Cooperation or competition? A city's response to homelessness

Lisa Scullion, Philip Brown, Gareth Morris, University of Salford, and Peter Somerville, University of Lincoln

Paper presented to the Social Policy Association conference on Bigger Societies, Smaller Governments? at the University of Lincoln 4-6 July 2011

[Feel free to quote but please acknowledge authorship. Comments welcomed]

Abstract

This paper reports on findings emerging from a two-year study into multiple exclusion homelessness in Stoke-on-Trent. It focuses specifically on the response of service providers across the city, exploring the mobilisation of partnership working, and examining how service providing professionals talk about the people they work with and alongside. It suggests an increasing ‘professionalization’ of key third sector services who are deemed the ‘big players’ in homelessness provision in the city. Based upon evidence from this study, this paper highlights the conflict between cooperation and competition in partnership working, with a perceived hierarchy of third sector organizations and a common ‘us and them’ narrative in relation to statutory services.

Introduction

Homelessness continues to be a widely debated issue. Economic change, manifested in unemployment, as well as changes in ‘traditional’ family structures have led to increases in homelessness but have also altered the composition of the homeless population (Edgar et al., 1999: 1). For example, the average age of homeless people has decreased, while ‘type of dependency’ has changed with increasing prevalence of drug use (Cloke et al., 2010). Furthermore, there is a recognition of a growing proportion of minority ethnic groups accessing homeless services, for example asylum seekers / refugees, but also, in more recent years, migrants from Accession countries such as Poland (McNaughton, 2008; Homeless Link, 2010).

At a national level, there have been a number of developments that have shaped the contemporary response to homelessness. This includes the Homelessness Action Programme (HAP); the passing of the Homelessness Act 2002 and introduction of Local Homelessness Strategies (LHS); the introduction of Supporting People; and, more recently the Communities and Local Government’s No one left out: Communities ending rough sleeping initiative (Roche, 2004; Cloke et al., 2010). Consequently, homelessness became a ‘core’ issue, rather than a ‘subsidiary issue within housing policy’ (Roche, 2004: 759). Underpinning these developments was a reorganization of homelessness governance (Cloke et al., 2010), making homelessness an issue ‘to be addressed at the local level’ (Roche, 2004: 759) and embracing partnership with third sector agencies (Cloke et al., 2010: 12).
It is well recognised that a multi-agency approach to service provision was at the heart of the New Labour ideology (Glover-Thomas, 2007; Rummery, 2002). However, the partnership discourse is not new and for many years welfare has been dependent upon mutual provision (Craig and Taylor, 2002). Greater collaboration between disparate agencies, for example, has long been a key policy priority within the health and social-care field (Glover-Thomas, 2007). Recognition of the multifaceted nature of the causes and manifestations of homelessness, however, led to a focus on how homelessness services are implemented (Berman and West, 1997; Roche, 2004). The diverse and complex needs of the homeless population requires multiple agencies to meet these needs; thus homelessness has been seen as a ‘prime example’ of an issue requiring coordination in terms of policy and interventions (Hambrick and Rog, 2000: 354).

While inter-agency working has developed in many areas of service provision, it has been suggested that homelessness provision has been relatively new to this idea (Roche, 2004). However, ‘Homelessness presents particular problems for joint working; assessing need and delivering health and social care services to an itinerant population is immensely difficult’ (Oldman, 1997: 241). Commentators on homelessness in the US make reference to the ‘fragmentation’ of homelessness services. Hambrick and Rog (2000: 354-55), for example, talk about a collection of ‘independent, small, service providers seeking to serve a specific need or specific segment of the homeless population’, suggesting the need for a more ‘orderly’ means for homeless people to gain access to services. Similar concerns have been raised in the UK. Roche (2004), for example, highlights difficulty for both service users and providers in terms of navigation through the various services available. There are also issues around the different ethos of organizations and cultures of provision, which can create problems when looking at the integration of services (ibid).

**Case studies of partnership working in homelessness provision**

It is not the purpose of this paper to revisit wider debates on the development of partnership working as this has been covered in a number of previous studies (see for example, Glendinning et al., 2002; Glover-Thomas, 2007), but rather to focus on the importance of the local context in the development of partnerships, how different stakeholders talk about the partnership and the organizations they work alongside. Before looking at the findings of our research in Stoke-on-Trent, it is useful to draw attention to some previous studies that have focused on the development of partnership working in relation to homelessness. It is clear that the impetus for partnership working and the actors and agencies involved shape the success of the approach.

