginning to get frustrated and there were incidents of staff and other service users experiencing minor assaults. Yet, at the time of the research, this issue was still unresolved. In a similar vein, in another project it was reported that funding uncertainties were leading to tensions developing between staff and service users, and a consequent increase in the number of assaults on the former.

These responses differed somewhat from those of the union activists. With regard to the issue of staffing levels, in Northern Ireland, it was reported how some smaller employers in the province operated without adequate lone working policies, safety reps or adequate risk assessments. A workplace activist from the SW of England revealed her concern with the lack of on-call cover for staff working during unsocial hours. In Scotland, the regional official reported how cuts in funding were leading to projects being under staffed ie where previously there would be two or three people undertaking waking nightshifts, cover was now reduced to a sleepover or alarm-based care. He stated:

"You have to be careful not to generalize about care because the whole thing has to be driven by the individual's needs, but when the pressure is on you as an organisation to make a saving… there are organisations out their prepared to take a gamble."

The regional official from Wales also mentioned how members had to be reminded of the necessity of following risk assessments around lone working. She cited incidents when members appeared willing to ignore risk assessments which called for two workers to accompany a client, especially when staff shortages meant a service user could not go on a social outing.

The health of employees in this intensified work environment was also of concern to managers and union officials and activists alike. A chief executive in one of the smaller organisations revealed how her own health was suffering as her project could not afford to employ more office staff. She recalled how:

"I developed very high blood pressure and angina problems, sleepless nights, basically very stressed, not wanting to let the service suffer."

Concerns were expressed in the focus groups of Astro and Telstar with regard to the implications of the insecure funding environment on worker health. From Astro, one worker commented:

"I think the health implications are really important the stress as well, because I know there are a number of people sitting around this table are having health consequences from insecurity in work…it's the lack of sleep or getting colds or you know just generally feeling you can't relax. Sometime somebody is just going to collapse in a heap."

The activist from Scotland revealed concerns about the effects of increases in working hours and shift patterns that don't allow minimum rest periods on client health and safety. The widespread use of long shifts associated with sleepovers, and subsequent exhaustion, led to some staff making mistakes with service user medication. He stated:

"In schemes people have had a drug error or have demonstrated bad judgement both in terms of their own health and safety and in terms of the health and safety of the people they are providing services for. Then you look at it and find they have been working 10, 12, 13 days in a row. Shifts of 12 hours with sleepovers built into them. It's absolutely disgraceful."

Another issue raised was the risks posed by the emergence of far more demanding client groups. In particular, in Supporting People services, one activist mentioned that care in the home was including elderly people who had quite disruptive behaviour, eg those who had dual diagnosis of drug and alcohol problems. She also went on to argue that current risk assessments under Supporting People do not have an appreciation of this phenomenon and need to be improved to deal with it.

Changes to working hours

Although not as common as some of the changes to people's working lives outlined above there was evidence to suggest that employees in the sector could experience significant changes to their working hours as a consequence of funding decisions. In one of the larger organisations, a manager, for example, reported how a local authority funder was requiring it to be more flexible with regard to dealing with two or three client visits over a period of a few hours, while at the same time refusing to fund any travel time in between these visits. Activists also reported how. In another large organisation, members were subjected to a potential cut in their hours as the local authority reduced funding. As a consequence the employees faced a significant degree of uncertainty as the employer 'scrambled around getting enough hours to cover their pay'.

In a larger organisation one activist reported how around 50 workers were increasingly anxious as managers were attempting to issue them with new employment contracts, which had significant implications for working time. These new contracts were described as 'Martini contracts' designed to deliver 'anything, anywhere, anytime' (UNISON activist) in accordance with what the demands of particular funders required. Reportedly, if they signed these contracts, employees would be expected to work a 37 hour week, over seven days with little notice with regard to being required to work weekends or other unsocial hours.

Activists also revealed some efforts by organisations to gain greater working time flexibility from staff. In particular, reference was made to an attempt by one housing association employer to force newly TUPEd administrative staff to accept working hours that were not their normal nine to five, and attempts by some employers in Northern Ireland to impose changes in working hours via the introduction of extra shifts, with little appreciation of the potential impact of this on family life.

