Discord and Distress: A Constructivist Grounded Theory of Homelessness in Austere Times

PhD Thesis

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Abstract

Since 2010, successive governments have pursued an agenda of austerity characterised by reductions in public spending and significant housing and welfare reforms. Taken together, austerity-driven policies hold profound implications for the way in which homelessness is being experienced and responded to at the 'street level'. This thesis presents a constructivist grounded theory study that explores how austerity is being experienced by single homeless people and the practitioners who support them. The empirical element of the study consists of 40 semi-structured interviews conducted with three participant groups: 17 single homeless people residing in accommodation services; nine practitioners from local authority housing departments; and 14 practitioners from homelessness third sector organisations. The study offers insights into the ways in which austerity policies have translated into participants' everyday realities, which are discussed and theorised here in relation to two overarching concepts*: discord* and *distress*. The 'atmosphere' of austerity was shown to be highly evident both within participants' material practices and experiences, but also affectively through their moods, sense of self and imaginings of personal futures (Hitchen, 2016). Participants' accounts of life within the service environment highlight how a combination of welfare and housing reforms, cuts to homelessness provision and significant strain on health and social care sectors meant that service users were at an increasing risk of getting "stuck" in the system, while practitioners spoke in terms of a system "backing up". This study provides a contribution to what is currently a limited body of literature situating experiences of homelessness within contemporary policy contexts. Listening to the lived experiences of those at the 'street level' offers a far more nuanced understanding of the effects of austerity and provides important counter narrative to a policy rhetoric dominated by behavioural explanations of homelessness and of poverty more broadly.

Contents

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Outputs from the study

Parts of this thesis have been presented/published elsewhere as follows:

Oral Conference Presentations

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Carmichael, C. (2019) *Contracts, competition and challenges to autonomy? The changing experience of homelessness VCOs in the context of contemporary austerity.* Presented at the Social and Spatial Inequalities conference, July 2019, Sheffield Hallam University.

Carmichael, C. (2019) *"Getting Stuck": A Qualitative Examination of the Barriers to Exiting Homelessness Services.* Presented at the Social Policy Association conference, July 2019, Durham University.

Poster Conference Presentations

Carmichael, C. (2019) *The paradoxes of 'independence': Exploring service user and practitioner perspectives on pathways out of homelessness.* Presented at FEANTSA 14th Annual European Research Conference on Homelessness, September 2019, University of Lund.

Book Chapters

Carmichael, C. (2020) No way home: The challenges of exiting homelessness in austere times*.* In Rees, J., Pomati, M. and Heins, E. (eds.) *Social Policy Review 32*. Bristol: Policy Press, pp. 251-272.

List of abbreviations

CGT Constructivist Grounded Theory

DCLG Department of Communities and Local Government

DWP Department for Work and Pensions

ESA Employment and Support Allowance

HB Housing Benefit

HRA Homelessness Reduction Act (2017)

JSA Jobseekers Allowance

LA Local Authority

LHA Local Housing Allowance

MH Mental Health

RSI Rough Sleepers Initiative

RTB Right-to-Buy

SHP Single Homeless People

SU Service User

TS Third Sector

TSO Third Sector Organisation

UC Universal Credit

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Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1. Introducing the research study

In 2015, a report published by the United Nations General Assembly characterised the existence of homelessness as an "extreme violation of the rights to adequate housing and non-discrimination and often also a violation of the rights to life, to security of person, to health, to protection of the home and family, and to freedom from cruel and inhuman treatment" (2015, p.3). Despite the clarity of this statement, the persistence and marked increase in homelessness (Fitzpatrick et al., 2019) suggests that governments, including that of the United Kingdom, are failing to protect the basic human rights of the most marginalised and socially excluded members of society.

There is now a large body of evidence to indicate that the austerity programme instituted by the newly elected Conservative-led Coalition in the wake of the global financial crisis of 2008-2009 has had a significant impact on the scale and nature of homelessness in this country. Introduced in May 2010, this austerity programme has consisted of an overhaul of housing and welfare policies, widespread cuts to public services and a localist agenda that has essentially transferred responsibility for community issues from central government to local authorities and the third sector. Sitting alongside and justifying these measures has been a rhetoric in which behavioural explanations of poverty have gained significant traction, and where the structural components of unemployment, welfare dependency and homelessness are increasingly overlooked or actively denied (Pemberton et al., 2016; Patrick, 2016). With regard to homelessness specifically, drastic increases have been recorded across all forms of homelessness in England since 2010 (Fitzpatrick et al., 2019) and provision for single homeless people in particular been one

of the foremost casualties of local government budget reductions (Thunder and Rose, 2019). People experiencing homelessness have also been faced with a series of new challenges as access to support and housing becomes increasingly limited and conditional (Watts et al., 2014; Reeve, 2017; Thunder and Rose, 2019).

This thesis presents a qualitative study examining individuals' lived and felt realities of 'street level' homelessness in a time of austerity. The term 'street level' is adopted throughout this thesis in recognition of a distinction between policy making discourses and the realities of how policy manifests and is experienced 'on the ground' (the latter being of primary interest here). The term 'street level bureaucrat' on which my use of this phrase draws was coined by Michael Lipsky (1980) in his highly cited account of frontline workers in public services.

Following a number of recent studies (Hitchen, 2016; Strong, 2018; Wilkinson and Ortega-Alcázar, 2019), the starting point of this study was a recognition that austerity represents *more* than a series of social and economic policies. It is something that is lived and affectively *felt* within the everyday, particularly by the poorest and most marginalised populations in our society (Hitchen, 2016). Indeed, the fact that the austerity programme has been presented by government both as a necessary evil in a time of economic hardship and as something "we are all in together" (Cameron, 2010) has served to mask the highly uneven manner in which it continues to translate into peoples' everyday lives (Wilkinson and Ortega-Alcázar, 2019). By framing austerity in this way, we gain a far more nuanced picture of what austerity *actually* means for peoples' everyday realities, as Esther Hitchen (2016, 2019) has argued:

Framing austerity in terms of everyday life means that austerity can be seen

as a very different political phenomenon. Instead of a coherent economic

policy, austerity is a multiplicity that surfaces in numerous domains of

peoples' day-to-day practices. Everyday life matters, as austerity in this

context is something that is experienced by living beings, and therefore is

understood through individuals' lived and felt realities (Hitchen, 2016,

p.103).

The empirical material that forms this study is drawn from a total of forty semi-structured interviews with three distinct participant groups: 17 single homeless people residing in homelessness accommodation and resettlement services; nine practitioners working in local authority housing departments; and 14 practitioners working in homelessness third sector organisations. Interview data were collected and analysed in accordance with a constructivist grounded theory framework as set out by Kathy Charmaz (2008a, 2008b, 2014). That a qualitative and inductive methodological design rooted in social constructionist philosophy was chosen for the empirical element of the study allowed it to transcend dominant (and often misguided) imaginings of homelessness and austerity. Instead, the study prioritises how these phenomena were being experienced and given meaning within peoples' lived realities. It is argued that armed with this sort of understanding, we become better placed to contest and counter the austerity rhetoric and pave the way for more appropriate and compassionate policy responses moving forward (Hitchen, 2016; Rose and McCauley, 2019).

1.2. Rationale for the research study

The harmful effects of homelessness are well-documented in the existing literature, and include risk of mental and physical ill health, self-harm and suicide, involvement in sex work, begging and anti-social behaviour, harmful substance use, extended unemployment, and involvement in the criminal justice system both as victim and perpetrator (Fitzpatrick, Kemp and Klinker, 2000; McDonagh, 2011; Mackie and Thomas, 2014). Beyond the obvious impact on those individuals who are facing homelessness, it is apparent here that rising levels of homelessness are placing considerable strain on a multitude of public services and third sector organisations. However, there is currently a paucity of qualitative research that explicitly situates practitioners' and service users' accounts of homelessness in the context of contemporary austerity, and this is the central concern and focus of this thesis. Existing research on austerity has predominantly sought to map the impact of policy reforms on a larger scale (regional or national) via the use of quantitative methods (Strong, 2018). While certainly useful in improving our understanding of austerity, such approaches alone do not allow us to capture the entirety of how austerity surfaces and is felt within peoples' everyday realities (Hitchen, 2016; Strong, 2018).

The scale and speed of cuts to public services, and particularly to homelessness service provision, has meant that both service users and practitioners are now navigating a fundamentally different landscape than that seen previously (Alden, 2015a; Daly, 2018). If policy and provision fail to suitably respond to the challenges posed by this new landscape, the extent of the homelessness 'problem' is likely to become yet more critical. Here, intervention is particularly crucial for single homeless people, who are recognised as being particularly vulnerable to the effects of austerity given their lack of entitlement

both to statutory homelessness provision and to adult social care. 'Single homeless person' is a term used to refer to individuals and couples without dependent children who sit outside of the remit for statutory assistance as per the existing homelessness legislation. Many single homeless people are also reliant on a range of support services (e.g., resettlement, targeted drug and mental health providers) that have been placed under increasing strain since the implementation of the austerity programme (Bowpitt et al., 2011a; Daly et al., 2012). Thus, a contemporary re-evaluation both of what it means to be a single homeless person and of what it means to work in the homelessness sector is clearly warranted.

This thesis represents 'voices' that often go unheard in academic, policy and public discourses. Single homeless people residing in non-statutory accommodation services form part of a substantive yet largely hidden population. Their inclusion in this research provides insight into the nature of services themselves; the characteristics and experiences of service users; and the barriers that they face in their attempts to move out of homelessness. This is particularly timely given that there is a growing concern amongst practitioners and academics around the way in which non-statutory provision for single homeless people is currently operating (Johnsen and Teixeira, 2010), a theme that will be discussed in Chapter Four of this thesis. Furthermore, while small bodies of literature have examined the experiences of homeless people (Daly et al., 2012, 2016; Fitzpatrick et al., 2016; Johnsen, Watts and Fitzpatrick, 2016; Wilson and Barton, 2019), third sector practitioners (Daly, 2016, 2018; Watson, Nolte and Brown, 2019) and/or local authority practitioners (Alden, 2015a, 2015b) in the context of austerity, the combination and comparison of these three groups' perspectives in one account is thought to be novel.

Finally, and given the background of well-documented methodological difficulties in researching marginalised and 'vulnerable' populations, this thesis serves to provide a reflective account of a process of conducting research on homelessness. In doing so, it highlights the value offered by grounded qualitative approaches both to this and comparable research topics during times of austerity.

1.3. Aims of the research study

The central aims of this research study may be summarised as follows:

- To gain understanding of how austerity-driven reforms and rhetoric have translated into the 'street level' experiences of homeless service users, practitioners and service providers.

- To critically compare the way in which homelessness is framed by policymakers with single homeless peoples' and practitioners' everyday realities.

- To deepen understanding of transitions into and out of homelessness in the context of austerity, and to consider the implications these hold for policy responses and interventions.

- To contribute specifically to knowledge on the lives and experiences of single homeless people residing in homelessness accommodation and resettlement services.

- To place the 'voices' of homeless people and practitioners at the forefront of theoretical developments, reflecting the belief that listening to participants' personal narratives is the best way to achieve a thorough and nuanced understanding of this topic.

1.4. Statement of research questions

The research aims were explored through and guided by a single overarching research question and three sub questions. In developing these, my own initial ideas about the topic were formulated and refined through the process of literature review. The overarching question is:

- **How is homelessness being experienced and managed at the 'street level' in the context of post-2010 austerity?**

The sub questions are:

- What is it like to be a single homeless person in the context of post-2010 austerity?
- What is it like to work in homelessness service provision in the context of post-2010 austerity?
- How do practitioners and service users construct their experiences in relation to the current policy context?

1.5. Structure of the thesis

The remainder of this thesis is divided into four parts. Part I of the thesis, comprising chapters two to four, summarises and critically examines existing knowledge relating to the research topic.

Chapter Two effectively provides a foundation for this study, bringing together existing literature on the scale and nature of homelessness in England. It considers the various definitions, explanations and theoretical perspectives on homelessness and summarises current knowledge about each stage of the homelessness 'pathway' (Clapham, 2002).

Chapter Three details policy responses to homelessness in England between 1977 and the present day. The latter section of the chapter specifically attends to the austerity programme implemented since 2010 and considers the implications that specific policy reforms hold for single homeless people and homelessness provision. This chapter also asserts the need to move beyond thinking of austerity as a set of policies alone, and to consider it as an affective phenomenon felt within peoples' everyday lives.

Chapter Four discusses existing literature on the role played by both statutory (local authority) and non-statutory (third sector) providers in responding to homelessness. The various factors that may affect the working practices of these groups, and how this may be changing against the context of austerity, are discussed. This chapter also situates the empirical element of this study alongside current debates around how to best support homeless people outside of the statutory remit of local authorities, and evaluates the evidence base of the two major approaches: linear, 'treatment first' models and alternative 'Housing First' models.

Part II, comprising *Chapter Five*, introduces the theoretical position and methodological design adopted in the empirical study, and provides an overview and rationale for both the use of constructivist grounded theory and semi-structured interviewing. It then goes on to provide a detailed account of the processes of data collection and analysis. The ethical implications of this research are considered, with particular emphasis on the experience of researching with a marginalised population. Additionally, the reader is directed towards the appendices of the research where detailed examples of the methodological strategies adopted in the study are provided.

Part III, comprising ***Chapters Six to Eight,*** presents and explores the empirical findings of the study. Drawing on the concept of a homelessness pathway (Clapham, 2002), the first two findings chapters discuss the service user participants' pathways into, experiences of and pathways out of homelessness. The final findings chapter situates participants' narratives within broader policy and organisational contexts and also attends to practitioners' accounts of working in the homelessness sector. The structure and content of the empirical findings chapters are fully introduced prior to the start of Chapter Six.

Part IV, comprising ***Chapter Nine*** presents the overall grounded theory that was constructed from the empirical findings explained with reference to two overarching theoretical concepts: discord and distress. This is then discussed in relation to the existing literature and several recommendations for policy, practice and ongoing empirical research are noted.

Before moving on, it is important to recognise that there remains significant debate regarding the appropriate position of the literature review within grounded theory research (see McGhee, Marland and Atkinson; 2007; Dunne, 2011; Charmaz, 2014 for discussion). Classic and 'Glaserian' forms of grounded theory explicitly advise against conducting a literature review prior to data analysis, believing that this inhibits the inductive process (Glaser and Strauss, 1967). More recent contributions to the field have acknowledged that this is often an implausible and inappropriate demand given that conducting academic research generally requires adherence to specific frameworks and that researchers rarely enter the field without considerable prior knowledge of their given topic. In their revised approach to grounded theory, Strauss and Corbin (1990) suggest that an early examination of existing literature can assist in positioning research questions, enhance sensitivity and "stimulate our thinking about properties or

dimensions that we can then use to examine the data in front of us" (p.45). With this in mind, the main review of literature in this study was conducted prior to the start of data analysis. The aim of this review was not to derive an a priori conceptual framework or hypothesis from existing literature, but to provide a platform from which the 'street level' realities of homelessness in the context of the post-2010 austerity programme could be explored (McGhee, Marland and Atkinson, 2007, p. 340). In the latter stages of this thesis, and in response to concepts emerging from the data, it was necessary to draw on a broader literature than is presented in the initial review. Further detail on the specific strategies employed during the initial review of the literature, and the application of exclusion and inclusion criteria are presented in Appendix J.

Part I: Literature Review

Chapter 2: Understanding and explaining homelessness

2.1. Introduction to the chapter

This, the first chapter of the literature review, provides an overall basis for approaching homelessness as a research topic. Recognising that homelessness is itself a highly politicised and contested phenomena, the first two sections of the chapter critically examine existing approaches to defining and conceptualising homelessness as a topic for research. Particular attention is given here polto the homelessness 'pathways' framework that helped to inform the empirical findings to be presented in Part III of the thesis. The final three sections of the chapter then summarise key themes in the existing evidence relating to pathways respectively into, through and out of homelessness.

2.2. Definitions of homelessness

Defining homelessness is no simple task, and is one that has received significant attention in the existing literature. No singular accepted definition exists, and those that do are recognised to be subject to specific policy, organisational and/or ideological agendas and interests (Dean, 2015; Farrugia and Gerrard, 2015). Indeed, that estimates of the scale of homelessness offered by stakeholders regularly vary is, in part, reflective of the fact that they are often measuring homelessness in fundamentally different ways: as acknowledged by Hutson and Liddiard (1994), "statistics can tell us more about the organisation collecting them than about the phenomena that are being measured" (p.32). Broadly speaking, definitions produced by policymakers and governments have tended to be narrow, thus limiting their perceived responsibility. On the other hand, third sector organisations, campaign groups and researchers favour definitions with a far more expansive reach and have thus tended to identify much larger numbers of

homeless people (Minnery and Greenhalgh, 2007; Amore, Baker and Howden-Chapman, 2011). The consequences of how homelessness is defined should not be understated; as Ravenhill notes, definitions have "shaped and formed public policy, moulded and manipulated public opinion, identified causes and defined solutions" (2008, p.5).

Before moving on to consider academic definitions of homelessness, I begin by setting out the definitions/categories of homelessness used in policy and practice given that these are the most commonly used and, arguably, also the most influential. For ease of reading, this terminology (statutory homelessness, single homelessness, hidden homelessness) is adopted through the remainder of this thesis.

Statutory homelessness

The legislative definition of homelessness is currently found in Part 7 of the 1996 Housing Act. In the first instance, homelessness is here solely defined in relation to a (lack of) legal right to housing:

> [A] person is homeless if he or she has no accommodation in the UK or elsewhere which is available for his or her occupation and which that person has a legal right to occupy. A person is also homeless if he or she has accommodation but cannot secure entry to it, or the accommodation is a moveable structure, vehicle or vessel designed or adapted for human habitation (such as a caravan or houseboat) and there is no place where it can be placed in order to provide accommodation. A person who has accommodation is to be treated as homeless where it would not be reasonable for him or her to continue to occupy that accommodation.
>
> (DCLG, 2006)

When compared to international equivalents, this definition is remarkably broad and progressive in that it recognises all persons without permanent housing to be homeless. However, the legislation becomes far narrower in its distinction between those deemed to be statutory homeless persons (to whom local authorities have a duty to immediately accommodate) and those deemed to be non-statutory homeless persons, to whom local authorities have a far lesser duty (Anderson, 2004; Dwyer et al., 2014; Lund, 2016). To be judged as statutorily homeless, applicants must demonstrate that they have a connection to the local area, are homeless 'unintentionally' (through no fault of their own) and conform to a 'priority need' criterion. In this way, an individual may be recognised as homeless, but may not be eligible for housing assistance. A detailed analysis of the construction of homelessness in policy, and the particular policy context, is provided in the next chapter.

Single homelessness

The term single homelessness (or single homeless person) is widely used in policy and practice to cover those individuals and couples who do not have dependent children and are unlikely to be owed a 'main homelessness duty' (i.e., temporary or permanent accommodation) by their local authority. A large proportion of those experiencing single homelessness will be accommodated by third sector services in shelters, hostels and supported housing projects. Others will remain street homeless ('rough sleeping') or in hidden settings (Homeless Link, 2019). All of the service users who participated in the empirical element of this study would likely be classed as single homeless people in both the policy and practice environment.

Hidden homelessness

Hidden homelessness can be recognised as a subcategory of single homelessness, specifically referring to persons experiencing homelessness in concealed settings and therefore unlikely to be captured in official estimates. This includes circumstances like 'sofa-surfing' (staying informally with friends or family), sleeping on public transport, staying at a private B&Bs or hostels, squatting, and sleeping rough in less visible spaces such as abandoned or little-used buildings (Homeless Link, 2019).

Academic definitions of homelessness

In public and media discourses, the use of the term 'homelessness' has generally become synonymous with literal rooflessness/street homelessness (widely referred to as 'rough sleeping') (McCarthy, 2018). However, consensus within the academic community is that that this actually represents only a small proportion of the homeless population and far broader definitions are generally applied encompassing a range of housing-based circumstances. The following 'common-sense' definition is often applied:

(a) rooflessness (i.e. street homelessness or 'rough sleeping);

(b) living in emergency/temporary accommodation for homeless people in hostels/night shelters;

(c) living long term in institutions because no other accommodation is available;

(d) bed and breakfast or similar accommodation unsuitable for the long term;

(e) informal/insecure/impermanent accommodation with friends, or under notice to quit, or squatting;

(f) intolerable physical conditions, including overcrowding;

(g) involuntary sharing (e.g. abusive relationships).

(Fitzpatrick et al., 2000, p.78, as cited in Anderson and Christian, 2003, p.106).

It has also been argued, however, that such broad definitions may result in overgeneralisation of individuals' experiences and the overlooking of distinct issues associated with "actual" homelessness (i.e., street homelessness):

> Overcrowding, poor housing conditions and insecurity of tenure are all very important problems … but apart from their most extreme manifestations, they cannot be regarded as homelessness. Quite simply, being poorly housed is one thing, having nowhere to live at all is something else. What is referred to as hidden homelessness is generally not homelessness at all, but instead encompasses moderate to severe housing need. (Pleace, Burrows and Quilgars, 1997, p.8)

Following calls to work towards a definitional consensus (Fitzpatrick, Kemp and Klinker, 2000), the most widely used definition in the literature appears to be the European Typology of Homelessness and Housing Exclusion (ETHOS). Developed by FEANTSA, a European-wide network of homelessness researchers, this typology encompasses a broad range of housing circumstances divided into the subcategories of *rooflessness, houselessness, insecurely housed, and inadequately housed,* further detailed in Table 2.1.

Conceptual category	Operational category		Living situation	
Roofless	**1**	People living rough	**1.1**	Public space or external space
	2	People staying in night shelters	**2.1**	Night shelter
Houseless	**3**	People in accommodation for the homeless	**3.1**	Homeless hostel
			3.2	Temporary accommodation
			3.3	Transitional supported accommodation
	4	People in a women's shelter	**4.1**	Women's shelter accommodation
	5	People in accommodation for immigrants	**5.1**	Temporary accommodation, reception centres
			5.2	Migrant workers' accommodation
	6	People due to be released from institutions	**6.1**	Penal institutions
			6.2	Medical institutions
			6.3	Children's institutions/homes
	7	People receiving longer-term support (due to homelessness)	**7.1**	Residential care for older people
			7.2	Supported accommodation for formerly homeless people
Insecure	**8**	People living in insecure accommodation	**8.1**	Temporarily with family/friends
			8.2	No legal (sub) tenancy
			8.3	Illegal occupation of land
	9	People living under threat of eviction	**9.1**	Legal orders enforced (rented)
			9.2	Repossession orders (owned)
	10	People living under threat of violence	**10.1**	Police recorded incidents
Inadequate	**11**	People living in temporary/ non-conventional structures	**11.1**	Mobile homes
			11.2	Non-conventional building
			11.3	Temporary structure
	12	People in unfit housing	**12.1**	Dwelling unfit for habitation
	13	People living in extreme overcrowding	**13.1**	Highest national norm of overcrowding

Table 2.1. ETHOS typology (FEANTSA, 2006), adapted from Amore, Baker and Howden-Chapman (2011, p.28).

Homelessness and home

A number of broader definitions draw on specifically notions of home in order to define homelessness, presenting the two as mutually dependent and dichotomous (Dovey, 1985; Wardhaugh, 1999). In a now widely cited publication, Somerville (1992) presents both home and homelessness as multidimensional concepts (see also Somerville, 2013). Here, "homelessness is ideologically constructed as the absence of home and therefore derivative from the ideological construction of home[1]" (Somerville, 1992, p. 530). Both are constructed according to a series of dichotomies, as outlined below in Table 2.2.

Key signifiers of home	Key signifiers of homelessness
'Shelter'(material protection)	Lack of shelter
'Hearth' (warmth, comfort)	Lack of hearth
'Heart' (emotional stability, love)	Heartlessness
'Privacy' (control, possession)	Lack of privacy
'Roots' (source of identity, sense of self)	Rootlessness
'Abode' (occupying physical space)	Lack of abode
'Paradise' (related to the idealisation of home)	'Purgatory'

Table 2.2. Somerville's meanings of home and homelessness (Adapted from Somerville, 1992, p. 533)

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[1] The meaning of 'home' (both for homeless people and more broadly) has been extensively explored and debated in the literature (for example, Moore, 2000; Holloway and Hubbard, 2001; Kellett and Moore, 2003; Mallett, 2004; Padgett, 2007; Parsell, 2012).

From this perspective, narrower housing-based definitions (such as those detailed above) are deemed to be insufficient as they overlook the emotional and psychological forms of deprivation that homelessness can entail. Indeed, accompanying such definitions tends to be a recognition that, to be successful, interventions and resettlement strategies must move beyond a pure focus on housing and consider homeless persons' broader health and wellbeing needs (Dovey, 1985).

Studies that have argued that home and homelessness should be understood as dichotomous have, however, faced criticism for assuming that home necessarily represents a positive experience for all as it may not, for example, for those in abusive relationships (Wardhaugh, 1999; Leggatt-Cook and Chamberlain, 2015), and also for assuming that a 'typical' home is something that all homeless people necessarily aspire to:

> What is valued by homeless people is often ignored, diminished, and set aside in favour of a set of steps back to the stereotypical home … Homeless people are harshly penalised for avoiding traditional family life, and trying to force them into societal moulds is not helpful. (Moore, 2007, p. 152)

Presenting homelessness as a 'lack' of home also has the potential to adhere to purely psychological, and therefore individualistic explanations of homelessness and as such, risks overlooking the role of the housing and welfare systems, and of broader structural inequalities, as below (Ravenhill, 2008, p.13).

Homelessness as a stigmatised identity

Within existing literature, homelessness has often been assumed to represent a form of 'stigmatised' identity (Snow and Anderson, 1987; Phelan et al., 1997; Belcher and

DeForge, 2012; Rayburn and Guittar, 2013; McCarthy, 2013). Stigma has subsequently been used as a theoretical lens through which the meaning and experience of homelessness has been explored, with the seminal work of Erving Goffman (1963) particularly influential. For Goffman, stigma is defined as an attribute or characteristic that represents a deviation from "normative expectations" within social settings (p.13). This serves to "spoil" (p.ii) a person's identity and exclude them from the mainstream (see also Phelan et al., 1997). Crucially, it is recognised that the characteristics that may be classed as stigmatised are changeable across time and context, and thus must be situated within broader social and political contexts (Goffman, 1963; Link and Phelan, 2001; Lloyd, 2010; Watts, 2013).

It has been suggested that within contemporary Western society, homelessness (particularly in its most visible forms) represents a form of stigma as it stands in stark contrast to 'being at home', a taken-for-granted social norm and signifier of social status (Wardhaugh, 1999; McNaughton, 2008; Watts, 2013). In a similar vein to the literature around the concept of 'home' described above, what this conceptualisation of homelessness as a form of stigmatised identity brings to light are the psychological and emotional dimensions of the homelessness experience (McNaughton, 2008; Watts, 2013). As such, strategies of how this "spoiled" identity is managed have been the central focus of a number of studies (most notably Snow and Anderson, 1987). However, McCarthy (2013, 2015) has noted that the way in which people may contest the prevalence of this stigma has been featured far less in the existing homelessness literature. That the focus has instead been on how people experiencing homelessness cope with the stigmatised identity may be criticised for assuming that people experiencing homelessness are passive victims to such a label or categorisation (see also

Parsell, 2011). On this point, it is noteworthy that an emergent body of literature has evidenced how other groups in poverty (for example, welfare recipients) often resist and deflect societal stigma through strategies of 'distancing' or 'othering' (see Patrick, 2016; Garthwaite, 2016; Pemberton et al., 2016).

Before moving on, it is worth noting that few research studies have thoroughly examined how homeless people themselves (or those that work directly with them) define homelessness and how this compares with the definitions to be detailed above. A small number of earlier studies found that homeless participants tended to focus their definitions around concepts of insecurity and impermanence rather than material deprivation, but also indicate a tendency to differentiate between rough sleeping and other forms of housing need (see Fitzpatrick, Kemp and Klinker, 2000; McCarthy, 2018). While for this study it was necessary to make some preliminary assumptions (for example, that those residing in homelessness accommodation services would likely define themselves as either previously or currently homeless), overall the study aims to privilege participants' own conceptualisations of what it means to be homeless above existing definitions.

2.3. Approaching homelessness as a research topic
Orthodoxies in homelessness research
A consistent theme across homelessness research is its positioning as a problem in need of a solution. As a result, identifying and assigning importance to a variety of causal factors has been a central focus of existing literature (Somerville, 2013; Farrugia and Gerrard, 2015); indeed, as Farrugia and Gerrard note, the phenomenon of homelessness "appears to demand explanation" (2015, p.4). Central to academic debate on

homelessness is an apparent dichotomy between structural and individual explanations

of its causes. Researchers have long used this polarisation to compare different pieces

of research, explain their own positions and critique legislation (Lee, Lewis and Jones,

1992; Neale, 1997; Jacobs, Kemeny and Manzi, 1999; Seal, 2013).

Broadly speaking, structural explanations focus on homelessness as a by-product of

capitalist systems and emphasise the role played by housing and employment markets,

precarious and low wages, a weak welfare system and structural inequalities around

race, ethnicity, class, gender and age (Belcher and DeForge, 2012; Lyon-Callo, 2004; Seal,

2013; Dwyer et al., 2014). Conversely, individual explanations present homelessness as

a product of personal circumstance and have tended to emphasise the role of personal

tragedy and/or trauma, relationship and family breakdown, mental ill health, harmful

substance use, offending behaviour and other behavioural 'choices' such as

worklessness (Neale, 1997; Belcher and DeForge, 2012; Seal, 2013). Amongst individual

explanations, a further distinction is often made between those that frame the individual

as responsible ("sin talk") and those that frame the individual as inadequate, and

therefore not fully culpable ("sick talk") (Gowan, 2010).

Through the development of homelessness as a field of research, multiple 'orthodoxies'

emerged as to how homelessness should be conceptualised and explained. Generally,

these have been broadly aligned to the dominant political and policy rhetoric of the time

period (see next chapter for further overview), reflecting the often "entangled" nature

of homelessness research and policy-making discourses (see Farrugia and Gerrard, 2015,

p.2). Up until the 1960s, the then limited body of research tended to explain

homelessness in terms of individual pathology or behaviour, focusing heavily on

homeless people's substance use, irresponsible behaviour and "disaffiliation" from

mainstream society (Busch-Geertsema et al., 2010, p. 12; Fitzpatrick, 2005; Somerville, 2013). In the 1970s and 1980s, and broadly reflecting policy changes (see next chapter), researchers in the British context shifted away from the view that homelessness represented an individual failing. The growing number of people facing homelessness meant that purely individual explanations were no longer viewed as adequate (Busch-Geertsema et al., 2010). Instead, researchers began to argue that homelessness was a direct result of particular political, social and economic conditions. In a highly cited and government-funded report in 1981, for example, homelessness was primarily attributed to a lack of affordable housing (Drake, O'Brien and Beiuyck, 1981; Fitzpatrick, 2005; Pleace, 2016). However, these wholly structural explanations for homelessness also faced substantive criticism for overlooking the role of individual agency (Pleace, 2016) and over-emphasising the role of the housing market (Fitzpatrick, 2005). Indeed, that many single and street homeless people have been shown to also experience issues with substance use and mental ill health serves to challenge this perspective (Fitzpatrick, 2005).

In the 1990s, and in response to the criticisms noted above, a 'new orthodoxy' emerged that has shaped the way that homelessness research has been conducted subsequently (Pleace, 2016). This new orthodoxy recognised neither structural nor individual explanations to be sufficient, and instead understands homelessness to be caused by an interplay of both of these. Here, structural factors (housing markets, welfare reforms and so on) are seen to create the conditions in which homelessness is able to occur, and people with particular personal circumstances or characteristics are more vulnerable to these than others (Fitzpatrick, 2005; Somerville, 2013; Pleace 2016). As May explains:

Homelessness is explained with reference to the manner in which changing

structural conditions impact most severely upon particular groups, either

because of a simple position of structural disadvantage or (more usually)

because of some further vulnerability that renders a person especially ill

equipped to cope with those changes. (May, 2000, p.613–614)

Somerville (2013), a proponent of the pathways approach (to be discussed below), is a

leading critic of the new orthodoxy. Central to his argument is that the focus placed on

establishing relationships between structural and/or individual factors (independent

variables) and homelessness (the dependent variable) represents a misunderstanding of

causation:

If you do not pay your rent, you are at risk of being evicted and, therefore,

becoming homeless, but this says nothing about the reasons why you did

not pay your rent, which could equate to a wide variety of independent

variables. Which of these independent variables are associated with your

homelessness, and in what configuration they appear, will depend on your

particular life history. In order to understand homelessness, therefore, it is

first necessary to take account of the biographies of homeless people… This

does not, however, rule out the possibility that, as we learn more about the

life stories of different homeless people, certain patterns or common

themes may emerge. (Somerville, 2013, p.389)

There is also space for interpretation here as to what exactly constitutes a 'structural' or

'individual' factor. For example, poor educational attainment could be regarded both as

an individual 'failing' and as a product of growing up in a particularly deprived area, or

indeed a result of multiple interwoven factors (Fitzpatrick, 2005; Somerville, 2013). Given that moving through the homelessness pathway often has substantial effects on individuals (as below), it may also be difficult to distinguish whether a particular factor (e.g. mental ill health) is pre-existing issue, a *product* of homelessness or both of these (Fitzpatrick, Kemp and Klinker, 2000; Clapham, 2003). Further, by isolating particular factors, there is a risk of overlooking the 'bigger picture', by failing to ask how these factors interact with each other.

Homelessness pathways

In the last twenty years, 'pathways' approaches have emerged as an alternative framework for mapping peoples' transitions into and through homelessness, and into resettlement (Anderson and Tulloch, 2000; Clapham, 2003; Fopp, 2009; Mayock, O'Sullivan and Corr, 2011; McNeill, 2011; Harding, Irving and Whowell, 2011; Chamberlain and Johnson, 2013; Somerville, 2013; Fitzpatrick, Bramley and Johnsen, 2013). According to this perspective, homelessness is constructed as a dynamic process rather than as an outcome and is situated within a persons' longer-term housing pathway (Clapham, 2003). Here it is recognised that being homeless is not a static state, but that a persons' circumstances are likely to change over their life-course and that people are able to exit homelessness. As Clapham (2002, 2003), a central advocate for the pathways approach, explains:

> Homelessness can be seen as an episode or episodes in a person's housing pathway. The pathways framework can shed light on the factors that lead to homelessness, influence the nature of the experience, and enable some people to move out of it (2003, p.123).

Pathways approaches consider the broader life histories of people transitioning through homelessness, aiming to account for both structural and individual factors, and identify patterns in how they interact with each other. In doing so, they have often highlighted how particular characteristics (particularly gender and age) may alter the pathway a person takes through homelessness (see Clapham, 2003; Chamberlain and Johnson, 2013). Clapham (2003) also posits that employing the notion of a pathway allows researchers to identify key 'junctions', that is points where there is some form of change in a persons' housing pathway, and why they might occur (for example, moving from a tenancy into sofa surfing, or moving from street homelessness into services). A more nuanced understanding of the circumstances under which these junctions may occur may help us to prevent/encourage them; as Clapham notes, "it may be that intervention at certain points in the pathway is more effective than at other points" (2003, p.126). Notably, and often in part due to the methodological difficulties in conducting longitudinal research, there is a currently far more extensive body of literature on pathways *into* homelessness than pathways *out*. This is, as McNeill (2011) notes, despite the clear importance of the latter in developing successful policy and practice interventions (see also Mayock, O'Sullivan and Corr, 2011).

For Clapham (2002, 2003, 2005, 2017), pathways approaches to homelessness are firmly rooted in a social constructionist paradigm. Indeed, and influenced by the work of Anthony Giddens, he emphasises the importance of understanding the meanings that people give to their housing circumstances but also, crucially, how these meanings relate to broader social and political structures and discourses:

> [A]n approach to the analysis of housing is needed which is based on social
> constructionism and, therefore, can give due importance to the subjective

meanings held by households. However, social constructionism needs to be

developed to incorporate insights from Giddens' theory of structuration,

which overcomes the common criticism of constructionism that it overlooks

the structural dimensions of interaction. (Clapham, 2005, p. 68)

A number of concerns have been raised in regard to the notion of homelessness pathways. First, in adopting this framework, researchers often have sought to develop generalised models of typical, possible or 'ideal' pathways that a person may take into and through homelessness (see Anderson and Tulloch, 2000; Clapham, 2003; Chamberlain and Johnson, 2013). This has often taken the form of identifying 'risk factors' and thus the pathways approach becomes open to the same criticisms as the new orthodoxy noted above (Somerville, 2013; McCulloch, 2015). Moreover, it is important to recognise that in scaling empirical findings up to form general pathways, there is a risk that these become disconnected from homeless peoples' own narratives and biographies (McCulloch, 2015).

Second, and while the pathways approach set out by Clapham (2002, 2003, 2017) and others does emphasise the importance of holistic analysis, it is often the case that homelessness tends to be conceptualised in relation to housing-based circumstances or need. In a more recent study on pathways through 'multiple exclusion homelessness', Fitzpatrick, Bramley and Johnsen argue for the need to move beyond this focus on housing, and instead "locate homelessness experiences in the context of their [homeless persons'] experiences of other domains of deep social exclusion" (2013, p.150). This, they argue, is particularly paramount for understanding the lives of homeless people with complex needs (see also McCulloch, 2015).

In the study presented in this thesis, I draw on elements of the pathways approach to aid the development of the analysis. Indeed, I recognised that in addressing my own research topic, there was a need to take a broad lens on how austerity is playing out at the 'street level'. Thus, the data collection and analysis placed focus on not only the service users' biographies of *being* homeless, but also on their retrospective accounts of transitioning into homelessness and their anticipated/planned/attempted transitions out. Indeed, a central finding of the entire study is that the effects of austerity are *felt* most acutely as service users attempted to move out homelessness services. The pathways approach is also congruent with the emphasis that I place on the need to move beyond dominant/normative narratives around homelessness and austerity, as I focus on how homeless people construct and give meaning to their own experiences. It is important to note, however, that I do not seek to develop a model/typology of typical or generalised pathways, but instead an overarching grounded theory that accounts best for the experience of these transitions in the context of austerity. Further detail on this is provided in the introduction to the empirical findings, at the start of Part III.

The next three sections of this chapter will briefly summarise the existing evidence base on what is known about each 'stage' of the pathway respectively with specific regard to single homeless people (pathways into homelessness, pathways through/experiences of homelessness, and pathways out of homelessness). Central to this thesis is considering whether single homeless peoples' characteristics, experiences and transitions are changing or have changed in the context of post-2010 austerity.

2.4. Pathways into homelessness

While researchers have repeatedly pointed to the heterogeneous nature of the homeless population, an extensive body of research has also sought to identify populations at risk of or more likely to face homelessness. This evidence can be divided into three categories: demographic characteristics; risk factors (life circumstances that increase vulnerability to homelessness); and triggers (specific events that may result in immediate homelessness) (Fitzpatrick, Kemp and Clinker, 2000, p26). As above, it is important that caution is taken in assigning relative weight to any of these, and that these factors are not viewed in isolation either from each other or from the broader social and political context (Busch-Geertsema et al., 2010).

Demographic characteristics

Because less rigorous data exists on single homeless people compared to the statutory homeless population, knowledge on demographic characteristics is only partial. A number of trends may be identified from existing data, however. Overall, the available statistics suggest that the vast majority of single homeless people are men of working age and without dependents or partners. UK-wide data from the Office of National Statistics gathered between 2005 and 2018 indicate that of those applying for homelessness assistance (including those deemed not to be statutorily homeless), young adults (18-25) accounted for around a quarter, while the largest age group was those aged between 25 and 49. In terms of gender, 62% of applicants were male, while 38% were female. That the latter are generally more likely to receive statutory assistance is reflected in the significantly larger proportions of men seen on the streets and in homelessness accommodation and resettlement services (Office of National Statistics, 2019). Similarly, and based on data drawn from non-statutory accommodation providers, a recent report from Homeless Link (2019) states that the majority of single

homeless people accessing accommodation (66%) and day centres (78%) were male, with the proportion of women accessing accommodation (24%) and day centres (17%) low in comparison. Notably, a significant proportion of people accessing accommodation services (30%) and day centres (14%) were young people aged 18-25. Of a survey of 269 people in hidden homelessness settings (Reeve, 2011), the majority were again male (84%), between ages 21 and 50 (85%) and white British (55%) although a significant proportion of other ethnicities were also recorded. Elsewhere, however, it has been suggested that both women and young people (16-24) are more likely to remain in hidden circumstances and their numbers are likely to be underestimated by current statistics (Homeless Link, 2019).

Risk Factors

The main risk factors for single homelessness identified in the existing literature are as follows:

- Childhood adversity

- Lack of family or social support network

- Time spent in the local authority care system

- Histories of offending behaviour/time spent in prison

- Histories of abuse by partner or family members

- Time spent in the armed forces

- Harmful substance misuse

- Mental ill health

- Physical ill health

- Long term unemployment

- Financial insecurity (particularly rent arrears)

- Previous experience of housing insecurity or homelessness

(Fitzpatrick, Kemp and Klinker, 2000; Shelter, 2006; Busch-Geertsema et al., 2010; Bowpitt et al., 2011a; Reeve and Batty, 2011; Mackie and Thomas, 2014; Shelter, 2018)

There is a broad consensus amongst researchers in the British context that the majority of these indicators can and should be understood as rooted in poverty and social exclusion, and that this in itself represents the most common risk factor for homelessness (Fitzpatrick, Kemp and Klinker, 2000; Fitzpatrick, Bramley and Johnsen, 2013; Johnsen and Watts, 2014; Bramley and Fitzpatrick, 2018; Bramley, 2019): As Fitzpatrick, Kemp and Klinker note, "the risk factor that unites virtually all homeless people is poverty – people who are not poor can usually avoid homelessness even if they experience personal crises" (2000, p.28). In their recent analysis of UK-wide datasets[2], Bramley and Fitzpatrick (2018), establish a statistically significant and directional relationship between experiences of poverty (particularly in childhood) and adult homelessness. They argue that this is indicative of the need to take account of the broader social and political context in which people live, regardless of their individual vulnerabilities. The data here also indicates that the key 'protective factor' able to prevent homelessness amongst those who would otherwise be thought of as at risk was the presence of social networks (partner relationships and/or living with others) reinforcing existing indications that the extent (or lack) of family networks plays an important role in the nature and longevity of a persons' homelessness (see also Busch-Geertsema et al., 2010).

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[2] Poverty and Social Exclusion, Scottish Household Survey and British Cohort Study 1970

Triggers

Immediate causes that may trigger homelessness (and particularly street homelessness) identified by existing research are as follows:

- Relationship breakdown

- Leaving a parental home

- Leaving the local authority care system

- Leaving prison

- Leaving the armed forces

- Bereavement

- A sharp decline in mental health

- A sharp increase in harmful substance use

- Eviction from a rented or owned property

(Fitzpatrick, Kemp and Klinker, 2000; Shelter, 2006; Busch-Geertsema et al., 2010; Bowpitt et al., 2011a; Mackie and Thomas, 2014; Reeve et al., 2018; Shelter, 2018).

In the context of this study, the breakdown of a relationship (either with parents or a partner) had previously been recorded as the primary trigger for homelessness in England (Fitzpatrick et al., 2019). This trend, however, appears to be changing. Among those presenting as homeless to their local authority, the end of an Assured Shorthold Tenancy (generally used in the private rented sector) has recently been reported to be the primary cause of homelessness with recorded instances quadrupling between 2009/10 and 2015/16 (Fitzpatrick et al., 2017; Fitzpatrick and Pawson, 2016; Fitzpatrick et al., 2019). Some reports have suggested that the austerity programme has also resulted in homelessness becoming more widespread in nature, with the general population increasingly at risk (FEANTSA, 2011; Shelter, 2016). European-wide research

conducted by FEANTSA found that welfare reforms had created 'new populations' at risk of housing exclusion. This includes middle class families becoming vulnerable due to unemployment and decreased benefits and those in low-paid or precarious employment (e.g., 'zero hour' contracts) struggling to access to secure tenancies (FEANTSA, 2011, p.4). Others, however, have refuted this claim and instead suggested that welfare and housing reform is likely be strengthening (rather than weakening) the relationship between homelessness and poverty (Johnsen and Watts, 2013; Bramley and Fitzpatrick, 2018). Bramley and Fitzpatrick (2018), for example, suggest that the correlations found in their survey data (detailed above) effectively "refute the myth of 'we are all two paycheques away from homelessness'" (p.113). Further analysis of the current policy context and the implications it holds for the homeless population are discussed in the next chapter.

2.5. Pathways through/experiences of homelessness

Pathways through homelessness may include periods spent as street homeless (rough sleeping), sofa-surfing with friends and family, in squats, in emergency/ cold weather shelters and in longer term accommodation and resettlement services. The pathways that people may take through homelessness (and the subsequent experience and effect of homelessness) are recognised in the literature to be highly varied, and dependent on a number of factors that include (but are not limited to):

- (Accessibility to) welfare system

- (Accessibility of) employment markets

- (Affordability/accessibility of) housing markets

- Immigration and criminal justice systems

- Local service provision

- (Extent/strength of) social/support networks

- (Complexity of) individual support needs

- Individual actions of homeless persons

(Adapted from review paper by Busch-Geertsema et al., 2010, p. 59)

Effects of homelessness

With notable exceptions (for example, Reeve, 2011; Sanders, Boobis and Albanese, 2019), existing research on the lives of people experiencing homelessness has tended to prioritise visible rough sleepers, with less known about the effects of more hidden forms of single homelessness (e.g., those living in accommodation services and squats, those sofa-surfing and those sleeping outside in hidden spaces). This is in part due to obvious methodological difficulties in accessing these populations.

It is also widely recognised in the literature that forms of houselessness (that is, sofa-surfing, staying in inadequate housing or in accommodation services) hold the potential for considerable adverse effects on wellbeing (Busch-Geertsema et al., 2010). This can include poor physical and mental health as a result of living conditions; stigmatisation by services and potential employers; social (and geographical) isolation; and fear and uncertainty with regard to the future (see Shelter, 2004; Busch-Geertsema et al., 2010; Reeve, 2011; Leng, 2017; Shelter, 2017). Before moving on, there is, again the caveat that in attempting to measure the effects of homelessness, it is important to recognise that homelessness is generally part of a longer-term trajectory characterised by poverty or other forms of social exclusion. This makes it particularly difficult to ascertain the degree of overlap between the specific effects of homelessness itself from those

associated with broader forms of poverty and social exclusion (Busch-Geertsema et al., 2010).

The prevalence of both poor physical health and mental ill health among those who experience street homelessness are well documented in the existing literature. A health audit conducted by Homeless Link in 2014 found that of 2590 surveyed respondents, 73 percent reported a physical health problem, while 80 percent reported mental health issues. It has been noted that a disproportionate number of people experiencing street homelessness have long-term physical health conditions that are then further exacerbated by their homelessness, while for others, the deterioration in health is directly connected to the adverse conditions on the streets or in inadequate shelter, such as lack of shelter, adverse weather, or poor diet (Reeve, 2011; Thomas, 2012; Homeless Link, 2014). That homeless people are more likely to die prematurely has also been highlighted with some estimates placing the mean age of death at 47 for men and 43 for women, compared with 77 amongst the general population (Thomas, 2012; see also Busch-Geertsema et al., 2010). Crucially, this is not a life expectancy, but rather the average age of those who die whilst rough sleeping or residing in homelessness accommodation services. In terms of access to services, homeless people have been noted as facing barriers in their access to health-related services and are less likely than the general population to be registered with a GP (Williams and Stickley, 2011; Homeless Link, 2014; Rae and Rees, 2015).