Pannell and Parry (1999), for example, highlight the response in Bristol as an example of good practice around homelessness service provision. *The Hub* in Bristol is a multiagency project providing a single point of access to a number of organizations. Pannell and Parry highlight a ‘chain of events’, which led to the development of this multiagency response. This chain of events included the
planned closures of resettlement units, a consultative body created for discussions on new units, funding being made available for this, as well as a dedicated worker being employed specifically for the development of multiagency working. Pannell and Parry’s research also highlighted the importance of ‘key players’ who had been working in the city for a long period of time. In addition they suggest that Bristol was ‘unique’ in its response to homelessness due to the involvement of the private sector, in particular, the business community who were concerned about how homelessness impacted on businesses in the city. Consequently, Bristol Chamber of Commerce and Initiative became a member of the multiagency group.

While Pannell and Parry talk relatively positively about involvement of the business community, other commentators have highlighted concerns around such involvement, highlighting that partnerships can develop around the primacy of business interests (Cloke et al, 2000; Cloke et al., 2010). Drawing on a case study of the response to homelessness in rural Taunton, Cloke et al., (2000) talk about a dominance of business concerns, particularly in relation to the perceived detrimental impact of begging on trade in Taunton. The partnership approach in Taunton was managed by the local authority who enrolled particular participants; however, the resultant group had a ‘clear hierarchy of power [and] it soon became clear that some interests were more powerful than others’ (Cloke et al., 2000: 125). In Taunton, the role of third sector organizations in the partnership was limited and their opinions were rarely taken into consideration. Indeed, there were clear discursive differences in relation to how business representatives talked about homeless people as problems, while voluntary agencies were more likely to see them as people with problems (ibid: 126). Overall, they paint a picture of a relatively unsuccessful partnership, one which ultimately provided a ‘further platform within which exclusionary practices are legitimized’ (Cloke et al, 2000: 129).

Methods and background

This paper presents findings from 18 interviews carried out during spring/summer 2010 with representatives from key services across Stoke-on-Trent. These interviews were part of a wider research project, which involved interviewing 104 homeless and multiply excluded individuals across the city. The project as a whole aims to explore the life histories of people experiencing multiple exclusion homelessness in order to explore the recurrence of episodes of homelessness across the life cycle and identify key themes and their interpretation by the individual. The wider project also aims to identify the role of so-called low level factors (aspirations, geographical area, expectations etc.) in the lives of multiply excluded homeless people. In part fulfilment of addressing such aims it was important to gain an understanding of the context in which homelessness services were delivered in the city. To this end, a number of people working in the ‘homeless industry’ (Ravenhill, 2008) were asked to comment on the issues impacting upon their work in Stoke-on-Trent, the services that were currently being provided and the partnership working that was, or was not, taking place.
Given that some organizations had a variety of specialisms (e.g. some provided services for all or a combination of the following: young people, older people, drug and alcohol users, lone parents, refugees, and sex workers), in some cases it was necessary to interview more than one representative from an organization to ensure that we were able to reflect the diversity of roles and client group. Consequently, the 18 key informant interviews represent 12 statutory and third sector organizations across Stoke-on-Trent. These organizations represented what Berman and West (1997) refer to as the ‘continuum of care’ in relation to homelessness services, including prevention, emergency accommodation, training, and housing support.

The interviews were audio-recorded, transcribed verbatim and then analysed with a particular focus on their understanding of the causes of homelessness in Stoke-on-Trent; the particular specialism(s) of their organization, if relevant; perceptions of good practice in relation to services; as well as exploring perceived gaps in provision.

In addition to the in-depth interviews, the paper also draws on discussions at the research project advisory group meetings. These meetings were attended by key stakeholders and service providers across the city. While the main purpose of the advisory group meetings was for the researchers to seek advice and guidance on the project, it was also a useful forum for discussions on how services have responded to homelessness in the city, as well observing the interaction between different service providers around a specific issue.

Findings

The following section firstly looks at Stoke-on-Trent in order to identify the socio-economic factors relevant to understanding homelessness in that city. This is followed by an exploration of what respondents saw as the trigger for bringing agencies to work more closely together. The section goes on to consider how the ‘professionalization’ of services has occurred and how the larger and smaller organizations appear to mobilise partnership working.

