Transformational Moments in Social Welfare
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Social welfare needs

Introduction

Narratives on the role of voluntary action are often wrapped up in, or based upon, fundamental understandings of (unmet) need. These views address the type of welfare needs that should be met, and how they should be met. They are of course shaped by the broader context in which they are embedded. Across both time periods, there were some points of agreement regarding growing levels of need, and parallel discussions of deserving and undeserving welfare recipients. Beyond that, however, there were significant differences between time periods, and among different sets of actors.

This chapter explores how these different narratives around welfare needs were constructed and articulated by the public, by voluntary organisations, and by state actors in both the 1940s and 2010s. It compares views on what welfare needs were, whose needs should be met, and whose responsibility it was to meet these needs. The chapter develops the argument that there was a contrast between the two decades, with the 1940s being a period of consensus and the 2010s being one of polarisation. We conclude with reflections on the implications of this change and contrast for the role of voluntary action.
Image 4.1: Members of uniformed youth movements helping older people, late 1940s

Source: *In the Service of the Community*, a 1950 publication illustrating the breadth of work undertaken under the aegis of the NCSS. Reproduced courtesy of NCVO.
New and expanding needs: a point of connection across time

In both the 1940s and the 2010s and across all three sets of actors, a connecting narrative centred on the emergence of new and newly visible unmet need.

1940s: consensus on significance of unmet needs

The Second World War brought into focus some of the pre-existing social welfare needs of children, young people and older people, which had previously been invisible to, or overlooked by, state agencies, the media and the public (see Chapter One). Beveridge’s 1942 report provided a memorable description of national social welfare needs as stemming from five giant evils – want, disease, idleness, ignorance and squalor. The report was well researched – drawing heavily, for example, on Rowntree’s work on poverty and paradigms of need – and displayed a comprehensive understanding of social welfare needs. Within this, Beveridge highlighted the needs of older people. Older people’s welfare was perhaps the most important of all the problems of social security, but as Beveridge later noted, also the most difficult (Beveridge, 1948: 226). The Beveridge Report, however, was not received without criticism – it ignored well-researched paradigms for meeting need and relieving poverty (Glennerster and Evans, 1994: 61), particularly findings on the relationship between poverty, low wages and high rents (Rowntree, 1941; Lowe, 1994).

The public, polled by MO in 1942 (Jacobs, 1992b), and consulted through MO directives in 1947, appear to have been in broad agreement with Beveridge’s assessment. More than 60 per cent of MO writers expressed their support for Beveridge’s recommendations, seeing it as an opportunity to create a better society and as offering a ‘renewed faith in democracy’ (Jacobs, 1992b: 22). Surviving scripts from the May and June 1947 directives, which specifically asked about social welfare needs and services, suggest that writers had little
first-hand experience of need or contact with those in need. Moreover, social welfare needs were referenced, implicitly, by many writers from across different political persuasions as being in two groups, needs which were ‘relevant to me’ (the writer) and needs which were ‘relevant to others’ (this phenomenon is also noticeable in responses to the 2018 directive). As Mike Savage (2010: 60) has noted, although many MO writers ‘identified with left-wing political causes, … by contrast their interest and sympathy with ordinary people seems much less marked’.

Voluntary organisations contributed extensively to debates on need during the 1940s. Indeed, there is clear evidence that government turned to the voluntary movement to supply information and insight on specific welfare needs, for example of children or older people. The resulting responses and cooperation arguably contributed to the apparent, broad, consensus in views in this decade. Voluntary organisations’ articulations of welfare needs were shaped strongly by their members’ particular interests, and blind spots. Before the war, NCSS, for example, concerned itself with the evolving needs of local communities, particularly those affected by social changes such as the creation of new suburban housing estates, the challenges facing rural communities, and the problems of unemployment. In 1938–9, the organisation moved rapidly to coordinate the voluntary movement’s war effort in partnership with government.

Youth organisations focused on working class young people aged 14 to 21 who left school to take up part- or full-time employment. Poverty, poor housing and limited education were factors that affected young people’s work, and a major concern during wartime was for their employment conditions and the housing situation of those living and working away from home. Through a study of young people in industry that was commissioned by the Ministry of Labour, the NCVYS provided evidence to government which effectively raised the profile of the social welfare needs of young people.¹ Much
thinking, however, seemed to be underpinned by an enduring worry about juvenile delinquency. The social upheaval caused by the war also highlighted significant unmet welfare needs among children. Pressure began to build for reform, particularly in residential care for children, prompting the formation of a new umbrella body representing the largest charitable providers of children’s homes: the Associated Council of Children’s Homes. The Council chose to celebrate ‘the opportunity afforded by the awakened national conscience concerning child-welfare’. However, it also sought to defend members’ interests. At a meeting in January 1945, the chair opened with ‘a vigorous and balanced vindication of the Residential Children’s Home System, and indicated certain advantages it had over foster-home arrangements, e.g. a wider liberty, a more generous upbringing, and generally more stabilised conditions’.