With regard to mental health, large discrepancies between the number of homeless people self-identifying as having mental ill health, and those that have a formal diagnosis, is indicative of the barriers in place to accessing mental health support (see Thomas, 2012; Homeless Link, 2014; Rae and Rees, 2015). The same Homeless Link

health audit, for example, revealed that a significant proportion of respondents with mental ill health (17.5%) and also alcohol issues (16.5%) expressed that they would have liked to be receiving support but were not (Homeless Link, 2014; see also Reeve et al., 2018). Also notable is that mental ill health amongst the homeless population appears to be rising, with the number of people recorded as sleeping rough with an identified mental health support need more than tripling over the last five years from 711 in 2009-10 to 2,342 in 2014-15 (St Mungo's, 2016).

Extended periods of street homelessness have also been associated with increased drug and/or alcohol consumption, and involvement in behaviours associated with "street culture": street drinking, 'survival' crime, begging, antisocial behaviour and sex work (Busch-Geertsema et al, 2010; Fitzpatrick, Johnsen and White, 2011; Reeve, 2011; McDonagh, 2011; Mackie and Thomas, 2014; Homeless Link, 2014; Bowpitt and Kaur, 2018). A number of qualitative studies have revealed how substance use may develop or escalate on the streets, both as a form of coping mechanism for living on the streets and suppressing physical and emotional trauma (Wincup et al., 2003; Shelter, 2006; Williams and Stickley, 2011; Mackie and Thomas, 2014), but also as individuals are increasingly exposed to others actively using harmful substances (Shelter, 2006; Williams and Stickley, 2011; Mackie and Thomas, 2014). A particularly high rate of what is generally known as 'dual diagnosis' (that is, combined mental ill health and harmful substance use) is also a central finding of multiple studies (see Busch-Geertsema et al., 2010; the prevalence of dual diagnosis has been recognised as restricting many homeless people from accessing relevant support, as services may be unwilling or unable to provide mental health interventions to service users who are actively using substances (Homeless Link, 2014).

Instances of abuse and violence towards people experiencing street homelessness are a common feature of existing studies (for example, Williams and Stickley, 2011; Albanese and Sanders, 2016; Shelter, 2018). Reporting the findings of a survey conducted with 458 people who had experienced rough sleeping, Albanese and Sanders (2016) found that instances of sexual assault (6%), violence (30%), threats of violence (45%), verbal abuse (56%) and damage to/theft of property (51%) were all commonplace and generally went unreported to police. Accompanying qualitative data indicated the considerable emotional toll caused by instances of abuse, which were recognized as undermining confidence and increasing isolation amongst respondents. Further, that the majority of respondents in the Albanese and Sanders' study felt that life on the streets was "getting worse" raises questions about why this is and, crucially for this study, how this might relate to the particular social and political context.

2.6. Pathways out of homelessness

While the focus of research has often been on identifying causes of homelessness, somewhat less attention has been given to the routes that people may take out of homelessness, and to service users' experiences within accommodation and resettlement services. Indeed, there remains a paucity of biographical and qualitative longitudinal evidence in this area.

At its broadest level, resettlement from homelessness is generally understood and, crucially, measured, in relation to rates of housing retention (McNeill, 2012; Warnes, Crane and Coward, 2013; Homeless Link, 2019). However, and as with the 'home' based literature described above, it has been repeatedly recognised in the literature that the successful resettlement involves attending to both the practical and emotional needs of

an individual (McNeill, 2011; 2012). Fitzpatrick and Klinker (2000), for example, argue that three interwoven factors determine successful resettlement: the existence of strong social networks; involvement in meaningful work; and access to appropriate accommodation and support (see also Pleace and Bretherton, 2017; Downie et al., 2018).

It has been shown that many single and street homeless people face significant barriers when seeking to access support in order to exit homelessness, particularly those with complex or multiple support needs. As discussed further in the subsequent chapter, places in hostels and supported housing projects are increasingly limited (Reeve, 2011). Other barriers that homeless people face in accessing services include:

- Lack of 'local connection' to the area, meaning services are unable to claim housing benefit (see Chapter Four)

- Exclusion based on being 'high risk', use of substances or complexity of need

- Exclusion based on previous behaviours/evictions

- Lack of knowledge of entitlements

- 'Entrenchment' in street lifestyle

- Being engaged in problematic or exploitative relationships

- General aversion to/negative perceptions of/fear of entering services (to be discussed further in Chapter Four)

(Johnsen and Teixeira, 2010; Cloke, May and Johnsen, 2010; Reeve, 2011; Bowpitt and Kaur, 2018; Homeless Link, 2018; 2019)

The existing literature base has also repeatedly highlighted the barriers to longer-term resettlement faced by single homeless people residing in homelessness services. These are also a point of discussion in the next two chapters; in Chapter Three with regard to

the introduction of austerity policies, and also in Chapter Four in relation to debates around the appropriate structure of service provision. To summarise, barriers to resettlement as identified by current research are as follows:

- Limited access to/supply of affordable (social) housing (see Chapter Three)

- Costs of private rented sector accommodation

- Landlord aversion to renting to (formerly) homeless people

- Ongoing exclusion from the employment market

- Discrepancies between service user and services' notions of resettlement

- Specific issues relating to 'treatment first' service provision and the hostel environment (see Chapter Four)

- Limited independent living skills / issues relating to institutionalisation

- Limited access to tenancy support (see Chapter Three)

- Ongoing complexity of service users' support needs (e.g. substance use)

- Being engaged in problematic or exploitative relationships

- Lack of confidence/self-belief/positive self-image amongst service users

(Harding and Willett, 2008; Busch-Geertsema et al., 2010; Bowpitt et al., 2011; McNeill, 2011; 2012; Crane, Warnes and Coward, 2012; Warnes, Crane and Coward, 2013; Homeless Link, 2018; 2019).

On this point, several studies in the British context have pointed to the prevalence of what is commonly called 'revolving door homelessness', where resettled homeless people return to homelessness due to social isolation, inability to meet housing costs and/or inability to manage a property (Reeve, 2011; Mayock, Corr and Sullivan, 2013; Warnes, Crane and Coward, 2013). That this often takes place within a relatively short

period has raised many concerns about appropriateness of current service provision, as discussed further in Chapter Four.

2.7. Chapter Summary

Overall, this chapter has provided a foundational overview of approaches to and academic knowledge of homelessness, with particular emphasis on the value of 'pathways' as a tool for conceptualising homelessness. The chapter also summarised key themes within existing literature as to the characteristics and experiences of homeless people; crucially, this provides a basis for considering questions of whether (and if so how) pathways into, through and out of homelessness may be changing in the context of contemporary austerity.

It was also noted in this chapter that homelessness represents a highly contested concept, with definitions and explanations intertwined with particular agendas and priorities. In many ways, this creates a problematic starting point for researchers in this field, as Nicholas Pleace has observed:

> Our challenge as researchers and as social scientists is to fully acknowledge, respect and understand the human beings at the heart of homelessness and to understand as much as possible about the environment in which homelessness occurs. This requires a new neutrality, an openness, leaving behind preconceptions and ideas and theories about what we think homelessness is [and] who we think homeless people are. (Pleace, 2016, p. 37)

It is on this point that I re-assert the value of a qualitative, constructivist and grounded approach to conducting research in this area, specifically for its ability to move beyond assumptions around 'who' or 'what' homelessness represents and instead prioritise how it is being experienced and given meaning within people's everyday realities. Indeed, that much of the literature reviewed through this chapter is quantitative is nature leaves substantial space for further explanation of these issues via a qualitative lens (Watts, 2012).

In this and each of the remaining chapters of the review, I identify a number of questions generated from the existing literature base that hold relevance to this study. These, in turn, informed the overarching research questions and aims for the empirical element of the study that were presented in the introductory chapter, and that will be re-introduced in Chapter Five. With this in mind, this chapter generated a number of questions to be taken forward, as follows:

- How do service users (and practitioners) define and explain homelessness? How do they view the relationship between themselves and broader structural forces?

- How do service users' pathways through homelessness compare to existing research, particularly with regard to their life within services, and potential pathways out of homelessness?

- In what ways does the austerity context manifest itself in service users' pathways? Are there 'junctions' in the pathway where austerity is felt most acutely?

- From the practitioner perspective, have the characteristics of the service user population changed in the context of austerity? If so, how has this translated into the way in which they operate?

Chapter 3: The policy landscape

3.1. Introduction to the chapter

This chapter provides an overview of the policy landscape with regard to homelessness in England. The first section offers a (brief) summary of homelessness policy between 1977 and 2010. While homelessness certainly existed prior to this period, 1977 marked the introduction of the first legislation specifically addressing homelessness and is, as such, here recognised to form the basis of current responses to homelessness (Anderson, 2004; Hodkinson and Robbins, 2013). The second section then reviews the policy landscape since 2010. Here, the implications of the austerity programme for single homeless people and for homelessness provision are discussed, with particular reference to local government budget reductions, the Localism Act (2011) and the Welfare Reform Act (2012). This section also examines the political rhetoric deployed by Coalition and Conservative governments since 2010. The third and final section of the chapter then briefly discusses the need to move beyond conceptualising austerity only as a series of policy reforms, and considers how austerity might manifest in the affective everyday experiences of those at the 'street level'.

3.2. Homelessness in the policy landscape 1977 – 2010

1977	**Housing (Homeless Persons) Act** *Placed first duty on local authority housing departments to offer advice and/or provide accommodation to homeless persons. Duty to permanently accommodate limited to those deemed statutorily homeless and in priority need.*
1990	*Rough Sleepers Initiative (RSI)*
1996	**Housing Act (Part 7)** *Replaced right of statutorily homeless households to permanent accommodation with accommodation for a maximum of two years. Altered social housing allocations process by introducing single housing register.*
2002	**Homelessness Act** *Expanded priority need criteria to encompass 16 and 17 year olds, vulnerable care leavers and those considered vulnerable as a result of leaving armed forces, prison or fleeing violence. Increased duty on local authorities to engage in homelessness prevention strategies*
2003	*Homelessness Action Programme (HAP)*
	Rough Sleepers Unit (RSU)
	Introduction of Supporting People funding stream
2009	*Removal of Supporting People funding stream ring fence*

Table 3.1. Key homelessness legislation and initiatives 1977 - 2010

The Housing (Homeless Persons) Act 1977

Housing and homelessness became issues of increased state intervention after the Second World War, alongside significant expansion in public service (see Alcock and May, 2014 for overview). Faced with a post-war housing shortage, the construction of housing became a priority for government and local authorities assumed a leading role in this task (Conway, 2000; Mullins and Murie, 2006; Arman et al., 2010). Local authority

investment resulted in continued growth in this sector until 1979, by which point 32% of

the population were living in social housing tenancies (Anderson, 2004, Arman et al.,

2010). While the expansion of the social housing sector was seemingly aligned to the

universalist strategies of the time, it has been noted that this policy was viewed as a form

of temporary state intervention, rather than a radical overhaul of housing (Mullins and

Murie, 2006; Malpass, 2005; Arman et al., 2010). By the 1950s and 1960s, and believing

that the housing stock had been replenished, both Labour and Conservative

governments instead favoured owner-occupation, with Conservatives also re-

emphasising the role of the private rented sector (Alcock and May, 2014; Blakemore and

Warwick-Booth, 2013).

The National Assistance Act of 1948 repealed the Poor Law system and provided a 'safety

net' in the form of welfare payments for those unable to make national insurance

contributions (see Lowe, 1997; Noble, 2009 for overview). It assigned responsibility for

social care to local authorities, and "placed[d] a duty on local authority welfare

departments to provide temporary accommodation for persons in 'urgent need

thereof'" (Fitzpatrick, 2004, p.183). Fitzpatrick (2004) characterises this as the first

statutory response to homelessness, while others have argued that homelessness was

not recognised as a distinct social problem in the decades immediately after the war

(Somerville, 1999; Pleace and Quilgars, 2003; Anderson, 2004). From the perspective of

contemporary commentators, the National Assistance Act did little to reverse the

traditions of the Poor Law regarding treatment of homeless persons (see Lowe, 1997;

Somerville, 1999; Carr and Hunter, 2008)

Although the social housing stock expanded during this period, the majority of people

facing homelessness did not have an automatic right to accommodation, with the

allocation of housing at the discretion of local authorities who often interpreted their duty in a limited fashion (Anderson, 2004, p.372, Fitzpatrick, Kemp and Klinker, 2000; Fitzpatrick, 2004). Somerville (1999) notes, for example, that many local authorities maintained a particularly unforgiving view of the homeless and saw their role as serving long-term residents willing to "wait their turn" rather than those demanding immediate assistance (1999, p. 30). The practice of transporting those without 'settlement' to other areas and the use of low-standard hostel accommodation are further evidence of the harsh treatment of homeless persons by local authorities during this period (Somerville, 1999).

This lack of local authority intervention coupled with programmes of slum clearance have been identified as key causes for an escalation in homelessness during the 1960s (Somerville, 1999; Fitzpatrick, Kemp and Klinker, 2000; Anderson, 2004; Fitzpatrick, 2004; Carr and Hunter, 2008). That homelessness had become increasingly visible was met with widespread public concern. Subsequent campaigns to tackle homelessness were further strengthened by the formation of Shelter, the national charity with a mission to end homelessness, and the screening of Ken Loach's television film *Cathy Come Home* in 1966 (see Jacobs, Kemeny and Manzi, 1999; Conway, 2000; Anderson, 2004; Crowson, 2012).

In response to this escalation in homelessness, the Housing (Homeless Persons) Act was implemented in 1977. Introduced as a private member's bill by Liberal MP Stephen Ross, the Act effectively transferred responsibility for homelessness from social services to local authority housing departments and in this way reconstructed homelessness as an issue of housing (Fitzpatrick, Kemp and Klinker, 2000). It placed a new duty on local authorities to secure permanent accommodation, generally in the form of social housing,

for individuals judged to meet the criteria of statutory homelessness. To be owed the main homelessness duty, applicants were required to (a) evidence a connection to the local area, (a) evidence that their homelessness was 'unintentional' rather than due to deliberate omission, and (c) be classed as a person in 'priority need' (DCLG, 2006; Dobie, Sanders and Teixeira, 2014; Alden, 2014). Priority need categories recognised by the 1977 Act included those vulnerable due to old age, physical or mental health conditions; those with dependent children; those facing threats of violence; and those under the age of 18 (Anderson, 2004; Dwyer et al., 2014; Lund, 2016). Further categories were added through additional legislation implemented in 2002, which will be discussed further below. For those that failed to meet the criteria of statutory homelessness, local authorities were (are) still required to provide advice and general assistance, but not permanent accommodation.

As discussed in the previous chapter, for many commentators the 1977 Act was and continues to be a highly progressive piece of legislation and close to unique by international standards (Seal, 2013, Fitzpatrick and Pawson, 2016). In reassigning responsibility from the individual to the local authority, the Act acknowledged for the first time the relationship between homelessness and insufficient and unsuitable housing stock (Fitzpatrick and Stephens, 2007; Fitzpatrick and Pleace, 2012; Bretherton, Hunter and Johnsen, 2013; Seal, 2013). It has subsequently been praised for providing a framework by which the most vulnerable individuals — and particularly families — are protected from literally rooflessness. (Loison-Leruste and Quilgars, 2009; Fitzpatrick and Pleace, 2012).

The 1977 Act has, however, also received substantive criticism, with many commentators arguing that this and all subsequent legislation rely on and reinforce

individualistic explanations of homelessness and longstanding distinctions between 'deserving' and 'non-deserving' populations (Hutson and Liddiard, 1994; Neale, 1997; Pleace and Quilgars, 2003; Anderson, 2004; Renedo, 2008; Seal, 2013; Dwyer et al., 2014; Fitzpatrick and Pawson, 2016). Seal, for example, suggests that the distinction between 'unintentional' and 'intentional' homelessness has "echoes of some homeless people being seen as 'bad' and 'cheats'" (2013, p.73) and characterises 'priority need' as a "personal test that neatly preserves the notions of individuality and denies structural causes" (2013, p.72). The legislation has also repeatedly been criticised for employing a highly narrow definition of homelessness that effectively excludes large proportions of the homeless population from accessing assistance (see Carlen, 1994; Seal, 2013; Somerville, 2013; Dwyer et al., 2014).

1979 - 1997: The New Right

In 1979, and almost directly following the introduction of the 1977 Act, the Thatcher-led Conservative government came to power and free market capitalism, individualism and minimal state intervention became the central tenets of policymaking (Anderson, 2004; Hodkinson and Robbins, 2013). During the period, the scale of homelessness in England increased quite dramatically, with the number of households eligible for statutory assistance doubling between 1978 and 1987 (Pleace and Quilgars, 2003). Despite there being no direct change to homelessness legislation, this rise has generally been attributed to the welfare and housing policies implemented by the Thatcher administration (see Anderson, 2004; May, Cloke and Johnsen, 2005; Seal, 2013; Fitzpatrick and Pawson, 2016). May, Cloke and Johnsen (2005), for example, assert that the increase in homelessness can be directly traced to: (a) an economic policy which created record levels of long term unemployment, (b) the right to buy policy which took

social housing into private ownership and reduced the stock available to local authorities, (c) the consequent over-subscription to housing associations and, (d) the removal of social security payments for sixteen and seventeen year-olds.

The first legislation to address homelessness directly since the 1977 Act was implemented by the John Major administration. This is found in Part 7 of the 1996 Housing Act and remains the primary homelessness legislation at the time of writing. Here, two new measures are of particular note. First, the right to permanent housing for statutory homeless households introduced in 1977 was replaced with a right to housing for a maximum of two years. Second, homeless persons' priority access to social housing was essentially revoked and replaced by a single housing register for all applicants (see Jacobs, Kemeny and Manzi, 1999; O'Connell, 2003). While the 1996 Act represented a clear reduction in state accountability for homelessness (Somerville, 2013, Fitzpatrick and Pawson, 2016), it has also been noted as having limited practical impact (Fitzpatrick and Stephens, 1999). Fitzpatrick and Pawson (2016), for example, note that the discretionary power of local authorities meant that homeless households continued to be prioritised for social housing, if only to lower emergency accommodation costs faced by local authorities. This again highlights the multi-layered nature of policy discourses around homelessness, and the need to fully consider the role of local policy-makers and 'street level' decision-makers (Lipsky, 1980).

Prompted by the rise in visible homelessness across London through the 1980s, the Conservative government under John Major also implemented the Rough Sleepers Initiative (RSI) in 1990. This programme allocated funds to third sector organisations offering outreach, accommodation and resettlement services to rough sleepers in London before being expanded to other cities in 1996 (Fitzpatrick, Kemp and Klinker,

2000; Pleace, 2000; Kennedy and Fitzpatrick, 2001; Fitzpatrick, 2004). The RSI has been criticised for placing an over-emphasis on rough sleeping in urban areas and thus, doing little to recognise or prevent the underlying causes of homelessness or address homelessness at a national level (Fitzpatrick, Kemp and Klinker, 2000; Anderson, 2003; May, Cloke and Johnsen, 2005). Nonetheless, the RSI has been recognised as the first government attempt to coordinate a direct response to homelessness and — while limited in scope — rough sleeper numbers in the capital did significantly decrease (Fitzpatrick, Kemp and Klinker, 2000). The value of the RSI as a precursor for later initiatives implemented by New Labour has also been emphasised (Fitzpatrick, Kemp and Klinker, 2000; Pleace, 2000; Fitzpatrick, 2004).

1997 - 2010: New Labour

At the time of the 1997 election, New Labour's housing agenda was relatively unclear, with limited policy development during Blair's early years in office (see Powell, 2008; Alcock et al., 2013; Blakemore and Warwick-Booth, 2013). Several commentators have noted that — as opposed to being 'new' — the approach adopted was broadly consistent with the previous administration. Many of the Conservative government's reforms were maintained and accelerated including the transfer of public sector housing through the right to buy policy, support for the private rented sector and a continued preference for owner-occupation (Anderson, 2004; Lund, 2016). Tackling homelessness, however, was a clear priority of New Labour from the offset, alongside a wider commitment to combat social exclusion (Anderson, 2004).

In the most substantive review of homelessness between 2000 and 2010, Jones and Pleace (2010) suggest that much improvement was seen during this period, with new legislation and initiatives that focused on prevention and improving localised responses

to homelessness. The 2002 Homelessness Act[3] placed new responsibilities on local authorities[4] to review homelessness in their district, develop a 'homelessness strategy' to target localised concerns and increase preventative measures (Fitzpatrick, Kemp and Klinker, 2000; Anderson, 2004; Lund, 2016). It also expanded the 'priority need' category to include several additional groups: 16- and 17-year olds, care leavers under the age of 21, persons vulnerable as a result of leaving prison or the armed forces and those at risk of violence in the home (Fitzpatrick, 2004; Carr and Hunter, 2008). Emerging as a result of increasing audits amongst the homeless population (Carr and Hunter, 2008), this legislation can be understood as a further recognition by government of the structural causes of homelessness.

New Labour's policy response to single homelessness also involved the extension of the Rough Sleepers Initiative and the launch of two new initiatives shortly after gaining office. The Rough Sleepers Unit (RSU) was tasked with developing and coordinating national policy on homelessness, while the Homelessness Action Programme (HAP) provided funding for third sector organisations across 113 towns and cities nationwide (Fitzpatrick, Kemp and Klinker, 2000; May, Cloke and Johnsen, 2005, 2006; Jackson, 2015). Unlike the RSI, however, HAP placed a greater emphasis on targets and 'quality assessment' within service delivery. As opposed to mere value for money, organisations

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[3] As a result of devolution, this applied to England and Wales, although comparable legislation was also implemented in Scotland (see Anderson, 2004; Lund, 2016 for overview).

[4] A brief point of clarification regarding use of the term 'local authority' is needed here given that in much of the country there are two tiers of local government. Assessing, assisting and accommodation applicants via the homelessness legislation is the task of the district or city council (e.g., Norwich City Council; Broadland District Council), while funding contracts for social care (including what was *Supporting People)* are administered by the county council (e.g., Norfolk County Council). In the case of London boroughs (and some other metropolitan areas), there is a singular unitary tier of local government that provides all council services.

were required to demonstrate their abilities to both lower rough sleeping and provide successful resettlement and 'move on' (May, Cloke and Johnsen, 2006).

The launch of these initiatives was accompanied by the introduction of the *Supporting People* programme in 2003. This involved the amalgamation of multiple welfare and housing-related funding streams into a single programme administered from the DCLG to local authorities who, per the 2002 Act, had become responsible for their own homelessness strategy (Homeless Link, 2013, p.6). Local authorities were subsequently tasked with commissioning a range of support and accommodation-based services for single homeless people, allowing service users to move from more intensive services such as hostels to less intensive services such as supported housing, with the end goal being independent living (Buckingham, 2010, p.7; Homeless Link, 2013).

The third sector organisations who provided such services were thus required to 'bid' for tendered contracts against other organisations in their areas. The increasingly competitive and conditional nature of funding has been criticised both for creating a sector forced to operate against a background of financial insecurity and for increasing inequalities between organisations (May, Cloke and Johnsen, 2005, 2006; Buckingham, 2010; Homeless Link, 2013; Jackson, 2015). It has also been suggested that the resulting local authority strategies often centered on providing support for the more visible forms of homelessness such as rough sleeping, rather than addressing the needs of the broader single homeless population (Jones and Pleace, 2010; Cuncev, 2015). That New Labour essentially devolved responsibility for homelessness provision to local authorities, and marketised public services in this way has been characterised as a form of 'neoliberalism in action' (May, Cloke and Johnsen, 2005; Cloke, May and Johnsen, 2011; Anderson,

2004). The implications of this funding culture for non-statutory homelessness provision are discussed at further length in the next chapter of this review.

3.3. The post-2010 policy context

In 2010, and in the wake of the 2007-2008 global financial crisis, the Conservative-Liberal Democrat Coalition government led by David Cameron took up office. Faced with a growing level of national debt, the primary focus of government became strategies of deficit reduction and 'austerity' became the cornerstone of the Coalition policy agenda.

In broadest terms, austerity can be characterised as an "economic and social reform agenda premised upon fiscal constraint and deficit reduction, reduced state expenditure, shrinking government achieved via privatisation, and significant cuts to social welfare" (Davidson and Ward, 2018, p.8). Such an agenda is associated with and rationalised by the belief that it is cuts to public services, rather than increased taxation, that best allow for governments to 'rebalance' and 'restore' an economy following financial crisis (MacLeavy, 2011; Farnsworth and Irving, 2015; Davidson and Ward, 2018). Notably, a move towards austerity-driven policies was also seen across much of Europe during this period, including in Greece, Portugal, Italy and Spain, and in the US (Bochel and Daly, 2014).

In the UK context, austerity measures were first implemented via the October 2010 'Comprehensive Spending Review' by then Chancellor George Osborne. Here, it has generally been recognised that local government (DCLG) and the welfare and housing sectors faced the most extensive budget reductions and policy reforms, while other sectors - for example, education and the NHS - received at least some level of protection (Bochel and Daly, 2014; Hastings et al., 2015; Williams and Scott, 2016).

Broadly speaking, this austerity agenda has since been maintained by the subsequent Conservative administrations elected in 2015 and 2017, with a continued commitment to limit public spending, albeit at a reduced rate. Indeed, while the language of austerity has diminished somewhat through the period in which this thesis was produced, there is little evidence to suggest any form of major shift with regard to the policies (and rhetoric) discussed here. It is subsequently important to recognise that austerity in the UK has not merely been a short-term initiative to rectify the budget deficit, but has actually involved a much more substantial and longer-term reconfiguration of the role that the state is playing in the provision of public services (O'Hara, 2014; Farnsworth and Irving, 2015).

As above, the implementation of the UK austerity programme has been presented and justified by government as an "unavoidable" step made in the collective national interest (Levitas, 2012), with Prime Minister David Cameron famously invoking the phrase "all in this together":

> We are all in this together and we are going to get through this together. We will carry out Britain's unavoidable deficit-reduction plan in a way that strengthens and unites the country. We are not doing this because we want to. We are not driven by some theory or some ideology. We are doing this as a government because we have to. (Cameron, 2010)

However, this presentation of austerity as a necessary response has been widely challenged by political opponents on the left and much of the academic community. Austerity has instead been characterised as an ideological choice; an acceleration of a neoliberal agenda; a challenge to the fundamental principles of the post-war welfare

state; and an assault on the poorest communities in society (Levitas, 2012; Wiggan, 2012; Hodkinson and Robbins, 2013; O'Hara, 2014; Clayton, Donovan and Merchant, 2016; Fitzpatrick and Pawson, 2016). Indeed, and on this last point, existing evidence has consistently demonstrated that the most deprived areas and marginalised populations are being disproportionately affected by service reduction and welfare reforms (see, for example, Jacobs and Manzi, 2013; Reeves et al., 2013; O'Hara, 2014; Hastings et al., 2015; Clayton, Donovan and Merchant, 2016).

Following an overview of the scale of homelessness since 2010, the remainder of this section provides a critical analysis of the policies and reforms judged to be most central to the UK's post-2010 austerity programme (Lowndes and Gardner, 2016). These are as follows:

- Sharp reductions to local government (DCLG) expenditure

- The Localism Act (2011)

- The Welfare Reform Act (2012), including the acceleration of 'welfare conditionality'

- Sharp reductions to housing expenditure and multiple policy reforms relating to housing tenure

Taken together, these are evidenced as creating new and profound challenges for single homeless people and the homelessness sector more broadly. However, and as noted in the introductory chapter, there is currently only a limited body of qualitative research that situates 'street level' accounts of homelessness in the context of this austerity programme. Thus, the current literature base on which the remainder of this section

draws predominantly comprises of conceptual and policy analyses, and the interpretation of quantitative datasets.

The scale of homelessness under austerity

The lack of consensus around what constitutes homelessness (as discussed in the previous chapter) coupled with well-documented challenges in 'counting' an often hidden, transient and varied population mean that estimates on the scale of homelessness vary widely (Fitzpatrick, Kemp and Klinker, 2000; Busch-Geertsema et al., 2010). However, methodological concerns notwithstanding, the upward trend across all forms and measures of homelessness since 2010 is irrefutable (Fitzpatrick and Pawson, 2016).

The number of statutory homelessness applications[5] made in 2017/18 stood at 109,000. Of these, 56,600 households were deemed to be owed a main duty by the local authority. While a small reduction on the year previous, this represents an overall increase of 42% since 2009/10 (Fitzpatrick et al., 2019). The number of statutorily homeless households' placed in temporary accommodation (for example, B&B's) by their local authority in particular has seen a substantial rise. In mid-2018, the number of people in temporary accommodation stood at 82,000, up by 71 per cent from seven years previous. Latest figures on street homeless indicate an increase of 165 percent between 2010 and 2018, while recent estimates have placed the overall 'hidden homelessness' figure at 3.74 million adults, representing a rise of a third since 2008 (Fitzpatrick et al., 2019, p. xviii). While figures show that the number of people residing in non-statutory accommodation and resettlement services has actually dropped by 20% during this period, this is a

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[5] This figure includes only those cases where a formal homelessness application was made, rather than informal advice/signposting, meaning the number of individuals who sought local authority assistance for homelessness is likely underestimated by this figure.

reflection of reduced capacity as a result of funding losses, rather than reduced demand (Fitzpatrick et al., 2019). This will be further discussed in the following chapter.

The broad consensus within the academic commentary is that rises in homelessness since 2010 are a direct product of the austerity programme (Seal, 2013; Hodkinson and Robbins, 2013; Fitzpatrick and Pawson, 2016; Stephens and Stephenson, 2016). Fitzpatrick and Pawson argue that rises in homelessness in England are "the result of deliberate policy choices rather than the post-2008 recession" (2016, p. 548), noting that earlier economic downturns have not necessarily correlated with rises in homelessness. Similarly, and drawing on a longitudinal and mixed methods analysis of homelessness in England since 2010, Fitzpatrick et al. found "most key informants consulted since 2011 have maintained that policy factors, and in particular welfare reform, have a far more profound impact on homelessness trends than the economic context in and of itself" (Fitzpatrick et al., 2016, p.2). As noted in the previous chapter, there is currently some debate as to whether or not the demographic profile of the homeless population is changing, or has changed, in the last decade.

Local government spending

While budget reductions have been felt across most government departments since 2010, existing evidence indicates that local government has seen the most substantive of cuts, and is arguably one of the greatest areas of casualty (Gray and Barford, 2018). Reports indicate that local authorities saw an average reduction of 27 percent in real terms between 2010/11 and 2015/16, although significant regional variation is also noted (see Hastings et al., 2015; Gray and Barford, 2018). In most cases, this has reportedly resulted in staff redundancies and reduced funding for frontline services, with

the loss of funding for Sure Start centres, community centres and libraries particularly prominent in media coverage (Hastings et al., 2015).

In 2009, the ring fence that had previously been placed around 'Supporting People' funding was removed and, by 2011, had been entirely subsumed into the Formula Grant - a single fund given to local authorities by central government (Homeless Link, 2013, p.7). As a result of this, local authorities are no longer required to allocate a set amount of funds to housing and homelessness-related provision and may prioritise spending allocation as they see fit (Homeless Link, 2013). This aligns with the localist agenda that begun to emerge under New Labour (as above) and has been accelerated since 2010, as will be discussed at further length below.

Given the breadth of cuts to local government under austerity, it is unsurprising that provision for homelessness has suffered so extensively. Reductions to funding have, however, not been felt equally by different homelessness populations. While spending activity on family homelessness has generally been maintained, spending on single homelessness has suffered disproportionately. Funding for single homelessness service provision via the Formula Grant reduced by 50% between 2008/9 and 2017/18 representing an approximate shortfall in spending of £5 billion during that period (Thunder and Rose, 2019). In many ways, this distinction seems to reflect longstanding notions around which groups are most deserving of assistance. Qualitative evidence also suggests that low and medium level support services (for example, supported housing) have faced particular reductions to funding with focus instead placed on crisis management by, for example, responding to visible homelessness and providing cold weather provision (Daly et al., 2012; Thunder and Rose, 2019).

Crucially, this period has also seen extensive cuts to the floating (community-based) services that provide a broad range of support aimed at preventing entries and re-entries into homelessness. The severity of cuts to specialist forms of floating support has been noted as being of particular concern, with St Mungo's (2018) reporting drastic budget reductions across community-based projects that offer tailored support around mental ill health (44%), harmful substance use (41%) and ex-offenders (88%) between 2014 and 2018. Despite the fact that homelessness prevention has been a central feature in successive governments' agendas, preventative strategies are evidenced as being increasingly undermined by austerity-driven funding cuts (Thunder and Rose, 2019).

Localism Act (2011)

Central to the post-2010 political landscape has been the Coalition government's attempts to replace notions of 'big government' with a 'Big Society'. This has predominantly been administered through the 2011 Localism Act that involved a drastic overhaul of local government, housing and planning policies (Levitas, 2012; Lowndes and Pratchett, 2012; Jacobs and Manzi, 2013; Jacobs, 2014; Bochel and Powell, 2016). The Act was billed as a measure to devolve responsibility for decision-making from central government and, in doing so, increase autonomy and creativity within local government and local communities (DCLG, 2011). Indeed, a fundamental aspect of localist rhetoric is an increased onus on 'responsible' citizens, third sector and private organisations to adopt a more central role in the provision of services for the community (Taylor-Gooby and Stoker, 2011; Patrick, 2014; Hastings et al., 2015):

> The best contribution that central government can make is to devolve
> power, money, and knowledge to those best placed to find the best
> solutions to local needs: elected local representatives, frontline public

service professionals, social enterprises, charities, co-ops, community groups, neighbourhoods, and individuals. (HM Government, 2010, p.2)

This localist agenda is recognised as having widespread appeal. In drawing on consistent themes of British politics — for example a distrust of big government and frustration with bureaucratic processes — it has been recognised as engaging both left- and right-wing audiences (Jacobs and Manzi, 2013; Jacobs, 2014). A number of academic commentators have noted some benefits to the localism agenda, namely the opportunity for individuals and civil community groups to further their involvement in local decision and policy making processes (Lowndes and Pratchett, 2012; Jacobs, 2014). Williams, Goodwin and Cloke (2014), for example, argue that localism has given rise to new spaces in which dominant political rhetoric around poverty has been disrupted and resisted (e.g., within housing cooperatives, food banks and 'ecovillages').

For the most part, however, the academic commentary has been highly critical of the localist agenda, characterising 'Big Society' as a tool to divert attention from public spending cuts, and shift responsibility away from the state (Levitas, 2012; Hodkinson and Robbins, 2013; Jacobs and Manzi, 2013; Jacobs, 2014):

'Big Society' is… little more than an attempt to get necessary social labour done for nothing, disproportionately by women, by pushing work back across the market/non-market boundary. We'll sack your librarians, but if you want you can keep your libraries open using volunteers. We'll cut your care services, so if you don't look after your relatives and neighbours they will be abandoned, or left unfed and untended even in hospitals. We'll axe the programme for intensive social work with families with multiple

problems, and replace it with untrained volunteers in the Working Families

Everywhere programme. (Levitas, 2012, p. 322)

Particular concerns have also been raised regarding the increasing pressure being placed on third sector organisations to 'plug the gap' left by the rollback of state services despite, as above, the amount of funding available for support and accommodation-based services markedly decreasing (see McKee, 2015; Daly, 2017). Further discussion regarding the changing contexts of third sector provision and the implications these hold for responding to homelessness is provided in the next chapter.

Welfare Reform Act (2012)

The Welfare Reform Act, passed in early 2012[6], instigated a drastic overhaul of the existing benefit system aimed at cutting the cost of welfare by £18 billion (Local Government Information Unit, 2012, Patrick, 2014). Key measures within the Act with relevance to homelessness include the replacement of legacy benefits with a single payment via Universal Credit; the replacement of Disability Living Allowance with Personal Independence Plans; new limits on the availability of Employment and Support Allowance; the introduction of the under-occupancy penalty (also known as the 'bedroom tax'); multiple caps to benefit payments and allowances; and an intensification of benefit sanctions and welfare conditionality (Child Poverty Action Group, 2012; Poverty and Social Exclusion, 2013; Patrick, 2014; Watts et al., 2014).

These reforms were justified by government as a way to simplify the benefit system and encourage positive 'behavioural changes' (DWP, 2010; Wiggan, 2012; Miscampbell, 2014; Reeve, 2017). The apparent existence of a "culture of entrenched worklessness

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[6] This developed the earlier White Paper "Universal Credit: Welfare that Works" (DWP, 2010)

and dependency" (Duncan Smith, 2012) was attributed by government to an overly "generous" (Osborne, 2013) welfare state that fails to incentivise employment. Within this rhetoric, that those in receipt of benefits are frequently vilified and placed in contrast with the 'hard working majority' can be understood as what Patrick has referred to as a "contemporary reworking of longstanding distinctions between 'undeserving' and 'deserving' populations" (2015, p. 24). This is well evidenced if we look to speeches made by members of the Coalition cabinet:

> Large numbers sitting on out of work benefits [go] unchallenged, many unwilling or unable to take advantage of the job opportunities being created…. It is a system set around the minority. An exemption here, an addition there, all designed around the needs of the most dysfunctional and disadvantaged few. (Duncan Smith, 2012)

> For too long, we've had a system where people who did the right thing — who get up in the morning and work hard — felt penalised for it, while people who did the wrong thing got rewarded for it. (Osborne, 2013)

Taken together, these reforms can thus be understood to represent a new hegemonic culture that presents the welfare state as the "anti-thesis of self-reliance, responsibility and independence" (Reeve, 2017, p.3) — the most seemingly unassailable and 'common sensical' of societal values. By choosing to frame welfare in this way, the government effectively created a backdrop against which harsh cuts to public services and increasingly conditional access to welfare have been legitimised and even celebrated (Reeve, 2017).

The acceleration of welfare conditionality by government has been of particular focus in a growing body of literature (Wiggan, 2012; Watts et al., 2014; Dwyer and Wright, 2014; Patrick, 2014; Dwyer et al., 2014; Reeve, 2017). Extensive evidence indicates that conditionality measures, and particularly the use of benefit sanctions[7], are having a disproportionate impact on the most vulnerable members of society unable to meet the requirements for accessing welfare benefits as a result of their circumstances (Watts et al., 2014; Reeves and Loopstra, 2016; Edmiston, 2017). Recent data collected on behalf of Crisis (Reeve, 2017), for example, reported that 39 percent of single homeless people surveyed had faced sanctioning, and 63 percent had found meeting conditionality requirements challenging. In most cases, this was found not to be a result of 'behavioural failings' but of unrealistic demands that failed to account for the additional vulnerabilities faced by homeless people (2017, p. 10). Many respondents, for example, reported being penalised as a result of lacking internet access or funds for travel, being provided with misinformation, and struggling to access the support necessary to comply. A significant proportion were simultaneously contending with substance dependency and mental and physical ill health that made navigating the bureaucracies of the welfare system far more challenging (Reeve, 2017).

That unemployment and welfare dependency exist as a result of individuals' behaviours, backgrounds and 'lack of work ethic' has also been strongly disputed by existing research (see Watts et al., 2014, Reeve, 2017). Multiple studies have identified a strong desire and

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[7] To clarify, sanctions effectively involve a benefit (ESA, JSA, UC) being withdrawn or reduced as a result of the claimant failing to adhere to their 'Claimant Commitment'. Reasons for sanctions include not meeting the criteria for job searching, being late for appointments, missing appointments at Jobcentre Plus or refusing to take part in a work or educational programme. As per the Welfare Reform Act, the length of a sanction imposed may range from 7 days to 1095 days (House of Commons Work and Pensions Committee, 2018)

enthusiasm to work amongst unemployed research participants, bringing into question the need for 'incentives' (Shildrick et al., 2012; Patrick, 2014; Reeve, 2017). Ethnographic fieldwork conducted by Shildrick et al., for example, reported finding no evidence to suggest the existence of 'culture of worklessness' amongst intergenerational families with high rates of unemployment, and instead point to a range of complex barriers including housing instability, poor schooling, offending and physical and mental ill health (2012, p.4). Moreover, drawing from interview data with benefit claimants, Patrick (2014, p.707) argues that far more attention needs to be given to the structural barriers to accessing and maintaining 'good' employment including job shortages, insecure contracts, child-care demands, risk of exploitation and discrimination towards certain groups in the job market.

Housing reforms

On housing, the central tenets of recent Coalition and Conservative policies are broadly similar to that of the previous Conservative, and arguably also Labour, administrations detailed above. For Hodkinson and Robbins (2013), the Coalition housing agenda represented a "radical resurrection" of Thatcherism and an attempt to "complete the unfinished neoliberal revolution" (2013, p.4). This, they argue, can be evidenced by the continued drive on home-ownership through an acceleration of Right To Buy schemes, further destruction of social housing stock and the lowering and removal of 'out of control' housing benefit payments as part of broader welfare reforms (as above). The similarities between the housing strategies employed by the Thatcher and the Coalition/Conservative governments since 2010 has been regularly noted (see for example Hodkinson, Watt and Mooney, 2013; Fitzpatrick and Pawson, 2016).

As noted, the private rented sector and owner-occupation have continued to receive preference over social housing despite lengthy waiting lists for the latter (Hodkinson and Robbins, 2013; Tunstall, 2015). Between 2009/10 and 2012/13, expenditure on housing development (primarily the building of social housing) fell by 44% or £4.8billion in real terms, representing one of the biggest percentage cuts to any government budget under austerity (Tunstall, 2015, p.29). Most notable in the context of this research study, is a range of new powers granted to Local Authorities and social housing landlords via the Localism Act (Stephens and Stephenson, 2016). Taken together, these can essentially be seen as a rebranding of social housing as a temporary and conditional tenure, to which access is heavily restricted (Hodkinson and Robbins, 2013, p.71; Rowe and Wagstaff, 2017):

- Local authorities may discharge their legal duty to statutory homeless persons via the use of private rented tenancies which applicants are unable to refuse. This replaces the previous duty that entitled homeless households to temporary accommodation until a social housing tenancy was available (Alden, 2015; Stephens and Stephenson, 2016; Fitzpatrick et al., 2017).

- Local authorities may implement specific criteria in the allocation of social housing. This may include a length of time in local area, the exclusion of those with histories of anti-social and/or offending behaviour, substance use or rent arrears (Stephens and Stephenson, 2016).

- Social landlords may now offer 'flexible' social tenancies, whereby length of tenure is fixed-term and renewal is dependent on the tenant's behaviour, income and employment (Garvie, 2012; Watts et al., 2014).

The renewed focus on encouraging homeless people away from social housing and into the PRS has been criticised as inappropriately insecure for vulnerable households, particularly those with children (Watts et al, 2014; Alden, 2015d). Evidence collected by Fitzpatrick et al. (2017) also indicated that particular local authorities are utilising these policies to increase gatekeeping and are "severely restricting access to their housing registers … despite the highly questionable legality of this practice" (2017, p.219).

Multiple changes to the rate of Local Housing Allowance (LHA) are also of particular relevance here. Where LHA was previously calculated in line with the market average, it is now set to reflect the lowest 30 percent of the market (Fitzpatrick et al., 2012; Hodkinson and Robbins, 2013; Wilson, 2013; Cole and Powell, 2015). Effectively this forces the most vulnerable households into the cheapest and often lowest quality accommodation (Seal, 2013, p. 79). That there is often also a substantive shortfall between market rental rates and the LHA available has been recognised in the literature as both a cause for homelessness, and a barrier to exiting homelessness via a private tenancy (Hodkinson and Robbins, 2013; Cole, Powell and Sanderson, 2016; Fitzpatrick et al., 2017; Rowe and Wagstaff, 2017). As noted in the previous chapter, the end of an Assured Shorthold Tenancy (AST) is now the most common reason for statutory homelessness applications, with recorded instances quadrupling between 2009/10 and 2015/16 (Fitzpatrick et al., 2017).

Homelessness Reduction Act (2017)

Recent changes to homelessness legislation have been brought about by the Homelessness Reduction Act (2017) (HRA hereafter), which was passed in 2017, and came into force in April 2018. Like the 1977 Act, the HRA was introduced as a Private Member's Bill by Conservative MP Bob Blackman and received considerable cross-party

support. The central aspects of the HRA are an additional duty placed on local authorities to implement preventative measures for those threatened with homelessness, and an extension of the definition of those considered 'threatened' with homelessness to include people likely to lose their home within 56 days, rather than 28 days as previously. It also requires local authorities take 'reasonable steps' to intervene in all cases of homelessness, rather than only those judged to be in priority need, and to create personalised housing plans for every applicant (Shelter, 2017; Fitzpatrick et al., 2018).

The focus on increasing preventative measures has been well received by third sector organisations (for example, Shelter, 2017; Fitzpatrick et al, 2018). Early concerns have, however, been raised regarding the additional pressure the Act places on local authorities already facing substantial cuts to budgets, resources and staff numbers (Fitzpatrick et al., 2018). Given the continued shortage of social and supported housing stock, the feasibility of the new statutory duties have also been called into question (Shelter, 2017; Cowan, 2019). Recent survey data, for example, found that 66.5% of Local Authorities surveyed (n=188) reported that they lacked sufficient funding to fulfil their new statutory duties (New Government Network, 2019). The obligation to offer assistance both at an earlier stage, and also to anyone presenting regardless of 'priority need', was here reported to have drastically increased strain on services. The HRA had not been fully implemented when the empirical element of this study was conducted. However, the early implications of the Act were a feature of a number of the interviews and will be discussed at further length in Parts III and IV of the thesis.

3.4. A note on austerity in everyday life

This chapter has thus far focused on the set of high level fiscal policy reforms (and accompanying discourses) implemented as part of the post-2010 austerity programme, and the way in which such policies have and are likely to be experienced in practical and material terms (through the reduction of support services, facilities, benefits and so on). However, and as noted in the introductory chapter to the thesis, the starting point of this research study was a recognition that austerity represents more than this and is also something that is affectively *felt* within peoples' everyday lives (and particularly those who are feeling the brunt of reforms).

In recent years, an emerging body of literature has begun to consider the lived experiences of austerity in the UK context for particular sections of the population including people attending food banks (Garthwaite, 2016; Strong, 2018); people in receipt of welfare benefits (Patrick, 2016, Pemberton et al., 2016); people with disabilities (Hitchen, 2016); families in poverty (Rose and McCauley 2019); and practitioners working in homelessness resettlement services (Daly, 2017). Esther Hitchen (2016, 2019), whose work has been central to my own thinking in this area, has argued for the need to conceptualise austerity as a "multiplicity that surfaces in numerous domains in people's day-to-day" (p.103). Drawing on the daily life of families with disabilities that had been substantially impacted by welfare reforms, Hitchen evidences the way in which the "atmospheres" and "collective moods" of austerity were both shaping everyday practice, but *also* held an affective dimension in peoples' lives. She evidences this with examples of participants' bodily states of low mood, uncertainty and worry, and in their changing patterns of living and imaginings of the future (p.103). Here,

the *felt* realities of austerity emerge through 'everyday' events, such as the arrival of a letter from the DWP:

> The term 'Department for Work and Pensions' printed on the letter is enough to create bodily feelings of fear that this envelope may hold within it details of lost or reduced welfare support ... Here, austerity surfaces as a shock in that it generates a rush of anxiety throughout the body, yet is paradoxically also expected. Austerity also surfaces here as something threatening; the encounter with the letter is (re)affirmation that Helen's future imaginaries are mired with fears of imminent spending reductions.
> (Hitchen, 2016, p.110-111)

In this thesis, I am sensitive to and will be discussing all three of these dimensions of austerity: the policy discourses; the actual practices relating to homelessness; but then also the affective and *felt* dimensions that Hitchen introduces, and the way in which they interact with and reinforce each other. As noted elsewhere (Hitchen, 2016, 2019; Daly, 2017; Strong, 2018), placing a focus on how austerity translates into everyday spaces and lives in this way can serve as a strong political challenge to the rising levels of inequality we see in this country at present: as Rose and McCauley note, "listening to lived realities ... provides a corrective to critical pejorative rhetoric and lays the foundation for the provision of appropriate government action and support" (2019, p. 140).