The context in Stoke-on-Trent

Stoke-on-Trent has historically been linked with coal mining, steel works and the ceramics industries. Imrie (1991: 447) describes a transformation in the economic and social organization of the city, making reference to ‘a dramatic increase in unemployment in the local economy’. While this process of deindustrialisation is not unique to Stoke-on-Trent, Imrie highlights that it has been coupled with a lack of development of the service industry in comparison to other areas that have experienced a similar decline. This issue has also recently emerged in a book entitled Lost City of Stoke-on-Trent, in which the author paints a rather bleak view of the city in the introductory chapter:

Stoke should be lovely but it’s not. Stoke has all the makings of a Manchester or a Leeds: fine municipal buildings – classical, gothic or Italianate; great churches and Nonconformist chapels; 50 miles of canalside snaking through
the city; and hundreds of terraces of dark, tidy, brick-built Victorian terraces. But it is a mess. It looks like London in 1950, as if a world war has left huge tracts of it blasted into oblivion and reconstruction is just beginning. 
(Rice, 2010: 16)

While it is not the purpose of this paper to discuss the wider context of deindustrialisation, it is important to recognise and acknowledge that the decline of Stoke-on-Trent’s traditional industries has led to a prolonged period of economic and social deprivation that has blighted the lives of many in the city. Indeed, at the time the research commenced, the city was ranked 16th most deprived under the Indices of Multiple Deprivation 2007, and the accounts of many service providers often made reference to this deprivation as a causal factor in relation to homelessness in the city.

The trigger for co-operation

There are a number of different factors that can shape the response to homelessness in a locality. Cloke et al. (2010: 12) make reference to specific geographical and political factors that form part of the context, while Berman and West (1997: 313) refer to the importance of different events and community circumstances as ‘driving forces’ of the development of homelessness initiatives. As highlighted previously, within these different contexts there are various ‘players’ who are involved in the response to homelessness, representing a range of different interests. The case studies referred to earlier, for example, highlighted the influence of business interests, based on the desire to remove homeless people from ‘prime spaces’ (Cloke et al., 2010: 5).

The contemporary response to homelessness in Stoke-on-Trent, however, had developed primarily as a result of a tragedy, namely the death of two homeless people in a fire in 2007. The interviews, but also discussions at advisory group meetings, suggested that this tragedy was the catalyst for the development of a Priority Needs Group. The Priority Needs Group was created to deal more effectively with the situations and circumstances of people in greatest need in the city:

‘The Priority Needs Group is a multi-agency meeting to talk about people with complex needs and its solutions. That ties in with the winter provision that Stoke provides between the 1st of December and the 31st of March, and that [group] meets fortnightly and it’s actually a really well established platform... it was a result of a fire death. There were a couple of people that were burnt to death in an arson attack and there was a recommendation that we have the Priority Needs Group.’ (Voluntary organization representative 14)

The Priority Needs Group focused specifically on what service providers described as ‘entrenched’ homelessness. A number of respondents referred to this group as an example of ‘good practice’ in homelessness provision:
‘We work within the Priority Needs Group, which meets [formally] every two weeks and looks at all supported accommodation needs in Stoke. All supported housing providers in Stoke are members of this group [except one], plus the fire service, the police and the probation service...In these meetings we look at the history of each case and the issues relating to it. It is one of the best stakeholder workings that we have.’ (Voluntary organization representative 15)

‘...I think the Priority Needs Group is a really good way of services working together. People come together on a fortnightly basis during the winter months and a monthly basis at other times of the year to talk about the most complex people...everybody there who attends the meetings is brutally honest about what they think about the services that that person could access...’ (Statutory organization representative 2)

It was clear that this partnership working had enabled organizations to adapt their ‘products’ around perceived needs (Edgar et al., 1999), thus providing a response to different homeless populations. For example, representatives of the Priority Needs Group highlighted that since its inception the Group had ‘branched out’ to focus on specific client groups; for example, women:

‘More recently we've set up a women's priority needs group that we're just looking at changing, but again looking at the specific needs of women. Again that pulls in not just our organization, but women's projects as well’. (Voluntary organization representative 5)

Unlike that found in other areas, discussions on the development of the Priority Needs Group in Stoke-on-Trent made no mention of business interests at any point. Indeed, the opinion was expressed in advisory group meetings that business players were generally ignorant concerning issues of homelessness in Stoke-on-Trent. This could be explained by what service providers perceived to be the unusual geography of the city. While the studies in Taunton and Bristol highlighted concerns raised in relation to homeless people in retail areas of the centre, Stoke-on-Trent was referred to as ‘a number of towns all joined together’. Thus, homelessness was potentially less of a ‘city centre’ issue, but rather something that occurred in particular areas.