In common with both Beveridge and MO writers, the voluntary movement also came to recognise that older people were emerging as a key group in need: ‘war has created many new trials and anxieties for old people’, reflected the NCSS. Indeed, in October 1940, the NCSS convened a conference of organisations and individuals concerned with the welfare of older people, which led to the formation of the NOPWC with an initial membership of 18 national voluntary organisations and government departments, and a remit ‘to study the needs of old people’. The Committee focused its first efforts on the effects of the Blitz and – following requests to help with the evacuation of older people out of London from the Ministry of Health – an investigation into the conditions and experiences of evacuated older people. From the outset, a key plank of the NOPWC’s work was research into the specific, unmet welfare needs of older people. The key areas of need identified included: poor housing conditions and overcrowding; poverty; ill-health and lack of appropriate healthcare for older people; the role of family in providing both help and hindrance to older people; loneliness; lack of meaningful occupation; and
other social needs of older citizens. As we will illustrate later, it is striking how many of these problems were still relevant 70 years later.

The 1940s, then, saw an emerging consensus among these different sets of actors that unmet welfare needs were significant, and increasingly so, both among the population, and particularly for certain groups, including older people, working class young people, and children deprived of a normal home life. Voluntary organisations were successful in both articulating the needs of their beneficiary groups and providing evidence of these needs to inform state narratives and secure policy responses. This broad agreement triggered responses from central and local government and from established and newly founded voluntary organisations. It led to the development of new welfare legislation by the wartime coalition, followed by a raft of policy and legislative changes brought in by the subsequent post-war Labour government (as discussed in Chapter One).

If the 1940s set the parameters for a comprehensive state-led welfare regime which contributed to increased social mobility, rising levels of affluence, and increased average life expectancy in subsequent decades (Marshall, 1950; Measor and Williamson, 1992; Squires, 1992; Howe, 2008; Savage, 2010), by the 2010s things had changed dramatically. The 2010s became a decade of economic, social and demographic change for England. The average life expectancy for men and women slowed unexpectedly and decreased for women over the age of 85 (Institute of Health Equity, 2017). The United Nations Special Rapporteur Philip Alston, visiting the UK in 2018, noted a growth in poverty: ‘14 million people, a fifth of the population, live in poverty. Four million of these are more than 50% below the poverty line, and 1.5 million are destitute, unable to afford basic essentials’ (Alston, 2019: 1). By 2012 it was suggested that inequality (in terms of share of income taken by wealthiest) was back to 1940s levels (Dorling, 2019). Like the 1940s, the 2010s witnessed rapid changes linked to
welfare needs. Unlike the 1940s, however, inequality, poverty and unmet needs continued to rise throughout the decade.

2010s: recognition of growing levels of unmet need

Voluntary sector narratives about need in the 2010s had much in common with those produced in the 1940s. Particularly resonant were the narratives, produced by the NCVO, Age UK, the NCYVS and Children England, that focused on the growth in unmet need for older people, young people and children. Indeed, there are some striking similarities in the issues that these groups focused on in the 2010s compared to the 1940s. They included housing and homelessness; unemployment and precarious employment, particularly for young people (with a growing concern, for example, about the gig economy and that ‘a two-tier jobs market is rapidly emerging’); social care; health/ill-health; loneliness; and poverty. Cutting across these issues was a broader concern for the growing level of inequality and an awareness that certain groups within the population were experiencing far more rapidly rising levels of unmet need than others.

Children England, the NCVYS and UK Youth, for example, all raised concerns about the growing levels of need being experienced by families, children and young people, particularly within more deprived parts of the country. They campaigned for government to address growing levels of child poverty, educational inequalities, youth unemployment and the growing gap in the employment rate between young and older workers, and issues of homelessness and home ownership. Meanwhile, Age UK campaigned and provided evidence of issues such as pensioner poverty, inadequate housing, loneliness (which it characterised as ‘a scourge of our busy, modern society’) and increasingly complex health and social care needs.