3.5. Chapter summary

This chapter has provided a policy backdrop for the empirical material presented in Part III. Taken together, the austerity-driven policies and reforms implemented since 2010

have been evidenced as having profound and lasting implications for responses to and outcomes for single homeless people. Based on the existing commentary, these implications may be briefly summarised as follows:

- Reduced capacity of local authorities to engage in strategies relating to homelessness prevention

- Increased regional disparity in responses to homelessness

- Reduced capacity of homelessness accommodation/resettlement services

- Reduced capacity of specialist and floating support (for example, targeted mental health services)

- Increased conditionality in accessing welfare benefits, particularly through the use of sanctioning

- Reduced access to social housing tenancies, accompanied by a renewed emphasis on the PRS as the primary destination for single homeless people.

- Increased political and public hostility towards people deemed to be 'workless' and/or 'welfare dependent'.

However, and while statistical analyses have served to capture the emerging picture at a national and regional level (Fitzpatrick et al., 2019; Thunder and Rose, 2019), what is currently missing is an empirical examination of the ways in which austerity is translating into the realities of homelessness from the perspectives of practitioners and service users, and framing their everyday experiences. Crucially, the last section of the review has emphasised that austerity can be understood as an emotive and affective

phenomenon, and thus indicated the need to consider not only how austerity measures are translating into everyday life, but how this may be being *embodied* and *felt* by those on the ground.

This chapter has generated a number of questions with relevance to the present study as follows:

- How are the specific policy contexts described through this chapter translating into practitioners and service users' everyday realities? And crucially, how is austerity being affectively *felt* at the 'street level'*?*

- How do service users and practitioners construct their narratives in relation to the prevailing political rhetoric identified here? Are policy constructions of homelessness resisted, reproduced or both?

- In what ways do service users relate their own experiences to concepts of deservingness, responsibility, (in)dependence and so on?

- How do homeless service users relate to and navigate what is essentially an increasingly stigmatising rhetoric?

- What are the implications of the HRA and how is it expected to translate onto the frontline?

Chapter 4: Homelessness service provision

4.1. Introduction to the chapter

This, the final chapter of the literature review, provides an overview of the landscape of homelessness service provision in England and is divided into three sections. The previous two chapters have established the centrality of both local authority housing departments and third sector organisations in the pathways and outcomes of people experiencing homelessness. However, the choice to include practitioners in this study was made not only because they would be able shed light on the particular client group, but also with the intent of furthering understanding of *what it is like* to work in these settings, and the roles played by different types of services, in the context of contemporary austerity. Thus, the first and second sections of this chapter examine key themes within the existing literature about local authority and third sector homelessness practitioners respectively. The third and final section aims to situate the empirical element of this study alongside current debates around how to best support homeless people outside of the statutory remit, and compares the evidence base of the two major approaches: the "treatment first" model which currently prevails in the UK and the alternative "Housing First" model.

4.2. Local authority housing practitioners: Key themes

A substantive body of existing literature has examined the working practices of local authority housing teams. Here, the primary aim of researchers has been to understand how frontline practitioners are interpreting legislation, and how this translates into the assessment of statutory homelessness applications. This focus reflects a broader consensus that to understand processes of policy-making and implementation, we must

give attention to the various settings in which it takes place — including at the 'street level' (Lipsky, 1980; Lendvai and Stubbs, 2007; Alden, 2015a, 2015b).

The homelessness legislation found in Part 7 of the 1996 Housing Act places a duty on local authorities to make a full assessment all individuals/households who present as homeless. This involves a five-point assessment process as follows:

- Eligibility: Is the applicant eligible for assistance based on their immigration status (either a British citizen or 'habitually resident')?

- Homeless: Is the applicant homeless or threatened with homelessness within the next 28 days (extended to 56 under the 2017 HRA)?

- Priority Need: Does the applicant meet the criteria for a priority need category, or share a household with someone who does?[8]

- Intentionality: Did the person become homeless unintentionally (through no fault of their own)

- Local Connection: Do they have a local connection to the area in which they are seeking assistance?[9] (DCLG, 2006; Dobie, Sanders and Teixeira, 2014, p.2-3; Alden, 2014)

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[8] Priority need is defined according to the following categories: pregnant or responsible for dependent children; homeless as a consequence of flood, fire or other disaster; 16 or 17 and not currently housed by social services; between 18 and 20 and were 'looked after' by social services when they were aged between 16 and 17; 'vulnerable' as a result of: a mental health problem, a physical or learning disability, old age, leaving prison or the Armed Forces; being in care, because they are at risk of violence (or threats of violence); or other special reasons (DCLG, 2006; Dobie, Sanders and Teixeira, 2014, p. 2).

[9] Local connection is defined as "being a resident for a considerable period of time (at least six months in the area during the previous 12 months, or for not less than 3 years during the previous five-year period), working in the area (where that employment is not of a casual nature), and/or having close family there". Notably, those at risk of violence are exempt from the local connection criteria given that it may be unsafe for them to remain in the area (DCLG, 2006; Dobie, Sanders and Teixeira, 2014, p.3).

Those that meet these criteria are entitled to suitable accommodation by their local authority, although this increasingly involves the provision of private rented sector and/or temporary accommodation (see previous chapter for further discussion). Crucially, all who present at a local authority should be provided with, as a minimum, meaningful advice and assistance, regardless of whether they are owed the main homelessness duty (Dobie, Sanders and Teixeira, 2014).

Across existing commentary, there has been consistent criticism of the discretionary power delegated to housing teams. The relatively ambiguous nature of the criteria listed above means that the implementation of the law relies heavily on how local authority staff interpret key language, for example, the concepts of 'vulnerable' and 'intentionality' (see Carlen, 1994; Dwyer et al., 2014; Alden, 2015b). This has been characterised as enabling subjectivity and inconsistency in decision-making, and encouraging the development of illegal and detrimental 'gatekeeping' practices (Carlen, 1994; Lidstone, 1994; Halliday, 2000; Cramer, 2004; Hunter, 2007; Pawson, 2007; Pawson and Davidson, 2007; Bretherton, Hunter and Johnsen, 2013; Dwyer et al., 2014; Alden, 2015a, 2015b). Examples of reported gatekeeping include conducting improper or incomplete assessments (Bowpitt et al., 2011a), withholding key information (Dobie, Sanders and Teixeira, 2014), diverting clients without speaking to an appropriate member of staff (Reeve, 2011, Dobie, Sanders and Teixeira, 2014), and improper or overly narrow application of legislative language (Bowpitt et al., 2011a, Alden, 2015a). A number of factors have been identified as influential to the decision-making process, and likelihood of unlawful practices.

First, existing research has provided evidence that normative values may influence the interpretation and implementation of homelessness legislation. The discretionary nature

of frontline decision-making has been characterised as allowing for spaces in which "wider cultural morality flows" (Hunter et al., 2016, p.81) and where practitioners become reliant on personally and socially constructed notions of 'deservingness' and 'service-worthiness' (Maynard-Moody and Musheno, 2003; Bretherton, Hunter and Johnsen, 2013, Meers, 2015, Hunter et al., 2016). A number of empirical studies in this area have, for example, highlighted the way in which specific traits such as gender (Cramer, 2005) and ethnicity (Halliday, 2000), or circumstances such as domestic violence (Rashleigh, 2005) affect the assessment process. Here, it has been argued that pervasive and normative beliefs (for example, that women are more 'deserving' than men (Cramer, 2005)) are utilised by professionals to frame homelessness cases in a way that allow particular applicants to be 'legitimately' denied assistance (Halliday, 2000; Cramer, 2005).

Contemporary research from Bretherton, Hunter and Johnsen (2013) has specifically examined how local authority housing team members assessed different medical conditions. Drawing on qualitative interviews with housing professionals, participants were shown to be relying on concepts of "first impressions" (p.79) and "gut feeling" (p.81) in their assessments of applicant's vulnerability, and at times favoured this over professional medical opinions. As a result, more visible or obvious health issues — for example, the use of a walking stick — generally elicited a greater sense of "worthiness" (p.86) than health issues that were less easily seen or evidenced. Although not explicitly stated by Bretherton et al. this seems to reflect a broader issue regarding the perception and stigma surrounding mental health and 'invisible disabilities' in the UK (for example, see Public Health England, 2015) and again evidences the role of normative values on outcomes for homeless applicants.

Second, research has served to highlight that local authority housing practitioners are subject to substantial organisational pressures and this has repeatedly been linked to increased levels of gatekeeping (Alden, 2015a). The existence of organisational performance targets (Halliday, 2000; Rashleigh, 2005, Reeve, 2011), high caseloads (Evans, 1999) and a widespread scarcity of housing (see previous chapter; Bowpitt et al., 2011a, Reeve, 2011) have all been identified as encouraging the use of negative discretion. Indeed, and as noted by Bowpitt et al. (2011a, p.37), "the scarce and often inadequate supply of social housing available [means that] housing officers and local authorities often face stark choices". Rashleigh (2005) also found that local authority frontline workers would often avoid being attached to a higher rate of acceptance for fear of being labelled soft by colleagues and management (see also Alden, 2015a).

Third, evidence suggests that local authorities may be more likely to engage in negative gatekeeping practices in regions where the availability of resources and housing stock is particularly minimal, or where demand is particularly high (Mackie and Thomas, 2014; Alden, 2015a). Dobie, Sanders and Teixeira (2014) conducted mystery shopper research (i.e. using actors) and reported that in 29 of the 87 visits to the local authority, 'applicants' were diverted away from the correct process of a homelessness application, being told they were either ineligible or needed additional paperwork. Crucially, every one of these instances took place in Greater London boroughs, with all mystery shopper visits that took place in the rest of the country involving an in-depth and 'by the book' assessment. As noted by the authors, this distinct regional difference indicates the nature of the London housing market is playing a significant role in the way local authorities are responding to homelessness.

Empirical research conducted by Alden (2014, 2015a, 2015b, 2015c, 2015d) provides the most contemporary account of working practices amongst local authority housing teams. Drawing on mixed methods data and informed by the notion of the 'street level bureaucrat' (Lipsky, 1980), Alden's findings reinforce the prevalence of illegal gatekeeping practices. Such practices are contextualised and explained through a combination of personal factors (for example, level of training and individual values) and organisational factors (for example, target culture, budget pressures, resource scarcity), although ordinarily the latter was found to take precedence. She concludes "whilst some frontline officers were viewed as more likely to gate-keep, the likelihood of it occurring overall was inextricably linked to service availability" (2015a, p.15). In other words, while the normative values of the professional do have the potential to influence decision-making, most significant is the broader organisational context and, more specifically, resource availability (Lipsky, 1980; Alden, 2015a).

While Alden's findings broadly align with those from previous research in highlighting the prevalence of gatekeeping activities, she also reports instances of discretion being applied in favour of homeless applicants (Alden, 2015a, 2015b). Despite the limitations created by both organisational pressures and the legislation itself, Alden notes that respondents "valued face-to-face contact with the public, and that a few gave examples of when they had applied discretion to help certain service users" (Alden, 2015b, p.10). In a similar vein, Somerville (2015) has argued that as 'translators' of policy, public sector frontline workers have the ability to contradict legislation and implement the policy in ways that are more "democratic" or in line with public opinion (p.22). That there is possibility for positive discretion is rarely recognised in the existing homelessness literature, with discretion tending to be characterised unfavourably.

It is also significant that Alden's findings also establish a clear relationship between the severity of austerity measures and the extent of illegitimate gatekeeping practices. Indeed, indications from the data suggest that local authorities increasingly felt the need to 'ration' and protect resources. There was also evidence to suggest that most local authorities were facing greater workloads, inadequate staffing and a lack of appropriate training (2015a, 2015c). As argued by Alden (2015a), this new landscape of local government has meant that local authorities are now facing different type of challenges than seen previously. Despite this, there remains a distinct lack of contemporary literature that explicitly examines Local Authority housing teams' experiences and practices against the backdrop of austerity and localism. Further research in this area is clearly warranted.

Overall, the existing literature in this area makes clear that local authority housing teams are required to balance a variety of competing demands, and that it is necessary to situate their practices within broader personal, organisation and policy contexts. Several calls have been made within the literature to improve the training of local authority housing professionals, or to provide more comprehensive guides to interpreting the legislation (for example, Hunter, 2007; Alden, 2015a). While clearly of value, especially in terms of challenging normative perceptions, Alden's findings indicate that decision-making processes are based on more than a simple reading or knowledge of the legislative duty but instead a far more complex interplay of factors. As such, it seems that additional information would only go so far in rectifying unlawful use of discretion (Alden, 2015c).

4.3. Third sector homelessness practitioners: Key themes

Despite an increase in government intervention and investment in homelessness (as described in the previous chapter), the third sector continues to form the primary alternative for single homeless people who fall outside of the remit of the statutory duty or who choose to avoid the statutory route for any reason (Renedo, 2014). Third sector organisations operate a diverse range of services that includes first and second stage hostels, specialist hostels, supported housing, day centres, education and training services, advice services, floating/tenancy support, outreach and soup runs, the size and scale of which vary greatly (Buckingham, 2010). Notably, many third sector organisations also have a history of being involved in campaigning and/or research activities also (Buckingham, 2010; Homeless Link, 2014; Renedo, 2014).

Data collected by Homeless Link, the national membership charity for homelessness third sector organisations, reported that in 2019 there were a total of 1,085 non-statutory accommodation projects for single homeless people operating in England. The majority of these are at least partially funded by Housing Benefit (89%), rent and service charges (75%) and statutory funding via the Formula Grant (formerly Supporting People funding) (71%). In the context of the cuts to local government detailed in the previous chapter, the last eight years has seen a 20% reduction in available bed spaces (43,655 in 2010 reducing to 34,900 in 2018) and, more broadly, the loss of many day centres and floating/tenancy support services (see Homeless Link, 2019; St Mungo's, 2018; Fitzpatrick et al., 2019).

The third sector is generally defined in terms of its distinctiveness from both the private and statutory (public) sectors (see Macmillan, 2013 for discussion). Indeed, while heterogeneity is recognised, definitions tend to focus on common characteristics of the

third sector including being client-centered, compassionate, non-judgmental, non-for-profit, autonomous, innovative, resilient, responsive and rooted in local communities/issues (see Buckingham 2010, 2012; Corry, 2010; Renedo, 2014). It is also noted, however, that the third sector is often highly sensitive to wider economic and social forces, and particularly to economic downturns whereby funding from government, donations from members of the public and private forms of philanthropy often reduce (Alexander, 2010; Milbourne and Cushman, 2015; Jones et al., 2016). Indeed, and as noted in the previous chapter, the capacity and role of the third sector is, in many ways, defined by external bodies. Further, and given the increasing reliance of most third sector organisations on heavily regulated statutory funding, some have argued that the distinction between sectors is becoming increasingly blurred (Hemmings, 2017).

On this last point, the increasingly competitive and conditional funding environment within which third sector organisations now operate has been a central feature of contemporary literature on third sector organisations specifically working in homelessness. Here, concerns have been raised as to the impact that said changes may be having both on the quality of support available for homeless people and on practitioner self-concept and wellbeing (May, Cloke and Johnsen, 2006; Buckingham, 2009, 2010; Scanlon and Adlam, 2012; Renedo, 2014; Hemmings, 2017; Daly, 2018; Watson, Nolte and Brown, 2019).

Existing evidence from research has consistently highlighted the ways in which homelessness third sector organisations have had to adapt their ways of working in order to satisfy statutory bodies and maintain access to funding contracts. Drawing on a national survey of emergency accommodation projects, May, Cloke and Johnsen (2006)

found that most projects surveyed were operating against a background of significant financial insecurity, and this was essentially forcing management to change the appearance and/or approach of their organisations to access funding. These practices, they argue, had resulted in "heightening inequalities between different organisations, as some managers were more proficient at this game than others" (p.716). Particular examples in the literature of the concessions being made by third sector organisations in the context of funding restrictions include:

- Relying on volunteers to deliver core aspects of the service, despite some being perceived to lack the appropriate skill set or knowledge.

- Reducing budgets for staff to receive specialist training (e.g., for particular mental health diagnoses).

- The rejecting of more 'complex' service users unlikely to be moved on within timeframes set out statutory funding.

- The moving on of service users into independent accommodation prematurely in order to adhere to timeframes set out by statutory funding.

(May, Cloke and Johnsen, 2006; Renedo, 2014; Cornes et al., 2016)

This funding context, then, can be seen as a challenge to longstanding notions of 'best practice' in working with this client group, and indeed can be regarded as contradicting the core characteristics of the third sector described earlier. Of particular note here is evidence to suggest that practitioner expertise, for instance around the appropriate 'move on' of their clients, is being encroached by the requirements of statutory funders (Renedo, 2014).

In a 2012 research study, Scanlon and Adlam evaluated the psychological impact of working in homelessness accommodation provision, with their findings illustrating the pressure being placed on frontline practitioners. They argue that homelessness organisations should be understood as fundamentally "(dis)stressed" spaces (p.74), in which practitioners are contending both with high levels of "client disturbance" (p.75) (trauma, distress, complexity need) and an adverse organisational and policy climate. The results of this, they suggest, may involve, (a) practitioners developing a sense of helplessness which may lead to burnout, (b) practitioners detaching from the emotional aspects of their role entirely, and/or (c) the emergence of hostile attitudes both within teams, and towards management and external providers.

In a similar vein, and drawing on a series of qualitative interviews and focus groups, Renedo (2014) examines how homeless practitioners construct their professional identities. Here, practitioners are portrayed as 'torn' between the requirements of statutory funders and their own professional and ethical duty of care towards their clients. Renedo notes that while participants described themselves as allies to their homeless services users, and emphasised the importance of non-judgmental and supportive relationships as the key to positive outcomes, the need to comply with statutory regulations was at odds with their ability to achieve such relationships. Notably, the extensive bureaucracy that comes with statutory funding contracts (for example, completion of checklists and the introduction of appointment systems) was recognised as creating unnecessary and unhelpful power differentials between staff and service users (Renedo, 2014). Like Scanlon and Adlam (2012), Renedo emphasises the potential impacts that this context holds for both practitioner *and* service user wellbeing:

Working in such "incohesive" context can lead to distressing effects on professionals, including feelings of helplessness and distantiation (sic) from clients and colleagues, which affect their capacities to care ethically and effectively… With increasing competition for government funding and diminishing resources, **professionals might not have other option but to resort to becoming "deviant" to their identity and caring approaches.** This can potentially turn their services into "spaces of fear" (Johnsen et al., 2005) that constrain rather than enable homeless people's engagement, thus hindering their chances for successful coping. (Renedo, 2014, p. 231, emphasis added)

The research studies detailed above serves to highlight the challenges faced by third sector organisations as funding becomes increasingly regulated. However, there remains a distinct lack of empirical qualitative research that explicitly situates the experience of homelessness organisations and practitioners in the broader context of austerity. As the previous chapter indicates, third sector organisations are now contending both with this 'contract culture' but also with the impacts of local government budget reductions and welfare reforms. One notable exception to this, however, is a more recent qualitative case study produced by Daly (2016; 2018). Drawing on a longitudinal research conducted in a single homelessness accommodation and resettlement service between 2011 and 2014, Daly again evidences the ways by which policy reforms and budget reductions impacted not only the provision of services, but also the professional and personal values of practitioners. She describes how a reduction in staff's hours and a reduction in the services offered by the organisation had led to a sense of "deletion" and "loss of professional value" (p.6) amongst those working on the frontline. For these

practitioners, who generally positioned themselves as advocates for their clients and expressed a strong duty towards care, that they were no longer able to operate in the way that they wished was a source of great anxiety, as Daly notes:

> The changed funding and policy context for homelessness and resettlement services destabilised workers' self-concept as providers of relational care. Staff were conscious of the contradictions in making changes to current models out of necessity in reduced circumstances, while at the same time to try to hold onto the organisations' values. (Daly, 2018, p.9)

While the resilience and creativity of the third sector is often lauded, taken together these accounts indicate that both third sector organisations and individual practitioners are under severe strain in the current climate. This certainly raises important points about how austerity is being felt and 'embodied' at an individual level worthy of further exploration (see previous chapter; Daly, 2018; Hitchen, 2016). Indeed, given the propensity for regional variation in the experiences of organisations and the continued acceleration of the austerity agenda, additional research in this area is certainly warranted (Daly, 2018).

It is also striking here that the focus placed on third sector practitioners' emotional wellbeing is distinctly different to the way in which existing literature has approached the work of local authority housing practitioners, which tend instead to focus on specific practices and processes, for example, how practitioners interpret and implement legislation (Bretherton, Hunter and Johnsen, 2013; Alden, 2015a). From the literature described here, then, one gains little sense of how the local authority practitioners *feel* about their work, or indeed *embody* austerity within their practices. Given that aspects

of local authority and third sector practitioners' roles are highly comparable this is potentially an oversight. As above, local authority practitioners are working in a context of organisational pressures, diminishing resource, increased demand, and are also consistently exposed to emotionally challenging cases.

It is important to note that the above challenges may not have relevance to all homelessness third sector organisations. There remain a significant number of organisations, particularly those with a faith-based element, that either choose or are forced to run independently from statutory funding or regulation (Buckingham, 2010, 2012; Cloke, May and Johnsen, 2010; Renedo, 2014). With this being the case, it is important not to over-generalise the experiences of third sector organisations and instead take a nuanced view to the experiences of those working in different services. Cloke, May and Johnsen (2010), for example, make a clear distinction between 'insider' and 'outsider' organisations each with their own characteristics and, in turn, their own challenges. According to this distinction, 'Insiders' adhere to centrally controlled ways of operating and, as such, are likely to need to adapt in response to being 'professionalised' as demonstrated by Renedo's (2014) findings. On the other hand, 'outsiders' who run autonomously may be able to offer higher levels of care in theory, but be limited by lack of funding and a reliance on volunteers.

Buckingham (2010, 2012) has developed a 'typology' of homelessness third sector organisations, asserting the need to distinguish further between service types. Based on an empirical examination of services across two British cities, she divides them into four distinct categories. The key components of each of these are detailed in Figure 4.1 below. As Buckingham herself suggests, the development of these categories may present an overly simplistic picture of third sector organisations. Indeed, the categories may be

better seen to each exist at a different position on a trajectory between, at one end, state marketisation and, at the other, voluntary sector welfare (see Buckingham, 2010 for discussion). In recognising the diverse responses of third sector organisations to the 'contract culture', the importance of situating practitioners' narratives within their particular organisational context for this research study is reinforced.

(1) Comfortable Contractors	(2) Compliant Contractors
• Business like in operation (e.g. housing associations or similar) • Involved in government contracts • No volunteer involvement or voluntary income	• Charities that have become professionalised/business-like. • Heavily reliant on government contracts • Limited volunteer involvement or voluntary income
(3) Cautious Contractors	(4) Community-Based Non-Contractors
• Involved in government contracts • Difficulties and/or resistance in adapting to statutory requirements • Significant voluntary income • Paid staff and volunteers both involved	• No involvement government contracts and independent of government monitoring • Entirely voluntary funded • Entirely or mostly staffed by volunteers • Embedded in local communities

Figure 4.1. Types of third sector organisations (Adapted from Buckingham (2010, p.13)

4.4. Models of service provision for single homelessness

The prevalence of single homelessness in England and particularly of entrenched rough sleeping (as discussed in the previous chapter) has resulted in a growing debate amongst researchers, policy-makers and practitioners as to how non-statutory service providers might better meet the needs of this population. Drawing on examples of international approaches to homelessness, this has involved a re-evaluation of established linear

models of service provision and the emergence of 'Housing First' as a potential alternative for resettlement (Johnsen and Teixeira, 2010; Bellis and Wilson, 2018). This section compares and evaluates the evidence bases for the two approaches.

Linear models of provision

In England, as well in the US, Australia and the majority of European countries, provision for single homelessness is currently dominated by a linear or 'continuum of care' model. Essentially, this means that resettlement services are designed in a manner so that service users may 'progress' through multiple stages, from more to less intensive services, with an end goal of independent living (Buckingham, 2010; Mackie et al., 2017). This generally involves:

- Contact with day services or outreach teams;

- A move into direct access or 'first stage' hostels;

- Progression into 'second stage' or specialist hostels;

- Progression into supported housing/accommodation;

- An eventual move into a social or private tenancy.

(Shelter, 2008, p.2)

Advancement through these stages is generally conditional on service users' engagement with various services (for example, specialist substance-based programmes) and ability to demonstrate that they have become 'housing ready' (Buckingham, 2010, Homeless Link, 2015; Bellis and Wilson, 2018). Specific time limits are usually attached to stays at each stage (generally between three months and two years, although sometimes less) with these tending to be a prerequisite for services to receive statutory funding via the Formula Grant. The roots of this model can be traced back to the 'continuum of care' approach that emerged in the United States through the

1960s in response to mass deinstitutionalisation (Pleace, 2011). Here, the services that aimed to reintegrate former patients of institutions into mainstream society and housing on a step-by-step basis were "predicated on the need for structure and control" (Padgett, Gulcur and Tsemberis, 2006, p.75; Johnsen and Teixeira, 2010).

The underpinning assumptions of current homelessness provision, then, are that single homeless people with support needs will generally be unable to live independently until their mental health, substance use and other needs are first addressed. Thus, placing them in an independent tenancy too early is viewed as akin to 'setting them up to fail' (Atherton and Nicholls, 2008). Parker (2017) has argued that linear models can subsequently be understood as adhering to an individual or behavioural explanation of homelessness as was described in Chapter Two of this thesis:

> Focusing on 'treating' homeless individuals conceptualises them as either *deviant*; becoming homeless due to their own immoral choices, or *incapable*; lacking the capacity to live independently. (Parker, 2017, p.25)

With regard to the evidence base for linear models, it has been widely accepted that they do hold some merit in terms of bringing many single homeless people indoors and thus alleviating absolute (street) homelessness and the risks associated with it (Johnsen and Teixeira, 2010; Mackie, Johnsen and Wood, 2017). They have also been evidenced as creating successful outcomes specifically for service users willing to engage with substance use services and able to manage in shared accommodation (Tainio and Fredriksson, 2009; Johnsen and Teixeira, 2010, p. 4-5). Drawing on a series of stakeholder interviews, Johnsen and Teixeira found that practitioners working in such services identified a number of benefits to their current approach including the ability to amend

levels of support in response to client need, a "tangible sense of progression" and the opportunity to witness and take inspiration from other service users making progress (2010, p.16).

The vast majority of studies and academic commentary have been critical of linear models. The main criticisms and negative outcomes attributed to these models are summarised below:

- Service users may be reluctant and/or distrusting of the conventional hostel environment and, therefore, less likely to engage.

- Service users may be unable to demonstrate their 'housing readiness' and thus become stuck in cycles of hostel use which are both harmful and expensive.

- Next 'stages' (specialist hostels, supported housing, independent tenancies) may not always be readily available, again leaving service users in first stage hostels for extended periods.

- Service users may face eviction if they are unable to meet the demands of a service.

- Service users have limited control or choice over where they are placed.

- Larger hostels, often chaotic in nature, may be damaging to service users' health and wellbeing.

- Support workers/service staff may be ill-equipped to deal with service users' complex needs.

- There is an overall weak evidence base for the efficacy of linear based models in successfully moving service users out of homelessness long-term.

(Shelter, 2008; Johnsen and Teixeira, 2010; Busch-Geertsema, 2013; Parker, 2017; CSJ, 2017; Pleace, 2018; Bellis and Wilson, 2018; Blood et al., 2018).

A notable caveat here is that many of these criticisms may be partially explained by the constraints on resource and staffing that many existing services face (see Chapter Three). Thus, the way that they are operating is unlikely to be the way they would *like to* operate (Homeless Link, 2015):

'Housing First' models

In light of these concerns, 'Housing First' (HF) has emerged as an alternative and potentially more successful approach to the support of single homeless people, and specifically those with complex support needs. Effectively 'skipping' the transitional stages described above, this approach involves placing homeless people directly into permanent independent tenancies, private or social, with access to ongoing support, as detailed in Figure 4.2. (Johnsen and Teixeira, 2010; Busch-Geertsema, 2013, Blood et al., 2018).
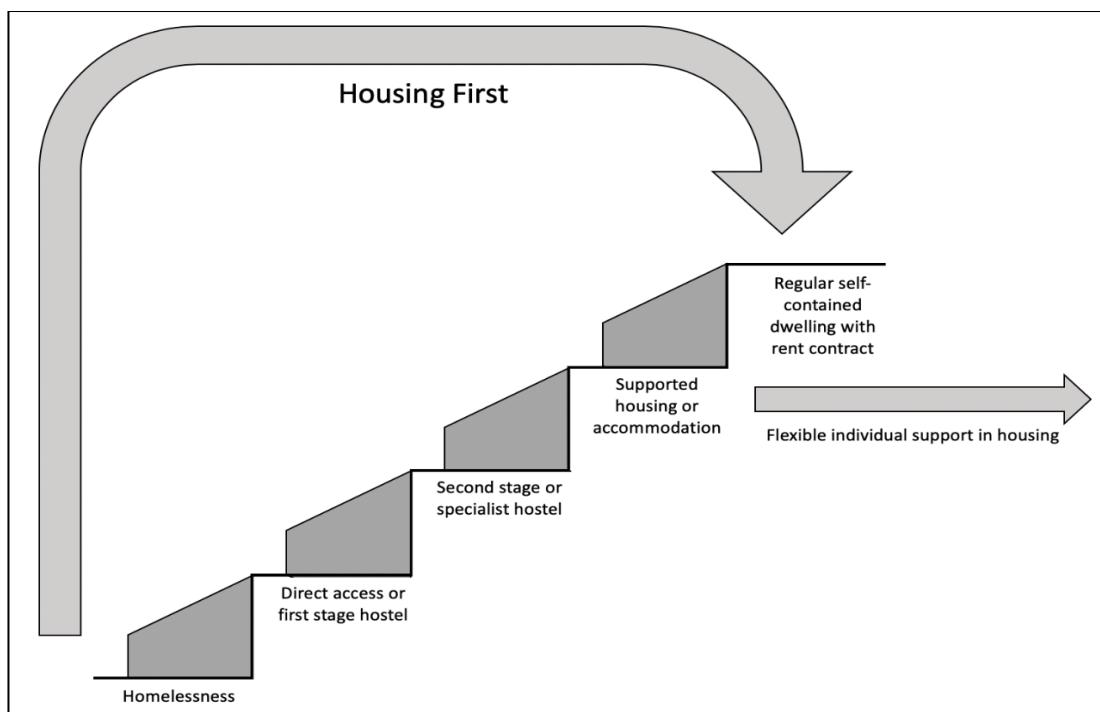
Figure 4.2. Comparing Housing First with traditional linear models (adapted from Busch-Geertsema, 2013, p.17)

Emerging in New York in the 1990s, the overarching philosophy of HF is that housing represents a basic human right and thus should be an immediate response to homelessness rather than a reward once 'housing readiness' is evidenced (Johnsen and Teixeira, 2010). This is accompanied by a recognition that "once the chaos of homelessness is eliminated from a person's life, clinical and social stabilisation occur faster and are more enduring" (Shelter, 2008, p.3). In the English context, the guiding principles for implementing and operating Housing First services have defined by Homeless Link (2017) as follows:

- People have a right to a home

- Flexible support is provided for as long as it is needed

- Housing and support are separated

- Individuals have choice and control

- An active engagement approach is used

- The service is based on people's strengths, goals and aspirations

- A harm reduction approach is used

While still in its infancy in England, there has been significant uptake of this approach in other countries, including in the US, Canada, Finland, Denmark, Norway, and Scotland (Centre for Social Justice, 2017; Bellis and Wilson, 2018). The international evidence base for Housing First approaches is very strong, with high levels of tenancy sustainment (>70%) consistently reported (Pleace and Quilgars, 2013; Centre for Social Justice, 2017) and many reports concluding that HF is particularly cost effective when compared to linear models (see Homeless Link, 2015).

Recent years have seen a small but growing number of Housing First pilot projects emerge across England. At the time of writing (November 2019), Homeless Link records indicate that there are a total 67 HF projects scattered around the country, although most are very new and operating on a relatively small scale (Blood et al., 2018; Homeless Link, 2019). It is important to note, however, that existing evidence indicates that many mainstream homelessness services in England have, in practice, also adopted and implemented several of the core principles of Housing First - particularly in terms of flexible working practices, the focus on service user choice and the focus on harm reduction. Thus, the distinction between TF and HF services in the English context is perhaps less pronounced than in other countries (Pleace, 2018).

Data from an early evaluation of nine HF pilots in England by Bretherton and Pleace (2015) resonates with the international evidence base. It found that both service users

and practitioners generally viewed the model positively, and that time spent in a HF project was associated with improved physical and mental health, improved social integration and reduced drug and alcohol use. That services have been in operation for such short periods does however mean that the long term effectiveness of Housing First in the English context is difficult to fully assess at present (Bretherton and Pleace, 2015). It is also noted that there is currently limited evidence to indicate whether Housing First may be able to counter the issues of social isolation and worklessness, shown to be necessary elements of delivering successful pathways out of homelessness (Pleace and Quilgars, 2013; Pleace, 2018).

For the most part, the concerns expressed regarding Housing First are less about its suitability as a model for provision, and more about its *viability* in the current political and financial climate. First, the majority of HF projects currently rely on funding contracts via the local authority which tend (as previously discussed) to be short-term, target-centric and have been subject to substantive cuts since 2010. The ability of services to fully implement the HF principles — centered on providing housing and support for as long as is needed — is therefore limited. Indeed, it has been argued that a longer term and more consistent investment is necessary for HF to reach its true potential in the English context (Blood et al., 2018, p.11; Downie, 2018). Second, there are substantial barriers to accessing both social and private sector tenancies, as noted in the previous chapter. Without access to adequate and affordable housing, a larger scale rollout of Housing First is unlikely (Homeless Link, 2015). Third, the distinct separation of housing and support in HF models relies on strong partnership across multiple agencies. Existing literature indicates that a lack of engagement from broader services thus poses a substantive challenge:

Commissioning was made more difficult by not having the right buy-in from cross sector partners including adult social care, criminal justice, health, and substance misuse. In most areas, stronger partnerships had been forged with individual agencies but this was not consistent across all sectors, and health was often cited as an area that needed to be involved more effectively (Homeless Link, 2015, p.19).

4.5. Chapter Summary

This chapter has provided an overview of the landscape of homelessness service provision in England, with particular focus on both local authority and third sector practitioners' working cultures and practices. Crucially the existing literature, which is relatively limited in places, illustrates significant concerns in regard to (a) the quality and accessibility of both non-statutory and statutory homelessness provision in the context of austerity, and (b) the wellbeing and self-concept of practitioners as they contend with a highly challenging policy landscape. This chapter also serves to situate the current research study in ongoing debates around how homelessness services should be operating. Given that a central aspect of the empirical findings is practitioners' and service users' accounts of life in services, the current study will be able to contribute further to this debate.

The subsequent questions to emerge from this chapter with relevance to the empirical study are:

- How has the austerity context translated into both groups of practitioners' everyday working practices? How are new challenges being navigated and responded to?

- What are the different participant groups' experiences/understanding of local authority decision-making and discretion?

- Given that they are usually treated as distinct, how do the experiences of third sector and local authority practitioners compare?

- Do participants' narratives reflect the concerns raised here around linear models of provision? And if so, would Housing First represent a viable solution for these (and similar) service users?

The last three chapters have effectively provided a basis on which the 'street level' realities of homelessness in the context of austerity can be explored. In Parts III and IV of the thesis, connections are made between the literature presented here and the findings of the empirical data in order to construct the overarching grounded theory that centres on the concepts of *discord* and *distress.* As will be discussed further, it was also necessary to draw on a broader range of literature than is presented here in response to the findings as they emerged from the data (Charmaz, 2014).   These will be discussed in Chapters Nine after the presentation of the research findings.

Part II: Methodology

Chapter 5: Research methodology

5.1. Introduction to the chapter

This chapter introduces and provides justifications for the methodological approaches employed in this study. The study adopted a qualitative research design, underpinned by social constructionist philosophy. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, and analysed in accordance with a constructivist approach to grounded theory (Charmaz, 2014).

Following a statement of the research aims and questions, this chapter comprises three sections. The first offers an overview of the theoretical framework underpinning this study. Here, my ontological and epistemological position will be discussed, and a rationale for both the use of constructivist grounded theory and semi-structured interviews is provided. The second section provides an account of the practical methodological strategies employed in this study, including details of how the interviews were conducted and analysed, and the ethical procedures and practices that were put in place. The third and final section details the participant sample of the study.

The choices made with regard to the research design were informed by the overarching research aims and questions/sub questions that this study aimed to address, as listed below. The fifth and final research aim is of particular relevance for the methodological decisions made:

Research aims
- To gain understanding of how austerity-driven measures and policies have translated into the 'street level' experiences of homeless service users, practitioners and service providers.

- To critically compare the way in which homelessness is framed by policymakers with single homeless people and practitioners' everyday realities.

- To deepen understanding of transitions into, through and out of homelessness in the context of austerity, and to consider the implications these hold for policy responses and interventions.

- To contribute specifically to knowledge on the lives and experiences of single homeless people residing in homelessness accommodation and resettlement services.

- **To place the 'voices' of homeless people and practitioners at the forefront of theoretical developments, reflecting the belief that listening to peoples' personal narratives is the best way to achieve a thorough and nuanced understanding of this topic.**

Research questions

- **How is homelessness being experienced and managed at the 'street level' in the context of the post-2010 austerity programme?**

- What is it like to be homeless in the context of post-2010 austerity measures?

- What is it like to work in homelessness provision in the context of post-2010 austerity measures?

- How do practitioners and service users construct their experiences in relation to the current policy context?

5.2. Theoretical framework

To be able to make a defensible contribution to knowledge, it is necessary to clarify the philosophical orientations that underpin any study. The ontological and epistemological position adopted by any researcher (consciously or not) hold profound implications for

the way in which research is approached and conducted. In brief, ontology refers to the question of what we believe to constitute social reality, while epistemology refers to the question of how we may come to know that reality (Denzin and Lincoln, 1994; Punch and Oancea, 2014; Bryman, 2016). Social constructionism, the paradigm within which this research is situated, is understood here to represent a particular position in relation to both of these questions.

The ontological position of social constructionism is that, rather than being 'out there' to discover, our realities are socially and discursively *constructed* by social actors. We are actively involved in producing (and reproducing) social reality through our interactions and language, and thus the meanings attached to social phenomena are in a constant state of revision (Berger and Luckman, 1966; Bryman 2016; Merriam and Tisdell, 2015). From this perspective, the social categories and concepts we use in everyday life are neither 'factual' nor objective, but embedded in particular contexts. For social constructionists, then, the answer to the epistemological question centres around the nature and value of social interactions and more specifically understands conversation and discursive practice as a way to 'know' and make sense of a broader social reality (Berger and Luckman, 1966; Burr, 2015).

There are significant variations in the way that social constructionism has been interpreted and applied within social science research (see for example Jacobs and Manzi, 2000, Fopp, 2007, 2008; Clapham, 2012, 2017; Burr, 2015; Jacobs, Kemeny and Manzi, 2017). The most radical forms of social constructionism — those which reject the notion of an objective reality entirely — have been criticised both for overlooking the importance of social structure (in favour of micro-level interactions) and for being so relativistic that the emancipatory power of research is relinquished (Fopp, 2007,

Clapham, 2012). Indeed, and while the values and practices that give rise to social inequalities can certainly be seen as constructed, it is important to recognise that these too represent a tangible reality for those experiencing them. I felt that to assume a position, which entirely rejects an objective reality, could serve to undermine and minimise my participants' experiences: "to deny such experience of objectively real social circumstances increases the chances of being accomplices to them" (Fopp, 2007, p. 14).

Following a number of other researchers in the field of housing, this study assumes a more 'moderate' form of constructionism (Jacobs and Manzi, 2000; Scott and Morrison, 2006; Fopp, 2007, 2008; Clapham, 2012, 2017; Burr, 2015; Jacobs, Kemeny and Manzi, 2017). Here, it is accepted that while there indeed is a singular material and spatial reality, our access to this is mediated through socially and culturally constructed language, interaction and discourse (Fopp, 2007, 2008; Clapham, 2012; Jacobs, Kemeny and Manzi, 2017; Jacobs, 2018). Within this study, for example, I acknowledge that there are undeniably people sleeping on the streets but would argue that the way we give meaning to and label this phenomena is contextually dependent and shaped by policy and public discourses; as discussed in Chapter Two, the meanings attached to homelessness remain highly contested and subject to change across time and place.

In the context of homelessness research, this form of social constructionism offers significant opportunity for social change in a way that radical social constructivism might not, as it can be dismissed as entirely subjective. Here, it is recognised that the rhetoric, policies and practices that govern our understanding of homelessness are neither objective nor inevitable, but instead social constructions aligned to particular priorities and ideologies (Fopp, 2008, p. 172; Jacobs, Kemeny and Manzi, 2017; Jacobs, 2018). As

noted by Fopp (2007), this grants us the space to complicate, critique and challenge these dominant discourses:

> ['Weak' social constructionism] has the potential to unsettle dominant and powerful voices who capitalise on their ability to dictate definitions, propagate explanations and causes for such 'social problems'. It has the potential to explain why some social phenomena are defined as social problems (such as those who are allegedly troublesome tenants) but not others (such as the decrease in affordable rental housing options for low income households)....In this sense it is 'critical' in the best traditions of social science (2007, p.9).

By adopting a research design that starts from the perspective of those worst affected under the status-quo (for instance, people experiencing homelessness), I am also far more likely to highlight these taken-for-granted assumptions: these are, as Harding notes, "much harder to detect when one starts thought from the activities of those who benefit most" (Harding, 1992, p. 584; Fopp, 2008, 2009).

It is from this starting point of social constructionist thought that the choice to adopt a qualitative research design was made. The focus of social constructionist researchers, and indeed of the research questions listed above, is on understanding the relationship between individual processes of meaning-making and broader socio-political practices and norms (Gergen and Gergen, 1991). This way of thinking logically lends itself to a qualitative research design where the subjectivity of participants' personal experiences are valued and prioritised (Bryman, 2016). Following a comprehensive review of

alternative qualitative methodologies, it was decided that a constructivist grounded theory (CGT) framework provided the best fit for this study.

Constructivist grounded theory

The grounded theory method was conceived by Barney Glaser and Anselm Strauss in their 1967 publication *The Discovery of Grounded Theory,* and proposed a new framework for conceptualising and conducting qualitative research. Glaser and Strauss aimed to depart from what they felt to be a preoccupation with speculative and deductive grand theories (Glaser and Strauss, 1967; Strauss and Corbin, 1990; Urquhart, 2012). Instead, they advocated for the use of systematic, inductive and comparative analyses through which 'middle-range' theories rooted in empirical data could emerge (Glaser and Strauss, 1967; Strauss and Corbin, 1990; Otkay, 2012; Charmaz, 2014). In introducing this framework, they also aspired to increase claims of legitimacy in qualitative research in a field heavily dominated by quantitative approaches (Strauss and Corbin, 1990; Charmaz, 2014).

The specific methodological strategies developed in *Discovery (*Glaser and Strauss, 1967) continue to endure in modern applications of grounded theory and will be detailed further below. Contemporary versions of grounded theory have, however, challenged the philosophical foundations of Glaser and Strauss' original framework and instead moved to integrate the methodological strategies of grounded theory with the traditions of the social constructionist paradigm (Charmaz, 2008b; Spencer, Pryce and Walsh, 2014). It is therefore necessary to differentiate between traditional grounded theory and the constructivist framework (CGT) that guided this study.

While *Discovery* advocated for an inductive form of research, it did not break from the positivist paradigm that dominated through the mid-twentieth century (Bryant and Charmaz, 2007). Glaser and Strauss presented grounded theory as a tool for *discovering* objective and generalisable truths, with the researcher presented as value-neutral and 'untouched' by prior knowledge (Glaser and Strauss, 1967; Charmaz, 2008b, 2011). Since the original publication, Glaser has remained rigidly aligned to this position, while Strauss has instead moved towards a 'post-positivist' position. In later publications co-authored with Juliet Corbin (for example, 1990), Strauss is clear in his rejection of the existence of a single 'true' reality, however he also continues to maintain several positivist assumptions (see Mills, Bonner and Francis, 2006; Charmaz, 2014 for discussion).

In recent years, the most influential contribution to grounded theory has come from American sociologist Kathy Charmaz (2008a, 2008b, 2011a, 2011b, 2014; Otkay, 2012). Most central to Charmaz's approach is the recognition of multiple contextually driven realities (Bryant and Charmaz, 2007; Charmaz, 2014). Cohesive to the philosophical position I assert above, Charmaz does not deny the existence of a spatial and material reality entirely (Bryant and Charmaz, 2007), but instead proposes that individuals perceive, interpret and describe the world in different ways depending on their particular social, political, historical and cultural lens:

My use of constructivism[10] assumes the existence of an obdurate, real world that may be interpreted in multiple ways. I do not subscribe to the radical subjectivism assumed by some advocates of constructivism… I assume that people make their worlds but do not make them as they please. Rather, worlds are constructed under particular historical and social conditions that shape our views, actions, and collective practices. (Charmaz, 2008b, p.409n2)

Charmaz' approach emphasises the importance of researcher reflexivity (Charmaz, 2008a, 2014). Rather than making claims of objectivity or neutrality, the influence that I as a researcher have on the research process — including demographic characteristics, political position, prior experiences, knowledge and aspirations — is continually considered and recognised through research process (Mills, Bonner and Francis, 2006; Charmaz, 2008b, 2014; Oktay, 2012). This results in fundamentally different form of research output than traditional grounded theory:

Rather than writing in the removed third-person voice, the researcher, as co-constructivist, can include his or her own voice in order to 'present [themselves] as a human being, not a disembodied data-gatherer'. (Mills, Bonner and Francis, 2006, p.11)

---

[10]There is some debate as to the difference between the terms 'constructivism' and 'constructionism'. While some authors have used the two interchangeably, others associate constructivism with a concern with individual's meanings and interpretations, and constructionism with a concern with broader cultural, historical and social processes (Rodwell, 1998). Charmaz has stated that "constructivist grounded theory has fundamental epistemological roots in sociological social constructionism" (2008b, p. 409n2) and both terms are certainly relevant to the epistemological stance taken in this research.