**Professionalization of homelessness provision: A consortium of ‘big players’**

Cloke et al. (2010: 181) make reference to a process of ‘professionalization’ of homelessness services, shaped by the availability and targeting of statutory funding. New tendering processes have created policies and procedures that third sector partners must follow, with suggestions that there has been a channelling of funding into ‘fit partners’ i.e. those whose approach aligns with the aims and objectives of central government policy (Ling, 2000). This professionalization was evident in the organizations in Stoke-on-Trent. For example, in addition to the Priority Needs
Group, there was a consortium of three large voluntary organizations which had developed from a re-commissioning of the statutory floating support services:

‘...there were pockets of floating support that were exactly the same. It didn’t work in the sense that there was no joined-up approach to it. There was no communication...so the thinking was that if we commissioned a service that has got three partners we get a broader range of service delivery rather than one organization doing floating support and another organization doing floating support, more often than not they were working with the same people, but they weren’t talking to each other.’ (Voluntary organization representative 6)

A representative from one of these organizations indicated that they had:

‘Taken best practice from three organizations and put together as one. So really we’re stealing [names of organizations] best practices, putting it all together in documents, training the teams up at the same level and then it works really well when they go out and everybody’s trained to the same standard’ (Voluntary organization representative 3).

The members of this consortium talked about this partnership in terms of providing a ‘holistic’ service for homeless people, thus catering for the diversity of needs and experiences. However, beyond the desire to provide a holistic service, such networks were clearly important for resource acquisition (Edgar et al., 1999).

The organizations within this consortium were perceived as the ‘big players’ in relation to homelessness services in Stoke-on-Trent, and this had been strengthened to a certain extent by sharing ‘physical space’, as well as sharing ‘best practice’. For example, the consortium had managers working out of one main office, but also had branches at different areas across the city. At each branch there was an officer from each of the partner organizations:

‘...a minimum of three people will work in each area...So they share the knowledge and say ‘I haven’t actually got that knowledge. Can you come out and joint visit with me?’, so they’ll do joint visits...So hopefully we’ve got it cornered and if they don’t know they bring it to the team meetings and there’s always somebody who’s gone down that path and has that experience.’ (Voluntary organization representative 3)

Part of the professionalization of homelessness services has involved the introduction of performance targets, with requirements to demonstrate reductions in rough sleeping and measurable movement of clients into accommodation (Cloke et al., 2010: 33). However, this focus on targets and outputs creates a temptation to ‘select those who are more likely to contribute to achieving the targets and to ignore the most difficult cases’ (Edgar et al., 1999: 67). It was evident that the consortium organizations in Stoke-on-Trent had seen changes in relation to the clients that they
were able to take because of their funding and subsequent targets, as one respondent highlights:

‘...the people that we used to accept were more chaotic, if you like, whereas now, we’ve got certain expectations, and there’s contractual targets that our funders expect us to meet. So if we feel that somebody is too chaotic then we can’t accommodate them, so we would signpost them to other organizations and we’re very rigorous with the supporting information that we gather about a person before we accept them...the clients have to be more stable and more willing to engage with support whereas you know a few years ago, we would accept anybody really’ (Voluntary organization representative 1).

Thus, the ‘big players’ appeared to have to negotiate contradictory roles: on the one hand, they were involved in the Priority Needs Group, focusing on the most entrenched (or chaotic) cases, while on the other hand, as part of the consortium they had to focus on those deemed less problematic.

‘Insiders’ or ‘outsiders’? The position of the ‘smaller players’

Linking in with the discussion above in relation to professionalization of services are debates around bifurcation between larger well-funded organizations (‘insiders’) and smaller less well established groups (‘outsiders’) (Alcock, 2010: 13). While Alcock has discussed this in relation to the third sector generally, Cloke et al. (2010) describe this as a specific feature of homelessness provision:

‘...local homeless service networks in many larger towns and cities are characterized by a range of both ‘insider’ and ‘outsider’ networks – those who have taken the money and, by and large, signed up to the service contracts...and those who have either been excluded from or have excluded themselves’ (Cloke et al., 2010: 40)

They describe the ‘outsider’ organizations as working with very small budgets, often reliant on volunteers, and consequently sometimes dismissed as ‘amateur players’ (ibid, 2010: 46).