While in broad agreement about growing levels of need, state narratives in the 2010s were dominated by a core
argument that there were individuals who were economically and socially inactive – in essence, an underclass – who were not participating in British society. This argument was a central tenet of the ‘Breakthrough Britain’ reports by the Conservative think tank the Centre for Social Justice, which identified ‘five pathways to poverty’: family breakdown, worklessness, serious personal debt, addiction and educational underachievement, likened to Beveridge’s five giant evils. The key argument employed was that governments had become fixated on income levels and poverty lines without understanding the wider social circumstances experienced by those in poverty, thus locking them out of full citizenship and participation in society. Six months after the election of a Conservative majority government in 2015, David Cameron built on this argument in a speech which signalled the launch of a forthcoming ‘Life Chances Strategy’ that would ‘transform the lives of the poorest’. Cameron argued that ‘It isn’t so much the dreadful material poverty that was so widespread in decades gone by – though of course some still exists. Today, it is more often the paucity of opportunity of those left behind that is the greatest problem.’ Cameron then spoke of the need to ‘break free from all of the old, outdated thinking about poverty’ arguing that ‘by applying a more sophisticated and deeper understanding of what disadvantage means in Britain today we can transform life chances’. The proposed strategy encompassed a range of themes, including employment, safeguarding children, education, housing, and treatment for substance addiction. The EU referendum in June 2016 interrupted the launch of the strategy but April 2017 saw the publication of *Improving Lives: Helping Workless Families*, which set the scene for further investment in the ‘Troubled Families’ programme. A specific ‘Life Chances Fund’ was set up to promote Social Impact Bonds, where external investors would provide up-front funding for projects tackling key social problems, with reimbursement by the state if key targets were met.
The questioning of genuine material poverty was also found in a small number of MO scripts, produced in 2018 by older, more right-wing writers. Most writers were not experiencing material poverty at the time of writing, but some shared childhood memories of poverty. However, some, who identified as being politically oriented towards the centre or the left, framed their discussion of poverty and needs within a narrative of ‘rights’ and ‘dignity’: ‘Essential needs in the modern world in terms of what welfare needs to enable people to afford would seem to be: food, clean water, sewerage, healthcare, sufficient heating for winter (no ‘fuel poverty’), electricity, and (increasingly so) the internet.’

Some writers remarked that, in a time of austerity, the collective definition of what constituted fundamental needs and rights was shrinking to refer to more basic needs of food, shelter and warmth. Many writers expressed the view that the needs of children and young people ought to include opportunities to progress their lives, echoing Cameron’s sentiment that people should not be left behind by their experience of poverty. Yet, while there was some agreement on the need to ensure opportunity for those experiencing material poverty, there was no consensus in the 2010s on the nature of that need, or the solutions that might resolve it.

We thus saw narratives focused on the growing levels of unmet need in both timeframes, and concern from voluntary organisations and the public at these unmet needs. Across both decades, voluntary organisations played a central role in articulating the needs of their beneficiaries, and to varying extents the needs of a wider population. Voluntary organisations provided research and expert testimony to demonstrate these needs to state actors, although the extent to which this expertise was heeded differed. Meanwhile, state narratives tended to construct need around core contextual problems such as unemployment, focusing attention on individuals in need rather than its structural causes. This leads us to a consideration of discussions of authenticity of need in the
two timeframes, and how there were considerable differences in how these narratives were framed.

**Deserving and undeserving welfare recipients: an enduring narrative**

An enduring narrative across both periods of time – despite significant legislative, demographic, economic and social change in the meantime – was of deserving and undeserving welfare recipients, related to notions of authentic and inauthentic need. Although judgement was not entirely absent from voluntary sector narratives, such sentiments were particularly prevalent in both public and state narratives.

As Howard Glennerster and Martin Evans (1994) note, Beveridge’s report was underpinned by judgemental attitudes about those groups in need who would not be able to contribute to an insurance scheme and would need recourse to means-tested national assistance. Minutes of the first committee meeting evidence the setting up of a sub-committee for those likely to need assistance: ‘Cripples, the deformed, deaf and dumb, mentally deficient and vagrants and moral weaklings’ (cited in Glennerster and Evans, 1994: 59). This particularly disparaging language by 21st-century standards (which was also reflected in terminology utilised by some voluntary organisations to describe their beneficiaries at the time) did not make its way into the final report. The Beveridge Report’s use of language, its focus on the insurance of working men supporting female homemakers, its juxtaposition of the concept of ‘contributions’ with the concept of ‘assistance’ and accompanying conditionality for those not contributing, however, fed into long-standing public discourses of the deserving and undeserving poor. These have existed for hundreds of years. For example, the 1494 Vagabond and Beggars Act, the 1536 Act for Punishment of Sturdy Vagabonds and Beggars, and the 1552 Poor Law all drew on the difference between those who were in need because of personal faults
(such as being idle or thriftless) and those who were in need through no fault of their own.

Such a distinction can be seen in 1940s MO responses by writers of different political persuasions. For example, one 1940s panellist wrote that he supported a welfare state, but believed that idlers should not receive support: ‘A good thing if wisely distributed as a palliative, but we should aim at a social state where the workers get the best & the idlers the worst conditions and money has no power over lives.’ Writing in April 1947 was often sympathetic to those experiencing ‘want’, with writers from across the political spectrum frequently using descriptors such as ‘temporary distress’ or experiencing ‘misfortune’ without blame. This fits with Harris’s (2004: 284) observation that ‘One of the most important consequences of the war was to demonstrate that people could be placed in poverty through no fault of their own’. Although this writing demonstrated some understanding, and sympathy, these distinctions also served to create a narrative of judgement – that genuine need was a temporary condition caused by unhappy accident. Implicit within this narrative is the existence of another type of less authentic need, which was often long term in nature and likely to have been self-created.