Impact on work-life balance

As a consequence of this combination of threats to members' employment, income, and health and safety security in the workplace and accompanying work intensification, it was unsurprising that several of the employee respondents in the focus groups revealed implications on their work-life balance. In Astro, one worker observed the following:

"There is nothing worse than sitting on the end of a phone at the end of a contract with three months work and your friends ring and say we are going to the cinema and then going for a drink, come and join us. You sit there thinking, 'well actually I don't know whether I can or not', or if there is a night school class you want to go to and you think, 'that is another £55.00,' and think, 'can I afford it? Well actually no because I don't know what is going to happen.'"

The following string of dialogue between participants in Merlin illustrates some of the tensions around family – life and working in the sector caused by work intensification.

<div style="border:1px solid orange; padding:1em;">

Researcher – does family life for employees suffer in this climate of insecurity and work intensification?

A1 What's family life? (they all laugh)

A2 Does it suffer anymore than ten years ago?

Everyone Yes

A3 It's stress, rotas, more things to think about, to do.

A1 My wife told me six weeks ago on a Sunday afternoon 'give it up.' I said, 'I wish I could,' I was there, I was cracking.

A3 My husband said the same too.

A4 It's funny my husband has too, it's not worth it.

A2 Sorry I am laughing because my niece said it to me over the phone the other day 'why do you do that job, why tolerate it?' (lots of laughing from other respondents).

</div>

In addition, our employee interviews revealed how clashes with work-life balance could lead to a breaking point. For example, in the focus group within Merlin an employee reported an incidence where the re-organisation of services meant that a number of employees had to leave because these changes did not fit in with their childcare arrangements.

6 Quality of care issues

There was some debate regarding the impact on quality from the insecure funding environment outlined earlier in this report. Some respondents at management level did not see clear impacts on service quality from the above insecure environment. Indeed, one senior manager argued that quality in the social housing sector was actually going up because of greater regulation and the impact of new funding streams. He argued:

"It's going up because, actually, funders, local authorities are monitoring the public purse better and taking action where standards aren't met…it's better than it was…from where I'm sat it's better."

This same respondent did, however, also argue that what was happening in terms of quality was very much influenced by the funding and monitoring policies adopted by local authorities. In this regard, he further argued that a third of authorities were good in this respect, a third reasonable and a third poor and took the view that government should impose more rigorous quality standards on them to deal with the problem of 'the bottom third'.

However, at the same time, other management respondents, as well as activists and employees did reveal direct and indirect impacts on service quality. These are now dealt with in turn through a consideration of the main issues giving rise to them.

Management time and resources

The first point to make with regard to making any analysis of the costs of contracting in terms of management time is that information is extremely difficult to come by. For example, of the participating organisations, only one had made a significant attempt to evaluate the costs to their organisation of the regular renegotiation of funding with external bodies. This left us with, at best, a series of illustrations of the management costs that organisations might incur when operating within the insecure environment of the quasi-market.

Respondents were asked whether they employed an individual responsible for bidding and renewing contracts/funding in their organisations. Four of the participating organisations reported that they employed such an individual. It was noticeable that these organisations were in all cases among the largest of our participants. In trying to ascertain the precise cost to individual organisations we then asked what proportion of that individual's time was spent on funding issues. Two of the organisations were able to give precise figures for this, with one (Organisation A) estimating it at 20% of the individual's time, and the other (Organisation B) 60%. In terms of estimating the actual cost to these participants, further insight was gained through asking for the salaries of these individuals. The former reported that the salary of their manager was approximately £28,000 and the latter £32,000.