The methodological strategies employed by grounded theory researchers are markedly consistent (Spencer, Pryce and Walsh, 2014) and can be understood in relation to three central principles. Crucially, these principles guide not only the data analysis, but also the entire process of research from start to finish (Glaser and Strauss, 1967, Charmaz, 2008a, 2014; Otkay, 2012; Spencer, Pryce and Walsh, 2014):

- Constant comparison and iteration throughout data collection and analysis stages;

- The use of theoretical sampling techniques to enable the researcher to reach 'theoretical saturation';

- Inductive and systematic procedures of coding data, separate from existing literature.

Further detail on the application of these principles within this study is provided in the next section of this chapter.

Rationale for choosing constructivist grounded theory

The rationale for adopting a constructivist grounded theory framework in this study was informed by several factors, which will now be discussed in turn. However, I would also add here that my understanding of what CGT could offer to this particular research topic has developed through the process of conducting the study. A further reflexive commentary on the potential that CGT holds as a framework for critical inquiry in the context of austerity is provided in Part IV of the thesis.

First, it has been established that this study took place at a time of significant change within the policy landscape. The literature highlighted how single homeless people and

homelessness practitioners are likely to now be navigating "new realities" (Daly, 2016, p.5) and thus, the starting point for this research was on generating *new* knowledge. As above, this is aligned to the principle of theory generation on which grounded theory approaches are centered. That there is a lack of empirical research explicitly situating the lives of homeless people and practitioners in the context of contemporary austerity (as described in Part I of the thesis) also served to rule out use of a deductive or hypothesis-driven approach to the topic, meaning it was necessary to instead choose an inductive framework (Tweed and Charmaz, 2012; Charmaz, 2014).

Second, constructivist grounded theory was felt to be well suited to research with a marginalised and often misrepresented population (Tweed and Charmaz, 2012, p.134). As noted in Part I of the thesis, the voices and perspectives of homeless people and practitioners are regularly overlooked and excluded from mainstream debate. The inductive and iterative strategies associated with CGT helped to ensure that research was not framed around taken-for-granted preconceptions and that participants' priorities, perspectives and language remained central in the process of theory development (Morse, 2007).

Third, it is recognised that I came to this research from a highly critical position and with an agenda of change. I am of the opinion that Coalition and Conservative governments' policy positions and austerity programme – both in terms of homelessness and more broadly — have been fundamentally unjust, and view this research as a means to counter and challenge these. This inevitably holds implications the way in which data is collected and interpreted, and this was an important point on which I was required to reflect. Nevertheless, it was important that the analytical framework chosen would ensure I moved beyond a simplistic reaffirmation and presentation of my own opinions. The

rigorous strategies and reflexive practices associated with CGT were judged to be a suitable choice to combat this concern given that they encourage the researcher to set aside their own perspective and work through the data with a mind open to new and emerging concepts (Charmaz, 2008a, 2014):

> Since the inception of the method, grounded theorists have pursued substantive topics in which they held a decided stake … researchers who start where they are at may risk importing preconceived ideas into the study; however, engaging in reflexivity and invoking grounded theory strategies can challenge their previously taken-for-granted actions and assumptions.
>
> (Charmaz, 2008a, p. 163)

Finally, I felt that for research to be undertaken successfully, the methodological framework used should align with the beliefs and commitments of the researcher and they should have confidence in their underpinnings. Having begun my academic trajectory in the discipline of social anthropology, I have consistently tried to maintain aspects of the anthropological and ethnographic tradition in my research. Barrett has stated "like the individual who was surprised to discover that he had always been writing 'prose', anthropologists have always been doing grounded theory … they just didn't have a label for it" (2009, p. 215). Indeed, the distinct similarities between CGT and anthropological approaches — the refusal to work from closed research questions; the exploratory nature of data collection; the importance of social and historical context, and the production of person-centered qualitative data — increased my confidence in this choice.

The way in which this research study has been designed is reflective of the need to take a broad lens when examining the experiences of single homeless people, as informed by the concept of homelessness 'pathways' (Clapham, 2002, 2003, see Chapter Two). Indeed, through the data collection and analysis, I was careful to attend not only to service users' biographies of *being* homeless, but also their accounts of transitioning into homelessness, and their anticipated/planned/attempted transitions out of homelessness. As such, I do acknowledge here that a narrative approach – in which participants' stories are treated as the unit of analysis – may in some ways have seemed a more appropriate choice for this study (see Riessman, 2008; Patterson, Markey and Somers, 2012 for discussion). However, my preference for CGT over narrative analysis primarily reflects the desired output of this study; while narrative approaches aim to preserve the individuality and 'wholeness' of participants' stories (Riessman, 2008), what I wanted to produce here were conceptual categories, and eventually a theoretical model, that would allow me to contribute towards an understanding of these phenomena on a broader scale (Charmaz, 2017). Additionally, and where narrative approaches are typically suited to a small number of participants with a common shared experience (Creswell, 2007; Esin, 2011), CGT allowed me to analyse a more extensive dataset, and incorporate and compare data from the three distinct participant samples within one analytical framework.

It is also worth noting on this distinction that narrative approaches are more likely to be theory-driven, with lines of inquiry often being guided by existing theoretical concepts (see Riessman, 2008, p.74). Given that the present study is centered upon generating *new* knowledge about a topic and context which is under-theorised (Pleace, 2016) and

widely misrepresented, I concluded that an inductive and theory-building approach such as CGT was more appropriate.

Interviewing

For this study, a total of forty in-depth, semi-structured interviews were conducted with participants from three distinct groups: (a) seventeen single homeless people (referred to hereafter as 'service users'), (b) fourteen practitioners working in relevant third sector organisations, and (c) nine practitioners working in local authority housing departments.

Research interviews can be designed in either a structured, unstructured or a semi-structured format, depending on both the aims of the research and theoretical orientation of the researcher. Structured interviews are most commonly associated with quantitative and positivist research, and involve the use of standardised question schedules, designed to ensure high levels of reliability and generalisability (Carter and Henderson, 2005; Lodico et al., 2010). In contrast, unstructured interviews are almost entirely participant-led in terms of length, topic and focus, involve little intervention or direction from the researcher, and can produce rich and detailed oral histories (Carter and Henderson, 2005). Semi-structured interviews can be seen to provide a 'middle way' between the two, and allow the researcher to both set the direction of the interview, but simultaneously remain open to emerging ideas (Carter and Henderson, 2005; Mason, 2017). Further details regarding the specific interview design of this study are provided in the second section of this chapter.

Rationale for choosing semi-structured interviews

In deciding on an appropriate method for this study, it was of paramount importance that the method chosen would allow the research questions listed above to be explored and addressed. The emphasis in this study is on accessing personal narratives of those

experiencing homelessness and working in the homeless sector: it was therefore necessary that the method chosen would encourage and allow participants to share their experiences and perspectives as fully as possible and provide me, as the researcher, with as comprehensive a picture of participants' lives as possible within the constraints of the study. Kvale (2008) has argued that qualitative interviews offer us "a unique access into the lived worlds of the subjects, who in their own words describe their activities, experiences and opinions" (2008, p.9). I also felt that in considering my research questions, there was a particular focus on understanding the nature of the 'everyday' realities of my participants and it seemed that an interview, which in many ways replicates the conventions of an everyday conversation (Kvale, 2008), would be an appropriate method.

The flexibility offered by the semi-structured approach ensures that participants are given a level of freedom and power within the interviews to share what they feel is important or relevant. Given that people experiencing homelessness are often highly marginalised, the opportunity to feel heard within an open discussion may also provide a positive experience for the participants themselves (Jensen and Laurie, 2016). While an unequal power dynamic between researcher and participant is inevitable, particularly in research with marginalised populations, a 'person-centered' approach to interviewing can be seen to encourage a more balanced and inclusive environment than a structured format (Mason, 2017). Being able to deviate from the prepared schedule also recognises that peoples' accounts of their lives are rarely linear, but instead are likely to be constructed in a complex and fragmented manner. This is a particularly relevant for those who have experienced significant trauma or live particularly 'chaotic' lifestyles.

Furthermore, and given the intention here was to access accounts of a potentially sensitive nature, the method chosen needed to allow for a rapport and sense of openness to develop. As participants may not be immediately open about sensitive topics (for example, political opinions or criminal activity), a structured 'question and answer' interview format or questionnaire would likely produce far less insight than a flexible and responsive approach. Indeed, it has been noted that because of the 'open' nature of the qualitative interview format, participants are more likely to disclose personal experiences and opinions (Bryman, 2016).

Finally, in choosing an appropriate method for this study, it was necessary to ensure the approach taken would be both practical and feasible (Mason, 2017). Interviews, at least in the geographical boundaries set by this study, provided an affordable option and could be conducted and analysed by the researcher alone without the need for either additional researchers or equipment beyond a basic digital voice recorder and transcription equipment. Although a relatively time-consuming method (Kvale, 2008), it was feasible that the data could be collected within a period suitable for the parameters of this doctoral study.

Interviews as co-construction

Within the social constructionist paradigm, the interview process is recognised to represent a shared production of meanings, experiences and knowledge (Mason, 2017). The interview is a 'co-construction' of data involving and influenced by the participant(s) and the researcher, and is firmly rooted within a set of specific social contexts, discourses and norms (Yeo et al., 2014). From this perspective, the interviewer is neither passive nor objective, but is instead an "active player in the development of data and meaning" (Yeo et al., 2014, p.179). As such, it is important to take time to consider the role that

the researcher may be playing in both the nature of the interaction itself, and the data produced. It is also necessary to recognise that the interview process places considerable reliance on both the participant's capacity and their willingness to remember, conceptualise and verbalise their thoughts, and the researcher's ability to access and understand those thoughts through interactions and questions. Data, then, must always be understood as partial, contextual and temporally bound. This is felt to be of particularly importance when conducting research with vulnerable and marginalised populations, who may face additional barriers in conveying and articulating themselves.

In presenting the interview data as a form of co-construction, the study may become exposed to critiques based on perceived lack of rigour and low validity. If we accept that interview data is time- and context-specific, its value in the 'real world' will be debatable (Yeo et al., 2014). On this point, I take a pragmatic stance and suggest that while the interview itself is contextually dependent, the knowledge that is shared and produced remains meaningful and legitimate beyond the specific interaction, as also suggested by Miller and Glassner (2011) and Yeo et al. (2014). Indeed, to overlook the value of this data entirely is to do an injustice to those whose 'voices' we seek to understand and represent:

> It is only in the context of non-positivistic interviews, which recognise and build on their interactive components…that intersubjective depth and deep mutual understanding can be achieved (and with these, the achievement of knowledge of social worlds) (Miller and Glassner, 2011, p.133).

5.3. Data collection and analysis strategies

The following section provides details of the practical strategies employed in conducting data collection and analysis. In line with CGT, the stages described below — developing interview schedules, accessing participants, conducting and transcribing interviews and analysing data — took place in a concurrent and iterative manner.

Development of interview schedules

Flexible question schedules were used to guide the interviews and were developed in accordance with Charmaz' CGT framework for interviewing (Charmaz, 2014). Although relatively similar in content, three versions of the schedule were produced, each tailored to a particular participant group. The primary aim of the interviews was to access participants' personal narratives and trajectories of homelessness and/or working in the homelessness sector; in other words, to gain a sense of *what it is like to be them.* A series of open-ended and exploratory questions aimed at eliciting these narratives formed the main part of the interview, for example:

- What is a typical day/night like for you?

- (To service users) Could you describe the circumstances that led to you becoming homeless?

- (To practitioners) How has your understanding of homelessness changed since starting in your role?

In accordance with the broader aims of this study, there was also an interest in situating participants' experiences in the broader policy context, and questions aimed at eliciting these formed the latter part of the interview:

- What do you think has caused the increase in homelessness in this area?

- If you could speak to a policy-maker, what would you say?

The schedules included also series of 'opening' and 'closing' questions (Tracy, 2013). At the beginning of the interview, broad introductory questions were asked, designed to generate conversation and 'break the ice'. These acted a way of "lay[ing] the foundation" for subsequent questions aimed at accessing experiences and opinions (Merriam, 2009, p. 104):

- Could you start by telling me a bit about yourself?
- (To practitioners) What made you want to work here?

Towards the end of the interview, "catch all" (Tracy, 2013, p.151) questions were asked, with the aim of capturing the overall 'story' of the interview, and ensuring a sense of conclusion (Charmaz, 2014):

- (To practitioners) If someone was going to do your job, what would they need to know?
- (To service users) Is there anything else I need to know to better understand your experiences?
- Is there anything else you would like people to know about homelessness?

Also included in the pre-designed interview schedule were a number of follow-up prompts/probes designed to help elicit further responses on a particular topic where needed (Charmaz, 2014). While the use of schedules ensured that topics relating to the research topic were covered, the interviews were conducted in a highly flexible and responsive manner. In line with the principle of theoretical sampling, it was also necessary to evaluate and amend the schedules in response to 'gaps' in the existing data,

as well as to clarify wording where questions had been met with confusion. Both the initial and amended versions of the interview schedules used in this study can be found in Appendix D.

Access arrangements

The process of accessing participants often receives only a brief mention in academic publications, and yet, this represents a pivotal and critical aspect of the research. The decisions made around access – to whom researchers speak and to whom they do not— inevitably influence the overall direction that research takes, and the conclusions that may be drawn. It seems critical, therefore, that researchers take time to reflect on their recruitment strategies, and any issues that arise during attempts to access participants. The processes involved in accessing participants may also provide new insights about the participant group in question, which in turn may provide the researcher with additional data. This seems particularly pertinent in research with marginalised populations, where the recruitment is often a challenging and complex process involving numerous stakeholders (Kristensen and Ravn, 2015, p.734).

To access third sector practitioners and service users, I made initial contact was made via emails to either service managers or administrators, depending on the information available on organisational websites. Appropriate organisations were identified through a combination of my existing knowledge and professional networks, and by searching localised resources and Homeless Link's national directory of services (Homeless Link, 2020). To access local authority practitioners, initial contact was made via emails to either departmental managers or specific individuals recommended to me by third sector practitioners. In most cases, the manager/administrator then arranged interviews with selected individuals whom they thought would be most appropriate and

open to participation. In a minority of instances, the manager instead passed on details to me of particular employees or service users that could then be contacted directly.

The initial emails sent contained a brief outline of the nature and aims of the research and included specific information leaflets designed for each of the participant groups, and where applicable a flyer for use within the service. Copies of all of the recruitment resources used in this study can be found in Appendices A and B. In some cases, respondents were willing to commit to an interview immediately, while others offered me an invitation to visit their service or authority for further discussion about participation, or to arrange introductions to potential participants.

The rationale for using 'gatekeepers' is well established within qualitative research: they represent a way of accessing otherwise hard-to-reach population and, as trusted members of a group, are likely to encourage participation (Hennick, Hutter and Bailey, 2011). In this study, gatekeepers had a great deal of knowledge about the characteristics of practitioners and service users, and as such were able to identity suitable participants for the research. I had been, for example, particularly concerned about the possibility that an interview could exacerbate the mental ill health or cause new anxieties for some service users. The use of gatekeepers decreased this risk as they generally undertook a risk assessment (informally or formally) regarding the safety of both participants and researcher. On a more practical level, gatekeepers' ability to identity participants, set up meetings and organise interview spaces significantly reduced the time and resources needed to conduct the research. Their involvement also ensured that organisations and authorities were fully aware of the research taking place and that internal ethical approval, safeguarding and due diligence processes could be followed appropriately.

It was clear from the outset of the research that the gatekeeper figures in this study played a pivotal role in the sampling process (Kristensen and Ravn, 2015). Gatekeepers' decisions about who to suggest seemed to be informed by a number of factors including (a) safeguarding concerns, (b) how they wanted the organisation to be portrayed, and (c) how able they felt service users would be to contribute to the aims of the study. In making these choices, gatekeepers inadvertently defined the parameters of the research sample. This is well illustrated by the following excerpt from my research diary detailing an interaction with a hostel manager:

> I asked whether they thought there were any service users on site who he might be able to introduce me to for a potential interview in the future. They looked around the centre, filled with a handful of service users, and told me they 'didn't think I'd get much from any of them'… What does he think I am looking for? What 'voices' are being excluded here? - Research Diary, September 2017

In a number of instances, I also felt that gatekeepers were actively choosing participants who would represent a 'success story' for their organisation; whose lives had been 'turned around' in a profound manner. While access to a 'representative' sample was not the aim of this study, it remains important to consider the implications of sampling in this manner. Further reflection regarding the 'voices' that may have been excluded from this research, along with suggestions for future research, are provided in Part IV of this thesis.

Conducting and transcribing the interviews

Interviews were conducted between June 2017 and June 2018. All interviews took place within the service or authority building with which the participant was associated and were conducted in a private enclosed room (such as an office, interview room or medical assessment room) in order to limit external noise and ensure a sense of privacy[11]. The choice to conduct interviews within workplaces was made both to ensure convenience and researcher safety. It did often mean, however, that the interview time was predetermined or limited by participants other commitments within the service or authority. With consent, an audio recording device was used in all interviews to improve accuracy of transcriptions and minimise the need for note taking. Full details of the ethical procedures applied throughout the interview process are discussed in detail at the end of this section.

At the start of each interview, I introduced myself and reiterated the central aims of the study. Prior to undertaking this research, I had gained considerable experience volunteering and working in homelessness service providers. During the interview process, I chose to draw on this to introduce myself and to situate the study. This reflected the belief that presenting myself as an 'insider' of sorts would improve rapport and encourage participants to 'open up' as a result of my perceived knowledge of/empathy with their circumstances (Rapley, 2017). However, and on reflection, I also recognise that sharing my background in this way represented an attempt to legitimise my presence in participants' spaces. At times, I experienced doubt about the usefulness of my research and my legitimacy as a researcher, and felt concerned that I would be

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[11] At the time of arranging the interviews, all participants were given the option of meeting in an alternative space (e.g. a room in a library) if they preferred.

deemed an outsider, incapable of understanding participants' lives. I was also acutely aware that despite asking participants to disclose intimate details of their lives, I was unable to offer any assurances as to the outcome or impact of this study in return. The research interaction, then, at times felt like a "one-sided contract" (Cloke et al., 1999, p.140).

My experience in the field, however, was that participants seemed far less troubled by my 'legitimacy' than I had anticipated. It was apparent that many participants valued the interview as an opportunity to share their experiences and opinions on homelessness policy and provision; as noted above, homeless people are consistently excluded from these discourses. While it is of course always important to ensure ethical practice, this does reinforce the need to avoid making assumptions about how participants might feel about being involved in research. Researchers' concerns about exploiting vulnerable populations may not always be shared by the participants themselves and therefore should not be used to as a reason to prematurely exclude them from the research process (Aldridge, 2014).

The pre-designed interview schedule(s) detailed above (and provided in full in Appendix D) were used as a guide in all of the interviews. I was, however, keen to ensure that the focus was placed on exploring what the participant felt was most important to share (Charmaz, 2014). At the start of the interview, I generally reiterated this to the participant, i.e. "I'm going to ask you some questions, but please do keep in mind that what I am hoping to understand is **your** experience and **your** opinions so feel free to focus on what you feel is important".

In practice, I found that how closely I adhered to the pre-designed questions and prompts was quite variable, and depended on the way in which the participant presented in the interview. The majority of the participants, and particularly the practitioners, generally spoke comfortably for extended periods of time with limited need for prompting. Others - and particularly a minority of the service users - were much more tentative in their responses and in these cases, I found myself adhering much more closely to the order and content of the interview schedule. In many cases, I also noted that while participants were able to speak about a particular experience or situation in detail, additional prompts were often needed to elicit the emotional dimension of that experience by asking questions such as: "how does that make you feel?" or "What did you find difficult about that experience?". Following each interview, I recorded my thoughts in a reflexive research diary; this included a description of the setting, my overall feelings about how the interaction had gone, my impressions of the participant and any issues that arose from the interview. This was used to frame subsequent interviews, as well as raising points for my analysis. Examples of extracts from the diary are provided in Appendix E.

I endeavoured to produce written transcriptions as soon as possible after the interview had taken place, whilst the content and interactions remained fresh in my memory. The process of transcription is inherently interpretative and involves making "theory-driven" decisions that transform the original oral recording into a new form of data (Riessman, 1993, p.13; Kvale, 2008). I chose to transcribe the data as close to verbatim as possible, accompanied by notations regarding tone of voice, extensive pauses and other behaviours/noises (for example, laughing, crying, sighing). The use of punctuation (for example, commas, full stops, question marks) was based on my judgements around what

constituted natural pauses. However, I did not change sentences to make them read more like written text as I was keen to maintain the structure of the conversation as far as possible. All identifying information was omitted at this point and replaced with general descriptors (for example, [name of hostel]). Although interviews were transcribed verbatim, at times I have edited quotations in the empirical chapters that follow (for example, by removing repeated or misspoken words). This decision was made to ensure ease of reading, but also to avoid falsely representing participants as incoherent. Indeed, it is recognised that 'natural talk' does not always translate neatly into written text (see Poland, 2003, p.272).

Analysing the data

The interview data was analysed followed the techniques set out by Charmaz' constructivist grounded theory, the overarching aim being the development of a substantive theory rooted in concepts that emerged from the data. As above, the process of CGT analysis involved multiple stages that took place in an iterative rather than sequential manner (Charmaz, 2014). By moving between data collection, initial analysis and focused analysis, I was able to develop and refine emerging theoretical concepts (Charmaz, 2008a).

The first stage of analysis, open or initial coding, involved attaching labels to extracts of raw data on a phrase-by-phrase basis, thus encouraging an in-depth interaction and "intimacy" with data (Urquhart, 2012, p. 24, Charmaz, 2008a, 2014). This stage of coding was particularly important during early data collection, as it allowed me to identify emerging concepts and areas for further exploration. While other qualitative strategies do utilise forms of coding, grounded theory is distinct in its emphasis on action rather than on topic (Charmaz, 2008a, Tweed and Charmaz, 2012):

Coding with gerunds, that is, noun forms of verbs, such as revealing,

defining, feeling, or wanting, helps to define what is happening in a fragment

of data or a description of an incident. Gerunds enable grounded theorists

to see implicit processes, to make connections between codes, and to keep

their analyses active and emergent (Charmaz, 2008a, p. 164).

Codes were labelled either using the participant's language ('walking around in circles')

or alternatively constructed through my own interpretation (losing sense of identity)

(Alvesson and Skoldberg, 2000) but were always developed without reference to

literature or existing theory (Charmaz, 2008a, 2014). An example of the open coding on

an excerpt of interview data is provided in Figure 5.1.

My wish to remain as open to emerging concepts as possible resulted in a vast array of

initial codes being generated: around 2000 in total. The second stage of analysis, focused

coding, consisted of reviewing, comparing and merging the most significant of these.

Thus, the abundance of codes identified in the initial process were condensed and

synthesized, allowing for the creation of tentative theoretical or conceptual categories

(Charmaz, 2008a, p.164). This process expedites the analytical process whilst

simultaneously ensuring that the richness and detail of data is not lost (Charmaz, 2008a,

2014). Following significant evaluation and reworking (and often, renaming), a set of

core categories that best accounted for and reflected the data were established. In the

next part of the thesis, these categories (and subcategories) are explained and explored

in turn. Together, these categories (integrated and analysed with reference to existing

literature) informed the construction of a broader theory — '*discord* and *distress*' —

presented in full in Part IV of the thesis.

Every day's just the same on the streets, it's amazing how tiring it is, even begging, that is tiring and it's soul destroying… It's not enjoyable at all, no. And you get a lot of abuse from other people, there was a group of lads going round just beating up the homeless. Like, I've been weed on…yeah I've had all sorts, and I've had, I was attacked one night on the streets by a man, um he accused me of stealing his phone, I hadn't stole his phone. He, then he tried to attack, like it was early hours of the morning, I was attacked by him, luckily I managed to get away, the police were there and they took me back to my place, where I was staying at the time which was the docks, but just not a home, it was just on the streets, but they took me back there, I dread to think what would have happened if they hadn't been there at that time but, yeah that was probably the worst it's ever been for me. And then, pretty soon after that once the winter came, it became awful but luck-, I was so grateful to get into the night shelter, as I say, before it got too cold the night shelter opened up and we, I had a few nights of cold on the street, it's not the warmest, certainly not and you don't realise how tired you are. Like the first night I had in the night shelter, I slept solidly. Even though you do sleep when you're, it's nowhere near like comfort, do you know what I mean, so um, that broke up our day, that was good being in the night shelter, 'cos then at seven o'clock we had somewhere to go…yeah, you knew it was coming to an end, that's how I looked at it, I knew that, yes I might have to be out at eight, nine in the morning, but come seven o'clock…my day was over.	**Implying lack of purpose** **Begging as 'soul destroying'** **Emphasising danger of rough sleeping / Facing abuse** **Recalling attack (on the streets)** **Differentiating between 'home' and the streets** **Reaching lowest point** **Feeling grateful (for bed space)/ Implying lack of bed spaces** **Emphasising extent of exhaustion** **Appreciating 'somewhere to go'** **Valuing 'end' to days**

Figure 5.1. Example of open coding of interview data from Sarah's interview

Following the initial stages of interviewing, I employed theoretical sampling strategies. The principle of theoretical sampling is to engage with participants in response to the ideas, questions and 'leads' that emerge through coding and memoing (Charmaz, 2014). Within early interviews with local authority practitioners, for example, I found that participants consistently emphasised the regional difference to local authority attitudes

and approaches, and indicated that experiences would likely be markedly different in more heavily populated or urban areas. As a result of this, I actively sought to access participants from a London-based authority, allowing me to explore these differences further. Ultimately, the aim of this process is to 'saturate' conceptual categories to the point that no new properties remain (Charmaz, 2014). I ended data collection after 40 interviews had been conducted and at a point where similar concepts were consistently appearing, and an overarching picture had emerged. That being said, I still felt that there were many avenues of inquiry that could have been explored further, and questions that remain unanswered. This is perhaps reflective the complex and fluid nature of the topic at hand. As a result, I would suggest that the notion of reaching theoretical 'sufficiency' is more appropriate here (Dey, 1999, p.117).

The analytical process was aided by the use of continuous memo writing throughout. Memos were found to be vital in charting exploratory and reflexive thoughts as and when they materialised and allowed for the comparison of initial and developing ideas (Charmaz, 2008a; Alvesson and Skoldberg, 2000; Urquhart, 2012). Memoing also served as a means to ensure that the research was trustworthy, in that it allowed me to track the analytical decisions I made (Elliott and Lazenbatt, 2005; Rapley, 2018). In this study, I used memos for three distinct purposes:

- To assist theoretical sampling techniques by raising questions for ongoing interviews;
- To assist initial coding by recording early thoughts about emerging concepts;
- To assist in the development of conceptual categories and the overarching theory by considering the overall 'picture' developing within the data.

An example of a memo is provided below in Figure 5.2. and further examples are

provided in Appendix F. Both coding and memoing were aided by the use of NVivo, a

piece of software designed specifically for close-text analysis and useful in managing a

substantial qualitative dataset (Birk and Mills, 2015). At times, my analysis benefitted

from moving between computer and pen-and-paper; indeed, I often felt that in order to

engage fully with the emerging ideas, it was necessary to 'map' these by hand. Further

evidence of the various stages of analysis is provided in Appendices F through I.

Memo, August 2018

*"The council need to be a lot more amenable than like, you shouldn't have to go through other people to get help… I know a lot of the people on the streets see the council as **if your face don't fit, they don't wanna talk to you**, but, so it hence why you have to go through people like [names of workers at service], however you shouldn't have to. You should be able to walk in and know that you're gonna be treated fairly, and even though they say you are being treated the same, you're not, not everyone gets treated the same. People, it should be the same rules for everyone and I don't feel like there is…I could ask exactly the same thing as somebody else but because they've got a title, or like [names of workers at service] could ask the council the same question that I wish to and they would be treated a lot differently, and answered differently to me. I think a lot of the homeless feel like they're, like they're aren't worthy or important enough to get anywhere and we should be made to feel like we are, do you know what I mean?" (Sarah, Service User)*

Sarah expresses a strong sense of frustration about her experiences at the local authority. That she has felt excluded because of, or even tarnished by her homelessness ("face don't fit") resonates strongly through her narrative, accompanied by deep feelings of injustice. Although not explicitly, Sarah alludes to the presence of gatekeeping on the part of the local authority- she seems to be implying that she has been unfairly diverted in her attempts to access assistance. I also think it is important to explore the idea that, in order to "get things done", Sarah required an advocate to help her navigate the system and speak on her behalf. This raises significant questions, not only about broader attitude/stigmatisation of homeless people, but also about whether this is still able to happen given drastic cuts to third sector services?

Figure 5.2. *Example of a memo to inform analysis from Sarah's interview*

Ethical practice

In developing and conducting this study, due attention was given to relevant ethical

concerns. Prior to data collection, the research study was subject to review by the UEA

School of Social Work's ethical committee. The ethical application submitted was written with consideration of the ethical guidelines set forth by various boards including the University of East Anglia, the Economic and Social Research Council and the Social Research Association. Conducting this study involved engaging with people experiencing homelessness; this is a highly complex, marginalised and 'hard to reach' population and, as such, it was necessary to give particular attention to the ethical implications that surround research with vulnerable adults. The ethical forms used in collecting data (information leaflet, consent form, service signposting) can be found in Appendices A through C.

All participants (both service users and practitioners) were made fully aware of the nature of the interview process, the research aims, the potential for publication and the ethical procedures in place. This information was detailed in information leaflets that were circulated to potential participants via gatekeepers prior to confirming their willingness to participate. It was then also reiterated at the beginning of the interview, where participants were given the opportunity to ask questions, raise concerns or withdraw. Informed consent was sought from all participants in both written and verbal form. Where it was apparent to me that participants had not seen/read the information leaflet or did not have a complete understanding of the research, I ensured that additional time was spent discussing the research with them prior to the beginning of the interview and before asking them to give consent. At the start of the interview, participants were asked to sign a consent form consisting of a declaration stating that they understood the nature of the research, were willing to participate and were willing to be recorded with an audio device. Once the recording started, participants were also

asked to reiterate this consent verbally[12]. In addition to consent from the individual, the use of gatekeepers ensured that organisations and local authorities were also fully aware of the research process taking place.

Prior to, during and following the interview, I continually reminded all of the participants of their ability to refuse, withdraw or retract their involvement. I reminded participants through the interview that they did not have to answer any of the questions or share information with which they were not comfortable. Following the recorded interview, I fully debriefed participants and provided them with a list of relevant support services in their local area (see Appendix C). Where specific issues had arisen during the interview, I explicitly asked whether participants were receiving any support for these, and whether they required any further information for these issues. Generally, I found that service user participants were aware of the services available to them, and did not require further signposting. All participants were given the right to withdraw their data from the study for thirty days from the date of interview. Alongside a copy of the consent form and information leaflet, participants were provided with a slip stating their wish to withdraw and a return address. All participants were also be provided with my contact details and informed they could retract their data by email request or phone call. At the end of the interview, service user participants only were remunerated with a £10 voucher by way of thanks for contributing their time.

Interviews often covered topics of a highly sensitive nature and had the potential to be a source of emotional distress for all of the participants. During the interviews, I was

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[12] Although the situation did not subsequently arise, it had been decided prior to the beginning of data collection that if an individual did not feel comfortable providing a signature, recorded verbal consent would be accepted in lieu of a written signature.

careful to be conscious and reactive towards possible signs of distress, reminding participants of that they were able to stop or pause at any point. There was also a clear potential for interviews to raise safeguarding concerns. All participants were clearly told that in any instances where there was evidence to suggest that they or another person was at serious risk of harm, I would discuss this with them and attempt to reach a point of agreement, or plan of action (for example, that the participant would refer this to a relevant service). They were also told that, should this not be possible, it would be necessary for me to report this information to relevant services and their confidentiality may be breached. While it was not felt that this research posed a particular threat to my own safety, steps were taken to ensure I was not placed at excessive risk. All interviews took place in a service environment, meaning there were practitioners in close proximity and aware that the interview was taking place. In preparing and recruiting for interviews, I asked that gatekeepers considered my personal safety when thinking both about the space in which the interview would take place, and any risks associated with the participant. While this situation did not arise, it was also decided that if I felt a participant was exhibiting behaviour that made me feel excessively uncomfortable or nervous, I would seek to remove myself from the situation and potentially rearrange the interview for another time. In all instances, I carried a phone with me during the interview and had made my supervisor aware of the times and locations of interviews.

The data collected during the interviews contained personal data, as defined by the Data Protection Act (GDPR) (2018): this included participants' names, locations, defining features, political opinions, mental or physical health, religious beliefs and involvement in criminal activity. Interviews were both conducted face-to-face and recorded using an audio device meaning complete anonymity was not possible. Several steps were

however taken to ensure that data remained confidential. All interviews were transcribed omitting identifying details (names, locations etc.). Both audio files and transcriptions were labelled using codes rather than names (for example, SU3-1) and pseudonyms are used to refer to participants through the remainder of this thesis. The consent forms, which do contain the names and signatures of the participants, are stored in a locked cabinet on university premises, separate to both the recorded and transcribed data to ensure no connection between the two may be made.

Efforts were also made to ensure that data were stored securely. All files are encrypted and stored on computers that require password access, and unnecessary duplicates were avoided. All audio recordings were destroyed following the completion of the transcription and analysis process. Transcripts will be stored securely for the duration of the research and for five years beyond the completion of the thesis when they will be destroyed. This data is not to be archived and, as such, will not be made available for secondary analysis.

5.4. Introducing the research sample

In this study, a total of forty interviews were conducted with participants from three distinct groups: (a) nine practitioners working in relevant local authority departments, (b) fourteen practitioners working in third sector homelessness services, and (c) seventeen single homeless people (known hereafter as 'service users'). This section will offer a brief rationale for the choice of sample, followed by a summary of the demographic characteristics of each of the three participant groups.

Rationale for the research sample

This study is underpinned by the core belief that the best way to understand this topic is to speak to those living through and engaging with homelessness on a daily basis. Indeed, I felt that the combination and comparison of the experiences and perspectives of these three groups would offer a robust picture of homelessness at the 'street level'. It was also recognised this would represent the inclusion of narratives that have often been overlooked by existing academic commentary, as noted in Part I of the thesis. The specific choice to interview single homeless people living within non-statutory accommodation and resettlement services was partially a result of using gatekeepers to access the participant sample, with several of the practitioner participants essentially also acting as gatekeepers. It also, however, represented the inclusion of a population about which less is currently known (as discussed in Chapter Two) and meant that service users' were able to talk about their entire trajectory through homelessness, offering insight into each stage of their pathway. Given that the objective of constructivist grounded theory research is theoretical saturation rather than representativeness, there was no definitive sample size for qualitative interviewing. The sample size in this study is, however, comparable to existing guidelines for grounded theory research at doctorate level (see Morse, 1994, Mason, 2010).

Local authority practitioners

Interviews were conducted with nine individuals working in a total of three local authorities, two in urban areas in East Anglia and one in a borough of Greater London. While the target sample had initially been frontline assessment and advice workers this was broadened in later interviews to include a wider range of job functions, both in response to emerging questions from the data and due to difficulties in accessing participants as intended. Further details of the local authority practitioner participants are detailed in Table 5.3.

Pseudonym	Gender	Primary function of job role
Elaine	F	Advice
Mary	F	Assessment
Louise	F	Advice
Andrew	M	Advice and Assessment
Andrea	F	Management
Ian	M	Advice
Janice	F	Statutory Homelessness/ Temporary Accommodation
Rebecca	F	Prevention
Katie	F	Prevention

Table 5.3. Details of local authority practitioner participants

Third sector practitioners

Interviews were conducted with fourteen individuals working in a total of six third sector organisations. All engaged with individuals experiencing homelessness in some capacity;

this included both first-stage and second-stage hostel accommodation, supported housing projects, specialist accommodation projects, day centres, soup runs/food provisions and employment/training/advice services. As many organisations served more than one primary function (for example, one service operated both a first stage hostel, a second stage hostel and a supported housing project), it was felt to be appropriate to interview several members of staff working within the same organisation. Further details of the third sector practitioner participants are detailed in Table 5.4.

Pseudonym	Gender	Primary function(s) of service	Primary function(s) of job role	Primary funding sources of service
Martin	M	Supported Housing	Management	Local authority; Housing benefit
Lucy	F	Supported Housing	Education + Training	Local authority
Anna	F	Specialist Accommodation	Frontline Advice/ Support	Local authority; Housing benefit
Arthur	M	Supported Housing	Frontline Advice/ Support	Housing benefit; Social enterprise
Leanne	F	Second-Stage Hostel	Frontline Advice/ Support	Local authority; Housing benefit
Rosie	F	Supported Housing	Management	Local authority; Housing benefit
Zara	F	Second-Stage Hostel	Frontline Advice/ Support	Local authority; Housing benefit
Rachel	F	Multiple Accommodation Projects	Education + Training	Local authority; Housing benefit
Bella	F	Multiple Accommodation Projects	Management	Local authority; Housing benefit
Lisa	F	First-Stage Hostel	Frontline Advice/ Support	Local authority; Housing benefit
Charles	M	Multiple Accommodation Projects	Management	Local authority; Housing benefit
Peter	M	Food Provision	Management	Public grants and donations
Joseph	M	First-Stage Hostel + Day Centre	Management	Local authority; Housing benefit

Sophie	F	Supported Housing	Frontline Advice/ Support	Local authority; Housing benefit

Table 5.4. Details of third sector practitioner participants

Service users

Interviews were conducted with seventeen individuals who were experiencing, or had recently experienced, homelessness. All service user participants would likely be classed as single homeless people (see Chapter Two), given that they sat outside of the remit of statutory homelessness and had primarily relied on third sector organisations for assistance and accommodation. At the time of interview, all participants were staying in some form of accommodation, with the majority residing in either a hostel (5) or a supported housing project[13] (10). A small proportion (2) had very recently moved into independent accommodation, but still remained engaged with the service where they were interviewed. The majority of participants had experienced rough sleeping (12) immediately prior to entering services. A smaller proportion had moved directly from sofa-surfing (3) or a hospital (2) into accommodation and resettlement services. Participants were not asked to provide their age but all were within the boundaries of standard working age at the time of interview (over 18, under 65). Further details of the service user participants are detailed in Table 5.5.

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[13] The term supported housing has been used to cover a range of services. In this instance, it is used to refer to projects that followed a model akin to a 'shared house' and where support was available on-site. Some of the supported housing services were funded via local authority grants and had specific time limits for move on/resettlement. Others were funded through other means (social enterprise, housing benefit, public donations and grants) and did not have specific time frames for move on. However, all were structured in a linear manner, with an end goal of independent living and thus would not be classed as permanent supported housing.

Pseudonym	Gender	Form of Accommodation [at time of interview]
Sarah	F	Supported Housing Project (time limited)
Paul	M	Second-Stage Hostel
Ryan	M	Second-Stage Hostel
Christopher	M	Independent Accommodation
Nick	M	First-Stage Hostel
George	M	First-Stage Hostel
Mark	M	First-Stage Hostel
Liam	M	Supported Housing (time limited)
Jason	M	Independent Accommodation
Scott	M	Supported Housing (not time limited)
Steve	M	Supported Housing (not time limited)
Ellie	F	Supported Housing (not time limited)
Stan	M	Supported Housing (not time limited)
Neil	M	Supported Housing (not time limited)
Malcolm	M	Supported Housing (not time limited)
Tony	M	Supported Housing (not time limited)
Oliver	M	Supported Housing (not time limited)

Table 5.5. Details of service user participants

5.5. Chapter summary

This chapter has sought to provide a rationale for the theoretical and methodological framework adopted in this study. As noted at the beginning of the chapter, a central aim of this study has been to ensure that the perspectives and priorities of both service users and practitioners are foregrounded throughout, and the constructivist grounded theory (CGT) framework set out by Kathy Charmaz (2014) was chosen to reflect this aim in particular. Crucial here is that CGT was not only adopted an approach to analysis, but guided the entire research design including the level of engagement with previous literature, the recruitment of participants, the research materials used, the structure of data collection and the final research outputs. The central ways in which CGT directed the conduct of the study may be summarised as follows:

- The use of semi-structured interviews with open-ended and flexible questions, aimed at providing participants space to share what they felt to be most important or relevant.

- An inductive and iterative and multi-layered approach to analysis, aimed at minimising the influence of preconceived definitions/concepts about the research topic and instead prioritising participants' lived experiences in theory development.

- The adaptation of the sampling strategy and interview schedule in response to questions/gaps/hunches from the analysis of early interviews (i.e. theoretical sampling), aimed at ensuring that the participants' experiences and priorities would guide the data collection process.

- The use of participants' language through the presentation of empirical findings, with the inclusion of sufficient raw data to ensure participants' 'voices' feel

consistently present, including in discussing potential solutions/practice and

policy responses (Bowpitt et al., 2011a; Charmaz, 2014).

Part III: The Empirical Material

Introduction to the findings

This section introduces the structure and contents of Part III of the thesis, in which the empirical research findings are presented. As previously noted, the central aim of this research study was to understand the 'street level' realities of homelessness in the context of post-2010 austerity. Following the principles of constructivist grounded theory, the emphasis was placed on understanding how service users and practitioners constructed and gave meaning to their experiences (Charmaz, 2014).

The conceptual categories that emerged through the CGT analysis have been organised into three empirical chapters, as follows:

- Chapter Six: Pathways into and experiences of homelessness

- Chapter Seven: Pathways out of homelessness

- Chapter Eight: Delivering services in a changing landscape

This structure and the conceptual categories that are discussed are also illustrated in Figure 6.1:
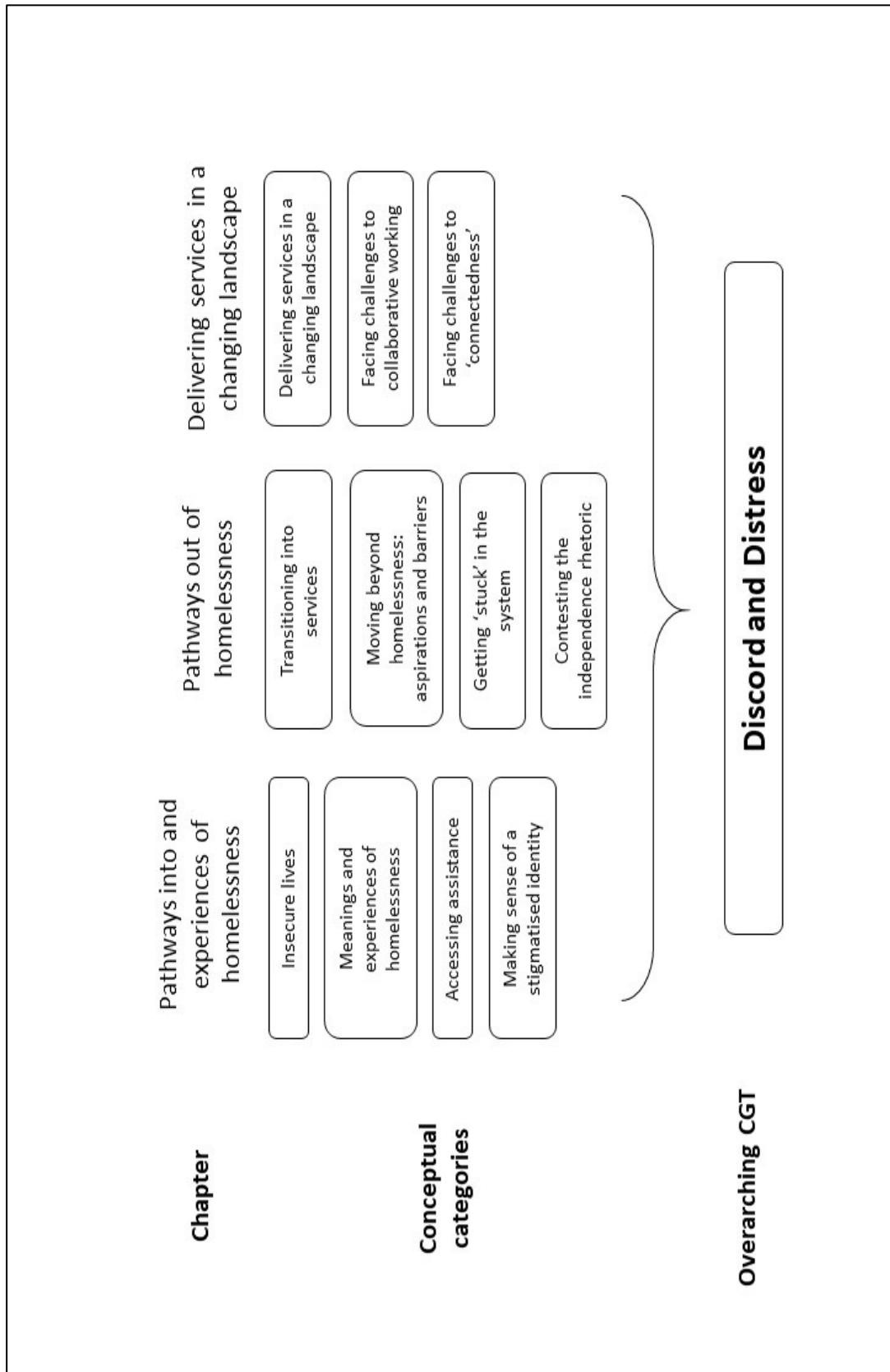
Figure 6.1. Structure of the empirical material (chapters, categories and CGT)

That the service user participants were residing in homelessness accommodation services at the time of interview meant that their narratives tended to encompass their life histories and transitions into homelessness; their experiences of *being* homeless; and their life in services and attempts at moving beyond homelessness. With this in mind, it was decided that the homelessness 'pathways' framework introduced in Chapter Two (Clapham, 2003; Somerville, 2013) naturally lent itself to the data and I chose to use this as a way to loosely inform the structure of the first two of the empirical chapters.

When I began writing these empirically based chapters, I envisioned presenting pathways *into, through* and *out* of homelessness as three distinct stages (Somerville, 2013). However, upon a more careful analysis of the empirical material, the notion of a pathway *through* homelessness seemed to evoke a sense of linearity that was not present in participants' accounts, which were typically more fragmented. Moreover, and given the complexities around what homelessness actually *is,* I found that the boundaries between *becoming* and *being* homeless were often extremely blurred. For these reasons, I made the choice to present findings relating to service users' pathways into and **experiences of** homelessness in a single chapter (Chapter Six). Chapter Seven then considers service users' pathways out of homelessness, and specifically their life in accommodation/resettlement services. The third and final empirical chapter (Chapter Eight) recognises the need to situate service users' narratives against a broader policy and organisational context and is primarily informed by practitioners' accounts. This chapter also draws on practitioners' personal narratives of working within the homelessness sector at a time of austerity.

The empirical material presented over the next three chapters together informed the development of a substantive constructivist grounded theory. Centered on the concepts of *discord* and *distress,* this will be presented in full in Part IV of the thesis. While these concepts emerged only after a detailed grounded analysis drawing on extensive empirical data, they are introduced here to aid the reader in understanding how and why particular excerpts have been selected and discussed in detail. The central lines of argument may be summarised as follows:

- Overall, the empirical findings evidence the various ways in which the austerity context had translated into service users' and practitioners' everyday realities, which are discussed here in relation to two overarching concepts: *discord* and *distress.* The "atmosphere" of austerity was highly evident both through participants' material practices and experiences (*discord*), but was also present affectively, that is, it was *felt* through participants' moods, self-concept and future imaginings (*distress*) (Hitchen, 2016, p.103).