Within these MO responses was an implicit lack of trust in those whose need was very visible, particularly beggars who made personal approaches for charity. Although several writers noted that at the time of writing, in 1947, these solicitations were less numerous than they used to be, personal approaches for help were socially awkward and embarrassing for those approached, and many writers preferred the anonymity of either organised charity or state welfare.

These narratives have clear parallels in the 2010s. Writers from different political viewpoints responding to the 2018 MO directive, for example, echoed earlier notions of ‘no fault’ and ‘temporary distress’, while also reproducing stories of deserving and undeserving recipients of state and charitable welfare,
often utilising the stereotype of large, workless families, living unhealthy lives of abundance, funded by the state. While these stories provided clear examples of those whom writers thought were undeserving, there was ambivalence about people with certain unmet needs, particularly the visible needs of those living on the streets. Concern about homelessness and begging was a leitmotif in responses to the 2018 directive (alongside foodbanks, which we discuss later). Writers were concerned that people who were ‘genuinely’ homeless should receive help, but the writing of some was comprised of contested and contradictory discourses that mixed blame and distrust with concern, questioning the authenticity of those saying they were in need. As in 1947, there was a concern that people were abusing the system, expecting state welfare as an automatic right. There were also concerns that some people were abusing charitable help:

Currently it [charity] is relevant in some areas today (care of older people, people genuinely homeless through no fault of their own) but too wide ranging, e.g. people have been observed at food-banks whilst smoking and driving up in a car. They can take free food and then visit their local pub!\(^{19}\)

This cross-political unity in public discourse on distrust may reflect the plethora of 24/7 inflammatory media messages that the UK population has encountered since the advent of the internet (Morrisson, 2019). It may also reflect a lower engagement with party politics compared with the 1940s, which has led to people aligning with certain political parties without necessarily understanding party positions or ideologies (Clarke et al, 2017). This may account for why the views of some MO writers did not necessarily align with their voting behaviours, and why they held ambivalent and contradictory views on social welfare needs and inequalities. These contradictions fit the findings of Andrew Defty (2016),
who drew on survey data to examine public opinion on meeting welfare needs. He found consistently high levels of public support for mass public services, most notably health and education (needed by all citizens), but a hardening of attitudes towards welfare benefit recipients, with support for spending on social security benefits in seemingly terminal decline. Similarly, MO participants in 1947 were supportive of services they needed and used, but appeared less supportive or understanding of services for which they did not have a need.

Such views were also reflected in state narratives, which during the 2010s were dominated by the binary talk of ‘strivers’ versus ‘skivers’ or ‘scroungers’. For example, Conservative Chancellor George Osborne argued, in a speech to the Conservative Party conference in 2012:

Where is the fairness, we ask, for the shift-worker, leaving home in the dark hours of the early morning, who looks up at the closed blinds of their next-door neighbour sleeping off a life on benefits? When we say we’re all in this together, we speak for that worker. We speak for all those who want to work hard and get on. … They strive for a better life. We strive to help them.20

This narrative was a strong feature of political rhetoric across mainstream political discussions, embodied in, and reinforced by, state welfare legislation and policy, and used alongside terms such as ‘welfare dependency’ and ‘troubled’ or ‘problem’ families. Announcing the government’s ‘Troubled Families’ programme in December 2011, Cameron argued:

I hate the idea that we should just expect to pay ever larger amounts in welfare to an ever larger chunk of society and never expect the recipients to change their lives. Our heart tells us we can’t just stand by while people live these lives and cause others so much misery. Our head tells us we can’t afford to keep footing the monumental
bills for social failure. So we have got to take action to turn troubled families around.\textsuperscript{21}

The state’s rebranding of narratives of idleness as ‘worklessness’, and squalor and ignorance as ‘troubled’ or ‘workless families’\textsuperscript{22} were accompanied by the introduction of new punitive modes of social welfare which reflected a hardening of state attitudes towards welfare recipients and spanned the political spectrum. Such narratives also permeated the language and rhetoric of the media, particularly the right-wing press and social media, and the public (as previously discussed) in a rhetorical feedback loop of blame. In the popular and political discourse, families with troubles were recast as ‘troublemakers’ (Crossley, 2018).

The voice of voluntary sector actors is more muted than others in these debates, particularly in the 2010s. Indeed, to some extent, voluntary organisations sought to rebut the distinction between deserving and undeserving poor. Age UK, for example, argued in 2010 that ‘The welfare systems should not stigmatise those who cannot undertake paid work and there needs to be a recognition that people often contribute to society in other ways’.\textsuperscript{23} All the voluntary organisations in this study argued for social justice and defended the rights of marginalised and vulnerable members of society.