However, this did not represent all the costs associated with funding activities for these organisations. For example, in organisation A, all

other senior managers and project managers were also involved in funding activities for, the respondent estimated, up to approximately 10% of their time. Although we did not obtain information regarding the current salaries of these personnel, we were able to get some insight into the costs by looking at the salary ranges of the specific managers involved. Again, in organisation A, the senior director reported how at his grade he was expected to devote approximately the same amount of time to funding matters and his salary lay in the band of £46,000-£49,000. In addition, there were 24 project managers devoting 10%of their time to funding activities who were paid within a salary range of £27,000-£29,900 per annum. The respondent also pointed out that it was not the case that all projects were subject to renewal of funding every year, but the majority were and the organisation had yet to experience any wholesale move to three year funding so these issues arose at project manager level between every one and two years.

In a similar vein, Organisation B reported that 95% of its fifty projects had their funding renegotiated on an annual basis, with project managers reportedly devoting approximately 3% of their time per annum to specific funding issues on a salary scale of £19,777-£21,946. Senior Managers, that is staff on a grade higher than the aforementioned Business/Development manager, reportedly spent 10% of their time on funding issues per year on a salary of up to £46,297.

A third organisation (C) employed a business development manager on a part-time basis for 18.75 hours who was paid £34,896 pa pro rata (£16, 845). However, the respondent described this contribution to the costs of contracting as 'a drop in the ocean, because of the large amount of work required to put together tender proposals and applications for preferred provider lists'. As a consequence, it was reported that senior managers above the level of development manager and project managers were involved in funding matters. At senior management level it was reported that regional directors could devote 10% of their time to such issues, while area managers could devote between 10-20% depending on the funding opportunities available. The senior managers were paid on salary bands ranging from £49,607 to £52,965, while area managers received salaries between £34,146 and £35,772. project managers had least to contribute to this process, as it was estimated they could devote as little as 1% of their time.

We were not able to get precise figures for the numbers of managers in the above bands for organisation C, but using the figures from organisations A and B, which are illustrated in the box below we can give some higher level estimates of the direct costs of contracting in terms of management time in these organisations. Assuming in the case of A that all contracts were negotiated on an annual basis, and in the same year, a worst case scenario would arguably produce figures of up to £82,260 p.a. on current salaries. In Organisation B, assuming that 95% of organisations have their contracts renegotiated in the same year, and relevant managers are on the top of their salary ranges, a worse case scenario would

arguably produce costs of up to £55,365. These figures are essentially limited given we do not have precise figures regarding how many projects are re-tendered in a given year and the exact salaries of managers. There would, therefore, seem a need for more in-depth research in this area. At the same time, such an approach, may contribute to any sector level campaigns aimed at raising awareness of any of the wholesale re-tendering of services through EU procurement regulations mentioned in areas of activity such as Supporting People.

Organisation A – Higher estimate – worse case scenario

Development manager
20% of individual's time spent on contracting **£5,600**

Senior manager
assuming highest point in scale **£4,900**

Project managers
assuming highest point in the scale **£71,760**

Total cost (£)
of management time devoted to contracting ***up to* £82,260**

Organisation B – Higher estimate – worse case scenario

Development manager
60% of time spent on contracting and top of scale **£19,200**

Senior manager
assuming top of the scale **£4,629**

Project managers
assuming top of scale **£31,532**

Total cost (£)
of management time devoted to contracting ***up to* £55,365**

Interviews also revealed the disparity of resources between larger and smaller organisations during renegotiations and tenders for contracts. In the former case, the reaction to funding challenges could be increasingly sophisticated and elaborate. In one organisation, as well recruiting an individual on a full-time basis to pursue funding opportunities, it had established a 'contracts group' headed by a senior financial manager. The purpose of this group was to gather intelligence with regard to work that was coming through for tender. This would include a process of identifying key priority areas for obtaining funding and tenders which should be disregarded. In contrast, the pursuance of funding in the smaller organisations in our study was generally left to one or two senior people who took on responsibility for certain areas of funding or for the organisation as a whole.

Some of our smaller organisations were also able to provide us with some useful information regarding the frustrations and costs associated with contracting processes. For example, in Telstar the senior manager reported how the renegotiation of the organisation's core contract with a local authority took an enormous amount of time, which was not helped by the key contact with the authority changing three or four times due to internal reorganisations. He also observed how, for smaller organisations, quality could be compromised because of the temptation to 'snap up a deal'. He added that closer scrutiny of some of these deals would reveal a disparity between the objectives and the resources required to meet them, especially around issues such as the lack of funds for staff training.