- From the service user perspective, transitioning into and through homelessness was a fundamentally *distressing* phenomenon, with the emotional and relational components and consequences of the experience tending to take precedence over forms of material deprivation. That feelings of loss, anxiety, hopelessness and shame resonated so strongly, even at the point of interview, indicates the need for resettlement strategies to move beyond a focus on housing alone. Transitions into and through homelessness were also characterised by significant difficulties in accessing assistance and/or accommodation, with almost no evidence to suggest that any form of preventative work had taken place with the service users interviewed. As a result, service users who could have promptly

exited homelessness or even avoided it entirely with effective support and advice entered a system shown to be incredibly difficult to leave.

- The presence of stigma towards homeless people served as a significant (and yet concealed) barrier at every stage of the homelessness pathway and served to worsen service users' health and wellbeing, their ability to access assistance and their ability to achieve resettlement on a longer-term basis. Given that recent years have seen the acceleration of a highly stigmatising rhetoric towards the 'undeserving poor' (as described in Chapter Three), this stigma is recognised here to be firmly situated within, rather than divorced from, the austerity context.

- Service users faced significant barriers in their attempts to exit homelessness long-term. There was a clear sense of *discord* between the expectations being placed on them and that they had of themselves (to secure independent accommodation, to move away from cultures of 'dependency' and 'worklessness'), and the realities of what was available and accessible to them in austerity context. Despite a strong emphasis on the importance of 'moving on', service users reported being "stuck" in homelessness services, and practitioners spoke in terms of a system "backing up" due to a lack of appropriate housing options and broader health and social care provision. More broadly, questions are raised as to whether the current preoccupation with a linear trajectory towards 'independence' represents an appropriate or desirable goal for all service users, particularly those with long histories of institutionalisation.

- The landscape of service provision was also characterised by a sense of *discord*, with practitioners seemingly caught between multiple and often paradoxical demands:

➢ Responding to a growing population of service users whilst facing severe

reductions in resource level;

➢ Supporting service users with increasingly complex support needs yet

being unable to access appropriate health and social care interventions;

➢ Adhering to statutory/funding frameworks whilst maintaining personal

and professional ethics of care.

• The complex and multifaceted nature of homelessness meant that it was not only

the direct cuts to homelessness provision that were proving problematic for

practitioners attempting to offer effective support, but 'across the board'

reforms to public service, including reductions in the capacity of local

government, provision for mental health and substance use, probation services

and increases in welfare conditionality.

• This growing disparity between 'ideal' and 'real' working practices was a source

of great *distress* for practitioners who, despite setbacks, consistently

demonstrated deep levels of connectedness and commitment to their work.

Notably, and while often presented as distinctly different, third sector and local

authority practitioners' narratives were extremely comparable in this sense.

• Finally, the narratives of both practitioners and service users are in themselves

recognised to represent a form of *discord*. Participants often occupied multiple

and contradictory positions, and moved between reproducing and actively

resisting the dominant political rhetoric surrounding homelessness (Garthwaite,

2016; Patrick, 2016; Pemberton et al., 2016). In this way, the 'atmosphere' of

austerity (Hitchen, 2016) is recognised to manifest affectively through

participants' accounts and constructions of self.

Chapter 6: Pathways into and experiences of homelessness

6.1. Introduction to the chapter

In this first chapter of the empirical findings, the pathways that service users took *into* homelessness and their experiences of the homelessness event (that is, prior to their arrival in accommodation and resettlement services) are examined and situated within the austerity context.

The chapter is divided into four sections. The first considers the life histories of service users and the conditions under which they became homeless. Here, particular attention is given to the *discord* between how service users understood their own homelessness and how they explained the causes of homelessness at a societal level. The second and most extensive section then moves on to look at service users' experiences of *being* homeless, with specific focus on their narratives of rough sleeping and 'sofa surfing' (that is, staying with friends and family on an informal basis). Next, the third section of the chapter details service users' accounts of attempting to access support and assistance during their transitions into and through homelessness. Finally, and in recognising that service users were not detached from (but acutely aware of) public and policy discourses around homelessness, the fourth section of the chapter considers how service users responded to and managed what is essentially understood here to be a form of stigmatised identity (Goffman, 1963; Pemberton et al., 2016; Patrick, 2016).

6.2. Insecure lives: Pathways into homelessness
Broader factors contributing to homelessness

The majority of the service users spoke about broader issues and/or experiences in their lives that they felt had contributed to their pathway into homelessness. In most cases,

and mirroring the existing literature base, there was a strong indication that most of the service users' life histories had been characterised by long-term instability, insecurity and social exclusion. Here, a lack of obvious social network, and in particular a lack of family ties seemed to be particularly common. Many of the service users implied that relationships with their families were strained, and had been so since childhood or adolescence. For others, any reference to family relationships was entirely absent in their narratives. Other forms of experience that were particularly common in the service users' narratives are listed below. Generally, these correspond with other studies in this area (see Chapter Two):

- Adversity as a child or in adolescence

- Family breakdowns and/or disputes

- Volatile and/or abusive relationships with partner(s)

- 'Transient' lifestyles (i.e. frequently moving from place to place)

- Historical/ongoing issues with substances

- Historical/ongoing mental ill health

- Stays in institutions (i.e. hospital, prison)

- Long term unemployment

- Engagement in precarious forms of work (i.e. working itinerantly, working on the "black market")

- Living in precarious forms of housing (i.e. without tenancy rights)

- Previous and frequent episodes of homelessness

It is particularly notable here that almost half of the service users (8) reported that they had experienced multiple stints of homelessness through their adult lives. In these cases, it was much more difficult to ascertain distinct causes or triggers for their homelessness.

Instead, there was a sense that rather than this being a linear trajectory, many of the service users had been for a long time teetering between precarious housing situations and homelessness. This, the prevalence of what is generally referred to as 'revolving door homelessness' (that is, repeated re-entries into homelessness), is also considered in further detail in the next chapter.

Triggers for homelessness

Echoing the existing literature base, the key triggers for homelessness identified by the service users (that is, events or circumstances perceived as leading directly to homelessness) were loss of employment; eviction and/or abandonment from private or social tenancies; the breakdown of cohabiting relationships; being discharged from hospital; and being discharged from prison without arrangements for housing. Generally, however, no singular trigger was identified and instead the route into homelessness was presented as a culmination of successive challenges or events. What was particularly apparent was that the downward trajectory towards homelessness often accelerated rapidly – likened by one service user to a "series of dominoes". Steve, for example, had been living with his partner and working as a car salesman. He and his partner suffered a miscarriage which led to difficulties in their relationship, and its eventual breakdown. His mental health started to decline, and he described feeling unable to go to work. Having lost his job and without income, he began to accrue rent arrears and was eventually evicted from his privately rented tenancy. He started to drink heavily and got into a fight that resulted in a six-month prison sentence. Within the specific prison, there was no longer a provision for housing related support, meaning he was discharged despite having no fixed abode:

Very rough, rough sort of break up… everything just kind of stripped away

from me within the space of a month really. Lost my job, my car, my house,

pfft, my dignity, just everything. I just wasn't ready to go to work, so I got

sacked, couldn't afford the car insurance, couldn't really afford the rent, um,

so yeah, I lost all of that. (Steve, service user)

For many of the service users, there was a sense that the negative effects of these sorts

of events were felt in a far more acute way because they were *already* living in financially

and/or socially precarious situations, and without the support mechanisms to help them

when a critical incident or trigger manifests (as discussed above). Indeed, given the

fragility of their circumstances, what may in other settings be classed as a relatively usual

life event (for example, the breakdown of a relationship) therefore often acted as a

"tipping point" into homelessness (Pemberton et al., 2016, p.27).

It is also notable that one service user, Ryan, directly attributed responsibility for his

homelessness to changes in the benefit system and specifically the transition from legacy

benefits to Universal Credit. Prior to becoming homeless, Ryan was unemployed and

living alone in a privately rented bedsit. He explained that he had often found systems

at Jobcentre Plus "too difficult" and had faced sanctions and disallowances. As a result

of delays in his claim for Universal Credit, he was without income and quickly began

accruing rent arrears, leading to an eventual eviction by his landlord:

They let me down for nine weeks, and I got chucked out of where I lived

while I was waiting for an answer…she was alright for four or five weeks but

it got to nine weeks and nah it was no good. Every time you phone them up,

they just say they're doing your claim and you just have to wait, but that's

no good to a landlady obviously. (Ryan, service user)

Attributing responsibility for homelessness: discordant narratives

Given that, as noted in Chapter Three, behavioural and 'victim blaming' explanations of homelessness have dominated public and policy discussions, it is interesting here to consider how service users themselves elected to frame their pathways into homelessness (Pemberton et al., 2016). With a few notable exceptions (e.g. Ryan, as discussed above), service users tended to speak about their homelessness in predominantly individualistic terms. Some described their homelessness as being a result of their own poor choices (for instance, substance misuse, offending behaviours):

> I couldn't afford to pay the rent because I was buying drugs, but things started to slip because I wasn't paying my bills, I wasn't paying my rent, housing benefit wasn't getting sorted because everything was getting put on the back burner, so, um, I got an eviction notice from the council house, I went to court, I got given another chance to save it, but still my drug issue was a problem. (Sarah, service user)

In contrast, for others the attributed cause was a series of traumatic life events primarily outside of their control (difficult upbringing, bereavement, relationship breakdown):

> My parents kicked me out when I was a teenager and I was living with my girlfriend, and then after my grandparents died, I just sort of gave up on everything, I didn't apply myself, and I was just sort of waiting for nothing in particular, you know, and after a while she broke up with me and she kicked me out, and that's how I ended up to be here. (Oliver, service user)

Service users, then, seemed to think about their pathways into homelessness as entirely disconnected from broader social and political forces. This is despite, from my own perspective, structural inequalities (unemployment, lack of access to services, housing

markets, poverty) being consistently apparent through service users' biographies. What was interesting, however, was that when the service users were asked more general questions about the existence of homelessness in society (rather than their own homelessness), their explanations for this were almost entirely structural. Indeed, almost all of the service users referred to issues with the housing market, benefit system and the withdrawal of support services, in many cases having well-articulated criticisms of political decisions which they ascribed to homelessness in general:

> Private rents are through the roof, I know they are for a fact … Obviously Maggie [Thatcher] said she wants people to own their house, and I think it is a good idea but how it actually worked in practice I don't know. All the money that was gathered, that should have been reinvested in building … And of course, all of these things around no mental health provision and this sort of stuff, no mental health beds, so you got a lot of people with mental health problems on the street, the police have to lock people in cells, put people in prison who shouldn't even be in prison. (Christopher, service user)

> Why is homelessness increasing? Because of the greedy fucking bastards ... it's your zero-hour contracts, it's your outsourcing. You've got these big companies ... they'll say affordable houses, alright, and they'll get that contract because they've put these affordable homes in. We'll make it forty percent affordable homes, and then by the time it's been built, it'll be about twelve percent. It's as simple as that ... the rich are tearing our society apart for profit. (Stan, service user)

While service users were clearly very aware of the relationship between structural forces and homelessness, the fact that so many of them constructed their own biographies in

an entirely individual terms reflects findings of previous research studies (Lister, 2003; Pemberton et al., 2016). In this way, we see the rhetoric underpinning the austerity programme - in which issues of poverty are described in wholly behavioural terms - emerge through the service users own narratives of self. As Lister has argued: "Where the problem of poverty is typically individualised and blamed on the poor … it is likely that those affected will make sense of their situation in individualised, often self-blaming terms" (2003, p.150).

Practitioners' perspectives on the (changing) characteristics of the single homeless population

Before moving on, both local authority and third sector practitioners were also asked about their perspectives on the characteristics of their 'typical' service users. For the most part, their explanations mirrored the points made above with regards to long term histories of abuse, substance use and poor mental health, and also the prevalence of relationship breakdowns. In addition to this, however, practitioners consistently reported that there had been two major changes to the characteristics of the service users presenting to them in recent years. First, almost all of the practitioners spoke of a marked increase in the level and complexity of service users' support needs with the single homeless population described by practitioners as more "demanding" and "critical" than in years previous. As will be detailed further in Chapter Eight, this was usually attributed to the stripping back of preventative and specialist services, particularly around mental health, and the removal of a 'safety net' which had previously protected the most vulnerable members of society from absolute homelessness:

> I think in the South East it's a mix of lack of mental health provision so communities form on the streets and become much more hardcore more quickly (Andrea, local authority practitioner)

We have a lot of complex needs people, so where they've got like, they're

homeless but they have contributing factors like mental health or they might

have substance misuse, something like that. So we've always had a few

complex ones but we're getting more that have got actual social care needs.

(Lisa, third sector practitioner)

Second, it was consistently noted that there had been a substantial increase in the

number of service users presenting with former tenancy rent arrears. Mirroring concerns

raised in the broader literature (for example, Kleynhans and Weekes, 2019), this was

seen to be a result of the introduction of Universal Credit, the growing disparity between

benefit allowances and rental rates, and the prevalence of precarious working contracts:

I do see more people coming forward with arrears from previous

accommodation, that seems to be consistent with everyone that comes in

whereas before, maybe few years ago, you'd get a couple with previous

arrears, but some without. (Sophie, third sector practitioner)

Um, the average person that we see is British White male who are homeless

after rent arrears on accommodation. And the rent arrears are usually

accrued by not enough work, zero-hour contracts, or the rent being put up

to such an extent that even if they're working full time, they just can't keep

the rent, the whole cost of living like travel, food. That's the average person

we see and usually along the way, they will pick up some form of alcohol or

heavy cannabis use. (Arthur, third sector practitioner)

Experiences of accessing assistance prior to homelessness

While most of the service users spoke at length about their engagement with various

services *during* their time on the streets or sofa surfing, there was little evidence to

suggest that service users had been at all involved with services *prior* to becoming homeless, or indeed that any attempt had been made by services to prevent their homelessness. In many of their pathways into homelessness, what was clear was that service users had often found it difficult to reach out and "ask for help". Many spoke of "burying their head in the sand" and of attempting to conceal their situation for fear of negative repercussions and particularly for fear of being stigmatised. As a result of this, it was often only when a 'crisis point', such as losing a tenancy, had been reached that service users began to engage with services:

> I think the stigma is if you ask for help or you seem to be looking round for that help, then you've got a weakness in you … I'm living proof of that because I never asked for help. It's not manly to say, is it, to say 'I'm struggling, I can't cope, I don't know what to do', so people battle on by themselves to try and resolve things themselves, until it's suddenly got totally out of control. (Malcolm, service user)

While the lack of service involvement prior to service users' homelessness can in part be explained by these attempts to conceal or ignore their situations, the practitioner accounts also made clear that the preventative function of many service providers (both statutory and non-statutory) had been severely reduced during the austerity period and that this was presenting challenges for people at risk of homelessness. The reduced capacity of local authorities and the loss of 'floating' support services that had previously worked to keep vulnerable people in tenancies were both noted as particularly relevant on this point (see also Thunder and Rose, 2019). That many cases of homelessness were deemed to be *preventable* was a deep source of frustration and distress for practitioners:

You know, if Joe Bloggs is about to be evicted because he keeps shouting at his neighbours and leaving uncapped needles on the front door then instead of going through the massive process and cost of evicting him, where he'll come out with arrears, end up rough sleeping and cost the local authority so much to get him back through, send someone in there twice a week to help him out, and see what happens. (Rosie, third sector practitioner)

I think a lot of homelessness could be prevented if housing officers could identify, you know, certain issues, if they could identify maybe domestic violence a little bit sooner, if they could identify, you know, substance misuse. Actually, if they were able to give a little bit of support, and sometimes it can be as simple as a housing officer phoning somebody up and saying look your housing benefit is stopped, if you come to the council and fill in a nil income, that would continue to be paid while you address your benefit issue, but they don't do that. (Leanne, third sector practitioner)

A clear consequence of this lack of service presence was that when service users were transitioning into street homelessness, they reported they had lacked necessary information about processes for seeking assistance via the local authority; their rights according to relevant legislation; and the broader services and sources of support that may have been available to them. Many service users explained that they only learnt what service provision was available locally (or that any existed at all) after a considerable period on the streets, and (as Reeve (2011) suggests) that this was generally via word-of-mouth from others in similar situations. Without knowledge of their basic entitlements (and without 'normal' means of access to this information) service users described feeling distressed and confused about their next steps:

Even if there was some sort of noticeboard or someone giving out leaflets about hostels … Just letting the genuine people know that there is a hostel, that there is help … 'cos I didn't know until someone told me, I've told at least ten people who had no idea about it … I had no phone, no access to internet, so unless someone told me word of mouth, I'm not gonna know. (Paul, service user)

I had no idea about if there was any help for the homeless people, I just thought that if you were on the streets, that's it, and it's only after I became homeless that no, there are actually options out there, but there's no information freely given for you to find this stuff out. It's always when you're in the situation, you then find out the problems and literally every homeless person I've spoken to, they've said the same thing. (Oliver, service user)

6.3. Meanings and experiences of homelessness

This section of the chapter considers the ways in which service users described the experience of homelessness. It focuses specifically on accounts of 'sofa surfing' and rough sleeping, as all but two of the service user participants had experienced either one or both of these forms of homelessness. The remaining two, Peter and Malcolm, had both moved directly into a service following a discharge from hospital.

Experiences of sofa surfing

Six of the seventeen service users reported that they had experienced sofa surfing prior to their entry into services. By most accounts, this primarily involved staying with friends rather than family which may in part be reflective of the lack of positive kinship relationships amongst this population as suggested by Reeve (2011).

Whether or not such sofa surfing represented a viable option for service users seemed to be heavily dependent on the extent of their existing support network. That several of the service users were both extremely socially isolated and also estranged from their families (as above) meant that sofa surfing was, for them, impossible. For example, Mark became homeless following the breakdown of what he described as a highly volatile relationship with his wife. Having been forcibly removed from property that he shared with his wife by the police, Mark had immediately begun to sleep rough that same night. Through his narrative, there was little evidence to suggest the existence of a wider support network:

> I left the property, I had literally no-one, no-one and nowhere to go. I've literally, I've got no friends in the area. I literally had nothing and I started sleeping rough behind a kebab shop. (Mark, service user)

While perhaps not as obviously damaging as street homelessness, the way in which sofa surfing was described by service users served to highlight that the detrimental impacts of the experience can, in some cases, be just as severe (see also Sanders, Boobis and Albanese, 2019). Despite service users often expressing that they were extremely grateful to those that had accommodated them, the experience of sofa surfing was generally described as being extremely stressful, and as characterised by precarity and intense feelings of shame and anxiety. Service users often spoke of being acutely aware that their arrangements with friends or family could end at any point, and thus felt themselves to be at the "mercy" of their hosts' "goodwill". Without a sense of security (and with the prospect of rough sleeping always looming), service users described being in a constant state of unease and nervousness:

> If you're staying round someone's house, you're doing it out of their
> goodwill and people's goodwill runs out so it changes your behaviour, you're
> not allowed to be yourself maybe … I'd be at the mercy of how her day at
> work went, she was generally quite a negative person so generally, I was
> very nervous when she came back from work. (Scott, service user)

A particularly common concern of service users was the lack of reciprocation that sofa surfing entailed, particularly given that they were rarely able to offer any sort of financial remuneration. In most cases, it was clear that their would-be hosts were often already in very financially precarious or overcrowded housing situations. Service users' awareness of this seemed to intensify their concerns around "overstaying their welcome". The feeling that they were burdening others with their presence often meant that service users had *chosen* to move on from sofa surfing in order to avoid being asked or instructed to leave (Sanders, Boobis and Albanese, 2019):

> After a couple of days, you start feeling, it's their family home, it's their life,
> and you feel a bit like you're putting yourself on. (Tony, service user)

In all cases, sofa surfing was also portrayed as an extremely impractical and awkward way of living. Access to a friend or family member's property (and thus basic amenities) would often be limited by their own work commitments, while the constant moving from place to place often meant that service user's belongings were spread across multiple locations and significant time was spent travelling (a pattern described in Sanders, Boobis and Albanese, 2019). For Neil, the culmination of these factors - and particularly the disruption to his routine - meant that he had found it increasingly difficult to sustain his part-time job. As a result, and as above, he spoke of eventually choosing to seek out support from a third sector service provider:

I thought I can't carry on like this, it was too much, even if I wanted like to

change my clothes, I had to sort make arrangements to get my stuff, I'd have

to wait for my mate to get home from work or I'd have to wait for my Mum

to come back and obviously I was staying at my friend's house which was

[name of a county] and my Mum lives in [name of a different county] so

getting from a to b was quite hard as well, honestly, like the train fares are

not that cheap. (Neil, service user)

As in Neil's case, sofa surfing was always presented as a temporary measure at best. For four of the six service users who had experienced it, sofa surfing preceded a lengthier period of street homelessness. The remaining two service users (Neil and Scott) transitioned directly from sofa surfing into a third sector hostel/supported housing project.

Experiences of street homelessness

For thirteen of the service user participants (eleven men and both the two women), the pathway into homelessness culminated in a period of street homelessness. The length of time spent on the streets significantly varied across the participant sample, ranging from anywhere between a few weeks to upwards of ten years. While one of the service users had spent time sleeping in a friend's car, street homelessness tended to constitute rough sleeping in outdoor spaces including in shop doorways, parks and graveyards.

What the remainder of this section serves to highlight, and indeed what became clear to me in listening to service users' accounts of homelessness (and specifically street homelessness), is the depth and breadth of the impacts that it has on the individual. These are discussed in further detail below, but may be summarised as follows:

- Poor physical health

- Poor mental health/wellbeing (including episodes of paranoia and/or psychosis)

- Suicidal ideation and/or attempts

- Intense emotional distress

- Social isolation/ breakdowns in support network

- Increased risk of violence and abuse

- Involvement in criminal/antisocial behaviour

- Increases in harmful substance use

Overall, street homelessness was presented by service users as a fundamentally *distressing* experience, with feelings of shame, loss, isolation, hopelessness and desperation central to all accounts. In the parts of their narratives in which they recalled time spent on the streets, service users placed a particularly strong emphasis on the emotional and relational components of their experience. Crucially, these seemed to take precedence over the more 'obvious' forms of material deprivation with which street homelessness is often associated (for example, lack of sleep, shelter, food, warmth) although these were also present. In this way, service users' constructions resonate with the 'home' based definitions discussed in Chapter Two which recognise homelessness to encompass both material and emotional dimensions (Somerville, 1992). Given that service users' accounts of street homelessness were retrospective, it is suggested that it these emotional and relational components of the experience that have the most enduring effects. This, as discussed further in subsequent chapters, holds important implications for strategies of resettlement.

Service users commonly described the experience of street homelessness as one where life seemed to hold little purpose, and where opportunities for meaningful or stimulating activity were sparse. Indeed, and while a number of the service users did mention the

use of services in the daytime, it was generally apparent that a substantial amount of their time had been spent outside, walking or sitting on the streets. Depictions of life on the streets as spent "watching the clock" and "walking around in circles" speak of the intense and distressing level of boredom and almost 'emptiness' that accompanied time on the streets (as also noted by Marshall et al., 2019):

> I got up about half five, I'd go into McDonalds and get a coffee, and go and sit outside the bank, and I'd literally sit outside the bank all day, literally just watching the clock ... I'd literally sit there until it became dark enough to go and sleep … its soul destroying. (Mark, service user)

> Like there's no reason for the day is there, you just walk around in circles, waste the day away. (Ryan, service user)

That daily life on the streets seemed to hold no tangible sense of direction or progression was recognised to have eroded service users' ability to perceive a better future for themselves. Indeed, service users often spoke in terms of "losing hope" whilst on the streets, but also feeling powerless as to make any sort of positive change. As the excerpt below from Steve's interview implies, such feelings of hopelessness were often exacerbated by negative experiences in their attempts to engage with services (which will be discussed at length in the next section):

> I was at rock bottom, like I'm just going to give up here, nothing is going to happen, no-one's helping me, I'm going to be homeless for a while. (Steve, service user)

For two of the service users (Paul and Mark) this inability to see a 'way out' of their situation had led to ideations or attempts at suicide. That this was the case serves to

further illustrate just how extreme feelings of desperation and distress could be on the streets:

> It's just horrible, and that's purely from being on the street where you've just given up, there's no hope. 'Cos in life, you've always got something on the horizon to look forward to, whether it's the holiday in August, you know what I mean, whether it's like Christmas. But on the street, you sit there, especially when you've been on your own for a few days, and it is just horrible, there's nothing on the horizon, you know there's nothing coming. It did sort of majorly affect me, took the life out of me, to the point where I just didn't care … I'd take my clothes off, sit there, try to die, freeze to death, and it just never worked. (Paul, service user)

Poor mental health was a relatively common feature within service users' narratives of life on the streets. For some, as above, the act of rough sleeping as accompanied by intense feelings of depression and low mood. For others, street homelessness had served to exacerbate pre-existing mental health conditions, as discussed above. Steve, for example, explained how rough sleeping and particularly the lack of privacy this entailed - having "nowhere to hide away" - had intensified his levels of social anxiety:

> It [mental ill health] was always there, but it wasn't nearly as bad as it was whilst I was street homeless which obviously if you got mental health, I suffer from anxiety, when you've got no roof or nowhere to hide away for a little bit, you're around people all day every day, it was really, really hard. I had to try and find places outside of town to sleep, just to calm myself down and be alone for a bit. (Steve, service user)

For several of the service users, the experience of street homelessness had involved a marked deterioration in their physical health. This manifested in the form of severe weight loss, trench foot, chronic pain, increased propensity to catching infections, and severe levels of exhaustion. Reasons cited for physical health issues included exposure to the elements, high levels of stress, a poor and limited diet, lack of sleep, and physical abuse by the public. Often, poor physical ill health was accompanied by a deterioration in mental health. Paul, for example, described how a lack of sleep had led him to him going "doolally" and experiencing episodes of both paranoia and psychosis:

> I mean at night times in the end I'd be finding myself staying awake for five nights and by that time you're going doolally, like I was hearing voices, seeing things where I hadn't slept, I was hearing voices, I thought I was being chased! It was that bad, 'cos of the no sleep. I went to the doctor and he said it's just a lack of sleep. (Paul, service user)

Some service users also described how extended periods on the streets had resulted in them becoming involved in what have been referred to elsewhere as "street culture activities" such as begging, drinking or using drugs in public spaces, and 'survival' shoplifting (Fitzpatrick, Bramley and Johnsen, 2012, p.2). As discussed further, at the end of this chapter, such behaviours were nearly always presented by service users as being a direct consequence of their circumstances, rather than pre-existing traits:

> I just became the epitome of a homeless person, sitting there with my hat out begging for money. (Steve, service user)

> I just wanted to get wasted every day. It's a horrible existence. I can understand how people on the street just want to get blotto. (Christopher, service user)

Experiences of abuse

The prevalence of abuse towards people experiencing homelessness, particularly those in visible spaces, is well-documented by existing research and third sector organisations (for example, Williams and Stickley, 2011; Reeve, 2011; Sanders and Albanese, 2016). This was echoed by service users who often spoke of fearing for their safety whilst on the streets, and regularly recalled instances of verbal abuse, harassment, physical violence, and theft by members of the public. The following extract from Paul's interview captures the extent of the danger that street homeless people were facing. What was most striking to me in this and other accounts was the way that such extreme levels of abuse were described as an expected, and almost normalised, aspect of being on the streets:

> I was attacked with a metal bar, set fire to, stabbed. The amount of times I got stamped on, kicked in the head, scar on my leg is from there, my finger, that finger there's now gone from where I was defending myself. [*Interviewer: And this is members of the public?*] Yeah drunken idiots, eighteen year old drunken idiots, I mean one of them, when he was setting fire to me and they knocked me unconscious and I was sort of coming, I could hear them going "I'm filming it, I'm filming it", and his mate was going "Set fire, set fire", and they set fire to my sleeping bag, they could've killed me.
>
> (Paul, service user)

Frequent experiences of abuse were described as intensifying feelings of vulnerability, hopelessness and social isolation on the streets, and making it more difficult to approach services for assistance. Many of the service users spoke of a general loss of trust in others and, as described by Nick, felt that to "harden up" was the only means to "survive" on

the streets. Several also implied that there was a connection between their experiences of abuse, their own negative patterns of behaviour (such as substance misuse) and mental ill health, a pattern also identified by Sanders and Albanese (2016):

> It [treatment from the public] worsens the situation in your own head and you get trapped in that mentality of just this is what it's going to be like. (Oliver, service user)

> I got mental health issues now, over it. It's 'cos on the streets, people think it's funny that someone's sleeping on the streets so go and torment them ... I get jumpy and angry now. [*Interviewer: why do you think that is?*] 'Cos the way you're treated when you're on the streets, you're treated like you're scum. (Nick, service user)

Losing and building relationships

The loss of old relationships and the development of new ones was a central feature within the service users' narratives. Consistent with the literature, many of the service users spoke of becoming increasingly alienated from their former lives and experiencing a breakdown in communication with relatives, children and friends. On being evicted from her property, and following an intervention by social services, Sarah had seen the legal guardianship of her three children transferred to her parents (the children's grandparents). As a result, she described the growing distance between her and her family:

> For the last year, I've literally, as much as I have had my Mum and Dad there, it's felt like I've been on my own 'cos they've had to put the children over me. (Sarah, service user)

Others, like Paul and Malcolm, had chosen to forego contact with their families whilst homeless and effectively disappeared:

> I got two kids, I couldn't, and I didn't tell them. I'm a coward, just
> disappeared. (Paul service user)

While feelings of social isolation were a common feature of service users' transitions through homelessness, it was also clear that many had formed supportive and enduring friendships with others in comparable situations and that this was viewed as a positive aspect of their experience (as described by Ravenhill, 2008; Sanders and Albanese, 2016). These friendships often provided service users with additional resources or knowledge (location of services, 'good' places to sleep) but also served to counter feelings of vulnerability and loneliness on the streets. Paul, for example, described how being in a group of three homeless people had allowed him to sleep and also to attend the soup run with lesser fear of attack or incident. Key in these friendships, it seemed, was a sense of solidarity and shared experience, as well as the reciprocal support described by Bowpitt et al. (2011a). Indeed, that homeless people were able to both give *and* receive care from others in similar situations meant these that seemed to represent far more equitable relationships than those with family, former or current friends, or practitioners in support services:

> One of my mates that I got really close with … I got knocking about with him
> 'cos he'd had a little bit of an issue with the stuff [opiates], so that's how we
> kind of pulled together at first, sort of helped each other out in different
> ways. (Liam, service user)

For a smaller proportion of the service users, however, the relationships formed with other people experiencing homelessness were far less positive and were characterised

by feelings of control and dependency. This was particularly apparent amongst female service users, for whom such relationships were identified as an explicit barrier in their attempts to move away from homelessness (Ravenhill, 2008; Bowpitt and Kaur, 2018). Ellie, for example, explained that she had felt pressured to stay on the street by a partner, despite the offer of a hostel space:

> All I wanted to do was get off the streets … I went and got an appointment at a [name of hostel] and I got in … but I felt that they [ex-partner] were keeping me on the street … apparently I was always doing what was best for me all the time, so they manipulated me to make me think it was my fault, and it wasn't, you know, and so I went back on the street to be with them.
>
> (Ellie, service user)

For Lucy, the loss or lack of other positive relationships (with family, friends, colleagues) in her life was recognised as a key reason for entering into and remaining in a relationship that she described as being highly volatile and exploitative:

> I suppose for me I didn't have anyone, and it was like someone going "You should do this, you should do this", it felt caring I suppose, but it wasn't very caring, some of the things he did looking back … I was twenty-three years old and he was forty, and he was like giving me crack cocaine. (Lucy, third sector practitioner [and former service user])

6.4. Accessing assistance

This section of the chapter provides an overview of service users' experiences of engaging with statutory service providers whilst on the streets or sofa surfing. Service

users' experiences of engaging with third sector accommodation/resettlement services is explored at further length in the next chapter.

Experiences of accessing local authority assistance

In fourteen of the seventeen interviews, service users noted that they had attempted to engage with their local authority for some form of homelessness advice or assistance. Generally, there was little evidence to suggest that service users had been appropriately assessed for a homelessness application as the legislation required (as described in Chapter Three and Four). Instead, they explained that they had tended to be signposted elsewhere, either to joining the general housing register, or to their local direct access hostel. Steve spoke at length about the multiple interactions he had with his local authority during the six months he had spent on the streets following a period in prison. Overall, he described his experiences as being characterised by a lack of proactive support on the part of local authority front line staff. He explained that he felt this had effectively kept him on the streets for far longer than necessary:

> The woman didn't actually tell me to make a **homeless** application, so I spent another two months homeless because I never made the homeless application which she never told me about, I had to find that out off of other homeless people in the area.

> I see a leaflet on one of the advisors' desks, for [supported housing project], and I asked her what it was about … I was like yeah, can you maybe refer me … she referred me over and within the space of a week, yeah, I was in … if I'd of known about it maybe five months before even, maybe I wouldn't have spent that much time homeless, but **the council only tell you bits and pieces**, I've noticed with them, you kind of have to delve deeper yourself

and find out, otherwise they won't tell you anything. (Steve, service user,

emphasis added)

Crucially, these excerpts indicate that Steve was only able to access accommodation as a result of his own initiative, persistence and ability to effectively challenge staff at the local authority. This of course raises particular concerns around the impact that this type of misdirection may have on those presenting with less ability to navigate complicated or bureaucratic systems (as discussed by Dobie, Sanders and Teixeira, 2014).

Of the seventeen service user participants, five explicitly spoke of making a formal homelessness application at one point or another. For two, Steve and Oliver, the seemingly narrow interpretation of 'priority need' criteria had resulted in a negative decision on the part of the local authority. This was despite both emphasising their own vulnerabilities, particularly with regard to mental ill health:

> I got mental health as well, I'm obviously on medication and stuff, so I would
>
> have thought that would take me a bit higher than the average sort of
>
> homeless person, and again that still didn't help. (Steve, service user)

> In their words, I didn't have any mental impairments, even though I was in a
>
> really bad mental state, they were just like you're not at risk enough for us
>
> to help you with housing … and at the end of it, she just gave me a leaflet.
>
> (Oliver, service user)

The remaining three service users had all departed from the family home following the breakdown of a cohabiting relationship, and had subsequently been judged to have made themselves intentionally homeless. In all instances, the negative outcome of the

homelessness application had resulted in them spending an extended period on the streets:

> The problem I had there was, er, about five years ago, um, again my wife and I were arguing, and she wanted my name taken off the tenancy. And we split up then, for a couple of months, I went back, but my name's not been on the tenancy [since]. So, when I did become homeless, I went to my own council and they said no you took your name of the tenancy, you've made yourself voluntary homeless, there's nothing we can do for you. (Mark, service user)

The local authority was often described as an intimidating space that service users struggled to navigate, particularly when attending alone. During his first visit to the local authority, Paul described how he had struggled to coherently articulate his situation or needs to the housing officer, resulting in being directed elsewhere. At the time, he had been sleeping on the streets for some time, and was struggling with issues of self-esteem:

> It's a big step, it might not be to normal people, but it is a massive step getting off the street and going to see these people… I mean on the street, you try to get yourself as clean as possible … but you see I used to think I weren't good enough to go in these places, I did try, but I don't know if it's where I felt myself under pressure so I made very stupid attempts to try and talk to them. Basically, they told me there was nothing they could do anyway. (Paul, service user)

In a similar vein, Sarah explained how encounters at the local authority had often left her feeling that she had been treated as inferior, as though her 'face didn't fit'. She

understood this to be a direct result of the perceptions that those at the local authority held of her and other homeless people, noting the difference that was made by having a support worker present:

> To me, and I know a lot of the people on the streets see the council as **if your face don't fit,** they don't wanna talk to you … hence why you have to go through people like [support worker] … I could ask exactly the same thing as somebody else but because they've got a title, like [support worker] could ask the council the same question that I wish to, and they would be treated a lot differently and answered differently to me. (Sarah, service user, emphasis added)

That homeless people presenting at the local authority without a worker would often face misdirection and mistreatment was reinforced by third sector practitioners' accounts. Leanne, a third sector frontline practitioner, recalled an instance where she had purposely taken off her ID lanyard in order to observe how those at the local authority responded to her service user's request to make a homelessness application. On arrival, both she and the service user were immediately directed back to the hostel from which they had come and only when she announced her position was a full assessment conducted, resulting in a subsequent offer of temporary accommodation.

Many of the service users had seen an advancement in their situation (for example, moving from the streets into a service such as a hostel) only after the intervention of a concerned practitioner or professional. Christopher, for example, recalled several failed attempts in engaging his local authority but, following a hospital admission, had received support from a healthcare worker who then spoke to the local authority on his behalf. This referral resulted in Christopher becoming engaged with his local authority, and

ultimately being offered a bedsit through a private leasing scheme, a tenancy that at the time of interview he was maintaining:

> She said "Where are you gonna go when you leave here", and I went "Well
> I'm homeless, I've got nowhere"… she went "Well I'll ring the council", and I
> was like "Well they won't help, they'll just fob you off like they fob me off",
> and she went "Well let me ring them", so she rung them, she spoke to them
> for half an hour, and she came back … owe her a debt of gratitude yeah, she
> came back, she said "They'll see you"… (Christopher, service user)

This apparent need for an advocate to navigate local authority systems and avoid being "fobbed off" needs to be set against the austerity context in which services currently operate. Given that homelessness third sector organisations have faced drastic reductions to funding and staffing, it is now becoming less likely that practitioners will have the capacity to support service users in this way. The changing nature of practitioners' roles in the context of austerity and the direct consequences this is having on the support available to service users is discussed further in the next chapter.

Three of the service users had chosen to entirely forego the local authority in their attempts to access assistance or accommodation. In these cases, service users often perceived themselves to be of a low priority and unlikely to receive any help. That there exists a highly negative perception of local authorities amongst much of the homeless population seemed to have effectively discouraged those service users from seeking assistance via this route, despite the possibility that they would have been owed a main homelessness duty (Reeve, 2011; Dwyer et al., 2014):

> I think that's quite a traditional way to think, oh yes I'll go to the council, but
> I think I was put off, just generally from what I heard from my peer group

and support services that it just doesn't work … I think I get the impression

that there's a lot more people ahead in the queue than me. (Scott, service

user)

From listening to people in here, I think other councils tend to just wanna

fob you off to somebody else … they try and find a link where they can send

you to another council that might be able to help you, you tend to get

pushed around until you end up here [direct access hostel]. (Ryan, service

user)

Experiences of accessing welfare benefits

The experience of attempting to access welfare benefits (Employment and Support

Allowance, Jobseeker's Allowance, Universal Credit) of any sort whilst on the streets or

sofa surfing was described as being extremely stressful. Both service users and

practitioners described the system as overwhelmingly hostile, complicated and

inflexible. The result of this was that most of the service users indicated that they either

had not received benefits at all during their time spent homeless (prior to entering

services) or that their payments had been highly erratic. Echoing concerns about the

welfare conditionality agenda raised elsewhere in the literature (for example, Batty et

al., 2015; Reeve, 2017), the requirements set out by the JobCentre Plus were recognised

to be, at a practical level, virtually impossible to adhere to while living on the streets. As

Steve notes, this left many of service users fearing the possibility of sanctions:

I mean, yeah, it's well and good we're helping you find work, but I'm

homeless, [laughs] how can I possibly get a job? For a start, on application

forms, you have to put down an address anyway … I didn't even have like a

suit or anything, to be honest, I was in like the same clothes for four days. I

was like, I cannot go to a job interview like this, I physically can't, as much as I wanted to go to it, I really couldn't. And even then, if I'd have got it, pfft, you finish work, where you gonna shower? … So you know, and then they'll sanction you because you haven't applied for work, so then your money gets stopped, so then you're even worse than you was. (Steve, service user)

Gatekeeping on the part of the Jobcentre Plus was also particularly evident in several of the service users' narratives, with a lack of postal address often wrongly[14] cited as the reason for them being turned down. Paul, for example, described how he had been denied the ability to make a claim on this basis and was subsequently left without any income. Here, again, the implication made by Paul was that stigmatising attitudes on the part of JobCentre staff had served to exclude him from accessing financial aid:

Paul: The lady was just like "Have you got an address", and I said "I haven't, I'm homeless". She's like "Well you must sleep somewhere", and I said "Yeah I do, but in doorways and things", she was like, "Uh well it's gonna be difficult" and I think she could've made it easier, but I can understand, some homeless tramp coming in, you don't really want anything to do with 'em do you … but nothing, no, I didn't get benefits at all.

Interviewer: Do you think there's a problem with their perception of homeless people?

Paul: I went in to see the same lady and she didn't recognise me, and she was totally different to me since I've been in here, yeah totally different to

---

[14] Guidance for JobCentre Plus staff states the following: "the adviser will consider the implications of the claimant having no accommodation and the steps that the claimant needs to take to find accommodation… All homeless people need a safe correspondence address which, if there is no suitable alternative, may use the local Jobcentre Plus office." (DWP, 2013; Cromarty, 2019)

me. I couldn't believe it was the same lady, I even felt like saying you don't

recognise me do you, but I didn't bother. But she treated me completely

different.

The perception that attending JobCentre Plus would often create additional challenges

for service users - i.e. the expectation of receiving a sanction - meant that some service

users explained that they found it easier to avoid making claims altogether and chose to

instead "get by" on the streets by alternative means (stealing, begging, attending

volunteer-run food provisions):

Job centre's too hard … They give you sanctions, disallowances, people just

get pissed off and leave, and so you're better off out getting free food from

the soup run. (Ryan, service user)

Moreover, that the interviews took place at a time of significant welfare reform

(transitions to UC, new requirements at Jobcentre Plus) meant that service users were

contending with the introduction of various new requirements. As hostel manager Bella

explained, this in itself was often a deterrent for making a claim:

What happens with welfare reform is it's not just the changes to the

benefits, it's the fact our clients really struggle to navigate those changes. So

what they're doing is, they're just simply not claiming, or they can't get

through the process. I mean, even a simple phone call, they'll call to make a

claim and immediately they don't get a detail right, they hang up on them.

Our clients get very frustrated with that very quickly, they don't have the

skills at that stage to think' oh well, I'll just go down there, and I'll talk to

them', they get angry and give up. (Bella, third sector practitioner)

On this point, it is also of note that for the few who had received Universal Credit, it felt that the change from fortnightly to monthly payments was generally at odds with, and represented a misunderstanding of, their life on the streets:

> I was claiming Universal Credit and it's terrible. They only pay you once a month, and when you're homeless … they're trying to make it as if you're working and you can budget your money for the month, which is fine, if you're housed, but if you're homeless, that money goes within the space of a week, 'cos you've got so many other obstacles, so yeah, that's not a great system for the homeless. (Steve, service user)

Taken together, the findings presented throughout this section of the chapter indicate that service users often struggled to navigate what was essentially described as being a highly hostile and inflexible statutory system. The underlying presence of normative and stigmatising notions of *what homeless people are like* seemed to act as an additional barrier to accessing assistance. The affective presence of the austerity context also emerges here; even retrospectively, service users speak with a sense of hopelessness about their expectations of receiving help — they *expect* to be turned down, to be judged negatively, to be sanctioned.

6.5. Trying to make sense of a stigmatised identity

In Chapter Three, it was argued that the austerity programme has been accompanied by a policy rhetoric in which behavioural and 'victim blaming' explanations of poverty, unemployment and welfare dependency have gained significant traction (Pemberton et al., 2016; Patrick, 2014, 2015, 2016). Thus, people experiencing homelessness are recognised here to be contending with both an increasingly hostile landscape (as above),

but also an increasingly stigmatising rhetoric. Indeed, existing literature has repeatedly recognised how the 'scrounger' narrative (Patrick, 2015) has permeated public consciousness and resulted in hardening attitudes towards 'the poor' in recent years (Shildrick and MacDonald, 2013; NatCen, 2013; Pemberton et al., 2016; Thomas et al., 2018). That this is the case is reinforced by the high rate of verbal and physical abuse reported by people experiencing homelessness, as detailed earlier in this chapter (and see Sanders and Albanese, 2016).

For the most part, it was quite clear that service users were acutely aware of how homelessness was portrayed and perceived within public and policy discourses, and multiple examples were given as to the impact of this both on their interactions with service providers (as above) and also with members of the public. In responding to these discourses, many of the service users made clear distinctions between their authentic identity and the behaviours they exhibited whilst on the streets (as above). Indeed, and while the 'street culture' activities often associated with the homeless population (street drinking, stealing, begging) were recognised to be accurate to an extent, these were rationalised and justified within the specific context of homeless peoples' lives, and presented as necessary elements of "survival" rather than a reflection of their true characters. That their choices were often made in the context of highly limited and unfavourable options was also emphasised:

> Stealing to eat 'cos you got no money, you've got to save the three pound
> to get into the night shelter, so it's like 'well do I eat and not have a roof, or
> do I have a roof and not eat'? (Steve, service user)

> Didn't beg for money on the streets, 'cos that just makes me feel worse
> about and, I mean, as I said I did steal food and everything but I wouldn't go

as far as stealing loads of alcohol or anything out of the back of a van, and

trying to sell that on, I'd only try and do as much as I can to keep myself

going. (Oliver, service user)

I didn't have any money and was shoplifting which has never, [sighs], it's

never been me at all, I never needed to, never needed anything, you know

what I mean, always had loads of money. But, you know, even, I'm not a

thief, you know, that's not me, but like I just wanted to get wasted every day

to deal with it. (Christopher, service user)

However, and while service users were keen to rationalise their behaviours whilst on the street, there is also here a real sense of discordance and of emotional distress; indeed, it seems that service users were struggling even retrospectively to consolidate past actions with their sense of self.

Mirroring the findings of existing literature on the management of stigmatised identities (Patrick, 2014, 2016; Pemberton et al., 2016; Garthwaite, 2016), the most common strategy to emerge in response to stigma was a form of what Patrick (2014, 2016) has referred to as 'othering'. The majority of service users made a point during interviews of constructing themselves and their identities as distinct from 'other' homeless people deemed to be less deserving of sympathy or assistance. Reflecting dominant public and policy discourses, this included immigrants, those using substances, those with offending backgrounds, those who begged, and those who were perceived as unwilling to "help themselves". This is despite, as above, many of the service users disclosing that they themselves had engaged in such behaviours whilst living on the streets:

You got the drink and the drug addicts, who ended up on the streets because

their families don't want them because they've robbed them blind or they're

literally happy to get off their nuts every day. You've got the people who're

in the middle who've maybe got some sort of illness, not really being helped

how they should be. Then you've got people who just through bad luck and

bad choices have lost their business, lost their house, who are **actually** on

the street. (Nick, service user, emphasis added)

Half of them choose to be on the streets pretty much … they sit there and

beg yeah, and you get like a hundred, hundred and fifty pounds a day if

you're begging, yeah and they spend that all on crack and heroin. I never did

that … 'cos they're on gear, majority of them. **Like I never met one person**

like me. (George, service user, emphasis added)

Efforts to distinguish their own behaviours and values from those associated with

'undeserving' homeless people were also strongly represented in many of the narratives.