Questions of blame: exposing differences across time and between actors

Closely tied into narratives of deserving and undeserving welfare recipients are questions of blame, although these are rarely explicitly articulated. Here, however, there are significant differences between the 1940s and 2010s, alongside differences between actors. The voice of voluntary sector actors was more evident in wider discussions of who was to blame for rising levels of need, particularly in the 2010s.

Implicit within some of the 1940s narratives was the assignment of blame to individuals in need. Within Beveridge’s
five giants, for example, idleness, ignorance and squalor could all be interpreted as blameworthy descriptors of unnecessary need (want and disease appear more blameless). Moreover, among some actors there was a sense that voluntary organisations were also partially ‘to blame’ for rising levels of unmet need: it was due to the deficiencies of the voluntary movement that needs were not being met (we return to this point in Chapter Five). More generally, however, what was significant within the 1940s, across all three sets of actors, was the sense of unity created through the collective experience of the Second World War as a significant – external – contributor to need: there was agreement that the war was largely to blame for rising levels of new and unmet need.

Across the 2010s we discerned much stronger and more explicit narratives of blame – a clearer sense that rising unmet need was someone’s fault – but, with no common outside force (such as war) to pin the blame on, greater polarisation was evident. The Coalition government blamed the previous Labour administration for its profligacy and mishandling of the financial crisis. It also blamed the unemployed and those dependent on, or judged to be abusing, welfare benefits. The dominant government narrative of austerity in the early to mid-2010s put forward public funding cuts as the only credible response to the financial crisis and subsequent recessions. This drew on rhetoric framed around fairness, responsibility and national unity in sharing the burden of fiscal correction: Osborne’s oft-repeated claim that ‘we’re all in this together’, which evoked and echoed the perceived national response to the Second World War.

MO writers blamed combinations of individuals, the government and/or the market, depending on their political orientation. Indeed, narratives of blame – marshalled around a sense of inequality and injustice that permeated discussion of the welfare state – were core themes in the responses of MO writers to the 2018 directive. A key narrative was of a crisis in older people’s social care, with criticism aimed at
the state for promoting market-based approaches and at the commercial sector for failing to adequately meet older people’s needs. Many described poor-quality care received from private companies, either under contract with the local authority or by directly accessing private providers. Writers reflected too on the prohibitive cost of care for those who needed it but were not eligible for local authority support and the negative impact on family members who were being forced to provide informal care for relatives.

Another common theme among MO writers in the 2010s was the emergence of food banks, but here there was more of a divide in views along the lines of political affiliation. For more left-wing writers, the growth of foodbanks was blamed on a rise in social need created by the state’s austerity measures, its project of punitive welfare reform and its failure to meet material needs. This placed the burden of provision onto organised, individual, charitable giving. These left-wing foodbank narratives were accompanied by concerns that individual giving and the voluntary sector would not be able to, or should not be asked to, meet the growing levels of social welfare needs – or ‘philanthropic insufficiency’ in Salamon’s (1987) terms (see also Chapter Three). While not without empathy for those in need, for more right-wing writers, foodbanks signified the economic difficulties that the country was in, and the unsustainability of expecting the state to provide for those in need. As one right-leaning writer suggested, ‘the welfare state does too much for people. It’s looked to, by too many people, as a first resort rather than a last resort. They don’t just expect to be provided for, but they demand it as they consider it their right.’

It is notable that the 2018 directive also saw a generational divide, with younger writers expressing frustration with older people who had been supported by the welfare state throughout their lives continuing to benefit from pensions, winter fuel allowances and, at the time, free television licences. In contrast, some older writers, or those who had elderly parents, wrote about the dashed expectations of the older generation, who
had worked all their lives, contributed national insurance and income tax, and saved to make their old age comfortable. They had expected the state to provide for them once they reached retirement age and beyond, but were shocked to find that they would have to pay for social care. Writers expressed a form of righteous anger at effectively having to subsidise the care of those who had not been so responsible in preparing for their old age. These arguments are in sharp contrast to responses to the April 1947 directive, which saw general concern – particularly among older writers – about the welfare needs of older people, regardless of class, with no blame attached.

Meanwhile, many within the voluntary sector blamed the government, particularly its austerity politics and its pursuit of market-based approaches. A key role for voluntary organisations during the 2010s (as in the 1940s) was in regularly highlighting the growing levels of unmet need being experienced by the individuals and communities that they were supporting and representing, often associating it with austerity-related cuts to government funding and welfare services and the narrowing of eligibility criteria. Voluntary bodies spoke out about the impact of austerity on their service users or beneficiaries, at the same time as they themselves were experiencing funding cuts and navigating perceived attempts by the government to silence such criticism (see Chapter Three). Throughout the decade, for instance, Age UK drew attention to rising levels of unmet need among older people, fearing that ‘years of political neglect’ and ‘a chronic lack of funding and the failure to reform’ had left the care system ‘crumbling’, with the potential to ‘permanently consign a fifth of people to poverty in old age’. This was having a ‘devastating impact on those older people who rely on social care to live with dignity and respect’. Age UK pointed out that funding for older people’s social care had declined by 10 per cent in real terms between 2010/11 and 2013/14. It also raised concerns about cuts to public spending, which were forcing local authorities to redefine their conceptualisation of need and leading many to ‘restrict care to those with only the
highest needs’ at the expense of those with moderate needs.\(^{29}\) This redefinition meant that cohorts of older people whose needs were deemed insufficiently high to gain local authority help were going without support, or having to look beyond the state to the private sector or to the family for that support (as was evidenced in the narratives and experiences of MO writers in 2018).