Another respondent from the organisation caring for the elderly, revealed how its senior manager was the individual most responsible for funding and that this could take up between 25%-30% of his time on a salary of £34,000. In another of the smaller respite organisations that had been facing financial difficulties, the chief executive claimed that the vast majority of her time in the previous six months or so had been spent dealing with funding issues and her salary was £16,500 per annum. The chief executive of one of the small advisory organisations also reported that she had devoted up to 40% of her time in the past year to funding issues, with her salary being on the local authority PO1, Pt 26, scale.

One of the small advisory services, meanwhile, generally left most of the funding issues to the voluntary management committee. The respondent from this organisation reported how the consequence of this was that the management committee had very little time to discuss the development of services or think strategically. Finances and the survival of the organisation were standing items on the agenda of meetings, and could take anything up to 40% of the time at any given meetings. As a consequence, it was felt that overall service quality suffered, for, although the respondent was confident the quality of the service was above that of other similar public and voluntary comparators, he felt something was missing. In summarizing his concerns relating to service quality, he stated:

"It's the added value bit…it's not well connected or as joined up as it should be. Let's say there is a lot of stuff we could be doing. We are very reactive, but there is more work we could be doing with councils and social landlords to prevent the problems arising in the first place. We are not spending enough time on that and that is what you should be doing, but we don't and we don't have enough time."

A chief executive of one of the small advisory centres described the time consumed by the search for funding in the following way:

"It's looking, constantly looking and searching for modes of funding and that is what is time consuming. We will go anywhere."

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Cuts to social activities

It was also the case that the majority of our organisations highlighted specific services that were always the first to suffer in the face of financial cuts and insecurity. A key area in this regard was social activities for respondents. Here, a number of respondents reported how these had significantly suffered in recent years, with service users not being able to have a holiday for a number of years. In addition, there were reports of some staff being reluctant to accompany users on such activities because of their general pay and conditions and the fact that such events could involve them being on duty twenty-four hours a day.

The costs of increased bureaucracy

The service quality issue was clearly associated with the costs and perceived burdens of additional administration on projects. Four organisations spoke of the increased administration placed on projects and direct care staff from supporting people funding and the increased costs associated with it. One of these, further, made the point that because there was little funding under supporting people to cover these costs they had to partially come from the organisation's other resources. In the other cases it was felt that time spent on administration was to the detriment of that actually devoted to service users.

In terms of visible outcomes on service quality, the following quote from an activist in the housing association sector best illustrates some of the frustrations front line staff experience of dealing with the administrative burden associated with Supporting People:

> "You know there's lots of different things you can do with clients that don't actually quite fit with what Supporting People want, it's much more the creative aspect of the work with clients and that's what's really being eroded because you're either too tired, or the goodwill goes in a sense because you feel so overwhelmed by the paperwork and the bureaucracy and the lack of understanding that as a front line worker you are under a lot of stress…"

The issue was not, however, solely confined to Supporting People. Within Astro several respondents spoke of similar frustration in trying to justify their funding by complying with what they felt to be excessive monitoring and checks of their activities, as the following quote shows:

> "I was writing my third report today in four or five months, you have to say we have done this or done this, it can take up half your week just making sure the funders are happy with you, whereas you should be spending your time with the young person."

Staff and service transfers

Despite viewing the prospects of transfers from public and private organisations into the voluntary sector in largely positive terms, respondents made a number of negative comments concerning the impact of TUPE transfers on service quality. One respondent, for example, felt that persistent TUPE transfers stemming from local authorities accepting bids overwhelmingly on the basis of cost could culminate in significant barriers to quality services. Here it was suggested that the focus on cost meant that the agency, voluntary or not, taking over the project may not be in a position where it would have the innovative capacity to pursue quality of care. In particular, it was feared that organisations that won bids on cost would not have the resources in terms of expertise and staff skills to take the service user as far down the road as possible towards person-centred independent living in the community.