It was evident that the ‘big players’ in Stoke-on-Trent fit into this categorisation of ‘insiders’. But what of the smaller players in the city’s map of service provision? Representatives from some of the ‘smaller’ organizations were also interviewed and it was apparent that despite being in existence for a number of years, some services had only recently gained recognition, as one respondent states:

‘...six years [this organization has] been running in Stoke-on-Trent. It’s only in the last twelve months it’s started getting a bit of a name for itself that’s seen as professional and reliable really...with regards to the way we interact with other services now, there’s some quite good progress being made with the probation services, with a few of the prisons, with a couple of the other big players...’ (Voluntary organization representative 7)
While it was clear that some of the smaller organizations felt excluded (at least in the past), it was evident that they had been able to benefit from the partnership approach that had developed in Stoke-on-Trent, even if they were not part of the consortium. Indeed, to a certain extent some of the smaller organizations were filling a gap left by the professionalization of some of the other services; for example, taking on some of the more chaotic clients:

‘There’s a lot of tenders going out to these massive companies where it’s sort of effectively one service provider for one type of service and what you’re finding with this often very chaotic client group is they’ll burn their bridges. When guys present to us they’ve nine times out of ten burnt their bridges with the [larger organizations] and they’re coming to us and they’re saying, ‘I know I’ve cocked up in the past. I know this is my last chance. If I don’t do it here I’m on the streets’…You can’t just have one service, one super company, providing all the homeless bed spaces in the city because that excludes people once they’ve made a few mistakes, which they do because they’re a chaotic and troubled client group’ (Voluntary organization representative 7)

This respondent - while talking positively about working with the ‘big players’ - felt that they were ‘ticking their boxes’, with very selective criteria in relation to the clients they would take on. Consequently, these smaller players formed part of an ‘environment of choice’ for homeless people (Cloke et al, 2010), providing an alternative, or in some cases, a second chance for certain client groups. This was reiterated by a representative of one of the statutory agencies in Stoke-on-Trent who, when talking about the consortium, stated that the ‘services do really well…but we haven’t really got an option for people who don’t fit within our existing model of services’ (Statutory sector representative 2).

Voluntary versus statutory organisations: Competition and ‘preciousness’

This final section focuses on relationships that homelessness organizations have with wider services, and more specifically with statutory organizations. While it was evident that there was a perceived hierarchy within the third sector which created some power differentials, it was apparent that nearly all of the voluntary organizations had a common ‘us and them’ discourse in relation to working with the statutory sector.

As highlighted previously, some of the barriers to partnership working relate to the different ethos of organizations, and the potential for ‘culture clashes’ (Roche, 2004). Representatives of the consortium did make reference to some initial problems in relation to the different working practices of the three organizations; however, it was stated that these had subsequently been ‘ironed out’. The ‘culture clashes’ in Stoke-on-Trent appeared to relate primarily to perceived differences between the statutory and voluntary sector. The accounts of some voluntary organizations included criticism of practical issues such as office hours:
‘...people don’t get homeless in office hours...Obviously the statutory stuff, they close down for Christmas. Now in our experience, in this centre, Christmas is our busiest time of the year.’ (Voluntary organization representative 14)

Furthermore, one respondent felt that caution was required when working with statutory agencies as the responsibility for the client could be passed completely to the voluntary organization:

‘...if they refer them we have to be very mindful that they’re not going to leave us with that person, because some people see us as we’ll take over and we’ll go in and, not do their jobs, but if they can’t think of where to signpost these people to they’ll probably refer us in and that’s the last we’ll ever see of them. So we have to be very mindful that if [a statutory service] actually do refer into this service that we do it with them on board.’ (Voluntary organization representative 3)

An underlying theme in the accounts of the different services, however, related to the ‘preciousness’ of some statutory services:

‘I think there’s a real split that needs to be addressed between the statutory and local authority services and the third-sector services...I’m not judging the [statutory organization] too harshly here, but there is a very precious culture around some of the statutory services...’ (Voluntary organization representative 14)

At best this ‘split’ between the two sectors manifested itself in an unwillingness to share information:

‘They don’t share, full stop. They don’t like sharing. They won’t share Risk Assessments with us, so they won’t share information with us...It’s like pulling teeth trying to get any information out of them unless they want our help.’ (Voluntary organization representative 3)

and at worst some voluntary sector organizations indicated that they had been told they were not allowed to take particular clients:

Respondent: ‘If a young person’s being referred here for housing and one of the people working with them was the [statutory agency], I’ve got to say no. I think that’s absolutely terrible.

Interviewer: So why are they saying that?