The crises in funding, provision, access to welfare, and unmet need were echoed and repeated in the narratives of other voluntary organisations throughout the decade. Children England, for example, campaigned against child poverty, repeatedly spoke out against rising thresholds and risks of growing postcode lotteries\(^{30}\) for accessing welfare services, and raised concerns that cuts threatened hard-won children’s rights. The state was largely identified as being to blame through, for example, austerity politics, particularly in terms of cuts to local authority funding, public service reforms, the pursuit of market-based solutions, and associated commissioning processes and practices\(^{31}\) (see Chapter Six), and the displacements of risks, needs and duties from one part of the system to another rather than a recognition of interdependencies and unique roles and capacities.\(^{32}\) Together these developments were seen to be creating a ‘perfect storm’, contributing to rising demand and declining funding.\(^{33}\) Similarly, the NCVYS campaigned against government policies which impacted negatively on young people, arguing, for example, that funding cuts were disproportionately affecting more deprived areas and already disadvantaged young people, evidenced through rising levels of youth unemployment.\(^{34}\)

The voluntary organisations taking part in this study and left-leaning MO writers shared a view that the policies of the Coalition and Conservative governments of the 2010s were largely to blame for rising levels of need. Academic and other commentators also pointed the finger at government’s use of austerity measures and public spending cuts (see, for example, Hiam et al, 2018). In his 2018 visit Philip Alston challenged the
UK government’s austerity narrative, arguing that conditions of poverty and unmet need were not being driven by economic circumstances ‘but rather a commitment to achieving radical social re-engineering’ with ‘revolutionary changes’ to the welfare system and the overturning of ‘the post-war Beveridge social contract’ (Alston, 2019: 2). He further noted that leading and respectable voices within the UK, including charities, think tanks, parliamentary committees and the National Audit Office, had drawn attention to the needs of those living in poverty but had been ignored by Conservative administrations.

Questions of responsibility: from collective to individual responses

Alongside and implicit within these different views of who was to blame for rising levels of need in both decades, different views were also apparent on who was, or who should be, responsible for meeting needs, and at what level. In the 1940s sources we identified a broad and growing agreement that society had a collective responsibility to meet welfare needs – albeit with differences of opinion as to who exactly should provide that collective response. In contrast, in the 2010s, views were far more polarised, but with a growing tendency to point towards individual responsibilities.

Beveridge’s 1942 report proposed a set of collective solutions for meeting needs. These proposals were framed around a national insurance scheme for working citizens, with contributions from the individual, the employer and the state, that would provide workers and their families with unemployment and sickness benefit, family allowances, free universal health care, and old age pensions without a means test. In combination with national assistance and additional voluntary insurance, these solutions would ‘make want under any circumstances unnecessary’ (Beveridge, 1942: para 17). Although the report was not endorsed by the wartime Coalition government, Beveridge ‘used the media of the time effectively to appeal above the heads of the Government,
outflanking both the Treasury and the Prime Minister, Winston Churchill, in presenting his vision of the post-war work, and his detailed ideas for building it’ (Hills et al, 1994: 1).

The Beveridge Report permeated public consciousness and captured the popular imagination (Jones and Lowe, 2002). By 1947, most MO writers were in favour of the state having increased responsibility for welfare. The report’s proposed solution of providing a ‘minimum’ safety net for those in temporary need, building on ideas going back to the 1909 Minority Report on the Poor Law, may have helped to shape public views on how need should be met. However, questions about what level this safety net should be set at were evident at the time and have reverberated in discussions ever since.

An emphasis on a ‘minimum’ of provision by the state was referenced by several writers responding to the MO directive on charity in 1947, before the new welfare state legislation was implemented. One writer, who had voted Conservative in recent years, described having been a strong supporter of state-provided welfare, but by 1947 she had revised her views:

I now take a somewhat modified view. A minimum of State service there should be (State service in the long run being help provided by the whole community, and paid for by taxes); no one should be deprived by lack of funds of health services; no one should have to stand begging, cap in hand, because he can’t earn his own living. But it should be a minimum, not a maximum. I feel a growing tendency nowadays to take State help for granted, without gratitude, almost contemptuously.35

More generally, MO writing from the 1940s provided considerable discussion of who should be responsible for meeting welfare needs, with views expressed often reflecting political allegiances, albeit united around a sense of collective responsibility. Writers who were left-wing supported a state-provided insurance scheme and felt in theory that all those in
need should be provided for through public funds regardless of the context of their need. Some felt this very strongly: ‘I am entirely for doing away with all promiscuous ‘charity’: the State must take care of all the needy’. Left-wing writers tended to argue that addressing need should be the responsibility of the state; but some writers, from across different political persuasions, used other (sometimes interchangeable) terminologies such as ‘the country’, ‘the nation’ or ‘community’. This distinction seems important in that for some it invoked a notion of both collective and personal responsibility for those in need.