This concern was shared by respondents at management level in participating organisations who revealed concerns regarding the detrimental impact on quality across the sector from such transfers in a climate where price appears to be the focus of tendering exercises. In Telstar, the senior management respondent and individuals in the focus group revealed concerns over the competitive pressures facing similar user-led organisations in England who ran services under the Direct Payments scheme for disabled people. Here, it was reported that some of these organisations that were initially contracted to deliver services had recently lost out in tendering processes to larger commercial or voluntary providers. It was further claimed that in successfully bidding for these contracts through undercutting the user-led providers, the larger organisations were sacrificing aspects of quality such as community development. Further they also argued that because the boards or management teams of these larger organisations were not predominantly from the user group, they did not wholly understand the needs of their clients and therefore quality would suffer.

Concerns were also raised with regard to projects moving to the private sector where workers would receive even less wages to provide a minimum service. In addition, a more general concern was expressed that local authorities were operating on the principle of services operating at a minimum quality standard, with providers who went above this being excluded from provision unless they provided some resources themselves. One respondent described the differing views on quality in the following way:

> "It's like the new Ford Escort being dumbed down to an old banger that can just about pass its MOT and if it can pass its MOT it's good enough and let's hope the wheels don't fall off. If they do then it's somebody else's fault."

Staff skills, training and development

The link between service quality and the skills, training and development of the workforce is an obvious one. In this area, on a positive note, one management respondent reported how Supporting People had led to improvements in staff training in his organisation. Yet, there were, nevertheless, signs that the development of employee skills was, at times, being undermined in the prevailing climate of insecurity. Several of the larger organisations in the study revealed how they had to cut back on their efforts to meet the external targets on NVQ qualifications for their workforces as a consequence of a lack of funding and general insecurity. In Merlin, the chief executive, more specifically, expressed concern that a proportion of line managers did not have sufficient skills to do their jobs properly because of the range of demands they faced and the lack of resources and time to equip them with the skills they needed.

A respondent from one of the larger organisations also revealed profound concerns regarding the implications emanating from the substitution of unqualified for qualified staff in projects as a consequence of local authority cuts. In particular, it was felt that when dealing with some vulnerable service users, for example young people, unqualified staff did not have the expertise to pick up signals from individuals who may be about to stop using the service despite their high needs or go back to drug use, or even, in the worst case scenario, self-harm. The same manager further argued that these types of incidents could particularly occur when the inexperience or lack of skills among unqualified staff was linked with a parallel high case load imposed by funders.

A manager from one of the small advisory centres noted how the low rate of pay provided by his organisation were insufficient to attract the right calibre of manager to run the project, namely someone with a breadth of experience in the sector regarding funding, staffing issues, service quality etc who was able to 'hit the ground running'. In his view this problem had important implications for effective management and hence the quality of service which could be supplied.

At the workforce level, there were further concerns regarding the personal development of staff. In Astro, all employees agreed that because management spent an increasing amount of time chasing funding, this meant that face to face supervision, and staff development and training were neglected. One respondent stated:

"All year it's just been recruitment and induction, funding. So you don't really get the personal development or the, you know, we should be talking about training opportunities but we are too busy talking about 'we will try and get you some funding'…I mean we are all doing brilliant work, but I think especially in my case it's all by commonsense and good judgement."

Another activist added how it was difficult to ensure the adequate training and development of staff to ensure quality of care because of the high level of 'as and when' staff used to cover absences etc.

Staff turnover

There were a number of illustrations of the impact of employee turnover on service quality in the participating organisations. Senior managers invariably noted how turnover was a persistent problem and one respondent drew on an analysis of exit interviews to highlight the way in which it was directly related to job insecurity and issues around pay and conditions.

In the smaller organisations managers pointed to the obvious quality implications arising from the loss of key staff. For example, one small advisory centre had seen four Directors of the project leave over the previous five years, with inevitable adverse consequences for planning, strategy and fundraising within the organisation. Within Astro and the other advisory centre, senior managers similarly complained of constantly facing the problem of training workers up to a high standard to provide a service that they generally felt was better than in the statutory sector, only to see these workers move on after a couple of years to gain more secure employment elsewhere.