It seemed particularly important to service users, for example, that they highlight the

extent of their working histories, their intention to return to work imminently and their

involvement in other forms of 'worthy' activity such as volunteering, caring for family

members or parenting (see also Boydell, Goering, and Morrell-Bellai, 2000; Pemberton

et al., 2016). Indeed, these were in many cases spoken about at length during the

interviews. Work, then, may be understood as a tool for challenging and countering their

stigmatised identity:

People are looking at me and thinking he's a scumbag. I've worked all my

life, I've paid hundreds of thousands of pounds to this city, and I've fell on

hard times, yeah. I'm not a dirty scumbag robbing thieving, whatever people

think you are when you're homeless. (Christopher, service user)

Sometimes you'd get people say things like why don't you get a job and that,

but they don't understand it…some people have worked hard all their lives.

(Liam, service user)

As has been noted by Patrick (2014, 2016), these processes of othering take place in a context characterised by limited resources and where "assessments of deservingness" are becoming an increasingly central feature of policy responses to homelessness (Patrick, 2014, p.232). Against this backdrop, and as also discussed at the beginning of this chapter, these narratives may be understood as a way to legitimise their own entitlement to assistance. Thinking then about the focus of this study, the austerity context can be understood as manifesting not only within service users everyday practices and activities (for example, during their engagement with services) but as also emerging within their own narratives and constructions of self.

6.6. Chapter summary

This chapter has provided an overview of the key findings to emerge from the study in relation to service users' pathways into and experiences of homelessness. First, it has shown the distress experienced by single homeless people, both when on the streets but also in more hidden forms of homelessness. That the emotional and relational aspects of the homelessness event resonated so strongly, even at the point of interview, indicates the need for resettlement strategies to move beyond a focus on housing alone, a point that is reinforced further in the subsequent chapter. Second, it has shown how transitions into and through homelessness were also characterised by significant difficulties in accessing assistance and/or accommodation, with almost no evidence to suggest that any form of preventative work had taken place with this service user

sample. As a result, service users who could have avoided or promptly exited homelessness with the right sort of help entered into a system that is shown in the next chapter to be incredibly difficult to leave. Finally, stigma towards homeless people emerges at several points through this chapter; both as a barrier to asking for and accessing assistance, but also through service users' own discordant narratives. It is argued here and throughout this thesis that the prevalence of this stigma should be viewed as connected to, rather than divorced from, the austerity context.

Chapter 7: Pathways out of homelessness

7.1. Introduction to the chapter

This chapter presents the empirical findings in relation to service users' experiences of living in homelessness accommodation and resettlement services. In the chapter, particular focus is placed on the aspirations and attempts of service users to 'move on' from homelessness altogether, which is shown here to be a highly complex and challenging task, exacerbated by the existence of austerity-driven policies and unhelpful public and policy rhetoric.

As well as service users' narratives, this chapter draws heavily on the third sector practitioners' accounts, which paint a broader picture of the homeless population residing in accommodation and resettlement services. In comparing the service user and practitioner accounts, what became apparent was that the issues raised by service users in the personal accounts through this chapter are typical of the broader picture of single homelessness depicted by the practitioners. At the time of interview, fifteen of the service user participants were residing in either a hostel or supported housing project, while the remaining two had very recently secured independent accommodation but continued to be in contact with, and receive support from, their former accommodation and resettlement service.

7.2. Transitioning into accommodation and resettlement services

In moving from the streets or 'sofa surfing' into accommodation and resettlement provision, most of the service users reported that they had initially struggled to access a hostel spaces in their local areas, with long waiting lists and closures of direct access services commonly reported: "everywhere is full" (Nick, service user). Because many of

the services locally were designed to meet the needs of certain subgroups of the homeless population (e.g., gender specific, mothers with dependents, younger people, older people), service users often felt that they were being excluded from accessing support. Ellie and Sarah, for example, both expressed frustration that as single women without dependents they fit neither into the traditional hostel system, which they felt was generally designed to support men, nor into refuge or specialist services designed for women with dependent children:

> There's not many places available, there is a lot of funding out there from the government, but they're not spending it on homelessness for accommodation for us people, you know for mother and baby units, you know accommodation for mother and babies, there's not many for women like me. (Ellie, service user)

> There should be more, especially in [name of large town], there should be more than one hostel. Like [local service provider], they've only just started to take on women, there was no hostels that accepted women here. They only have two female beds, that's it … I know there's not many, I think at one point there was about five, six of us on the streets but, you know, why can only two of them females get a bed of a night? (Sarah, service user)

Subsequently, the first port of call for many of the service users, were local emergency night shelters, which were generally limited to opening through the winter months. While offering only basic facilities, these were appreciated by service users in that they served to protect them from the elements and dangers associated with rough sleeping. It was also recognised, however, that they did little to alleviate homelessness on a longer-term basis, nor the emotional and relational components of the experience

described in the previous chapter. Indeed, that such shelters were generally accessible only for hours of sleeping meant that feelings of boredom and of hopelessness often endured. That being said, and as in the following excerpt from Tony, it was often whilst at the shelter and with the help of staff or volunteers that referrals would be made to accommodation and resettlement services:

> I was there for about, about seven weeks, it was good. The rules were basically you had to be out between nine in the morning 'til quarter past seven at night. To me it was like you're on a wheel, a hamster wheel, come in at certain times, go to bed at a certain time. I was there for quite a while, as I said, about seven to eight weeks, and then they recommended me to here. (Tony, service user)

By the time that service users had managed to access longer-term accommodation provision, many had been living on the streets for an extended period. The move therefore often represented a significant transition and a marked departure from previous daily routines. Indeed, the need to adapt to new surroundings was a common feature of service users' narratives. For the majority, such changes were described in broadly positive terms. Steve, for example, spoke fondly of his first days in his supported housing project

> I remember the first night I got here and I got my key, I got in my bed and I just sprawled out on it and I slept for a good eighteen hours, 'cos I hadn't had a bed for about six months, it was such a nice feeling. It really was. It took me a while to get back into a routine, I was so used to being up at the crack of dawn, like right hide my sleeping bag and stuff, it's like oh don't need to do that … can I go downstairs and make myself some food, there's

actually food I can just eat, it's really weird but it's such a great feeling.

(Steve, service user)

For Liam and Oliver, both of whom can be characterised as 'entrenched' rough sleepers (Wilson and Barton, 2019), "going inside" was described as a highly challenging experience. Indeed, and echoing concerns raised around 'treatment first' model described in Chapter Four (Johnsen and Teixeira, 2010), both described their current services as overly structured and restrictive spaces at odds with their previous lifestyles. The existence of curfews, schedules and specific rules around the use of substances on-site were described as representing a fundamental misunderstanding of their needs:

I pretty much lived under my own rules you know, sort of got up when I wanted, went to bed when I wanted, you know when I first come in here they have sort of structure where they get you up … I'd say in general the services weren't as understanding about it … [you] come in and then straight away it's like fucking hell, you know, it was so much, it was overwhelming … some of them who were out there with me, some are still struggling, they're just not ready, then there's no point coming in here … 'Cos they've been out there for years, and if you're not ready, you'll just end up back on the street and you feel ten times worse. (Liam, service user)

I feel like I've had a fair deal of my personal freedoms taken away from me … they sort of expect you to just do everything that they want down to the letter ... it's not like we've just come out of college or university and we've got that mind frame of let's get into working, let's get on with it, these are people who have had a bad time on the streets, they're at risk and they come

into a place like this and they've got a whole load of restrictions put onto them which in my eyes, some of it is completely unfair. (Oliver, service user)

What is apparent from these accounts is that hostels, despite their common depiction as highly unrestricted and chaotic spaces, may represent something entirely different for service users, and particularly for those coming from extended periods on the streets. These accounts also serve to reiterate that longer-term stays on the streets often have substantial impact on service users' levels and patterns of need, and thus require consideration in strategies of resettlement.

It was also consistently clear that for those service users transitioning from the streets into a life in services, the process of resettlement and even beginning to think about their next steps, often took some time. Several service users described how the first few weeks and/or months living in services were essentially taken up with looking after their wellbeing. There was a sense here that while their basic material needs were now being met, the longer-term emotional impacts of their time on the streets continued to present challenges. As detailed in the previous chapter, Paul had spent an extended period on the streets, and in this time, reached a point where he had attempted suicide on multiple occasions. What was clear in his account was that these feelings did not instantly disappear on his arrival into a hostel, but that time was needed for him to reflect, to heal, and to adapt to his new circumstances:

> It's taken me, from the first time going into [direct access hostel], **four months, just to get to the point where I wanna be alive again.** Where I feel better within myself again, and I do now, I do wanna be alive again, and I would say it is only in the last two weeks that that's happened. (Paul, service user, emphasis added)

However, this need for time seemed often to be at odds with the structure and specifically the time-restrictions in place within most accommodation and resettlement services. Liam, for example, recalled that he had found himself being forced to move on from a direct access hostel after only thirty days. Having spent several years living on the streets, as discussed above, he spoke of feeling overwhelmed at the speed at which he was expected to "put things into place". In this way, his concerns again mirror broader criticisms of the linear/'treatment first' model of provision (see Chapter Four; Johnsen and Teixeira, 2010):

> When I first came in here I was in a real bad way, I had a big beard, hair all over the place, very dishevelled, probably hadn't had a bath in a couple of months, you know, just sort of in a real mess. I came in here in a bit of a state, and yeah, sort of **slowly but surely** started finding things to do, and um, sort of started putting things in place. And I was coming up to my time, but that is a little bit of an issue, the time thing because obviously, with their contract, they need, they sometimes need a little bit longer because they can't always get somebody moved on in that time, because for a variety of different reasons, people can't always get moved on in thirty days, thirty days is not a long time, it's not a long time at all really. (Liam, service user, emphasis added*)*

7.3. Moving beyond homelessness: aspirations

As discussed in the previous chapter, feelings of hopelessness and difficulties in envisaging any kind of more positive future were a central feature of service users' pathways into homeless, and of their time spent on the streets. At these earlier points

through the pathway, service users' attention was often focused on managing more immediate needs and simply 'coping' with their everyday circumstances. By the point of interview, and with most having now resided in accommodation and resettlement services for some time, service users generally expressed that they felt far more hopeful for their future and most gave examples of specific aspirations and/or goals that they held. It seemed, then, that being in even temporary forms of accommodation afforded service users the opportunity to move beyond what Nick referred to as "survival mode", and instead offered the necessary space and time to think about, and plan for, a future beyond homelessness. Moreover, and while substantive issues were raised through the interviews around the appropriateness of the service environment (to be discussed below), witnessing others within the service managing to successfully exit homelessness served as a particular source of positive inspiration:

> Life is a lot different from sleeping rough, once you get in a secure place, your temperament starts to change, and you know, it's great … What's keeping me going is there's a lad, I think they said he's been here about a month, and they've already found him a flat and he left today, and I'm hoping that's gonna be the same for me. (Mark, service user)

When asked what they hoped for in the future, most service users' aspirations centered on feeling better in themselves, (re)building positive relationships, accessing secure housing and (re)entering paid employment: themes also mentioned in previous research by Kennedy and Fitzpatrick (2001) and McNeill (2011). That similar aspirations were consistently mentioned across service users' narratives suggests that what people who have been homeless want for themselves is generally much the same as for those who have not (McNeill, 2011). It is also recognised, however, that some service users may

have been apprehensive in expressing their 'actual' aspirations, either for fear of ridicule or hostility if such aspirations did not align with the perceived priorities of the accommodation service (or indeed, the researcher or wider society), as suggested by Lemos (2010).

The importance of feeling secure, stable and 'independent' was consistently expressed by service users when speaking about their aspirations for the future, with both 'having your *own* place' and 'working for yourself' being commonly cited ideals. This represents a clear contrast or even an antithesis to the service users' transitions into and experiences of homelessness that, as described in the previous chapter, were generally characterised by feelings of dependency, insecurity and patterns of constant movement and relocation:

> I want to get my own place again and just settle down. I keep moving from place to place and I just want to settle. (Ellie, service user)

> I just want to get myself into a flat … one year from that day I'll hopefully be either having a business or be in the sort of motions of getting it up and running … I've always been self-employed from my first day of work…so I'll definitely be opening up a business again. (Paul, service user)

> I want to get back into a situation where I am working. Have my own little place, a flat or something like that … just to be happy, just to get back to myself, the way I used to be. (Tony, service user)

Several of the service users had children who were either adults or living with former partners/other relatives. Despite often being estranged from children and other members of their families, many participants expressed that they wished to rebuild

these relationships. While it seemed that this was their overriding priority, it was generally felt that this would more likely be achieved following resettlement and, as such, securing housing seemed to take precedence in service users' shorter term plans:

> What I'm hoping for in the future is obviously to get out of here, my own place, and sort of make contact with my children and my wife. So yes, that is the aim. (Mark, service user)

> [I'm hoping for] my own tenancy for once. And then I can have my daughter … once I get my own tenancy, once I get my own place again, I can start having my daughter. (Nick, service user)

As well as re-establishing and rebuilding relationships, there was a sense that several of the service users saw exiting homelessness as a way to reclaim aspects of their identity — who they *are* — lost during their transitions through homelessness (a theme discussed by Boydell, Goering, and Morrell-Bellai, 2000). In the previous chapter, the experience of homelessness was recognised to be about *more* than a lack of housing, and instead could be characterised as an assault on service users' sense of self. Throughout the narratives, and as the excerpts here and above demonstrate, service users repeatedly placed emphasis on the notion of a 'return' to a previous state of existence, with words and phrases like 'getting back', 'returning', 'before' and 'again' being common features in their language:

> All I want is my children back … **I miss all the stuff I did before, I just wanna be a Mum again.** (Sarah, SU, emphasis added)

> I work in the engineering industry … I'm signed off sick, **really hoping to get back** to work at some point in the future when I feel up to it … I

loved engineering, I still do. You know, that is my trade. (Christopher, SU,

emphasis added)

Crucially, and as the remainder of this chapter will explore, these aspirations were in marked opposition to the range of barriers that service users were facing in their attempts to move beyond homelessness. In the narratives, then, there was uncomfortable sense of *discord* between the service users' aspirations and their lived realities at that point in time. That service users were acutely aware of this discord, and of the barriers they faced in trying to exit homelessness, clearly contributed to and exacerbated feelings of hopelessness and emotional *distress.*

7.4. Moving beyond homelessness: barriers

Despite the majority of service users expressing that they did aspire to 'move on' from homelessness services, most had either faced or anticipated for the future a series of barriers in their attempts to do so. The barriers detailed in the rest of this section may be viewed as representing a complex interplay of structural and personal factors. However, what was consistently apparent was that austerity-driven policies, and also the particular rhetoric that has accompanied them, had served to further exacerbate many of the barriers to exiting homelessness. Indeed, the austerity context had essentially placed the prerequisites necessary for longer-term resettlement out of the reach of many service users. There is a real sense of discord, then, between policy rhetoric and the 'street level' realities of these service users (Patrick, 2015). While the discourses associated with austerity consistently tell us of the importance of moving away from cultures of 'worklessness' and 'dependency' (Duncan Smith, 2012), the overall picture that emerges here is one of a system "backing up" and a population of service users

"stuck" in inappropriate service environments. It is also of particular note here that the barriers to exiting homelessness discussed here clearly mirror some of the issues identified as contributing to participants' pathways into homelessness in the previous chapter. In other words, it seems that the some of the factors that lead to homelessness are also exacerbating attempts to leave homelessness (McNaughton and Sanders, 2007). In this way, the systemic solutions to preventing homelessness and to resettlement may be understood as correspondent.

Before moving on to discuss these barriers in more depth, it is important to keep in mind that the following discussion centres on the challenges faced specifically by single homeless people residing in homelessness accommodation and resettlement services, reflecting the sample of this study. However, the local authority practitioners' narratives also indicated that similar types of barriers were commonplace in their work with the broader homeless population including those who receive statutory assistance and those supported into private sector accommodation through tenancy schemes.

Barriers to health and wellbeing

As noted in Chapter Six (and as will be discussed further in the following chapter), practitioners consistently reported that they had seen an increase in complex support needs across the service user population presenting to their services. A primary concern of practitioners then, was to (re)engage their service users with targeted mental health and substance use service providers. However, efforts to do were often arduous. Specific barriers reported included a lack of suitable provision in local areas; long waiting lists; higher thresholds for accessing services; and conditionality clauses that limited access. Instances of exclusion from services based on a dual diagnosis (combined mental ill health and harmful substance use) were particularly common, and had resulted in

service users being bounced between various providers with minimal intervention. In the absence of specialist support and in contending with the service environment itself (Johnsen and Teixeira, 2010), services users' wellbeing was often seen to have worsened during their time in homelessness accommodation services. Where primary support and health-related needs were effectively going unmanaged, steps towards longer term goals and aspirations (housing, education, employment) were often forced onto the backburner:

> The [mental health service] waiting list is so long, so my clients they're just waiting and waiting and waiting and they just get more poorly to be honest. (Sophie, third sector practitioner)

> The scripting thing was so slow … I was quite shocked at how long it took to get a script, they need to script people pretty much straight away, you know, not put them through months and months … because as soon as you got the Methadone, and as soon as that started working properly, it might take a bit of time before it completely stop you, but you know I sort of started putting things in place. (Liam, service user)

As the excerpt from Liam's interview makes explicit, the increasing levels of conditionality attached to accessing Methadone scripts were often recognised to be a particular hindrance on service users' progress. Here, the conditions attached to being scripted - for example, attending multiple appointments or workshops - were deemed to be disconnected from the chaotic nature of homeless drug users' lives:

> It has turned into a thing where you go and see your worker, and then in a week's time, you go to the city, do a urine test there, if that is positive, they

invite you back a week later. It can maybe take a month to get a script …

being quite chaotic and quite difficult to control things, yeah, it's not easy to

string that together half the time. (Scott, service user)

Where you used to just be able to go to a drop-in, now they expect some of

the clients to do like … six sessions or three sessions, so many weeks of a

workshop first before they can then be assessed to be titrated … they can't

tell you where they were a couple of days ago let alone be confident enough

to sit in a room and do a load of group work first. (Lisa, third sector

practitioner)

For a number of practitioners it was felt that successfully abstaining from substance use

whilst in homelessness accommodation and resettlement services represented a "near

impossible mountain" for the most persistent of drug users (Rosie, third sector

practitioner). Many reported that where they had previously been able to refer service

users to residential rehabilitative services or 'detox beds' in hospitals, this was no longer

available. This is consistent with national level figures, which indicate an 18% drop in

local government funding for drug and alcohol treatment between 2013/4 and 2017/8

(BBC, 2018). Rosie, a supported housing service manager, explained the difficulties faced

in supporting people with drug users in the hostel environment:

There is no good, funded, specific drug rehabilitation centres, money put in

there for getting people into recovery, getting people well. There's no point,

I bang on about this all the time, there's no point detoxing somebody, oh

we've lost our detox beds, we had two up in the hospital a few years ago,

they took those away, yeah. There is no point in detoxing someone, you

know, a chronic substance abuser, and having an appointment with them

once a week and saying, 'how you getting on?' (Rosie, third sector

practitioner)

The nature of homelessness accommodation services themselves were also recognised

to be exacerbating mental ill health and substance use issues. The pervasiveness of

substance use, particularly in direct access (first stage) hostels, was recognised as

hampering service users' attempts to abstain from drug and alcohol use and placing the

most vulnerable service users at risk of exploitation. Paul, for example, described how

he had developed a "major drinking habit" during his time on the streets, and now in a

hostel, was attempting to abstain from alcohol. He expressed that this was particularly

difficult given the constant presence of alcohol in the hostel, and he had taken to going

out all day in order to avoid drinking:

Paul: I do anything to keep myself occupied, 'cos I just don't want to end up

drinking, I just want to sort myself out.

Interviewer: Is that difficult, in this kind of environment? To not drink?

Paul: To not take it? I mean, it's a lot harder than the normal world, 'cos it's

there constantly in your face every day … Like my neighbour [in the hostel],

he drinks all day every day. He's always offering me drink.

In a similar vein, Christopher described how he struggled to manage his alcohol use in

hostels where others were regularly drinking. As a result, he had faced eviction on

multiple occasions, each time resulting in a return to the streets:

I went into the hostel and to be honest, at that point in time, which was

2016, it wasn't the right time for me to be there and it wasn't the right

environment because there was some young lads in there, and there were

people drinking and it wasn't a dry house, and there was a lot of drink everywhere. I'd go into the village and I'd have some drink, come back to the house thinking I was going to go to bed, and they'd have drink and they'd offer me a drink and I'd struggle to say no and I'd get on it, and it was, it didn't work out for me there. I threw a TV through a bedroom window twice and that got me in a whole heap of trouble. (Christopher, service user)

Barriers to accessing housing

For those service users that were in a position to think about moving on from accommodation and resettlement services, most reported that they had faced or were facing difficulties in gaining access to the housing market. A social housing tenancy remained the favoured destination for most service users who perceived this as offering a more secure and affordable option when compared to the private rented sector. However, from the practitioner perspective, access to social housing was recognised to have become increasingly conditional and thus, out of the reach of most single homeless people. The right of local authorities to reject applicants based on histories of antisocial and offending behaviour, former tenancy rent arrears, or harmful substance use under the 2011 Localism Act was seen to have effectively excluded the majority of service users from the process of bidding for social housing entirely (patterns also identified by Rowe and Wagstaff, 2017). In some cases, the local authority had set out conditions that service users needed to meet before being able to bid on the housing register, for example, paying back rent arrears consistently for a set period, or engaging with a substance use service. These conditions were generally deemed to be implausible within the confines of the service environment, as both Zara and Rosie explained:

[The local authority] want our clients to pretty much bend over backwards before they will give them a low banding. You're talking twelve months paying off any debts … six to twelve months engaging with substance misuse, six to twelve months of no offending. For some of our guys, that's never gonna happen and part of the reason is because they are stuck in an environment like this. (Zara, third sector practitioner)

Because we have more and more people come through with high former tenancy arrears now, there needs to be a payment plan set up for at least twelve months, where consistent payments are made every fortnight on benefit day generally for a year before we can even put an application [for social housing] in. Now, our funding says that they have a maximum of two years stay in a project. So, I think one of the difficulties is you've got say someone coming into the project from a direct access hostel, potentially have been quite chaotic. You've got probably about a month, six weeks, to settle that person down into shared accommodation … so then we have to encourage a payment plan to be set up, and that all takes time, and often with the local authority, if a couple of payments are missed, then that twelve months starts again, and we've got the two year time limit. (Rosie, third sector practitioner)

For those service users who were able to bid for properties on the local authority housing register, concerns were raised regarding how distressing the nature of this process could be. Given that most single homeless people do not score highly with regards to the social housing banding system, bidding for properties was seen to involve being repeatedly rejected and thus, reinforcing the feeling of being 'stuck' in services:

Don't underestimate how the whole system of bidding for the properties,
just totally demoralises people … Like every two weeks you have to look at
houses and bid for them, you have to make yourself look at these houses
and think "oh yeah, that'd be a nice place" and then two weeks later, you're
like hundredth on the list or something. (Lucy, third sector practitioner and
former service user)

Where offers of social housing had been made, which was rare, these often involved a
relocation to parts of the country where tenancies were more readily available. These
were generally described by service users as undesirable, and several spoke of their
anxiety around what a move to another area would mean for their existing support
network. Liam, for example, had chosen to forego the offer of a social housing tenancy
in a different area and instead remain living in a supported housing project. While he
was aware that without a 'local connection' this was likely to be the only offer he would
receive, he was resolute that this was the right decision for him. He explained that he
had reached a point in his life where he was feeling relatively settled, had a strong
friendship group and positive relationships with support staff. Having spent the best part
of twenty years living transiently on the streets and in hostels, he was keen to avoid
returning to what he perceived would be a highly isolated situation and setting. As will
be discussed further below, this reinforces the indication that successful resettlement
for service users was about more than housing alone, and that relationships and
networks of support also play a key role:

To be honest, I'm not going anywhere else, my friends are here. Like
Haverhill or Northampton or Coventry, and why do they send people there?
'Cos no bugger else wants to live there because if you go to those places they

are run down fucking shit holes … And then all the homeless that haven't got

connections that they can sort of brush, they're brushed under the carpet

sort of thing. (Liam, service user)

The suggestion that the private rented sector could represent a viable alternative to

social housing for those ready to move on from services was heavily disputed both by

practitioners and by service users. Particular barriers to accessing the private rented

sector included the high cost of rent, the need for upfront cash payments, and what was

referred to in some areas as a "complete" lack of accommodation at the newly-adjusted

rate of Local Housing Allowance (see Chapter 3):

There's no private rented for our clients in this city at all, doesn't exist … I

think you'll find if you speak to the local authority, well I checked, even their

own data will show you that they don't have any accommodation that fits

within the Local Housing Allowance that's in the private sector. (Bella, third

sector practitioner)

Even in cases where private tenancies were potentially affordable to service users,

landlords were often reported as being unwilling to rent to homeless people, welfare

recipients and/or ex-offenders (Fitzpatrick et al., 2018). Given that affordable private

rented accommodation is highly oversubscribed, service users often described

themselves as being placed at the bottom of a very long waiting list (Homeless Link,

2019). Crucially, on this point, the rollout of Universal Credit was viewed as further

reducing access to the private rented sector. This was explained in relation to both well-

documented delays and underpayments, but also, as Reeve et al., (2016) describe,

landlords' aversion to relying on a payment directly from the tenant, rather than from

the local authority as previously:

They've put the rent up, not many landlords now will take people if you're on housing benefit … and if you've got to wait eight weeks for the council to pay your rent and stuff, who's gonna give you a place with no money for eight weeks? (Nick, service user)

I've seen five people in eight years go into private rented … even if they would take housing benefit long term, which they won't … with our guys, private landlords don't want to take them, there's a stigma attached. (Rosie, third sector practitioner)

While service users were generally very keen to exit homelessness services, several also expressed deep concern over the prospect of moving into a privately rented tenancy. Steve presented with minimal support needs and spoke of his support workers' intentions to try to move him on imminently. However, he seemed quite overwhelmed by the financial burdens that this would entail:

I don't know whether I'm going to [move on] just yet, I need to find something that can be feasible, like I can afford all the bills and at the minute, it's posing quite hard to find, so I could be here for an extra few months … It's not even just the rent … most places want the first month's deposit and then a month's rent, and then all the admin fees …[sighs] how the hell am I going to afford that? (Steve, service user)

The hesitancy that Steve and others expressed must be situated alongside their trajectories into and through homelessness. As noted in the previous chapter, a significant proportion of service users interviewed had previously been evicted from a private rented or social tenancy, while others had experienced attempts to move them

on - normally to undesirable areas and without support - that ultimately broke down. It is, as such, unsurprising that they wish to avoid falling into the same cycle repeatedly.

What we see in these accounts is the repeated pattern of discord between aspirations of the service users and the options that are available to them. When faced with only inappropriate options (relocation to a new area, unaffordable private rented accommodation), this represents, for the service user, not a resolution but a new form of discord. This then contributes to a deeply entrenched sense of uncertainty and distress, as is particularly present in the excerpt from Steve's interview above.

Barriers to work

The majority of service users expressed that entering (or re-entering) the paid employment market was a key objective for them, and many were taking active steps to find work at the time of their interview. This was often of particular priority given the challenges faced in maintaining regular access to Universal Credit/Jobseeker's Allowance/Employment and Support Allowance payments (see previous chapter and also Reeve, 2017). Generally, however, service users described feeling overlooked in the employment market, despite their competencies and willingness to work. Particular frustrations included a lack of (funded) training and education opportunities, minimal job prospects for those with criminal records, and the sanctioning procedures and hostility they faced when attending JobCentre Plus. That despite their efforts they were facing repeated rejection again served to exacerbate feelings of emotional distress, and a general sense of hopelessness about the future:

> We're sort of treated as if we're a broken appliance … there really isn't enough opportunities out there for a homeless person to be like look, I am willing to work. (Oliver, service user)

I've got a criminal record, it's hard, I want to get a job, but it's hard for me

to find a job … I tick the box saying criminal record and their system filters it

… Half the time employers don't even look at you. (Nick, service user)

If you haven't got the qualifications, your application just goes in the bin …

obviously that's a barrier, it's something that I've got to deal with…[I'm]

trying to get retrained [but] struggling with getting funding … everybody

wants you back in work, let's face it, especially the government … but you

have to have that qualification. (Liam, service user)

Where service users had been able to access paid employment, this tended to be on a zero hours, casual or temporary basis, and did not afford them the level of financial security to allow them to move on. As a result of specific Housing Benefit eligibility rules, accepting offers of employment also resulted in service users having to pay additional rental costs to their hostel or supported housing project. Given the supported/specialist nature of homelessness services, the cost of rent is generally incredibly high when compared with market rates. That being in work was actually often more precarious that remaining on regular unemployment benefits was described by service users as a particular source of frustration. This had actively discouraged some service users from seeking work, while others implied that they were only able to participate in cash-in-hand or what was referred to by some as "black market" forms of work. In this way, concerns were raised around the potential for service users' to face exploitation. For those already in some form of work, these rules were recognised as placing them at an increased risk of eviction:

I can't get a **real job** 'cos I wouldn't be able to afford the wages at the

moment, the rent sorry…The rents are massive here, so I'd have to be taking

home like two grand…'cos it's about three hundred a week to stay here. So

I couldn't afford that if I was working. (Paul, service user, emphasis added)

He [service user] is paying an extortionate amount of money to live here, we're gonna end up getting him in arrears with his rent because he's not earning absolutely loads, but he's earning too much…housing benefit can't calculate what he's entitled to because one week he might work twenty four hours, but the next week he might work sixteen hours, every time he puts in a wage slip his housing benefit gets stopped… **[He's] got no chance of maintaining employment.** (Leanne, third sector practitioner, emphasis added)

Here, it seemed that service users were being faced with paradoxical demands leading to another source of discord and distress: while it was near impossible to accept work whilst living in a service, remaining unemployed (and therefore reliant on income from benefits) was recognised to be a significant hindrance in attempting to secure and maintain accommodation.

Overall, these accounts can be understood as counter-narratives to dominant government rhetoric (Patrick, 2015). While rationalised as incentivising moves away from 'worklessness' and 'welfare dependency', austerity-driven policies are actually doing the very opposite and pushing service users further away from secure housing and regular employment markets. As elsewhere, there was little evidence to suggest a 'culture of worklessness' or that benefits represented a preferred 'lifestyle choice' for service users (Reeve, 2017). Instead, the emotional and practical burden of accessing and surviving on welfare benefits was a consistent theme (confirming the arguments of Shildrick et al., 2012 and Patrick, 2015). What is also apparent is here is that stigmatised

perceptions of homeless people often exacerbated the problems service users faced further (for instance, in trying to access a tenancy in the private rented sector or in applying for work). Crucially, and as will be discussed further in Chapter Nine, this is not divorced from but rather created and reinforced by the austerity context and accompanying rhetoric. The way in which the government chooses to frame homelessness, welfare dependency, unemployment, poverty and so on, inevitably result in hardening public attitudes and responses (Pemberton et al., 2016).

7.5. Getting 'stuck' in the system

In the absence of appropriate housing options and access to broader health and social care provision, service users often described feeling "stuck" in services, while third sector practitioners' spoke in terms of a system "backing up". Practitioners repeatedly reported that they had faced difficulties both in moving people through the homelessness service pathway/staircase (i.e. from first-stage accommodation to second-stage accommodation) and also in moving people out of services entirely (i.e. into independent tenancies). Thus, services designed specifically to address short-term needs were often becoming longer-term options by default. This raised major concerns for the wellbeing of both service users, but also those single homeless people who were essentially being left on the streets for longer:

> The whole system is backing up, so people are staying way too long. If we're
>
> not moving people on, [night shelter] aren't moving people on, so the people
>
> on the streets can't get in. (Martin, third sector practitioner)

The turnaround should be around one to three months … I have known

somebody to stay in a direct access service for over two years. (Leanne, third

sector practitioner)

We would, ordinarily, have a bed available every other day here … that is not

going to be a reality, we're not going to be able to do it … low level support

services have been removed around the second stage [i.e. less intensive

hostels and supported housing], which means they're going to be less

inclined to take our more challenging or complex need clients, which means

they stay in here longer, and it means your street population goes up. (Bella,

third sector practitioner)

The general consensus amongst the third sector practitioners was that this standstill had

resulted in a general sense of despondency and hopelessness across the population of

service users residing in accommodation and resettlement services. Many reported

increases in antisocial and criminal behaviour, abandonment of services and relapses

into harmful substance use. These were contextualised and rationalised alongside this

lack of opportunity for move on:

They're losing that motivation because they think well, what's the point,

there's going to be no housing for me to go to, no-one is going to take me, I

can't get any money so I'm gonna go and cause antisocial behaviour or

criminal behaviour… they really are trapped in this cycle. (Bella, third sector

practitioner)

The longer they have to keep waiting and the more setbacks they get,

eventually they get very despondent … if all you're wanting to do is just fix

the problems in your life and every step of the way you're just hitting your

head on a wall, I think it can be quite damaging to the mental health to be

honest. (Zara, third sector practitioner)

For Scott, who was living in a supported housing project, actively using opiates and struggling to access substance-based support, this overwhelming sense of hopelessness was particularly pronounced. In the face of multiple barriers and with little sense of what his next steps should be, he appeared to have become fairly resigned to the idea of remaining in his situation indefinitely. At points within the interview, for example, he began to question the value of tackling his substance use entirely:

I look at people who do have scripts … and I kind of think, yeah, that would

be great … but I'd still be tied to getting up and having to go out and get

something anyway which is the same as what I'm doing anyway … It seems

quite difficult to say to myself, 'things will be better tomorrow'. I get

impatient and I'm not sure how optimistic I am about the future or what I

see for myself. (Scott, service user)

Practitioner and service users' accounts also pointed to a significant rise in cases of revolving door homelessness, whereby service users were re-entering accommodation services after a period of maintaining independent accommodation. In one direct access hostel, for example, it was reported that the number of service users who had been through the service on at least one previous occasion had increased from 18 in 2010 to 75 in 2017. In the absence of specialist support, practitioners' felt that service users were often being moved on without fully resolving underlying issues such as mental ill health, and substance misuse, and that this placed them at risk of effectively repeating the cycle again: "they're kind of just spinning around" (Bella, third sector practitioner). Service

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user accounts reinforced this further; several had experienced homelessness on multiple occasions and alluded to facing problems in maintaining independent tenancies without ongoing support:

> I'm always ending up, you know, in hostels, I always go back. I felt so stressed and depressed … I felt closed in and claustrophobic, that's why I left [my accommodation] and why I became homeless. (Ellie, service user)

> I was half living in the house … which was, er, gradually deteriorating … I couldn't afford to, the boiler had broken, and everything just piled on top … everything was a fight … I wanted to get out. (Scott, service user)

Overall, these accounts serve to reinforce existing concerns around accommodation provision for single homeless people as it is currently operating (see Chapter Four). As has been argued elsewhere (Johnsen & Teixeira, 2010), service users - and particularly those with more complex support needs are shown here to be at increasing risk of getting stuck in endless cycles of homelessness and instability. Difficulties in breaking cycles of service dependency amongst single homeless people are by no means new, and have been a longstanding concern of practitioners and policymakers and a central critique of linear-style (treatment first) service provision for some time (Johnsen and Teixeira, 2010). What this data indicates, however, is that the risk of being stuck in an "institutional loop" (Benjaminsen and Knutagård, 2016, p.58) seems to be starker in the current climate, and particularly where the services that work to prevent homelessness re-entries are being increasingly decommissioned. Again, what these accounts also reveal is the affective impact of the austerity context on service users' lives (Hitchen, 2016, 2019). The obvious discord here - between "wanting to fix the problems in their

lives" and "every step of the way just hitting their heads on a wall" - unsurprisingly translated into emotional distress, feelings of hopelessness and pessimism for the future.

7.6. Contesting the independence rhetoric

As discussed in Chapter Three, policy and organisational discourses around homelessness are dominated by a rhetoric that promotes 'independence' as a primary aim for service users. Here, welfare dependency is regarded as an inherently bad thing, with social and supported housing options viewed as inferior to private and owner-occupied (Neale, 1997; Hodkinson and Robbins, 2013). This is also reflected in the linear structure of most homelessness services, in which the resettlement is generally viewed as synonymous with achieving an independent tenancy (Johnsen and Teixeira, 2010; McNeill, 2011). As above, the majority of service users demonstrated great enthusiasm around moving on from services and stressed the importance of living in their own tenancy and finding employment. This sentiment was shared by practitioners who also tended to focus on independence as a goal for their service users, with notions of 'moving on', 'tenancy sustainment', 'independent living skills' and 'life without services' all being central to the ways that they defined their work:

> The aim? Mainly to get somebody to adhere to keeping a tenancy, sustain a tenancy, so that they are ready for a landlord … to get rent paid on time, build independent living skills so you can withdraw that support when somebody moves on, because there isn't floating support anymore. (Sophie, third sector practitioner)

> You want them to be able to live without services … You want to help them to build resilience … and develop their own coping strategies and

mechanisms for remaining independent without having to depend on support services. (Bella, third sector practitioner)

As noted in the excerpt from Sophie's interviews, practitioners' adherence to this ideal may in part be due to the lack of viable alternatives. For example, there are now very few opportunities for long-term tenancy support (see Chapter Three). Upon further probing in the course of the interviews, what was apparent was that that whilst independent living may have been the stated target of most organisations, several practitioners were, on an individual level, unsure as to whether this represented an appropriate or viable outcome for some of their service users. Again, a discord emerges between the stated aims of the organisation and the confidence of practitioners that these could be delivered, or were even desirable. Particular concern was expressed for those who had limited experience of managing a tenancy (for example, young people, care leavers and ex-offenders) and for those who had been 'entrenched' in cycles of homelessness for several decades:

> I think that is one of the sad things that has happened … this two year rule … everybody had to be living independently in two years. Well, not everybody wants that, there were actually prior to that, a lot of people who had these shared house arrangements, with a bit of support in, who were perfectly happy and then they were told no, you've got to move on and live on your own in a flat, they don't like it. A lot of our clients have become quite institutionalised in a way, with prisons and care and stuff like that. And they don't have strong family networks, so they want to have people around. (Bella, third sector practitioner)

I've just taken a lad, again, who I've known for years and years and years who, one of the revolving door guys, I think the local authority said enough is enough, let's just give him a flat, in there on his own, never coped, really isolated, never slept there, slept out, you know, slept everywhere, and all he wanted was to be in shared supported accommodation. (Rosie, third sector practitioner)

As these excerpts indicate, the issue is not only whether some service users would manage living independently, but also whether this would meet their needs in terms of social relationships. One of the supported housing projects in which service users were interviewed followed an alternative 'community' model where service users were asked to contribute to the running of social enterprises and in turn receive support and accommodation. These types of independently funded service have far less structured expectations that residents will move on, and, as a result, seemed to represent a legitimate and long-term alternative to independent accommodation for some. Stan, for example, showed little interest in the prospect of independent living. Now in his sixties, and with his adult life characterised by homelessness, transient living and itinerant working, he spoke of the stability, routine and security that the service offered him:

Interviewer: Does something like this service appeal to you longer-term?

Stan: I am getting to the point where I don't really need to worry about the future anymore. I mean I've been here three years, and that's the most I've been in one place for a long time ... I'm quite content at the moment, it's very fulfilling for me. So I would be quite happy.

On this point, it is interesting to note that the two service users who had successfully moved into independent accommodation with the assistance of their former homelessness and resettlement services (Christopher and Jason) had both chosen to 'stay in touch' with the service in which they previously lived, and now characterised themselves as volunteers. Both spoke of their appreciation at being able to continue accessing forms of support, whether that be in an informal manner (as with Jason) or in a more formal and structured way (as with Christopher):

> I know **I've got four five people from when I first came in that are still there for me now**, it's nice they're concerned about you … so now, I come and volunteer here three days a week. (Jason, service user, emphasis added)

> I've been going to a lot of NA [Narcotics Anonymous] and some sort of self-help groups that I do with my worker at the hostel and a 'Building Good Habits' course at the hostel too … **I'm still engaged with my worker** on a project teaching young people about substance misuse, I've been really busy with that. (Christopher, service user, emphasis added)

The issue with this is that, from the point of view of third sector practitioners, the ability to offer of this sort of ongoing support was not always felt to be possible, particularly following the removal of floating forms of tenancy support (as discussed in Chapter Four). Rachel, for example, explained that within the organisation that she worked, support for service users moving into an independent tenancy was only offered for a maximum of six weeks:

You worry about them a little bit when they're moved on. There is one person I am moving on, he's ready to, he can sustain a tenancy really well but he still needs that support. So if I think about him for a minute, he could really do with floating support but it's just not available. We support them for six weeks in their new properties which is already a struggle because you'll have somebody else moving into their flat, more work, but it's really good that we can do that, we'll put them in touch with local CAB, and then after that we hope for the best really. (Rachel, third sector practitioner)

What these accounts indicate is that the ability of (former) service users to maintain a social and support network is often key to successful resettlement. The argument being made here is not that people who have experienced homelessness cannot or should not live independently, but rather that the heterogeneous nature and complex backgrounds of this client group should be acknowledged in the development of long-term options. Service provision and support networks premised on interdependence and sustainable social networks may be a more appropriate model than an over-simplistic notion of 'independence' (Bowpitt and Jenson, 2007). Indeed, there is a sense that we must accept that not everyone will 'succeed' in the way envisioned by the current linear approach. However, rather than demonising clients' inability to reach the target of independent living, there is a need to widen the perception of what constitutes a positive outcome.

7.7. Chapter summary

This chapter has presented the findings from the empirical study with regard to the experiences of the service users and the practitioners that work with them, as they navigate the challenging and complex task of moving out of homelessness. In doing so,

it has contributed to a limited body of qualitative literature that considers pathways out of homelessness against the backdrop of austerity.

The chapter demonstrates how through a harmful combination of welfare and housing reforms, cuts to homelessness services via local government and significant strains on health and social care sectors, the austerity context has served to inhibit rather than incentivise departures from what government has characterised as cultures of 'dependency and worklessness'. As a result, service users described finding themselves increasingly "stuck" in homelessness services, with little opportunity for progression. In this way, the sense of hope and aspiration within service users' accounts sits uncomfortably and discordantly alongside their lived realities, leading unsurprisingly to instances of emotional distress.

It has also be shown here that achieving successful resettlement is, for service users, about more than housing alone and that current options for moving on may not be meeting their needs. Thus any implementation of Housing First strategies, for example, must always be accompanied by proper mechanisms through which broader, ongoing, sources of support may be routinely accessed. The impacts of the austerity programme, not only on homeless sector itself, but also on broader health and social care provision must then be taken fully into account in ongoing responses to homelessness.

Chapter 8: Delivering services in a changing landscape

8.1. Introduction to the chapter

This, the final empirical findings chapter, aims to situate the themes discussed thus far in the broader landscape of policy and service provision. To do so, the first three sections of the chapter examine the local authority and third sector practitioners' narratives, highlighting the main issues that they reported encountering in the austerity context. The final section of the chapter then turns its attentions to the relationship between practitioners and their practice, and argues that this too is under strain in the current climate. Overall, the chapter evidences the ways in which the realities of homelessness service provision have fundamentally changed since the implementation of the austerity programme. The broader policy context is shown to have had profound impacts both at the level of service delivery, but also affectively in how practitioners *felt* about and *related* to their work (Hitchen, 2016; Daly, 2018).

8.2. Delivering services in a changing landscape: third sector perspectives

Changing practices

When I personally began thinking about this study several years ago, it was (partially) predicated on the belief that austerity policies had potentially created a 'new' population of homeless people whose circumstances were purely a consequence of financial instability caused by particular the particular policy context (welfare reforms, precarious working contracts, competitive rental markets and so on) and who would, as a result, present to homelessness services with minimal support needs. This expectation reflected suggestions in broader media coverage and in some academic literature that a significant proportion of the general population were only 'one pay cheque away' from homelessness (see Bramley and Fitzpatrick, 2018 for a discussion of this)

The empirical evidence that emerged from the study has served to challenge this expectation. The accounts of third sector practitioners consistently indicated that they had seen both a rise in overall demand on their services, but also a particular increase in the proportion of service users with higher level and/or complex support needs. This was explained by practitioners as being a result of a combination of "across the board" cuts to health and social care providers and the loss of 'floating' tenancy services that previously supported people to maintain their tenancies (St Mungo's, 2018). As a result, it was felt that those who may have formerly received assistance from other providers were now finding themselves with no other option but to seek assistance for homelessness. As the following interview excerpts illustrate, practitioners explicitly situated this change in their client group alongside austerity-driven reforms:

> We seem to be having more chaotic people coming through our services as well, because there's not the same amount of money in mental health services, sort of addressing their drug issues, everything has been cut. (Zara, third sector practitioner)

> It's as if they removed a layer without putting anything in the place to catch people that may fall through the net, so we become the go-to-guys, and it seems as if we're having people who have very serious and enduring mental health issues who are having to live in a homeless hostel and that's not fair... we've had more safeguarding issues raised in this hostel this year than I've ever seen in its entirety because we're having very vulnerable people in here. (Bella, third sector practitioner)

In light of this increase in demand, the majority of the third sector practitioners reported that their accommodation and resettlement services were running either at or beyond

their capacity. Struggles in meeting this increasing demand meant that practitioners often found themselves turning people away:

> We actually have to turn away between ten and thirty people each day at the moment and that number's on the rise. (Joseph, third sector practitioner)

> There used to be, you could knock on the door and get a bed, but I think those days are gone, long gone … Even the main hostel that used to be a drop-in service is full to capacity, so there's a lot more people sleeping rough here. (Anna, third sector practitioner)

In common with other third sector organisations, cuts to statutory funding had translated into a reduction in the number of employed staff and/or the number of hours for which staff were contracted. In some cases, it had also meant the loss of entire aspects of a service (Daly, 2018), often accompanied by a sense that anything deemed 'non-essential' by external funders had been removed. Indeed, and whilst the majority of practitioners emphasised that their organisations did continue to have *some* level of financial stability, cuts to funding had served to undermine their attempts to deliver anything more than what one of the practitioners referred to as a "bare bones" service. Particular examples of this included the loss of budgets for meaningful activities and training; the removal of in-house mental health teams; the removal of floating staff from supported housing projects; and the loss of targeted substance use programmes.