The views of some middle class, right-of-centre writers were underpinned by a paternalistic understanding of need and how it should be addressed. These writers described a sense of middle class responsibility to those less fortunate than themselves, and saw charitable giving as a middle class social norm. Most were of the view that this informal system should be retained but did not acknowledge or discuss the state and charity welfare mix that existed at the time of writing. Among all writers, a burgeoning sense of ‘rights-to-come’ emerged from their responses. Unlike in the 2010s, MO writers in the 1940s did not discuss the role of the private sector in providing for need.

When it came to implementing the report, however, compromise was needed. Practically, despite the deeply held commitment to extending state social services, the overall economic situation limited what the new Labour government was able to do in office. The 1940s welfare state was therefore ‘an austerity product of an age of austerity’ (Tomlinson, 1995: 219). As defence spending was cut back, overall public expenditure fell by over 20 per cent in Labour’s first five years in office to 1950, while spending on social services increased only moderately from approximately 10 per cent of GDP to 14 per cent (Tomlinson, 1995: 209). Financial constraints led Labour to introduce the new family allowances at a lower rate than desired and even to consider charges for prescriptions and some NHS treatments (Eversley, 2001; Glennerster, 2007). Expenditure on education, for example, did not exceed
pre-war levels until 1950 (Thane, 2018: 195). Pensions did not provide full subsistence, leaving nearly half a million older people dependent on means-tested benefits in 1948 (p 198). There was to be a continued reliance on voluntary organisations to provide support to the most needy, while commercial provision in various sectors survived.

The state’s assumption of greater responsibility for its citizens was welcomed by the voluntary movement, albeit with some hesitancy over what it might mean for the future of voluntary action (see Chapter Five). For example, Lord Aberdare, Chair of the Council of the NABC, reflected that while the boys club movement might lose ‘some of our freedom’ as a result of new legislation such as the Education Act 1944, this was a price worth paying to improve young people’s lives. The voluntary movement was keen to stress, however, that its roles in both delivering services and in pioneering solutions to new need would, and should, continue. The NCSS, for instance, called for organisations to identify ‘a creative and continuing function post-war’.

By way of contrast, in the 2010s, there was a growing polarisation of views in terms of who should take responsibility. Reinforcing trends since at least the 1980s, there was most notably an intensifying emphasis on individual responsibility for meeting welfare needs. The state, for example, increasingly pushed for individuals and communities to take responsibility for themselves, steering interventions towards voluntary methods for meeting need that seem to echo pre-welfare state approaches. Rebuilding a responsible society became a leitmotif of many speeches and initiatives, especially in the early ‘Big Society’ years of the Coalition government. As the 2010 general election campaign began, Cameron articulated what would become a broad governing approach:

Big society – that’s not just two words. It is a guiding philosophy – a society where the leading force for progress is social responsibility, not state control. It
includes a whole set of unifying approaches – breaking state monopolies, allowing charities, social enterprises and companies to provide public services, devolving power down to neighbourhoods, making government more accountable.\textsuperscript{40}

Six weeks later, outside Downing Street, Cameron’s first words as Prime Minister reinforced the ethos of responsibility:

Real change is not what government can do on its own – real change is when everyone pulls together, comes together, works together, where we all exercise our responsibilities to ourselves, to our families, to our communities and to others. And I want to help try and build a more responsible society here in Britain. One where we don’t just ask what are my entitlements, but what are my responsibilities. One where we don’t ask what am I just owed, but more what can I give.\textsuperscript{41}

These principles informed the Coalition’s subsequent legislative programme. For example, the 2011 Localism Act sought to place responsibility on communities to provide local voluntary solutions to local problems. This initiative had the potential to change public conceptualisation of how need should be met. While more affluent communities had the capacity to rise to these challenges, the Localism Act ignored the lack of resources and capacity available to distressed or deprived communities to do this for themselves (Lindsey, 2013).