One respondent from Telstar revealed some of the tensions relating to worker insecurity and service quality by stating:

"One of my colleagues is currently thinking about her future job. She has had two or three years of job insecurity and is sort of thinking I want more sustainable security in the future…and that is going to impact on the delivery of the service, because it might be one member of staff who has really good skills, good experience and is really competent in what she does…I don't have the ability to sort of ensure that there is going to be enough funding and covering the costs of the service in the future, so there are various economies I might have to make and I am looking at a contraction of the service potentially."

The larger organisations provided turnover figures which ranged from 12.5% up to 25%. Management in Merlin provided some illustration of the cost of having turnover at the top end of this scale, when it reported how in one year expenditure diverted to hire agency staff to cover absence and turnover was £170,000. Recruitment costs were also reportedly extremely expensive, with the key press journal in the area charging £1,400 per advert.

With regard to voluntary turnover among those on short-term contracts, management respondents revealed a familiar dynamic of (a) the organisation recruiting someone on a short-term contract (one year or so) (b) that person taking time (several months) to get used to the job (c) the employee applying for another post after around six months and (d) management recruiting another worker to replace that individual on another, shorter contract: the result being that the service user had little or no continuity of care from the

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agency, and only several months of service delivery which is fully effective as the project undergoes several cycles of recruitment, induction, training and turnover.

Respondents, invariably, expressed anxiety regarding the impact on the continuity of care for their clients in this climate. Even where staff remained resilient and committed in the face of impending redundancy, there were quality of care issues, which were best illustrated from the focus groups. Here, workers expressed frustration on several levels. For example, there was the tensions accruing with service users whose expectations had been built up from receiving a service, and were now facing considerable anguish from the threat of having their particular project closed. From our smallest case study, staff revealed how young people, who had already been let down by the education system, would express extreme frustration at the prospect of their support services being closed.

At a more practical level, for those remaining in work but experiencing uncertainty, there was the dilemma of having little capacity to forward plan for the service, including planning to link clients with other services if the project closed down. This was because in many cases the decision to close or retain the service can be taken at the last minute (i.e. a couple of days before initial funding runs out). Also in the same project, it was reported that workers entering into the last few months of a contract, were reluctant to take on anymore clients, because they did not want to feel as though they could offer them a service. One employee stated:

"You have to get the balance right between being able to commit and getting a 100% and you are thinking in the back of your mind, am I actually going to be here in six months and is there someone to take over and pass this person onto. You know it's really difficult because you don't want to let the person down."

Staff morale and commitment

Managers from participating organisations generally did not cite examples of staff withdrawing any cooperation from services whilst employed in their organisations as a result of the insecurities they faced. Instead, they revealed many stories of how staff willingness to 'go that extra mile' was responsible for saving many projects that were experiencing financial difficulties, even when this involved considerable sacrifice on their part. At the same time, the presence of workplace discontent and dissatisfaction was indicated through the reports provided of high levels of absence in certain projects/organisations leading to detrimental consequences for service quality via the disruption of continuity in care etc. Moreover, the senior manager from the organisation that had recently introduced pay cuts and short term working stated, when asked whether the cuts had an impact on staff turnover, that:

"No, but I think if it went on for much longer it would have done. People can only take it for so long."

Activists, however, did reveal tensions emerging regarding people's ongoing commitment to their employer even whilst in work. According to one activist this usually occurred when workers had reached the last straw. One regional organiser when commenting on the impact of successive cuts in funding argued that:

"I think this kind of issue has an impact on people and their willingness to go that extra mile…certainly there are some instances where people are now not prepared to do the fund-raising stuff."

Another organiser outlined how morale among staff could collapse in some instances. She gave the example of local authority imposed cuts leading to the management in one organisation (not participating in this study) cutting mileage allowances for staff. This reportedly caused a lot of bad feeling among staff who had significant distances to travel to cover services in a large rural community. In addition, another organisation was facing serious issues with regard to staff morale because of its efforts to introduce zero hour contracts.