Respondent: Because they want to be the only people working with them...They’ve said it to a number of agencies I believe’. (Voluntary organization representative 10)
Consequently, this respondent had concerns about the future sustainability of their service:

‘I got no referrals for a number of months...Where are they? Because prior to that I used to be sitting on fifteen, twenty referrals at any one time. Suddenly they dried up.’ (Voluntary organization representative 10)

**Conclusions**

Partnership working in Stoke-on-Trent evolved differently from areas featured in previous studies. Organizations mobilised around a tragedy, with third sector agencies being key actors in developing partnerships. This contrasts with an approach led by local authorities and responding to concerns from the business community, which contributes to a negative discourse about homeless people. However, it was clear from discussions at the advisory group meetings that organizations in Stoke-on-Trent felt that there was value in involving business actors in the response to homelessness. For example, when the authors discussed dissemination of the project findings, one representative suggested a need to avoid an event focusing on the ‘usual suspects’ (e.g. third sector and statutory agencies already working with homeless people), and to raise awareness of homelessness among business leaders in Stoke-on-Trent. Indeed, it was felt that involving the business sector was desirable because it was an additional source of potential funding for initiatives. More fundamentally it was perceived as a necessary step towards tackling the issues of unemployment and ‘worklessness’ that were seen to be the main causes of homelessness in Stoke-on-Trent. However, this raises a number of questions concerning which businesses should be involved and how to engage with business leaders, but also how business partners might benefit from involvement.

The interviews highlighted a complex array of relationships in Stoke-on-Trent. There were ‘key players’ in the homelessness industry in the city, who not only led a consortium of provision but were also members of the Priority Needs Group. These organizations had become more ‘professionalized’ as a result of their funding and contractual obligations; consequently, they faced some restrictions on the types of clients they could support. Working alongside them were smaller organizations who, to a certain extent, had managed to carve out a niche for themselves, providing an alternative to the more structured support available. However, it was evident that supporting the more ‘chaotic’ cases remained a key issue within the city. Consequently, there was a need to consider how to develop the smaller organizations who were in a position to provide support to this client group.

Despite the perceived hierarchy among the non-statutory homelessness organizations in the city, it was evident that they worked well together and the partnerships that had developed were held up as exemplars of good practice. In contrast, the statutory agencies were generally perceived by these organisations as
'outsiders’ (in a different sense from that of Alcock and Cloke et al), with a strong ‘us and them’ discourse evident in a number of accounts. This could perhaps help to explain the observed greater cohesiveness of the ‘homeless industry’ in Stoke-on-Trent in comparison with that found in studies of other cities.

It is important to take into consideration the timing of this research, which straddles a change of government. Partnership working was a key aspect of the Labour approach to service delivery, with increased support for third sector organizations, but typically led by local authorities in relation to housing and community services. The election of the Coalition government has led to a ‘change of direction’, with an emphasis on building the Big Society (Alcock, 2010b: 379), in which third sector organisations are increasingly expected to take a lead in the provision of public services. In one way, this could work to the advantage of homelessness services in Stoke-on-Trent, because of the leadership role taken by third sector organisations here. In another way, however, they could suffer because of their continued reliance on diminishing government funding. Alcock (2010b) highlights that government support already appears to have been reduced rather than enhanced, with concerns about the divisive nature of budget cuts and competition. Indeed, the interviews carried out in Stoke-on-Trent suggest that competition that already existed between services, coupled with the ‘financial crisis’, has created an environment where both statutory and voluntary organizations are concerned about securing resources. Discussions at the most recent research advisory group meeting highlighted the changing context of service provision and, perhaps unsurprisingly, the homelessness services in Stoke-on-Trent were concerned for the future of their organizations. More specifically, there were fears that a lack of resources could act as an impediment to joined-up working (Oldman, 1997). Indeed, as one respondent stated:

‘Services are in competition ultimately in terms of money. We're about to head into a period of time where they're screaming ‘There is no money and actually the money you’ve got won’t be there’…And not just third sector agencies, but all agencies, statutory and third sector are all going to have funding cuts and I think sometimes people are a little bit fearful of getting together and coming up with a solution.’ (Voluntary organization representative 5)

References


**Acknowledgements**

The study upon which this paper is based was conducted in collaboration with a wide range of statutory and third sector partners. It was one of four projects supported by the ESRC MEH Research Initiative, which was jointly funded with the Joseph Rowntree Foundation, Communities and Local Government, Department of Health and the Tenant Services Authority, and supported by Homeless Link. Economic and Social Research Council (grant number RES-188-25-0016).