While MO writers were agreed that there needed to be a solution to the rise in unmet need, views on the balance of responsibility between the state, voluntary organisations and the market varied according to political orientation. Views rather than solutions were proffered; and these were often contradictory in nature, counterbalancing what would be best in an ideal world, what writers thought they should say to fit their political orientation, and what was realistic. For example,
many left-wing writers believed that the state should take far more responsibility for unmet need; the voluntary sector should not have to step in to pick up responsibilities that had been dropped by the state; yet they acquiesced in the state narrative of austerity, and the inevitability of subsequent cuts to public services. Right-wing writers were concerned and sympathetic about inequalities and poverty but were of the view that the state could no longer take responsibility for meeting all these needs; the state could learn from the market and adopt more business-like models; and the voluntary sector should take more responsibility (see Chapter Five).

There was also a tendency evident within MO writing to believe that individuals should take responsibility for their own situation. For example, while the NHS was viewed by nearly all writers as a cornerstone of the welfare state, a national treasure meeting universal national needs, some MO writers, from across different political orientations, felt that those individuals who had not taken responsibility for their own health (through smoking, substance abuse or obesity) should be denied treatment. These contradictions, about whose needs should be met and by whom, coincide with Defty’s (2016) findings on public attitudes towards state welfare.

There was also concern among MO writers that the safety net was being reset at a minimum that was different to that envisaged by Beveridge. This was voiced by a Conservative-voting, yet left-of-centre, writer:

> In broad terms the aims of the welfare state are to ensure that the population has its basic needs covered for shelter, food and warmth. I view the Welfare State as a safety net but I am aware that in today’s economic climate it de facto necessarily has to provide for some of the essential basic needs of many members of society.\(^{42}\)

Voluntary organisations shared this concern about a resetting of the safety net. More generally, among the voluntary
organisations in our study, the underlying emphasis was on state responsibility for meeting welfare needs, and a concern that this was being eroded, but with a recognition that different actors had a role to play. It was suggested, for example, that the state has responsibility for welfare in terms of upholding rights (for example access to welfare), funding, regulation, quality assurance and, for some, market stewardship. It was acknowledged that a diverse mix of other actors, including voluntary organisations, private businesses and individuals, would then have a role in the delivery of welfare services (with some calling for them to do so ‘responsibly’). Debates were underpinned by a concern for an erosion of (statutory) rights to welfare, and of the basic safety net, with calls for the state to maintain or uphold its (statutory) responsibility for ensuring that those rights are met, regardless of who is delivering welfare services. There was recognition that there was a lack of agreement on how needs should be assessed and where that safety net should be set, and that the state may struggle to meet its responsibilities in the context of an ageing population. This led to calls for a renewed conversation about rights and responsibilities, including how state welfare should be paid for, and what role everyone should play. The NCVO, for example, argued that ‘it is time to talk again about how we work together to make our country stronger, fairer and optimistic about its future’, while Age UK stressed that ‘We cannot go on as we are and it is high time we had a proper national conversation about what our growing older population needs and deserves to live well and how we pay for it’.

Summary

In Chapter Three we focused on how an important narrative of voluntary action is that it is part of how society identifies and meets needs, albeit in different ways. In this chapter we have examined more closely the idea of new and unmet needs in both decades and across all actors. The 1940s and the 2010s are
united by significant enduring issues: growing levels of unmet need, which include homelessness and inadequate housing, loneliness among older people, and poverty, manifested in the 2010s by food insecurity; and a wider questioning of who is or is not deserving of support to meet these needs. Beyond these unifying points, however, there are stark differences in attitudes towards need and the appropriate response to it.

In the 1940s, looking across the narratives articulated by the state, the voluntary movement and the public, we identified a broad consensus on the nature of need and collective responsibility for meeting it. State actors on the left argued that responsibility for addressing and meeting the needs of the ‘distressed’ or ‘disadvantaged’ was of cross-party concern, utilising discourses aimed to allay the concerns of the right, while also assuaging concerns of the public about the supposedly ‘undeserving’ poor. Among the general public, there were differences according to political affiliation regarding who should provide services, with some on the left ruling out a role for voluntary organisations, while some on the right placed responsibility on the shoulders of the middle classes through voluntary efforts. Overall, we conclude that the 1940s can be characterised by a convergence of views on the growing levels of need and a consensus that a collective response was necessary to meet need.

In the 2010s, points of agreement are harder to identify within and across state, voluntary sector, and public narratives. Instead more polarised views on the nature of need were apparent, particularly with regard to who was ‘to blame’ for people being in need, and who should be responsible for meeting their needs. These views tended to be marshalled around political orientation. On the left there was concern at the erosion of welfare state values and public services, and at the widening of differences between those who have and those who do not. On the right we saw a developing rhetoric that challenged the expectations that all needs should be met by the state. We also found evidence of growing differences in
opinion across generations. In contrast to the 1940s, the 2010s can be characterised by increasingly divergent views on need and response, by distrust of those in need (and a more general erosion of trust within society), and by a growing emphasis on individual responsibility for addressing need. These were accompanied by contradictory public concerns about visible needs, such as food poverty and homelessness, funding cuts faced by voluntary organisations delivering social welfare, and fears for the future role of the voluntary sector.