7 Conclusion, discussion and recommendations

The purpose of this project has been to gain insights into the direct and indirect implications of the insecure funding regime faced by the social care sector, with a particular focus on those relating to employment and service quality. Whilst the data for this project is not longitudinal, the results do suggest an intensification of pressures with regard to funding insecurity in the voluntary sector. These appear to be caused by a number of factors most notably an intensification of competition, in part due to the introduction of new EU public procurement regulations, a tightening funding environment in areas such as Supporting People and the slow progress of other government measures to bring balance to the rigours of the quasi-market for voluntary organisations, namely 'full-cost recovery', aspects of the policy of best value and The Compact.

This has caused a number of significant problems for the sector. With regard to workforce issues in voluntary organisations, it is clear that the multifarious forms of insecurity outlined by Standing (1999) are present in the sector. These include threatened or actual redundancy, insecurity in pay and conditions, concerns relating to health and safety, changes to job roles and working hours and skill reproduction insecurity. The first two of these forms of insecurity appeared to be the most common manifestations, although it is also clear that workers can experience at a particular point in time any combination of the above pressures at work. It is also clear from the findings obtained that these various forms of insecurity are usually linked, as has been found in other studies (see Burchell 2002), to work intensification and that such intensification is particularly apparent among administrative/managerial personnel. Meanwhile, the findings further suggest the potential for other aspects of insecurity to emerge through the proceedings and outcomes of POVA committee hearings.

In relation to the more general impact of these pressures on the workforce, the evidence suggests, in common with other studies exploring job insecurity and employee well-being, that they can cause a significant degree of private misery through high levels of stress and adverse consequences for general health and well-being, family life and work-life balance, as well as the ability to gain affordable housing (see Wichert, 2002: Nolan, Wichert and Burchell, 2000: Walker, 2000).

The report also reveals how the dynamics of this insecure environment can adversely affect organisational performance and service quality, notwithstanding the observations of some respondents that quality has in some areas increased because of greater monitoring of the sector's activities by various government regulators and the impact of new funding streams. For example, the report's findings reveal how service quality has been often detrimentally affected by a number of key tensions which arise from the dynamics of the quasi-market. These include the costs to organisations in terms of management time and resources that are devoted to tendering and re-tendering for contracts and the increases in bureaucracy brought about by the aforementioned intensification of monitoring by funders. They also include the way in

which increased competition, and associated cost pressures and cuts, have acted in some cases to reduce the resources devoted to staff supervision, training and development, encourage the expansion of the roles of unqualified staff to cover work previously done by qualified colleagues and, more generally, created tensions with the aims of service quality, innovation and the move towards independent living; consequences that it seems possible may further increase in the future if, as some respondents suggested, the recently introduced EU public procurement requirements act to increase the extent to which services are subject to competitive tendering processes.

The findings also pinpoint specific *zones of vulnerability* in the sector. The first zone relates to the vulnerability of smaller organisations and their workforces, not withstanding the clear difficulties also faced by larger organisations. Thus, the findings clearly show that smaller organisations can be more vulnerable to pressures from the quasi-market. In particular, the findings illustrate how funding decisions can affect the very survival of smaller organisations as going concerns in the sector, with several respondents reporting how they are going into deficit funding and running down their reserves in order to maintain a viable service. This situation is aggravated by a lack of resources at management level to pursue funding in comparison to larger organisations. As a consequence, respondents from smaller organisations reported how service quality is again negatively affected as senior managers or members of governing boards attempt to maintain existing services and secure jobs by chasing funding to the detriment of strategic planning and the development of innovation in service delivery. Meanwhile, employees in such organisations were found to be less likely to be able to be redeployed and therefore more likely to be made redundant; concerns over health and safety appeared to be more acute; and, workers, because of the difficulties for UNISON in organising smaller employers, were noticeably less likely to be able enjoy the benefits of union representation.