Several of the frontline practitioners also reported that the time that they were able to spend with their service users, building relationships and offering one-to-one support, had significantly reduced. With less staff available, and an increase in both demand and

service user need, many of those delivering front line services described how their working hours were now essentially spent responding to "crises" within the service environment. Where previously the frontline role had often entailed going "out and about" with their service users, practitioners were generally also now restricted to the service building at all times. This was an uncomfortable reality for many of the practitioners who viewed the relational aspects of their work - "just giving them that hour" - as key in working towards successful resettlement:

> With some of our complex needs clients, used to be able to drive them to mental health appointments, stay with them at [local drug service] to make sure they get on a script, sit with them through a mental health assessment, sit with them through a GP appointment. Sometimes when our clients get in them rooms with them people, they sort of shut off and go blank, and we can put our bit in and support them. Can't do that anymore, we have to cut back on all our expenses, can't do that anymore, [we're] restricted to the hostel at all times (Leanne, third sector practitioner)

> I would meet with him, used to go and have a fry up, have a chat and he used to proper look forward to seeing me the next week. That time spent is that normality, just giving them that hour of doing that is enough … We used to be able to take our guys out and do bits and bobs, now it's just about meeting up with that person to follow that process, and that's sad. (Zara, third sector practitioner)

That responding to "crisis" situations had become an increasingly central part of their work was also of particular concern given that most third sector practitioners working in accommodation and resettlement services do not receive any form of specialist training

around mental ill health or substance use (Reeve et al., 2018). Several of the practitioners expressed the view that they felt ill equipped to respond to such situations but, without proper means of access to external providers, felt they had little other choice but to do so:

> We recently had somebody who binges alcohol trying to cut the vein artery in his leg with glass … we could not get him engaged with mental health, we're not specifically trained in mental health, we're not specifically trained in drug use or any of these things, yet it felt like "Oh he's there with you, you deal with it" … it was just so frustrating … just to watch him going through all that, but not being able to get that help for him. (Zara, third sector practitioner)

For those in 'back room' and/or management roles, the requirements associated with the procurement of statutory funding contracts meant that an increasing amount of time was being spent on administrative tasks such as monitoring and reporting on contracts, or bidding for tendered contracts). This change seemed particularly acute within smaller third sector organisations where the need to adhere to bureaucratic procedures represented a marked departure from previous working practices. In such organisations, it was clear that even those in management positions had previously routinely been involved with service users. Both Martin and Lisa, for example, spoke of their sadness at becoming increasingly removed from their service users. Indeed, there was a strong sense again that this challenged their notions of what their work should look like:

> There is a lot of computer stuff now … I don't do computers very well and I don't do sitting up here very well. I like being downstairs, out and about with people and yeah, the grassroots stuff. (Lisa, third sector practitioner)

When I was first here, actually I was much more hands on, I had a lot more contact with our residents, you know I would have named them on first name terms, I would have been daily meeting up with our volunteers, I would have, you know, had a lot of involvement actually being out in the projects. Nowadays, I'm pretty much an administrator, so I sit behind a desk, answering dozens and dozens of emails, thinking about where we're spending money, where we want to spend money, where we can save money … the tenders and big contracts, that's a big chunk of time, and that will preoccupy me for several weeks. (Martin, third sector practitioner)

In one organisation that comprised multiple different 'stages' of accommodation and resettlement projects (see Chapter Four), the extent and impact of funding reductions was particularly pronounced. At the time of interview, the manager of the organisation reported that they had faced an overall decrease in statutory income of approximately 75 percent. Woven through the narratives of the practitioners working within this organisation, there was a palpable sense of uncertainty and concern for the future. Rosie, for example, at the time of interview had recently received the news that the supported housing projects she managed were to lose *all* of their funding in the subsequent months. In her interview, she spoke at length both around the sadness she felt in terms of the inevitably of losing her own job, but also in terms of the implications that this funding reduction held for the service users who she was supporting:

For our second stage type of accommodation [supported housing], the funding stops. Entirely. …What do I foresee that meaning? I mean these houses are in the community. If you don't have staff to manage the people in those houses, I mean its difficult enough sometimes keeping the

neighbours happy. You know, the anti-social behaviour without being managed will get worse. Um, I think without support, our guys won't cope. I mean some of them if they don't have support and they've still got a flat or whatever, they'll still sleep rough, homelessness will rise, street homelessness will rise. Um, there will be such staff shortages that anti-social behaviour I think will go up, with that specific client group. […] My job is gone. What am I going to do? I don't know, stack shelves in Tesco's … I've always felt really secure in my job, and it is only in the last twelve months that it was always going to happen. (Rosie, third sector practitioner)

Leanne, who worked in a second-stage hostel run by the same organisation, also expressed significant anxiety around the implications of having less staff working at any one time. Anticipating that lone working practices would soon become the norm, she explained that she now *expected* to be placed in what can only be described as overwhelmingly dangerous and distressing situations. Indeed, and as the excerpt below illustrates, there was a sense that without adequate staffing and resources, frontline practitioners were potentially being faced with making 'life-or-death' decisions:

We run on shadow staff, so our staff do lone work here, with some quite complex need, quite challenging clients … if a member of staff was to leave this project now due to the cuts that have come into place, we will not be replacing them, which potentially means we will have one member of staff on all the time instead of two … It is difficult enough with two ... if one resident, you're trying to perform CPR, you're trying to get the door open for an ambulance, you're trying to actually direct an ambulance crew to a room, you're trying to deal with another resident 'cos there's two of them

in a room and they've overdosed together, which one do you choose, which

one do you save when there's only one member of staff? (Leanne, third

sector practitioner)

In both of these excerpts, the affective presence of the austerity context is made

markedly apparent through practitioners' emotional and ethical distress, and wholly

bleak imaginings of the future. That both Leanne and Rosie were anticipating further

ramifications at the point of the interview (late 2017) also reinforces that the full extent

of the austerity programme remains emergent. Indeed, in many cases, third sector

organisations seemed to have been able to survive and continue to operate despite

earlier waves of funding cuts by relying on their own cash reserves and existing contracts

from funders yet to experience their own reductions in funding. It was only in these later

years, then, that the full force of austerity was beginning to be felt (Daly, 2016, 2018).

The longevity of the austerity programme also seemed to have undermined

practitioners' ability to view these new working practices as being only temporary:

instead there was a consistent feeling within the interviews that practitioners had

become resigned to a new reality (Daly, 2016): as one said: "this is what is it going to be

like now" (Rachel, third sector practitioner).

Navigating a 'contract culture'

As set out in the literature review (see Chapters Three and Four), the majority of

homelessness third sector organisations, including those in this study, are required to

participate in a process of tendering in order to secure funding contracts for their various

services. Such contracts are generally tied to specific conditions, targets and/or

regulations, and are also increasingly limited in the context of austerity-driven cuts to

local government budgets (Thunder and Rose, 2019).

Overall, the process of tendering for funding contracts appeared to have created a landscape of service provision characterised by uncertainly about organisational futures and, as above, anxiety amongst individuals around their job security, roles and professional identities. The competitive mechanisms by which statutory commissioners allocated funding was often reported by third sector practitioners to have created a level of secrecy and even hostility between organisations that had previously worked together closely. Martin, for example, explained that in the context of competitive tendering, longstanding networks between third sector organisations in the local town had almost entirely broken down. Here, organisations that had previously been actively involved in partnership working were now described in antagonistic terms:

> What it [tendering] does is that you suddenly, everybody starts watching each other, all the other providers, 'cos you're thinking who's bidding. So we don't talk to them anymore, we don't share that information that we used to. There is a group of local homeless providers group which we set up sort of twenty years ago and there was supporting each other, and you know, if we had an issue or something else, or if we were having issues with the local authority, you know, we would support each other and exchange information. But when tendering came along, all that stopped. You daren't say or show any vulnerability because somebody will be looking at you. (Martin, third sector practitioner)

Practitioners also spoke of the difficulties created by the conditions encouraged or imposed by statutory funding contracts. That these tended to centre on achieving particular outcomes or meeting targets for numbers of service users being moved on were often described as undermining practitioner (and organisational) notions of good

practice. It was reported, for example, that some services had become less willing to provide accommodation to service users presenting with high level or complex support needs as they were viewed as less likely to achieve resettlement in allotted time frames (as also reported by Cornes et al., 2016). In this way, such targets may be viewed as further excluding the most marginalised parts of the homeless population even further. On this point, Bella, the manager of a direct access hostel, explained that she often struggled to move 'high risk' service users into second stage hostels or supported housing projects, leaving them in services designed only to address short-term needs for far longer than appropriate (as also seen in the previous chapter):

> Obviously, there are contract requirements and some of those are around, obviously quality, but they are very outcome focused. So they have a percentage of outcomes that have to be planned move … I think that is where cherry-picking goes on around services, because they're so focused on those planned outcomes that they won't take anyone who's got those challenging need. (Bella, third sector practitioner)

The various barriers that service users' faced in their attempts at resettlement have been discussed in the previous chapter: these included a lack of appropriate housing and employment options, and a lack of targeted support for mental health and substance use. In this context, third sector practitioners often expressed concerns that they felt the targets being set out by statutory funding contracts were essentially unworkable. As noted in the previous chapter, resettlement was generally understood as process that takes time and negotiation, particularly for those individuals with long histories of entrenched rough sleeping, or additional support needs. However, it was also noted that

to present more realistic proposals and potential outcomes to statutory funders (even if these were based on extensive experience) would risk the loss of contracts altogether:

> The difficulty we've got now and what I've been trying to explain to the commissioners, is that the type of client we have now, someone that requires statutory services, for example, is gonna be here for months and months and months, and on that basis, we cannot have the same turnaround. (Bella, third sector practitioner)

> We have lost a number of contracts… the big national organisations have come in and, not in all of them but in most of them, and promised the Earth, you know, sounds fantastic, they're never able to deliver that. (Martin, third sector practitioner)

There was also evidence to indicate that statutory commissioners often overruled service managers with regard to the type of service that they should be operating, Martin, for example, had been central in the establishment of a controlled drinking ('wet') project. This operated on the basis that for a minority of long-term and heavy drinkers, abstinence is not a realistic goal and instead, focus should be placed on harm reduction. While based on his professional experience this was deemed to be an extremely successful service, he recognised that it was at odds with the priorities of commissioners. This eventually resulted in the entire service losing its funding:

> We set up a service specifically for chronic alcoholics, an extremely successful service, but the county was never happy that we weren't working towards abstinence, and we lost the contract for that. (Martin, third sector practitioner)

On this point, it is interesting to note that Arthur, as the only practitioner interviewed who worked outside of the statutory funding remit, presented a notably different account of the working practices within his organisation. The service that Arthur worked for did not apply for tendered contracts via the Formula Grant: instead, its central sources of funding were Housing Benefit, income generated from multiple social enterprises and private donations/grants. That he felt able to work in person-centred and creative way was explained as a direct consequence of his organisation *not* taking statutory funding or being accountable to external agendas:

> One of the best things about us, is because we don't take SP [Supporting People] funding, or what was SP funding, people can stay for as long as they want, we're not tied to finding them accommodation in a year, eighteen months. So some people stay with us for a long time…I really, really like that we can do support however the hell we want, and rather than seeing it as a way of doing as little as possible, I personally see it as a way of doing as much as possible. (Arthur, third sector practitioner)

Overall, these findings echo broader concerns raised in the literature around the pressures being placed on third sector organisations as state involvement becomes increasingly limited (Milbourne and Cushman, 2015; Jones et al., 2016; Daly, 2018). While the resilient and innovative nature of the third sector is often emphasised (see Chapter Four), it is also important to recognise how sensitive it is to the policy context in which it is operating, particularly in terms of the impact on frontline practices and indeed the staff themselves (Daly, 2018). That being said, it was important for many of the third sector practitioners that they and their organisations not be portrayed as passive victims

of broader policy and funding structures. Indeed, emphasis was often placed on the sector's ability to be resourceful and adaptable in the face of new challenges:

> I think one of the positives out of austerity is it does force people and organisations to work a bit smarter, so we're always being told to do more with less… we're always trying to deliver value, we'll show commissioners that we do loads of things that they don't pay us to do. (Joseph, third sector practitioner)

> It's really easy to try and bash everything, to say we need more money… okay brilliant, we need more money, we're never gonna get it, but the way that lots of agencies are being smart now is absolutely brilliant. (Arthur, third sector practitioner)

Notably, in a number of cases, practitioners had actually found ways to circumvent the priorities of their statutory funders. Two managers, for example, spoke explicitly about utilising less regulated sources of income (for example, public donations and external grants) to support provisions which they felt to be essential, but were less aligned to the priorities of their local authority funding. Despite the conditional and restrictive nature of funding contracts, third sector organisations were continuing to find ways to respond to the emerging issues (for example, increases in revolving door homelessness) in their services:

> Seven [bed spaces] are outside of commissioning so they belong to the trust in its entirety. We can give them out as we please which gives us a lot of flexibility and freedom that we probably had years ago, so we've brought that back ... the intention was to capture some of what we now refer to as

revolving door clients … in the seven beds, there is no expectation in terms

of outcomes, there's no length of time that person can stay there, we have

an up to two year rule inside the hostel, but I can have them in there for as

long as I like. (Bella, third sector practitioner)

Charitable donations which come in the form of money … that allowed us to

set up our own rent deposit scheme. That means if somebody comes in, and

they're working, then they're not entitled to housing benefit … then we can

help them with rent deposits. (Joseph, third sector practitioner)

8.3. Delivering services in a changing landscape: Local authority perspectives
Changing practices

In many ways, the changing working practices reported by the local authority

practitioners mirrored that of their third sector counterparts. They too noted an increase

in overall demand on their services, and particularly in the number of service users with

complex and/or high level needs presenting to them. As with those working in third

sector organisations, this had generally translated into an increase in their workload, but

also broader changes to their daily practices and activities. Mary, for example, described

how her average case load had almost tripled in recent years, but also how she was

spending more time responding to situations of a 'critical' nature:

I used to run at a caseload of about eight, not 'cos I couldn't cope with

anymore, but just that used to be the average, now it's about twenty-two …

the cases are a lot more complex as well, like more and more we have cases

where somebody is at a critical, at a critical edge, they're going to go and

harm themselves or somebody else so we have to make calls to the police,

people have to come in here to assess them, people have been taken away

to the hospital to be assessed … Going back probably two years, I'd probably

do an incident report, I'd probably only done a couple in my lifetime here,

but now it's probably every month … people are more aggressive …

[*Interviewer: why do you think that is?*] … Because people are more

desperate now. (Mary, local authority practitioner)

As discussed above, third sector practitioners often reported that they were no longer

able to accompany service users "out and about" in the community (for example, for

meetings and attending appointments). Interestingly, this seemed to have had

consequences for how some of the local authority practitioners were approaching their

work. Elaine, for example, explained that where service users would have previously

been accompanied to the housing department for an appointment, an increasing

number were now presenting alone. She described how, as a result, she had begun to

adopt a more support-based role, essentially to counteract the lack of third sector

presence:

I find over recent years that I actually go a lot further for the client than I

would have done previously, because they don't have a support worker any

more … so whereas previously it'd been the support worker to maybe help

them apply for benefits, I'll probably help. (Elaine, local authority

practitioner)

However, and as with those working in the third sector, local authority practitioners

often expressed that they too felt ill-equipped to respond to the increasing level of need

amongst the service users presenting to them but without proper means of access to

broader service providers, they again felt that they had no other choice:

We haven't got the capacity to support-work people, but we're having to do

it nonetheless … don't get me wrong, I like it but it's the time, we're not

getting any more staff for it you know, and it is the case of you know,

potentially someone killing themselves, so you can't just shut the door on

that person, you've got to work with that person, you've got to deal with it.

(Mary, local authority practitioner)

Echoing concerns raised in the previous chapter, an overall lack of accommodation and

onward referral options was a regularly repeated issue in the local authority narratives.

This was consistent across their dealings with single homeless people, but also

households that had been granted the main homelessness duty. In the local authority

located in Greater London, where social housing was essentially described as being "non-

existent", practitioners reported that they had become increasingly dependent on 'bed

and breakfast' providers and other forms of temporary accommodation to house the

increasing number of people presenting to them. Janice explained that this served as a

challenge to her ideas about what good resettlement strategies looked like but, faced

with limited options, felt that she had no other option but to use them. That the nature

of her job role had effectively changed from rehousing people permanently to placing

them in what she saw as unsuitable temporary accommodation was a source of deep

distress:

[Sighs] I can only deal with what I've got, I can't magic it [housing] up from

anywhere else, we might have the Premier Inn, Travelodge, Holiday Inn, that

we have to use, I had to use it for a lady last week that was in a wheelchair

'cos we didn't have anything, but for families, you might think that's good

but you can't cook in there, they can't cook so, you know, takeaways, it's not

right for a family … it's not a home, so we're not doing anything great for them, it might seem "Ooh, they've got the Holiday Inn", it costs us twice as much as anything else, if not more than that, but it's the very last resort, if we've got to find something for that family, at the end of the day, we have to find it … 'Cos the nice part of this job used to be putting people into their own homes, and it was so nice because you could go down and talk to them and tell them. But that was all stopped and I found it quite hard really. (Janice, local authority practitioner)

Debating the extent of discretion

As discussed in Chapter Four, existing literature has tended to characterise local authority practitioners as holding significant discretionary power in assessing applications for statutory assistance, in part as a result of highly ambiguous homelessness legislation. The majority of researchers have been critical of this discretion, suggesting that it allows for inconsistent decision-making and detrimental gatekeeping practices (see Chapter Four for overview; Pawson, 2007; Bretherton, Hunter and Johnsen, 2013; Dwyer et al., 2014; Alden, 2015a, 2015b). As noted in Chapter Six, this characterisation was reiterated in service user narratives, which tended to portray local authority practitioners as judgmental and evasive.

The idea that there exists a space for discretion was met with a variety of responses from the local authority practitioners. Mary and Elaine, who worked in the same local authority, both indicated that homelessness legislation did indeed allow them the space to apply flexible working practices. However, in contrast to the picture in the existing literature, and for that matter the views of service users interviewed , they both felt that they were using their discretionary power *to the advantage* of service users and gave

examples of circumventing 'standard procedure' in order to provide additional assistance:

> If it then seems to us that perhaps they don't or they shouldn't have those arrears, we could maybe look into that a bit further... try to make it easier for them to join ... so that would be a sort of indirect way of challenging [the legislation] that would involve me having to sort of do the investigation to establish why. (Elaine, local authority practitioner)

> So even if somebody is intentionally homeless, we might still might be able to look at Homeless Prevention Fund to help them fund a deposit, or look at ... all sorts of different things, a referral to our private sector leasing scheme... so we look at it [the legislation] to underpin what duty we might owe somebody but we're flexible with it as well. (Mary, local authority practitioner)

It is notable that in their particular local authority there remained a (relatively) ample social housing stock and both Mary and Elaine recognised that their ability to exercise discretion and work creatively relied on this. Additionally, there was a sense that being able to go 'above and beyond' their basic statutory duty takes considerable time, and thus relies on the existence of supportive team and management. Mary, for example, went on to acknowledge:

> You don't want them to be even more vulnerable, but it's hard because you've got to fit it in, and of course the council would be like 'what're you doing that for?' ... My team leader's pretty good, I worked with a case for months and I was having like a two hour meeting with this person every

week because they needed it … 'cos otherwise that person would have been

rough sleeping. (Mary, local authority practitioner)

In many ways, this seems again to resonate with the dilemmas reported by the third sector practitioners as they tried to balance the requirements of the broader statutory system and its underpinning legislation with their commitment to offering appropriate support (Daly, 2018).

For other local authority practitioners, and particularly those in supervisory or management roles, the ability to use discretion was significantly downplayed, and emphasis was instead placed on the high level of scrutiny of their work, and accountability to the people "upstairs". Consistent with the existing literature (Alden, 2015a, 2015b), the perceived space for discretion seemed also to be diminished in settings where there was a notable lack of resources:

So when a customer's standing there saying oh you don't understand … they

don't realise that upstairs, in terms of, our superiors, MPs, government or

whatever, they've given us a rope to play with … and we can only do so much

with it. (Katie, local authority practitioner)

We are so accountable to the politicians and the local community … the sign

off process is incredibly thorough, everything has to be justified, everything

has to be argued … there is no room for any element of doubt. (Louise, local

authority practitioner

Anticipating the Homelessness Reduction Act (HRA)

At the time of interviews (late 2017/early 2018), the Homelessness Reduction Act was due to come into force imminently and thus was a central point of focus for in many of the local authority practitioners' narratives. As noted in Chapter Three, the Act

essentially places a number of new duties on local authorities to implement preventative measures for those threatened with homelessness, to take 'reasonable steps' to intervene in all cases of homelessness (rather than only those judged to be in priority need), and to create personalised housing plans for every applicant. It also involves an extension of the definition of those considered 'threatened' with homelessness to include people likely to lose their home within 56 days, rather than 28 days as previously (Shelter, 2017). For the most part, local authority practitioners expressed approval of the fundamental principles set out by the HRA, believing this to allow for a more holistic and "person-centered" type of working. An inability to respond 'creatively' to the needs of their clients was a central complaint of practitioners and this was expected to be rectified to some extent by the new legislation. As Louise explained:

> At the moment it is so legislative-driven, it's very bureaucratic in the way that it's administered, and I think it's far too lengthy, it's far too procedural. So I suppose for me, the Homelessness Reduction Act is going in the right direction. It's looking at, okay, we've got people who are homeless, let's just not put them on the streets saying they're intentionally homeless or they're not eligible. Everybody's a human being, let's try and assist them into some sort of housing solution. (Louise, local authority practitioner)

That being said, concerns were consistently raised as to how viable implementation of the new Act would be in practice, given that local authority practitioners already felt very limited in terms of resource level and staff capacity. Andrea, a longstanding manager of a local authority housing department, felt that without more wide-ranging changes, the new legislation was at risk of becoming a box-ticking and bureaucratic exercise with minimal value in real terms. She went on to suggest that the HRA could actually prove

more damaging for the homeless population in that through the new preventative duties, it would become easier for local authorities to divert applicants via private (rather than social) tenancies:

> This is back to rearranging the deckchairs on the Titanic. It looks great on paper, but without any more accommodation coming online, it won't make that much difference … I've seen huge rearranging of deck chairs on the Titanic taking place all the time, but it has, bottom line, stayed very much the same. If anything, it's just opening the doors for people who previously would have got a council house being told to take a six month private tenancy. I think it is part of the general dismantling of the social housing model in this country. (Andrea, local authority practitioner)

For those working on the frontline of service provision, there was a tangible sense of discord between the additional responsibilities being placed on them by the Homelessness Reduction Act and what they felt they were *actually* going to be able to offer with the resources available to them. Woven through these accounts were intense feelings of trepidation, confusion and distress, as captured by the following excerpts from Mary and Janice's interviews.

> Local authorities have got to do a lot more, so it'll be, all the cuts really we're going to have to suck up I think. You know where we might have asked [local homelessness service provider] or a hostel to accommodate someone, we're going to have to do it ourselves, and if it's someone who is particularly chaotic, **how on Earth are we going to do that?** 'Cos we can't place that person in temporary accommodation with a family if they're active drug using or sex working or whatever, so obviously [sighs] we'll hopefully work

out a plan nearer to the time but it's just everything has hit at once, and I don't, you know, it's going to get worse isn't it. (Mary, local authority practitioner, emphasis added)

There's a new act coming out in April, so there's a team at the moment set up raring to go, so we will get more, 'cos at the moment if somebody hasn't got a priority need, so they are single on their own without an obvious medical need, we wouldn't have to house them, but I think in the legislation I think we have to do that for them, so I think that will have an impact on our service. [*Interviewer: If you're already short of spaces, and you're about to have the duty to offer more people ...*] **What are we going to do?** We have asked this question! They're saying that we're not going to get anymore stock, they're saying that we won't. From our point of view, we can't see it working. (Janice, local authority practitioner, emphasis added)

8.4. Facing challenges to collaborative working

Increasing difficulty in accessing and engaging broader service providers was a consistent feature of both the third sector and local authority practitioners' narratives. Practitioners portrayed the broader service provision landscape as highly fragmented, with a lack of collaboration and a lack of thinking or planning at a system-wide level. Many of the practitioners recognised that in being "stretched across the board" (Leanne, third sector practitioner), the concern of most services had become protecting and maintaining their own professional identity. Woodhouse and Pengelly (1991) observe, "communication and cooperation prove most difficult to achieve when they are most needed" (p. 3), and practitioners from both third sector organisations and local authorities confirmed this:

You're all trying to hold on and protect your own piece. And it doesn't really

go so well together where you want people to be able to work together

better. I don't think it supports that in the way that it should. (Bella, third

sector practitioner)

Nobody joins together and says 'look this person is costing us this much' …

nobody's got any money, so nobody wants to spend anything on anybody.

(Mary, local authority practitioner)

Contrary to my own expectations, the interview data indicated that this was not simply

a case of statutory (local authority) and non-statutory (third sector) providers struggling

to communicate with each other, but that breakdowns in collaborative working were a

common occurrence both across and *within* sectors. There were multiple examples of

poor communication *between* local authorities and *between* homelessness third sector

organisations. There was also a vast array of examples provided by interviewees in which

both local authority and third sector practitioners had struggled to access broader forms

of service provision. This included complaints about police and probation services,

Universal Credit services/helplines, children and adult social care services, and targeted

mental health and substance use services. Table 8.1. illustrates some of the types of

relationships noted by practitioners as being under particular strain, expressed in their

own words.

Type of inter-agency relationship	Illustrative excerpts
Between local authorities	Because the other boroughs, they've got access to the same [temporary accommodation] rooms … so we're fighting … you may get other boroughs quite close to us placing here because it's cheaper obviously, that's the thing, so that's a bit of a task. (Janice, local authority practitioner)

We don't have a lot of dialogue between other councils and, to be honest, my experience actually is, especially if you're trying to refer a customer to another local authority, more often than not they don't want to know. (Katie, local authority practitioner) |
| **Between homelessness third sector organisations** | We don't talk to them anymore. We don't share that information that we used to. In the area there is a homeless providers group which we set up, sort of twenty years ago … you know, we would support each other and exchange information. But all that stopped. You daren't say or show any vulnerability because somebody will be looking at you. (Martin, third sector practitioner) |
| **Local authorities – homelessness third sector organisations** | We worked much more collaboratively, but it's interesting, about a year ago, if perhaps a bit more, the city council started, the pressure was on again from central government, you've got to get these numbers down, and that relationship with the city council went down … Um, so we've gone from this very collaborative working together, to a bit more, there's a lot less carrot and much more stick nowadays. (Martin, third sector practitioner)

One I'm finding extremely challenging. People are submitting housing applications … In order to find out whether their application is being processed, its nine to fifteen days, working days, for a telephone call back, you can't even get through to the Housing team, almost impossible. (Sophie, third sector practitioner) |

Local authorities – broader service providers	It's not just voluntary agencies we have issues with, we have issues with statutory agencies as well … you'll argue with **Children's Services** about who should house this household but somebody's got to do it. (Mary, local authority practitioner) When you try and get **mental health services** to try and involve themselves, it's like well no, that person's got capacity and they're making the decision to sleep on the streets. But you can see that that person's really struggling, but they just won't get involved until it is crisis point, when things could have been sorted out a lot sooner. (Elaine, local authority practitioner) More and more we have cases where somebody is at a critical, at a critical edge, so we have to make calls to the **police** … and even just doing that, getting the police interested is really hard. (Louise, local authority practitioner)
Homelessness third sector organisations – broader service providers	They should be **social services',** not ours … for some reason social services won't support us with [service user] but yet his needs are high, in terms of his mobility … they're saying it's the alcohol, if he gave up the alcohol he'd be better. (Lisa, third sector practitioner) Our working arrangement with **probation** has been the most struggle for us … we just don't get the communications coming through to us…not receiving the information, critical information for our safety. (Leanne, third sector practitioner) **Universal Credit** web-line, where you're meant to be able to query any of your queries, they don't respond, don't respond at all. I don't know why, that must just be a blank email or a blank computer sitting at the other end and nobody mans it, I think it's just in a room on its own. (Lisa, third sector practitioner)

Table 8.1. Reported breakdowns in collaborative working described by third sector and

local authority practitioners.

Crucially, what was apparent from practitioners' accounts was that this "fighting" (Janice, local authority practitioner) with other service providers had become a major aspect of their work, and that this was essentially diverting their time away from supporting service users (a pattern also described by Johnsen, Watts and Fitzpatrick, 2018). It is notable that the way in which they described their relationships with other providers was in marked contrast to how both third sector and local authority interviewees described their 'ideal' working environments. Indeed, practitioners' explanations of what they would *like* their work to look like consistently drew on notions of intensive, holistic and person-centered support involving multiple providers:

> A lot of the time it needs to be a holistic approach doesn't it, and not one support worker can help with everything, and if there's a piece missing from the jigsaw, then that can cause the whole thing to fall down. (Elaine, local authority practitioner)

> When all those different sectors work together, it provides a better overall support for the individual … [A service user] might tell me one thing, he might tell his probation officer another thing, if you are all communicating, you might have a better idea of what's going on and you can better support them. (Zara, third sector practitioner)

That practitioners were often unable to offer the level or type of support that they aspired to was shown to be a great source of distress, a theme that will be discussed further in the next section of this thesis. However, it is also noted that despite their obvious frustrations, practitioners tended to avoid placing blame with particular individuals or service providers. Instead, complaints about the decline in multi-agency

working generally took an empathetic tone, with these difficulties situated in the context of an entire system under strain:

> The thing to remember is that every judgement that a local authority housing officer does gets scrutinised by the money deciders … so it's not continuous dig at them, it always appears to be a continuous dig at them. (Arthur, third sector practitioner)

> [The mental health service are] so overworked, they don't have enough staff, enough workers … I think they're just super, super busy at the moment and overrun. (Sophie, third sector practitioner)

8.5. Facing challenges to 'connectedness'

Thus far in this chapter, I have highlighted the ways in which the austerity context has created a series of new challenges for practitioners working in third sector homelessness organisations and local authority housing departments. Both groups of participants spoke of the way in which their everyday practices had changed within this policy climate, echoing what Daly has called the "new realities" of homelessness provision (2016, p. 207). But in this section, I argue that practitioners' accounts reveal more than just a change in working practices, but also what Hitchen (2016) refers to as the 'mood' of austerity — that is, changes to the way in which they *feel* about and *relate* to their work.

In navigating the austerity context, both sets of practitioners spoke of finding themselves caught between multiple and *discordant* demands: responding to a rise in demand, whilst facing reductions in resource and staff levels; supporting service users with increasingly complex needs, and yet being unable to access appropriate health and social

care interventions; adhering to statutory/funding frameworks whilst maintaining personal and professional duty of care. Woven through these narratives of a life under austerity (and as well evidenced by the excerpts provided thus far) is a palpable sense of distress, of hopelessness, of loss of professional identity and value, and of concern for the future. Being unable to provide the type of support and assistance that they aspired to, or even that they been able to provide previously, left many of the practitioners grappling with their relationship to their work, and experiencing feelings of anxiety and emotional distress:

> The reason why I came into this job is to help and support our clients to get access to services, and I'm just watching them get pulled away…and that means the staff team struggles, I find that hard now, it's making my job more difficult. (Bella, third sector practitioner)

> People would get a shock if they came into homelessness services now and found out how difficult it really is … I lie in bed at two o'clock in the morning worrying. (Rachel, third sector practitioner)

> Particularly since austerity, my workload is just being piled on and on and on and on and on, to the point where I can't sleep 'cos I'm worrying. (Andrea, local authority practitioner)

While levels of workload have certainly increased in many professional settings in recent years, it is suggested here that this - the *affective* presence of austerity - is felt in a particularly acute way in settings where practitioners are deeply connected and committed to their work. Indeed, and despite the difficulties that their roles entailed and the many frustrations that they expressed towards the policy and organisation context,

it was also nearly always the case that practitioners' described working in homelessness as fulfilling and enjoyable, and as something that formed an integral part of their identity:

> It'll change your life, it really does, [it is] very difficult to imagine earning a living in any other way. (Joseph, third sector practitioner)

> I love my job and the client group. I think you meet some of the most honest people and they are in such a vulnerable position and you think I know I can do something to change that and make a difference in this job. (Bella, third sector practitioner)

In this way, practitioners seem to present their roles in quite a discordant manner where notion of an 'ideal' job (that they valued and felt deeply connected to) sat uncomfortably alongside their descriptions of what the actual 'real' work entailed (that served to challenge their values and connectedness).

For several of the practitioners, the level of emotional distress and of frustration that they experienced seemed to be heightened by the fact that they themselves had been homeless (as described by Clayton, Donovan and Merchant, 2014). Eight of the twenty-three practitioners in this study (four local authority, four third sector) disclosed that they themselves had experience of homelessness in some form, and named this as a key motivator for entering into and remaining in the sector:

> When I was a homeless teenager, I still remember…this lovely punk housing advisor… her saying to me 'have you got anywhere to sleep tonight', and I said 'no', and she said 'right I'll get you into temporary accommodation' and

that night I went into a hostel … And that made me want to work in housing…

'Cos I knew how much difference it makes. (Andrea, local authority

practitioner)

I always thought once I got myself a bit sorted and where I wanted to be, I'd

dip into homelessness services…and see if I could sort of give a little

something back. (Leanne, third sector practitioner)

Within this group of practitioners, it was consistently emphasised that their relationship

with (and level of commitment to) service users was strengthened through their

awareness of the emotional and material realities of homelessness. As explained by both

Katie and Arthur, their own backgrounds granted them a particular affinity and increased

their capacity to engage with this group:

I understand differently to someone who might be silver-spooned, so to

speak… I understand the emotional factors… when I am speaking to a

customer, I'll be able to pick up on that, and give them that emotional

support as well. (Katie, local authority practitioner)

It helps a lot of the guys open up to me and be honest with me because they

know that if they tell me they found it really traumatic or really scary, that I

know exactly what they mean…it sort of gives us that little bit in common.

(Arthur, third sector practitioner)

In managing the emotional impacts of their work, some of the practitioners spoke of the

need to exercise restraint and a level of detachment so as not become overly emotionally

invested in service users' lives or outcomes (Clayton, Donovan and Merchant, 2014).

Indeed, developing appropriate boundaries was often deemed an essential component

of coping with their roles. Interestingly, parallels may be drawn between this and the service users' strategies for managing homelessness; the need to "harden up" to "survive" was a common feature of their narratives:

> You don't want too much heart as a housing advisor. (Andrea, local authority practitioner)

> To survive the job, you've got to be fairly thick-skinned and fairly bombproof for want of a better word. (Louise, local authority practitioner)

However, while this "emotional distancing" (Grootegoed and Smith, 2018, p.1938) was often presented as important or even necessary to "survive the job", in practice it seemed that few of the practitioners actually succeeded in developing this distance from their work. What was much more common, and as the excerpts earlier in this section demonstrate, was the continued presence of emotional and ethical distress (Grootegoed and Smith, 2018).

What is particularly interesting about these narratives is that local authority and third sector practitioners described their work, and indeed the personal and professional dilemmas created by the austerity context, in very similar terms. The distinctive nature of the third sector, and the emotional dimensions of third sector practice has been a regular feature of existing research in the area (Scanlon and Adlam, 2012; Renedo, 2014; Daly, 2018; see Chapter Four). However, far less attention has been given to how local authority practitioners' *feel* about and relate to their work, with research instead tending to focus on particular practices and processes (for example, decision making) (Alden, 2015a, 2015b). The indication from the data here is that individuals from the two groups both talked in very similar terms in regard to the importance of their commitments, and

also their vulnerability to feelings of helplessness, ineffectiveness and emotional distress.

8.6. Chapter summary

The findings of this chapter contribute to the main research question by providing an overall picture of how the austerity context was being experienced and navigated by practitioners working in both local authority housing departments and third sector organisations.

The chapter illustrates how the landscape of homelessness service provision has been fundamentally transformed by the austerity context. Practitioners working both in local authority housing departments and third sector organisations are being tasked with navigating a new set of challenges that may be best encompassed by the sentiment of 'doing more with less' (of course, in actuality, one can only do less with less!) (Clayton, Donovan and Merchant, 2014, p. 27; Daly, 2016, 2017). That practitioners were often struggling with the increasing disparity between 'ideal' and 'real' working practices is indicative of how the austerity context serves to both undermine but also to strengthen notions of what 'good practice' looks like — indeed, this is ever more apparent when you are *not* doing it (Clayton, Donovan and Merchant, 2014). Crucially, the complex nature of homelessness means that it has not only been the direct cuts to homelessness provision that are shown to be problematic for supporting this population, but the combination of 'across the board' cuts to public services (i.e., local government, mental health, substance use, probation and so on). In this way, these empirical findings evidence the need to take a broad lens when considering the full implications of austerity for people experiencing homelessness.

The last three chapters have provided an overview of the central findings of the empirical analysis. In the chapter that follows, these findings are summarised and discussed in relation to the two overarching concepts that emerged through this analysis, discord and distress, which are presented as a substantive constructivist grounded theory. The chapter then moves on to discuss the implications of this study for policy, practice and for ongoing academic research.

Part IV: Discussion and Conclusions

Chapter 9: Discussion

9.1. Introduction to the chapter

The empirical study presented in this thesis set out to examine how austerity-driven measures and policies have translated into the everyday lived realities of people experiencing homelessness, and practitioners working in homelessness-related services. The research sought specifically to address the following aims:

- To gain understanding of how austerity-driven measures and policies have translated into the 'street level' experiences of homeless service users, practitioners and service providers.

- To critically compare the way in which homelessness is framed by policymakers with single homeless people and practitioners' everyday realities.

- To deepen understanding of transitions into and out of homelessness in the context of austerity, and to consider the implications these hold for policy responses and interventions.

- To contribute specifically to knowledge on the lives and experiences of single homeless people residing in homelessness accommodation and resettlement services.

- To place the 'voices' of homeless people and practitioners at the forefront of theoretical developments, reflecting the belief that listening to peoples' personal narratives is the best way to achieve a thorough and nuanced understanding of this topic.

These aims were articulated as a focal research question and a set of sub questions, as follows:

- **How is homelessness being experienced and managed at the 'street level' in the context of the post-2010 austerity programme?**

- What is it like to be homeless in the context of post-2010 austerity measures?

- What is it like to work in homelessness provision in the context of post-2010 austerity measures?

- How do practitioners and service users construct their experiences in relation to the current policy context?

In this final chapter, I draw together the empirical findings from the study with reference to existing literature and present the substantive grounded theory that was developed. It is important to here reiterate that the aim of this thesis was not to establish objective or generalisable outcomes, but to understand how service users and practitioners constructed and gave meaning to their everyday realities. However, it is also recognised that the empirical material presented in the preceding chapters has relevance and value beyond the immediate context in which the data was collected (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). With this in mind, the latter sections of the chapter discuss the implications of this thesis for policy, practice and future academic research. In particular, I draw attention to the merits of constructivist grounded theory as a framework for critical inquiry in the face of growing inequality and injustice. Finally, an overall conclusion is provided, offering a number of final thoughts and outlining the original contributions offered by this thesis.

9.2. Constructing a grounded theory: *discord* and *distress*

In keeping with the principles of constructivist grounded theory, the final stage of the analytical process was the construction of a substantive theoretical model. The aim of this model to best account for and provide insights into the central themes that emerged from the empirical material and answer the main research question and sub-questions

(Charmaz, 2014). As explained above, the main research question of this study asked how homelessness was being experienced and managed at the 'street level' in the context of the post-2010 austerity programme. In answer to this, the constructivist grounded theory presented here proposes that the austerity context had translated into participants' lived realities in two distinct ways: (a) within their 'actual' day-to-day experiences and practices as a form of *discord,* and (b) affectively through their moods, sense of self and imaginings of personal futures as a form of *distress*. Discord was also a source of distress, amongst both service users and service providers, as shown in Figure 9.1.
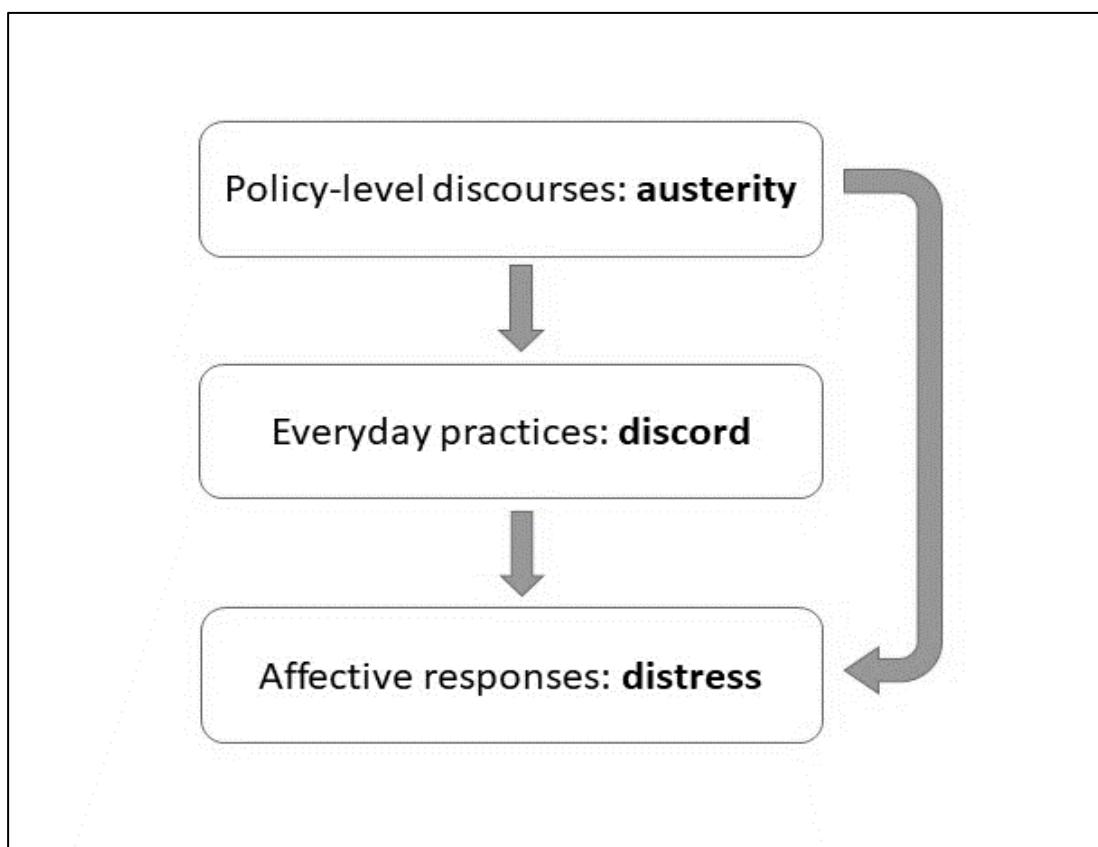
Figure 9.1. Discord and distress: CGT model of translation of austerity to 'street level'.

What surfaced most consistently and most starkly across all of participants' narratives were the many paradoxes, the 'gaps', the things at odds with each other. Taken together, the empirical material conveyed an overwhelming sense of *discord*: discord between political rhetoric and lived realities; between service users' aspirations and lived realities; between levels of demand and levels of resource; between 'ideal' and 'real' working practices; between services and sectors; and also, crucially, *within* the participants' own narratives. There is a risk, however, when we start to speak about such a range of discord that this will obscure the emotional and relational components of how austerity had manifested into participants' lived realities. Indeed, the empirical material presented in the preceding chapters made clear that emotions, and specifically feelings of emotional *distress*, were "at the heart" of how these many forms of discord were being experienced at the 'street level' (Clayton, Donovan and Merchant, 2014, p.24). A theory which acknowledges *both* discord and distress avoids any suggestion that all that needs to be done is to address feelings of distress expressed in individuals; while at the same time rejects the idea that if organisational or sector-wide sources of discord were identified and resolved, feelings of distress would disappear.

To illustrate this substantive theory further, the following two sections will consider the central findings of the empirical study with reference both to these key concepts and also to the existing body of literature. However, and before moving on, I feel it important to reinforce that I am not suggesting that the austerity context alone is responsible for the participants' feelings of emotional distress. Instead, I suggest that the context of austerity should be understood as heightening or amplifying what are already fundamentally distressing experiences. As the data indicates, being homeless is likely to be highly distressing regardless of the prevailing policy context against which it takes

place; however, the emotional toll it takes on the individual is exacerbated in contexts where services are overstretched, conditionality and gatekeeping activities are common, and political and public discourses are particularly hostile. Likewise, practitioners in the homelessness sector will always be faced with emotionally challenging situations in their work and thus are at risk of feelings of distress, but such feelings are likely to be exacerbated when they are overstretched and unable to offer appropriate forms of support (Scanlon and Adlam, 2012).

9.3. Discussion of the empirical findings

Discord and distress in the service user narratives

In the first of the empirical findings chapters (Chapter Six), the service users' pathways into homelessness were explored. Reinforcing findings from an already extensive body of literature, what emerged was that service users' life histories were consistently characterised by much longer-term forms of instability, insecurity and social exclusion (as in, for example, Busch-Geertsema et al., 2010; Fitzpatrick, Bramley and Johnsen, 2013; Johnsen and Watts, 2014; Bramley and Fitzpatrick, 2018). Indeed, there was a sense many of the service users had teetered for some time between precarious housing and absolute homelessness. This study, then, broadly aligns with claims in the existing literature that the relationship between poverty and homelessness remains consistent (and is perhaps even strengthened) in the austerity context, rather than the reverse (Johnsen and Watts, 2013; Bramley and Fitzpatrick, 2018).

Also presented in Chapter Six were service users' accounts of what it was like to *be* homeless prior to their entry into accommodation and resettlement services. Overall, homelessness (and particularly street homelessness) was presented as a fundamentally *distressing* experience. Service users consistently emphasised the psychological,

emotional and relational components of their experience, and presented the homelessness event as having profound effects upon their sense of self (Williams and Stickley, 2011). In this way, service users' narratives of homelessness align more closely with definitions that draw on notions of 'home' and 'stigma' (as discussed in Chapter Two) in that they construct homelessness as being about 'more' than housing alone (Somerville, 1992; McNaughton, 2008).

Crucially, what was made apparent by the service users' narratives in this study was that the distressing nature of the homelessness event was exacerbated further by their inability to access appropriate service provision in a timely manner. Mirroring findings from contemporary research, service users reported finding themselves almost entirely excluded from statutory forms of homelessness assistance (Dwyer et al., 2014); unable to navigate an increasingly hostile benefit system (Reeve, 2017); and facing an overall shortage of spaces in accommodation and resettlement services (Reeve, 2011; Bowpitt and Kaur, 2018; Homeless Link, 2019). These factors, taken together, served to keep service users on the streets for longer, meaning the support needs they reported (physical and mental ill health, substance use, entrenchment in street culture) often intensified. Indeed, service users spoke of finding themselves faced with a discordant reality in which they increasingly struggled to see a way in from the streets (Bowpitt and Kaur, 2018). Notably, the impact of reduced service access was further reinforced by practitioners' depictions of the service user population as more desperate, critical and complex than seen in years previous (as also noted by Homeless Link, 2013).

Chapter Seven moved on to explore the service users' lives within accommodation and resettlement services and their attempts to move beyond homelessness on a longer term basis. Here, there was an overwhelming sense of discord between the service users'

aspirations and their *actual* lived realities. Indeed, emerging from the service users'

narratives were repeated patterns of discord between the opportunities available to

them, and what would actually allow them to achieve resettlement and stability on a

longer-term basis. When presented only with limited and inappropriate options – the

offer of a hostel space for only thirty days, the offer of social tenancy miles away from

their support network, private rented tenancies they could not afford, opportunities of

work that risked their space in a hostel - this represented for service users not a solution,

but yet another source of discord.

The barriers faced by single homeless people in their attempts to move on from

accommodation and resettlement services have been a feature of contemporary

literature, and broadly reflect the findings of this study (for example McNeill, 2011; Rowe

and Wagstaff, 2017; Homeless Link, 2019, see also Chapter Two). Less attention,

however, has been placed on how these barriers are *affectively* experienced by service

users. What the findings here indicated was that the overwhelming sense of discord

within the service environment - between rhetoric and reality, between aspiration and

reality, between what was available and what was needed - created a great deal of

emotional distress for service users. The sense of "stuckness" that came with their life in

services seemed to hinder service users' ability to imagine a more positive future for

themselves. This was reflected in the very many unanswered and unanswerable

questions that ran through their narratives: *Who is going to offer me a tenancy? How am*

I going to afford to live there? How will I get a proper job? What is the point of tackling

my substance abuse? Am I going to be able to cope on my own without support? Indeed,

and perhaps while only implied within the service users' accounts, from the practitioner

perspective it was made clear that the result of this discord was a population of service users who felt hopeless and were becoming increasingly despondent.