The second *zone of vulnerability* relates to the existence of additional vulnerabilities that appear to be associated with particular funding streams. Respondents from children's services organisations, for example, raised a number of general concerns with regard to changes in the Children's Fund which perhaps needs further investigation that is beyond the scope and resources of this project. However, the funding stream which most consistently raised concerns among respondents was Supporting People. In acknowledging this, the authors do not seek to challenge the need to reconstitute and reshape services along the lines recommended in recent studies (Sullivan, 2004: Audit Commission, 2005), or to argue that Supporting People has not led to the provision of new and quality services. They also acknowledge the variability of experience under the programme across local authority areas with regard to funding and service quality. The fact, nevertheless, remains that the evidence obtained does clearly suggest that features of the programme, and the changes underway within it, have frequently had consequences which are detrimental in some respects to service quality and the well-being of the workforce. In particular, it would seem

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that Supporting People has increased the administrative burden on front line workers, which many feel stifles more creative interaction with clients, while recent funding cuts have led to threats to employment security and significant work intensification.

The third *zone of vulnerability* concerns the plight of specific groups of workers in the voluntary sector labour market in this insecure environment. We have little data on the age profile of the voluntary sector workforce to suggest that it is any different to the wider economy. However, broader studies have highlighted how older workers rarely make voluntary job changes, and that they are more likely to experience involuntary wage losses in subsequent jobs (Greg, Knight and Wadsworth, 2000). Anxieties related to these twin threats were forcefully brought to light in the interviews and are possibly going to be added to if further detrimental changes to pension provisions develop in the future.

The other group which may experience greater vulnerability are disabled people. Interviews from Telstar, an organisation that specialised in facilitating independent living for the disabled, revealed growing anxiety among disabled staff regarding the implications of future employment insecurity. These anxieties touched upon the issue of whether they would receive as good support to facilitate their continued employment if they were forced out of their current posts and into the private and public sectors, or less well resourced voluntary sector providers. Overall, the voluntary sector employs proportionately more disabled people (18%) than both the private and public sectors (13%), a situation which arguably has several causes, including the introduction of effective target setting in equal opportunities in the sector, flexible work practices and an affiliation with the voluntary sector among disabled people because of the nature of work undertaken by many organisations (Passey, et al, 2000; Wainwright et al, 2006). Given this, any adverse developments in the sector regarding the employment security of disabled workers has the clear potential to accentuate the difficulties that this already vulnerable labour market group faces.

Recommendations

The findings reported have a number of policy implications for UNISON in terms of membership recruitment and retention and the further development of workplace organization, which will be the subject of a separate report to the union. Other more general recommendations arising from the findings are reported below.

Lobbying and campaigning

- UNISON should engage in further lobbying of government to draw greater attention to some of the current problems surrounding the structure and operation of contracting in the social care area in respect of service quality, and the health, terms and conditions, workloads, training and development and job security of staff, and to obtain reforms aimed at addressing them.

- Consideration should be given to lobbying jointly with employer organisations in the voluntary sector where a substantial degree of mutual interest would seem to exist.

- Key issues that could usefully be a focus of such lobbying include:

  i The current degree of focus on costs in negotiations between purchasers and providers and its adverse service quality and workforce implications

  ii The need to accord greater recognition to the problems identified with regard to service quality and workforce issues under Supporting People in the ongoing re-shaping of this programme and

  iii The desirability of developing better quality standards under the Supporting People regime in order to counter the poor contracting practices of some local authorities.

POVA committee hearings

While acknowledging the interests of service users are paramount, action is needed to enhance the transparency of the proceedings of POVA committees when an individual worker's employment is at stake and to ensure the presence during them of some form of representation of employee views.

Further research

Further research could usefully be undertaken to:

- explore the differing dynamics of the contract markets operating in different sub-sectors of the social care market

- clarify the implications of the Public Contracts Regulations 2006 (Public Contracts (Scotland) Regulations 2006) for future tendering practice and to subsequently monitor their impact on such practice, as well as service quality and workforce experiences

- explore how the transfer of collectively bargained public sector terms and conditions to voluntary sector organizations could be improved, including via the introduction of relevant legal requirements and

- identify more clearly and reliably the direct and indirect costs of contracting for voluntary organisations and their implications.

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