What service users' narratives also made clear was the glaring disjuncture - the *discord* - between dominant political rhetoric and their own lived realities (Patrick, 2014, 2015). As discussed in Chapter Three, the government discourses that have underpinned the austerity programme are framed around the importance of moving people away from cultures of perceived 'dependency' and 'worklessness'. Yet, the picture that emerged in Chapter Seven was of a system "backing up" and a population of homeless people "stuck" in services. Austerity-driven policies were shown to (ironically) be pushing service users further away from housing and employment markets (Patrick, 2014, 2015). As elsewhere, there was also little evidence to suggest the existence of a 'culture of worklessness' amongst service users, nor that benefits represented a preferred 'lifestyle choice' (Shildrick et al., 2012; Patrick, 2015; Reeve, 2017). Many of the service user participants were actively seeking employment at the point of interview and spoke hopefully about returning to work in the future, even in the face of a multitude of barriers. Indeed, being in paid work was consistently recognised to be a preferable option to the emotional and practical burdens that come with attempts to access and 'get by' on welfare benefits (Patrick, 2014; Shildrick et al., 2012; Wilkinson and Ortega-Alcázar, 2018).

Stigma

In both Chapters Six and Seven, the acute sense of stigma associated with homelessness was shown to be a significant barrier for service users, exacerbating already intense feelings of distress and discordance. In terms of emotional distress, actual or anticipated stigmatisation by others - frontline practitioners, potential landlords, potential

employers, the general public - was reported by service users as intensifying their feelings of shame and social isolation, and impeding their ability to imagine a better future for themselves; as Oliver, a service user, remarked, "you get trapped in that mentality of just this is what it's going to be like". More practically speaking, stigmatised attitudes towards homeless people on the part of potential landlords and employers were described to be actively hindering opportunities for resettlement. In this way, stigma served to reinforce the sense of discord felt by service users as they attempted to move beyond homelessness. Importantly, evidence from the interview data also indicated that the stigma associated with homelessness can altogether stop people from approaching services for assistance, the result being that many of the service users reached a point of 'crisis' that may otherwise have been preventable.

The prevalence of this stigma is understood here as fuelled by, rather than divorced from the austerity context on which this thesis is focused. As described in Chapter Three, the austerity programme has been accompanied by a policy rhetoric in which behavioural explanations of poverty have gained significant traction, and where the welfare state is presented as "antithesis of self-reliance, responsibility and independence" (Reeve, 2017, p.3): the most seemingly unassailable 'commonsense' societal values. The divisions created by this rhetoric - between the 'hard working' majority and the welfare dependent 'other' have permeated public consciousness, resulting in a hardening of attitudes towards "the poor" (Shildrick and MacDonald, 2013, p.286; NatCen, 2013; Pemberton et al., 2016; Thomas et al., 2018).

Stigma was also shown to manifest *discordantly* through service users' own narratives which often moved between, on one hand, resisting dominant representations of homelessness, and on the other, internalising and reproducing them through the

construction of a homeless 'other' (Patrick, 2016; Garthwaite, 2016; Pemberton et al., 2016). In this way, and as noted by Pemberton et al. (2016), the pejorative policy rhetoric that has accompanied the austerity programme is "granted a spurious authenticity through the voices of the poor themselves" (2016, p.31). Again, and as Ruth Patrick has argued (2014, 2016), it is critical that this process of "othering" is situated in the context of the welfare retrenchment and conditionality agenda that has accompanied austerity. Service users are, in the current context, increasingly required to assert and defend their 'legitimacy' and entitlement to support.

Discord in the practitioner narratives

The practitioners' narratives presented in Chapter Eight revealed how homelessness service provision has fundamentally changed since the implementation of the austerity programme. The broader policy context was here shown to have had profound impacts both at the level of service delivery and everyday practices, but also affectively in how practitioners *felt* about and *related* to their work. In this way, and as Colley presciently stated early in the austerity period, the austerity context is evidenced as having "change[d] the conditions of the field" but also as "reorient[ing] practice within [it]" (2012, p.331). Practitioners' everyday realities were characterised by an intense sense of *discord* as they found themselves caught between multiple and often irreconcilable demands: responding to a growing population of service users in the face of depleting resources and staff numbers; engaging and attempting to support service users with increasingly complex support needs whilst being unable to access broader forms of service provision; and being required to adhere to increasingly regulated statutory and funding frameworks whilst maintaining personal commitments and professional ethics of care.

For those working in the third sector, and reflecting existing research in this area (Scanlon and Adlam; Renedo, 2014; Daly, 2018), a specific sense of discord emerged between the requirements set out in statutory funding structures, and practitioners' own professional and personal ethos. Here, what was overwhelmingly apparent was how this funding context had served to undermine and diminish the space for relational care between practitioners and service users, so central to the third sector identity (Renedo, 2014; Daly, 2018). Notably, that third sector practitioners were shown here to be playing a primarily reactive role (through management of 'crises') rather than a long-term support-based role was noted as having substantive ramifications for service users' resettlement (Daly, 2018). For those working in local authority housing teams, the starkest sense of discord arose between the increasing level of demand on their services, and what they could *actually* offer both in terms of their legislative duty and also their resource levels (Alden, 2015a; Cowan, 2019). This was particularly pronounced in their anticipation of the Homelessness Reduction Act (2017) which, without an injection of resources (housing), was set just to represent yet another form of discord for the practitioners.

As set out in Chapter Three, the Localism Act (2011) was billed by the Coalition government as a way to enhance the power and autonomy of local authorities, third sector organisations and community groups, and to subsequently develop more appropriate and creative responses to local issues (DCLG, 2011). On this point, what again emerges from the empirical material is further evidence of *discord* between this "rhetoric of empowerment" and practitioners' lived realities (Clayton, Donovan and Merchant, 2016, p.731; Dagdeviren, Donoghue and Wearmouth, 2019). As above, and in the context of extensive budgetary cuts, both sets of practitioners described themselves

as actually being more restricted than ever in how they operated. Within the third sector, local expertise was being explicitly undermined and bypassed by statutory commissioners' own targets and preferences, which also generally favoured national organisations (who can "promise the world") over local providers. Notably, this reiterates earlier concerns raised in the literature around the heightening inequality between third sector organisations created by the acceleration of this 'contract culture' (May, Cloke and Johnson, 2006; Clayton, Donovan and Merchant, 2016). From the perspective of those working in local authorities and as above, it was consistently emphasised that their capacity to, in the words of the interviewees, "do anything good" or to "go the extra mile" for their clients was significantly restricted by depleted resource levels (Alden 2015a).

In Chapter Eight, it was shown how austerity-driven policies have contributed to a broader service landscape in which collaboration and communication have broken down, and cultures of secrecy and "passing the buck" have emerged. While similar observations have been made specifically in relation to breakdowns in partnership working between third sector homelessness organisations (May, Cloke and Johnsen, 2006; Buckingham, 2009), what the findings here suggest is that this was taking place on a much broader scale than previously reported. Indeed, what the accounts in this study reinforce is that the complex and multifaceted nature of homelessness means that it is not only the direct cuts to homelessness provision proving problematic for supporting this population, but the combination of 'across the board' retrenchment of public services. Crucially, this breakdown in collaborative practices sits discordantly alongside practitioners' notions what 'good practice' looked like which routinely centered on holistic and joined-up forms of working.

Distress in the practitioner narratives

Being caught between these increasingly discordant and paradoxical demands served as a deep source of emotional distress for practitioners. Indeed, consistently woven through their narratives - and alongside their depictions of the contemporary service environment - was a tangible sense of anxiety, sadness and loss. Working in homelessness-related service provision will always involve some potentially distressing situations as practitioners engage with individuals experiencing trauma (Scanlon and Adlam, 2012; Grootegoed and Smith, 2018). However, it seems that emotions surface in a particularly intense way in contexts where practitioners are constantly being faced with ethical and moral dilemmas, and where there emerges a significant gap between ideal and real working practices (Colley, 2012; Grootegoed and Smith, 2018). Indeed, it was the navigating of these discordant demands, and not their relationships with the service users, that practitioners consistently described as being the main source of their emotional distress (Watson, Nolte and Brown, 2019, p.135). Moreover, with additional cuts to funding anticipated and new responsibilities in the form of the HRA, practitioners expressed concerns about the increasing discord between their professional and personal commitments and the services they would be able to offer in the future. This sense of impending loss, inability to cope or even of services closing was a source of significant distress; as Esther Hitchen has argued, austerity affectively manifests not only in the present, but also in the way that people envisage their own futures (Hitchen, 2016).

As suggested in Chapter Eight, it seemed that the *affective* presence of austerity is experienced in a particularly acute way in settings where practitioners demonstrate deep levels of commitment and connectedness to their work. Despite the many

hardships, practitioners also consistently spoke with joy and appreciation for their roles, and recalled very personal motivations for entering into and remaining in this sector. In this way, a discordance emerges as to how practitioners presented their roles. Indeed, the notion of an 'ideal' job (that they valued and felt deeply connected to) sat uncomfortably alongside and bore minimal resemblance to their descriptions of what the actual 'real' work entailed and that served to challenge these values (Eraut, 2004; Colley, 2012). Some existing studies have suggested that in navigating the 'new realities' (Daly, 2016) of service provision, practitioners may turn to strategies of emotional detachment or distancing that help to protect from feelings of emotional distress (Scanlon and Adlam 2012; Renedo, 2014; Grootegoed and Smith, 2018). Scanlon and Adlam, for example, suggest that practitioners may adopt the position of a ''detached bystander'' where they "avoid all emotional connection with their clients, with their colleagues or the life of the organisation" (2012, p.77). In the present study, there was little evidence to suggest that this was taking place. Indeed, and while some aspired to adopt such strategies, in reality it was clear that practitioners' emotional attachment to their work endured or, in some cases, even intensified (Grootegoed and Smith, 2018).

There has also been a tendency within the existing literature to present those working in third sector organisations and those working in local authority housing departments as entirely distinct, or even dichotomous (Renedo, 2014). A number of studies have recognised how particular policy and funding contexts may have distressing implications for third sector practitioners, and particularly those working on the front line (Scanlon and Adlam, 2012; Renedo, 2014; Daly, 2018, 2018; Watson, Nolte and Brown, 2019). However, there has to date been much less of a focus on the emotional well-being of practitioners working in local authority housing departments. Instead, attention has

generally been given to local authority practitioners' implementation of particular practices or processes such as legislative decision making (see for example, Alden, 2015a, 2015b). While differences certainly arose across the two groups in this study, what I found to be striking within the empirical material was how similar were the terms in which the practitioners spoke about and related to their work. Indeed, the indication from the interview data was that practitioners from the two groups may be equally vulnerable to feelings of ineffectiveness, helplessness and emotional distress.

Before moving on, it is important here to reinforce how the narratives of the service users and the two groups of practitioners can be understood, in many ways, as quite alike. Both are shown here to be contending with the *discord* that emerges between the policy rhetoric and their lived realities, and even more, the discord between their own aspirations and their lived realities. Again, for both groups, this translates (unsurprisingly) into deep-rooted feelings of emotional *distress*, both in response to their present circumstances, but also in terms of their imaginings of personal futures (Hitchen, 2016).

Assessing the impact of austerity in the lives of single homeless people
This study has taken place against a background of austerity – both as a set of economic policies, and as a particular political and public discourse - and this was referred to by participants, as discussed previously. However, it is recognised that many of the points raised in this thesis regarding the experiences of single homeless people and the provision of services for them predate 2010 and the introduction of austerity. Indeed, in looking to the previous literature, there are certainly many points of similarity. In a qualitative study that explored the experiences of multiple-exclusion homelessness conducted between 2009 and 2010, for example, Bowpitt et al. (2011a, 2011b) highlight

the presence of inappropriate conditionality clauses, gatekeeping activities on the part of local authorities, difficulties in accessing welfare benefits, difficulties in accessing targeted forms of support, and a lack of joined-up working between agencies. In a similar vein, drawing on a review of evidence between 2000-2010, Jones and Pleace (2010) note particular issues in responses to homelessness including the absence of affordable accommodation, the lack of preventative efforts on the part of local authorities, and discrimination towards homeless people by employers.

So then, what - if anything - has been distinctive and different in the decade since 2010 in relation to single homelessness in particular? What the empirical material in this study shows is that what this period of austerity has done is served to exacerbate and intensify many of the challenges and barriers faced by single homeless people as they transition through homelessness, and particularly as they work towards longer-term resettlement. As discussed through Part III of the thesis, this includes (but is not limited to) reduced access to bed-spaces in homelessness accommodation and resettlement services, reduced access to targeted support services, reduced staffing of services and changes to the role of frontline practitioners, reduced collaboration between agencies, and increased levels of hostility and conditionality. The empirical evidence from across the three participant groups, many of whom had experienced homelessness/working in the homelessness sector prior to 2010, suggests that qualitative and hard-to-reverse changes have occurred, which, as above, are experienced by those at the 'street level' in the form of distress and discord. However, it is also important to reinforce that the primary aim of this thesis was not to establish causal relationships about the state of homelessness before and after austerity, but to understand and situate the lived experiences of service user and practitioners within this particular policy context.

9.4. Recommendations for policy and practice

The empirical material presented in the preceding chapters indicated that there is a critical need to re-evaluate responses to homelessness, both at the level of policy-making and also within the service environment. In the remainder of this section, I outline a series of key recommendations for policy and practice. These are predominantly drawn from my own analysis of the empirical material, but also contain a number of suggestions made directly by participants of the study. In the interviews, all participants were given the opportunity to share what they believed would improve support for people experiencing (or at risk of experiencing) homelessness.

I feel it is important to recognise the underlying sense of irony and sense of sadness that accompanies these recommendations; the discord and distress that I myself feel when I compare what could and should be happening with what seems plausible and likely to happen. One of the central findings of this thesis was that the capacity of both statutory and non-statutory providers has been vastly reduced in the context of austerity. Thus, their ability to *actually* implement any of the changes suggested below is highly compromised (Bowpitt et al., 2011a). While some of these recommendations could certainly be implemented at a regional or municipal level, it is overwhelming clear that what is really most needed here is a radical shift in the policy agenda. At the time of writing, however, there remains little evidence to suggest that this is on the horizon. Despite this, it remains important that we continue to put forward counter narratives, both as a source of critique but also to consider future directions in the event of a shift away from austerity.

Recommendation 1: Alleviating the distressing effects of austerity on homelessness

This thesis provides insight into how austerity policies have negatively impacted the lives of people experiencing homelessness and undermined the effectiveness of services and authorities that work to support them. What emerges is a clear need for the replacement of regressive austerity-driven policies with substantial and secure cross-sector investment. Particularly crucial for alleviating the impact of austerity on homelessness are the following three recommendations:

- Replenishment of local government budgets to allow appropriate commissioning of homelessness resettlement services and tenancy related support, ideally accompanied by the reintroduction of a ring-fenced funding stream for homelessness-related provision as existed previously.

- Investment in and growth of the social housing sector, and implementation of specific regulations to ensure that (a) existing social housing stock is protected from being sold off, and (b) single homeless people are not excluded from applying to social housing registers.

- Investment in targeted and non-conditional mental health and drug-related provision, and ensure such services are available in all areas and particularly those areas with substantive homelessness populations.

Moving forward and given that at the time of writing the newly elected government have been keen to suggest that they are "turning the page" on austerity (former chancellor Sajid Javid as quoted in BBC, 2019), it will be important to see how this is realised in practice and what may be recouped and reconstructed in the aftermath of austerity. While the economic rationale for austerity has seemingly been weakened, and increased spending has been promised, there are two key areas that will require particular scrutiny.

The first is whether economic uncertainty around national growth and around Britain's departure from the European Union means that such spending actually materialises in reality. Second is whether ideological choices mean that single homelessness remains a lesser priority when compared with health, education or social care for the elderly. If so, the prospects for a major shift in policy responses to homelessness seem remote.

Recommendation 2: Reframing homelessness in policy and public discourses

The austerity programme has been accompanied by a "shirkers and scroungers" rhetoric (Garthwaite, 2016, p.1) in which unemployment, welfare 'dependency' and homelessness have been constructed in wholly behavioural terms, and the structural components of poverty have been overlooked or actively denied. The empirical material here indicates that this highly stigmatising (and misinformed) rhetoric has permeated public consciousness (Pemberton et al., 2016) and created a series of additional barriers for services users as they transition through homelessness. This is both in terms of their access to services, housing and employment, but also in terms of their own wellbeing. In thinking about how we reverse the damaging effects of austerity, attention must be focused not only on much-needed policy reform and investment, but also on changing the way that we as a society think and speak about homelessness, starting at the top. Moving forward, the government should work to reframe the way that homelessness is presented more objectively in policy making discourses, and avoid derogatory and stigmatising language (Garthwaite, 2014, 2016). Perhaps if the government were to adopt a more empathetic stance, others would begin to follow their lead (Garthwaite, 2013, 2014).

Recommendation 3: Refocusing on strategies of homelessness prevention

Homelessness prevention has been an identified priority of successive governments (Downie et al., 2018). However, the austerity context (and the drastic rise in homelessness that has accompanied it) has seen both local authority housing teams and the commissioners funding homelessness services move away from this focus and instead towards 'crisis management' (Thunder and Rose, 2019). The lack of homelessness prevention taking place was noted consistently by practitioners, but was also evident through service users' accounts, which rarely referenced any sort of service involvement prior to their transition into homelessness.

Given the emotional distress associated with homelessness (Chapter Six) and the profound difficulties that service users faced in attempting to exit homelessness services (Chapter Seven), the need for policy and provision to refocus attention on preventative strategies is markedly apparent. Suggestions for preventing homelessness drawn from the interview data include:

- Reinvesting in tenancy support/sustainment service provision.

- Improving housing arrangements for those leaving hospital and prison so that discharge to the street/hostels is avoided.

- Funding deposit schemes to support access to the private rental sector.

- Delivering clear and targeted advice to groups at heightened risk of homelessness.

- Providing training for staff in statutory services (local authorities, Jobcentre Plus) and other public bodies to help them identity people at risk of homelessness.

(See also Bowpitt et al., 2011; Downie et al., 2018, who discuss similar strategies).

In many ways, much of the above is what the Homelessness Reduction Act (2017) (HRA) was intended to do. Since the time of data collection, the HRA has come fully into force across England. While generally recognised to have increased the rights of homeless people, and particularly those who sit outside of the statutory remit, early evaluation suggests that its success in reducing homelessness has thus far been limited. Mirroring the concerns that the local authority practitioners raised in this study (Chapter Eight), a recent survey (New Local Government Network, 2019) reported that two thirds of the 188 surveyed local authorities felt that they lacked sufficient funding to fulfil additional statutory duties. The obligation to offer assistance both at an earlier stage, and also to anyone presenting regardless of 'priority need', was here reported to have further increased strain on services. Without investment into local government budgets and significant reform of housing policy, the capacity of local authority housing teams in preventing homelessness will continue to be limited. There is also a need to monitor how local authority practitioners will navigate these new duties — indeed, and based on the existing literature, it seems that increased instances of illegal gatekeeping are likely (Alden, 2015a, 2015b; Cowan, 2019).

The empirical material also indicated that a key barrier to preventing homelessness was the stigma associated with "asking for help". Several service users indicated that they had avoided disclosing their circumstances to loved ones or professional bodies for fear of being "tarnished" (as described in Chapter Six). It follows that there is a need to extend discussion around prevention to consider how homelessness is being presented in public, media and policy discourses and the impact that this has on people's engagement with services. For a number of the participants, early (school-based) education was

identified as key strategy for improving the dialogue surrounding homelessness and removing this stigma:

> What we've got to get away from is short term results and look at things on a bigger scale. The main thing we need to bloody do is get into schools and talk to kids, between the ages of nine and maybe fourteen, and say right, this is what homelessness is, it's nothing to be ashamed of, nothing to be embarrassed about, this is why people become homeless, this is what you need to do if you are facing homelessness, these are the people you can speak to for advice. These are the kids that are going to be at risk in six years, ten years, fifteen years, these are the kids whose friends are gonna be kicked out from home. (Arthur, third sector practitioner)

Recommendation 4: Improving accessibility of services

Empirical findings indicated that service users had struggled to access and engage with relevant agencies at every stage of their pathways through homelessness (Chapters Six and Seven). While this is of course related to the reduced capacity of many services and will only be rectified by proper investment, a number of more localised recommendations can also be made. First, the routes by which people can access both non-statutory and statutory homelessness assistance must be more widely disseminated within spaces occupied by those experiencing (street) homelessness. Here, it is particularly important to recognise that many people experiencing street homelessness are often limited with regard to their means of communication (access to phones/internet etc.). Second, there is an urgent need for statutory services to ensure that they are making themselves accessible and approachable for people experiencing homelessness, recognising that much of this population is likely to be contending with

additional support needs. It is suggested that practitioners in statutory services would benefit from additional training to better equip them to engage with this population sensitively and empathetically:

> When people go into the council, don't make them feel that big [places finger and thumb close together], they already feel that big, you know just be a bit more friendly to them. If they've made the effort to go to the council, it's a big step, might not be to normal people, but it is a massive step getting off the street and going in to see these people, so just be a bit nicer to them.
>
> (Paul, service user)

On this point, it was also made clear that single homeless people (and particularly those with complex or additional support needs) require the support of advocates to assist them in navigating the complicated and often hostile service landscape. Again, this is indicative of the need for additional funding for third sector providers and specifically reinvestment in the 'floating' forms of support that were a particular casualty of austerity-driven cutbacks (St Mungo's, 2018).

Recommendation 5: Reconsidering approaches to provision for single homelessness

Not for the first time, concerns have been raised here as to the appropriateness of the current linear/treatment first model of homelessness service provision, particularly for those service users presenting with complex and/or multiple support needs. The empirical findings consistently emphasised that once service users had entered the system of homelessness accommodation services, it was extremely difficult for them to exit on a long-term basis. Many service users were thus finding themselves "stuck" in services with little opportunity for meaningful progression. In line with the existing literature, it is also noted that traditional hostels were often recognised as exacerbating

issues around mental ill health and substance use (see Chapter Seven; Johnsen and Teixeira, 2010; Blood et al., 2018). While it is necessary to avoid entirely placing the blame with accommodation and resettlement services who were rarely operating in the way that they aspired to (Homeless Link, 2015), it does certainly seem that calls for a move towards Housing First are warranted and deserve further exploration.

In considering the third sector practitioners' perspectives, the Housing First model does seem to be more aligned to the 'ideal' working practices that they aspired towards; that is, creative, responsive, person-centered, non-conditional support, with collaboration from multiple agencies (Chapter Eight). Housing First also seems to counter issues of precarity that so many of the service users had faced, both in time-restricted hostels, but also in insecure tenancies:

> The Housing First model, that is where your flexibility comes in, it's very person-centered, very strength based, it gives security of tenure, which is what you desperately, desperately need. If you have security of tenure, it will prevent at least fifty percent of the homelessness issues, it's much more concentrated on need. It is client focused and not service focused. (Bella, third sector practitioner)

There is an important caveat to this, however, which is that access to Housing First accommodation must always be accompanied by proper mechanisms through which broader sources of support can be routinely accessed. It is important, then, that the full extent of the austerity programme (i.e. not only on the homeless sector, but also on targeted health and social care provision) be taken fully into account as ongoing responses to homelessness are developed. Moreover, to ensure the success of Housing

First, there is a need for statutory commissioning to move away from target- and time-specific funding contracts and recognise that accommodation and resettlement services work best in contexts where practitioners are able to exercise flexibility. The continued reliance on short-term and insecure funding contracts puts both the success of these sorts of initiatives, and also the expertise of those working in the third sector, at risk.

Alongside a call to move towards Housing First, I also raise here an important second point about whether services should always be geared towards independent living. There was a strong sense of discord in the empirical material presented in Chapter Seven between dominant notions of resettlement based around the idealised notion of independence and what was felt would actually be most appropriate and *desirable* for service users. Rather than demonising service users' inability to reach the target of independent living, there is a need to widen the parameters as to what constitutes a positive outcome by making access to longer term forms of support a realistic option. That 'interdependence' may be a more appropriate outcome for some service users is by no means a new argument within the homelessness literature (for example, Bowpitt and Jepson, 2007) but may need to be reasserted as a rhetoric framed on the importance of moving away from 'dependency' continues to gain traction (Reeve, 2017).

9.5. Potential avenues for future research

In this section, and drawing on the evidence presented through the thesis thus far, I make a series of recommendations for future academic research. In making note of these, I also reflect on a number of limitations to the current study. The section is concluded with a brief commentary on the merits of a constructivist grounded theory framework as a tool for critical inquiry in times of austerity.

Recommendation 1: Continued focus on homelessness in the austerity context

First, and in light of the empirical findings presented here, there is a need for continued examination around the effects of austerity on the both the lives of people experiencing homelessness, and the broader landscape of homelessness service provision. Although the language of austerity may now be less visible in political discourses, what has been shown here is that the full effects of the austerity programme remain emergent, and homelessness services are continuing to be tested in a multitude of ways (Daly, 2018, p.10). While there exists extensive and ongoing research on the state of homelessness at a national level (for example, the annual Homelessness Monitor series produced by Fitzpatrick et al.), qualitative accounts can offer an insight into the lived experiences of homeless people and practitioners operating at the 'street level'.

The empirical material also indicated that it was not only the direct cuts to homelessness provision that were proving problematic for this population, but the "across the board" reduction in expenditure within statutory and third sector services. Thus, a particularly valuable avenue for future research would be to examine the effects of austerity on a wider remit of services than is discussed here (for example, mental health provision, targeted drug rehabilitative services, prison and probation services) and consider the implications of this in relation to single homelessness.

Recommendation 2: Inclusion of people experiencing 'hidden homelessness'

This study placed specific emphasis on exploring how austerity had translated within the homelessness service environment. For this reason, the sample was limited to practitioners and service users residing in accommodation/resettlement services. Further qualitative research into the experiences of 'hidden' populations (non-visible rough sleepers, sofa surfers, those in private hostels and so on) is also necessary if we

are to gauge the full extent of the effects of austerity policies on people experiencing homelessness. On this point, and whilst valid concerns exist regarding the inclusion of the homeless population in academic research (for example, Fitzpatrick, Kemp and Klinker, 2000, p.49), it is important to recognise that participating in research can be a positive experience for those who are otherwise marginalised from public and policy debate. The opportunity to share, reflect and be heard was generally described in highly favourable terms by the participants.

Recommendation 3: Use of pathways approach and longitudinal methodologies

This thesis has highlighted the value of adopting a 'pathways' framework (Clapham, 2002, 2003) for conducting research on homelessness. Using this approach allowed me to move beyond thinking of homelessness as a static state, and instead situate the homelessness event against service users' broader biographies. By choosing to interview service users already residing within homelessness or resettlement services, I was able to gain a sense of their transitions into homelessness their experiences of 'actual' homelessness (Chapter Six) and their life in services/intentions for the future (Chapter Seven). However, the obvious question that remains, particularly given the many barriers to 'move on' that are noted in Chapter Seven, is what happened to the service users next. I would suggest that there is significant scope for the application of longitudinal methodologies to further explore homelessness pathways, and particularly pathways out of homelessness, against the backdrop of austerity. On this point, longitudinal approaches would also allow researchers to map the impacts of particular policy reforms over time and as they 'unfold' into participants' lived realities, as shown by Daly (2016, 2018).

Constructivist grounded theory as a framework for critical inquiry

In Chapter Five of this thesis, I set out a comprehensive rationale for adopting a constructivist grounded theory framework that reflected my thinking at the point prior to data collection (see Chapter Five). While I would maintain that this original rationale remains fully valid, I also recognise that through the process of analysis and in bringing this thesis together, the way I understand and think about the topic area has evolved. With this has come new perspective on CGT and the potential it offers for critical inquiry: that is, as a form of research that overtly positions itself as intending to expose and rectify issues relating to social injustice and inequality (Charmaz, 2017, 2020; Denzin, 2015). To my knowledge, there has thus far been very limited application of CGT in studies of contemporary austerity.

As noted in Chapter Four, existing research on austerity has predominantly sought to map the impact of policy reforms on a regional and national scale via the use of quantitative methods (Strong, 2018). While certainly useful in providing a broader cross-section of the inequalities created under austerity, such measures alone do not allow us to capture the entirety of how austerity surfaces and is felt within peoples' everyday realities (Hitchen, 2016; Strong, 2018). Quantitative measures, I would argue, risk presenting local spaces and communities as "passive receptacles" of austerity and overlooking the multifaceted ways in which austerity is experienced, negotiated, transformed and embodied at the 'street level' (Strong, 2018, p.7).

It follows that what qualitative methodologies (and specifically 'grounded' approaches) can offer is deeper and more nuanced narratives of austerity. In examining austerity through the lens of those at the street level, the less obvious manifestations of what it *actually* means for peoples' lives are brought to the surface: the third sector worker who

is no longer able to have breakfast with her service users; the local authority worker who stays up in bed worrying; the service user questioning the point of tackling his substance dependency. Crucially, these sorts of empirical findings should not be viewed as secondary or as less valuable than the macro-level analyses provided by quantitative approaches; as evidenced above, they hold important implications for policy and practice responses in and of themselves (Robinson, 2008).

By starting inquiry at the point of a broad research interest, and following trails from *within* the field, CGT encourages the researcher to move beyond conventional or taken-for-granted definitions of social problems (including their own!) and approach analysis with a critical lens (Charmaz, 2017, p.39-40). I would argue that this is particularly important when the topics of research are ones around which exist powerful and pervasive public and policy rhetoric, and in which the voices of those about whom we are talking (people experiencing homelessness, people feeling the brunt of austerity reforms) are so often marginalised and excluded from the debate. In choosing an inductive and iterative methodology rooted in social constructionist thought, I was able to transcend dominant (and often misguided) imaginings of homelessness and austerity and instead prioritise how these phenomena were being experienced and given meaning by the participants of the study. In this way, inductive qualitative approaches like CGT can offer us a counter to what is often a highly pejorative rhetoric. In making claims about the legitimacy of these alternative narratives, the iterative nature of the CGT analytical process is particularly crucial. Multiple layers of rigorous analysis coupled with researcher reflexivity ensure we are moving beyond a simplistic reading of the data: as Charmaz has argued it is "through such interrogation [that] researchers can connect the

subjective with the collective, and move their analyses to make statements about injustice, inequities, and human rights" (Charmaz, 2017, p.41).

9.6. Original contribution of this thesis

The empirical study presented in this thesis contributes to what is currently a very limited body of literature that explicitly situates qualitative accounts of homelessness in the context of contemporary austerity (Alden, 2015a; Daly, 2012a, 2016; Watson, Nolte and Brown, 2019). In doing so, it has served to increase our understanding of what is a rapidly changing 'street level' environment (Daly, 2016). The empirical findings provide particular insight with regards to the lives of single homeless people residing in accommodation/resettlement services and the barriers that they are facing in their attempts to move beyond homelessness on a longer-term basis. This is noted as being particularly timely given the growing concern/debate around the way in which non-statutory provision for single homeless people is structured (see Chapter Four).

While a small body of existing literature has examined the experiences of single homeless people (Daly, 2012, 2016; Fitzpatrick et al., 2016; Johnsen, Watts and Fitzpatrick, 2016; Wilson and Barton, 2019), third sector practitioners (Daly, 2016, 2018; Watson, Nolte and Brown, 2019) and/or local authority practitioners (Alden, 2015a, 2015b) in the context of contemporary austerity, the combination and comparison of these three sets of narratives in one place is thought to be novel. That I was able to consider the accounts of these various groups concurrently offers the opportunity for a more robust picture of how homelessness was being experienced and managed at the 'street level' in the context of austerity.

Theoretically speaking, this thesis follows an emergent body of literature in demonstrating the need to move beyond the conceptualisation of austerity as policy alone to something that 'actually exists' (Strong, 2018) both materially and affectively within peoples' everyday lives (Garthwaite, 2016; Hitchen, 2016, 2019; Horton, 2016; Strong, 2018). While the empirical study was focused in the field of homelessness, it is suggested that the CGT presented in this final chapter holds the potential for broader use as a lens through which the effects of austerity at the 'street level' may be explored further. Indeed, it suggests that in public services more generally it is not enough to simply focus on identifying tensions or organisational problems in order to address discord because the discord resides inside the individuals as well. At the same time, simply looking at distress in isolation and trying to solve it as a deficiency in the individual ignores the systemic and discordant causes of that distress. This has the potential to be a more widely applicable theoretical framing.

Finally, and in the context of well-documented methodological difficulties in researching marginalised and vulnerable populations, this thesis has offered a reflexive account of conducting empirical qualitative research in the field of homelessness. In doing so, it has demonstrated the potential offered by CGT as a framework for critical inquiry into this and comparable topics at a time of austerity.

9.7. Concluding remarks

This thesis has offered insight into how the austerity programme introduced in 2010 has translated into the 'street level' realities of single homeless people and practitioners working in homelessness-related provision. In this final chapter, it has also presented a substantive grounded theory in response to the overarching research question posed at the beginning of the thesis. This proposes that austerity can be understood as

manifesting at two levels within the participants lived realities: (a) through their everyday practices as a form of *discord*, and (b) through their moods, sense of self and imaginings of personal futures as a form of emotional *distress.* Overall, what has emerged most consistently from the study is the profound damage that the austerity programme has had and continues to have on what is already a marginalised and distressed population. While in popular discourses the language of austerity may be fading, what this study makes quite clear is that almost a decade on, the full effects of austerity on homelessness are continuing to emerge.

While the localised scale of this study leaves substantive space for further inquiry around the issues raised, what I hope it does serve to highlight is the value that qualitative and specifically grounded accounts can offer to this field. By placing the lives of those at the 'street level' at the forefront of our research, we gain a far more nuanced understanding of the everyday realities of homelessness and of life under austerity than is recognised by public and policy discourses. It is with this sort of understanding that we may begin to contest and counter the pejorative rhetoric that continues to dominate, and instead to lay the foundations of more appropriate and compassionate policy responses. On this point, it is only right that the last words of this thesis are reserved for Sarah, one of the service user participants:

> Start listening to the homeless. Ask and listen to the people that are actually living it, that's what you should do, listen to us, let our lives be heard and done something with.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Recruitment documents

General Flyer

University of East Anglia

What are your experiences and views of homelessness?

A researcher at the University of East Anglia is looking for volunteers to share their experiences of and opinions about homelessness.

Your voluntary participation would involve an interview with Christina Carmichael, a PhD researcher in the School of Social Work. This would last around one hour, and take place at a mutually convenient time and place.

By sharing your experiences, you will be contributing to a research study that aims to assist in improving support for those experiencing homelessness.

If you would be willing to take part or would like further information, please email me at c.carmichael@uea.ac.uk or call/text me on 07852604672.

Invitation to Participate

What are your experiences and views of homelessness?

University of East Anglia
SCHOOL OF SOCIAL WORK

You are being invited to participate in a research study on homelessness with UEA researcher Christina Carmichael. This leaflet provides information on what the study would involve; please feel free to get in touch if you have any questions.

What is the study about?

The purpose of this research project is to examine recent experiences of homelessness in England. It seeks to understand what the realities are for people facing homelessness now, particularly following changes to welfare and housing policy.

What will happen if I take part?

If you decide to take part, you would be asked to participate in an audio-recorded interview with me likely to last approximately one hour. This will take place in person and can be conducted at a time and location you are comfortable with, either at the service that put you in contact with me or in a room at the library or at a coffee shop.

Do I have to take part?

No, the study is completely voluntary and you are under no obligation to take part.

What are the benefits of participating?

This is your chance to be involved in a project that aims to change perceptions of homelessness and contribute to improving services for people experiencing homelessness. In addition - to thank you for your time - you will be provided with a £10 voucher.

Are there any risks?

This research is not expected to pose any risks to participants, although you may be asked to speak about topics of a sensitive nature.

What will be done with the information that is collected?

The information provided by the interviews are to be used for my PhD research and may also be published. Your details will be treated confidentially and you will not be identifiable.

What should I do if I want to take part?

If you would like to be involved, or want to discuss the study, please email me on **c.carmichael@uea.ac.uk** or call/text me on **07852 604672.**

Full information Leaflet

(NB: A slightly altered version of this form was produced for practitioners)

UEA
University of East Anglia

SCHOOL OF
SOCIAL WORK

Participant Information Leaflet

Homelessness Now: Insider Accounts from the 'Age of Austerity'

Christina Carmichael

You are being invited to take part in a PhD research study. Before you decide, it is important that you understand why the research is being carried out and what it will involve. Please take time to read the information in this leaflet carefully, and feel free to get in touch if you have questions.

Thank you for reading this leaflet.

Please contact me for further information:

Christina Carmichael (Researcher)
University of East Anglia
School of Social Work
Room 2.27 Elizabeth Fry Building
Norwich
NR4 7TJ
c.carmichael@uea.ac.uk
07852 604672

Professor Jonathan Dickens (Supervisor)
j.dickens@uea.ac.uk

What is the purpose of the study?

The purpose of this research project is to understand what the realities are for people facing homelessness, particularly following changes to welfare and housing policy.

The study involves interviews with around 40 participants and will include people with direct experience of homelessness, people working in homelessness organisations and people working in relevant local authority teams.

By drawing on the accounts and perspectives of people with 'on the ground' experience, it is hoped that this research can inform current policy debates and assist front-line advocacy and local authority workers in better understanding the nature of their client group.

Do you have to take part?

No. Participation in this project is entirely voluntary and you are under no obligation to take part. If you choose to participate, you will be asked to sign a consent form before the interview begins. You are, however, under no obligation and may withdraw at any point.

What will happen if you take part?

If you decide to take part, you would be asked to participate in an interview likely to last around one hour. This will take place in person and can be conducted at a location of your choosing, either at the service that put you in contact with me or in a public setting.

Before the interview starts, I will check you understand the research project and are happy to go ahead. You will be asked to sign a consent form, confirming your agreement. I will also request to record this interview with an audio-recording device.

The interview will involve me asking you a series of questions about your experiences of homelessness, any support you may have received from the local authority and charitable organisations and your opinions on homelessness more generally. What I am most interested in is your experiences and opinions, and you will not be forced to answer any questions you are not comfortable with.

Are there any risks?

This research is not expected to pose any risks to participants, although you may be asked to speak about topics of a sensitive nature. If you experience any distress following participation you are encouraged to tell the researcher. A list of useful resources will also be provided.

What will happen to the results?

Your interview will be typed up and analysed alongside the other interviews I conduct. These will then form the basis of my PhD thesis, and may also contribute to academic articles, reports, newspaper or website segments.

Will the research ensure confidentiality?

The information you provide in the interview will be treated as confidential. All names, organisations and personal details will be entirely anonymised. Things you say in the interview may be directly quoted in my thesis or publications, but you will not be identifiable.

Once I have typed them up, the voice recordings of the interviews will be destroyed. The typed transcriptions will be saved under titles that do not identify individuals and will be stored securely. These will be destroyed within five years after I finish the project.

Prior to beginning this research project, full ethical clearance was granted by the UEA School of Social Work Ethical Committee.

What if I change my mind about participating?

Participation is entirely voluntary, and you are under no obligation to take part in or continue the interview if you are uncomfortable. You may end the interview, and state your wish to withdraw at any point during the interview without explanation.

If you decide that you wish to withdraw your involvement after the interview has taken place, you are asked to do this within 30 days of the interview date. At the interview, you will be provided with a withdrawal form that you can post to me, or alternatively, you can send me an email or text.

Appendix B: Consent form

UEA
University of East Anglia

SCHOOL OF SOCIAL WORK

Participant Consent Form

Project Title: Homelessness Now: Insider Accounts from the 'Age of Austerity'

Researcher: Christina Carmichael

Please complete this form <u>after</u> you have read the Information Sheet and listened to an explanation about the research.

Thank you for considering taking part in this research. The researcher should explain the project to you before you agree to take part. If you have any questions arising from the Information Sheet or explanation given to you, please ask the researcher before you decide whether to join in. You will be provided with a copy for your records.

Please read the following points and, if you feel comfortable to continue, sign and date below.

1. I have read the information leaflet provided and have been given the opportunity to ask questions about the research. ☐

2. I understand how this research is to be used, and that it may result in a variety of publications. ☐

3. I understand that my words may be directly quoted within any publications, but that my name and identifying features will not be included. ☐

4. I understand that all my data will be treated confidentially and held securely. ☐

5. I understand that my participation in this research is entirely voluntary, that I am under no obligation to answer any question and that I may end the interview at any point without explanation. ☐

6. I understand that I am able to retract my involvement in this research for up to 30 days after the date of this interview, and am aware of how to do this. ☐

7. I consent to the use of an audio recorder in this interview, with the knowledge that the recording will be destroyed following transcription. ☐

_____   _____   _____

Name of Participant   **Date**   **Signature**

_____   _____

Name of Researcher   **Date**

Consent form V1
January 2017

Appendix C: Debrief/signposting information

NB: A region-specific version of this leaflet was offered to all participants as part of the interview debrief. Where particular issues were raised during the interview, a more thorough discussion regarding available services was had.

Useful Resources

The following is a list of local services you may find useful:

General Advice and Support

Cambridge Citizens Advice Bureau
Free and impartial advice service (benefits entitlement, worker's rights, housing)
Phone: 01223 222660
Address: 66 Devonshire Rd, Cambridge CB1 2BL

Cambridge Samaritans
Confidential emotional support, via phone or in person.
Phone: 01223 364455
Address: 4 Emmanuel Road, Cambridge, CB1 1JW\

Housing and Homelessness Assistance

Cambridge City Council - Housing Advice Service
Advice for tenants, homelessness applications, choice-based lettings. Drop in service available.
Phone: 01223 457918
Address: Mandela House, 4 Regent Street, Cambridge, CB2 1BY

Winter-comfort for the Homeless
Day centre open 7 days a week(welfare services, food, laundry and washing facilities).
Phone: 01223 518140
Address: Overstream House, Victoria Avenue, Cambridge, CB4 1EG

Cambridge Access Surgery
GP specialising in assistance for homeless people. Morning drop in service available.
Phone: 01223 358961
Address: 125 Newmarket Road, Cambridge, CB5 8HB

For a more comprehensive list of homelessness services in your local area, you may wish to visit http://www.homeless.org.uk/search-homelessness-services

Appendix D: Interview Schedules

Original Interview Schedule – Service Users

Could you begin by telling me a little bit about yourself, and your current circumstances?

> ➢ How long have you been in this situation?

> ➢ Have you been in this situation before?

Could you describe the events that led up to you becoming homeless?

> ➢ What factors do you feel contributed?
> ➢ What was going on in your life at that time?

What, if any, experience have you had with voluntary or charitable services in the area?

What, if any, experience have you had of [name of local authority]?
Tell me about a normal day for you at the moment.

> ➢ What do you do? Who do you see?

How has your current situation impacted you and your life?

> ➢ How, if at all, have you changed?

Could you describe the advice you would give to someone else in your situation?

What, if anything, do you feel needs to be done to better assist people experiencing homelessness?

> ➢ Who do you think is best placed to help?
> ➢ Who do you think is responsible for offering assistance?

What do you think has caused the increase in homelessness in this area?

Imagine the government approached you for suggestions on helping individuals experiencing homelessness. What advice would you give?

Is there anything else I need to know to better understand your experiences?

Finally, is there anything you would like to ask me?

Amended Schedule - Service Users [Bold indicates amendment to original schedule]

Could you begin by telling me a little bit about yourself, and your current circumstances?

➢ How long have you been in this situation?

➢ Have you been in this situation before?

Could you describe the events that led up to you becoming homeless?

➢ What was going on in your life at that time?

➢ What factors do you feel contributed?

What, if any, experience have you had with voluntary or charitable services in the area?

➢ **How did you find out about this service?**

➢ **What do you think about the services on offer?**

What, if any, experience have you had of [name of local authority]?

➢ **What, if any, assistance have you received?**

➢ **What do you think about the services on offer?**

Tell me about a normal day**/night** for you at the moment.

➢ What do you do? Who do you see?

How has your current situation impacted you and your life?

➢ **Do you feel like you've changed?**

➢ **What helps you manage your current situation?**

 What do you hope happens in the future?

➢ **What sort of accommodation do you hope to live in?**

➢ **What would you like to be doing?**

Could you describe the advice you would give to someone else in your situation?

What, if anything, do you feel needs to be done to better assist people experiencing homelessness?

What do you think has caused the growing numbers of homeless people in this area?

Imagine the government approached you for suggestions on helping individuals experiencing homelessness. What advice would you give?

Is there anything else I need to know to better understand your experiences?

➢ Is there anything you would like to ask me?

Original Interview Schedule – LA Practitioners

Could you start by telling me about your role at _____?

> ➣ What is a normal day like here?

What made you want to work at _____?

> ➣ What were you doing before this role?

> ➣ What do you like and dislike about your role?

In what ways does your role lead you to engage with people experiencing homelessness?

Could you describe a typical homeless person you meet here?

What, if anything, did you know or think about homelessness before you started in this role?

> ➣ How, if at all, has this understanding changed?

What do you see as the main challenges facing homeless people?

What factors influence the way in which you respond to people experiencing homelessness?

What, if any, are the barriers or challenges in assisting people experiencing homelessness?

Are there aspects of the policy you feel hinder or assist your ability to offer support?

Have you experienced any changes in working with this group during your time here?

What are your experiences of working or engaging with voluntary sector services and workers?

How would you explain the growing numbers of individuals experiencing homelessness?

What, if anything, do you feel could be done to better assist people experiencing homelessness?

If you could talk to a policy-maker, what would you say?

Is there anything else you think I should know? Is there anything you would like to ask me?

Amended Schedule – LA Practitioners [Bold indicates amendment to original schedule]

Could you start by telling me about your role at _____?

> ➢ What is a normal day like here?

What made you want to work at _____?

> ➢ What were you doing before this role?

> ➢ What do you like and dislike about your role?

In what ways does your role lead you to engage with people experiencing or at risk of homelessness?

Could you describe the various situations/circumstances of the people you meet here?

How has your understanding of homelessness changed since starting in your role?

> ➢ **How would you define homelessness?**

What do you see as the main challenges facing **the homeless people you engage with**?

What is the desired outcome when working with clients?

What barriers do you face in assisting people experiencing homelessness?

How do you feel about interpreting/ implementing the policy?

Have you experienced any changes in working with this group during your time here?

> ➢ **Has this local authority seen any changes?**

What are your experiences of working or engaging with TS services and workers?

How would you explain the growing numbers of individuals experiencing homelessness?

What, if anything, do you feel could be done to better homeless people? If you could talk to a policy-maker, what would you say?

What do you anticipate happening in the future?

Is there anything else you think I should know? Is there anything you would like to ask me?

Original Interview Schedule – Third Sector Practitioners

Could you start by telling me about _____, and your role here?

> How does this organisation engage with individuals experiencing homelessness?

> What is a normal day like here?

What made you want to work at _____?

> What were you doing before this role?

> What do you like and dislike about your role?

Could you describe a typical user of this service/organisation?

What, if anything, did you know or think about homelessness before you started in this role?

> How, if at all, has your understanding changed?

What do you see as the main challenges facing homeless people?

What factors affect your ability to offer support/assistance to individuals experiencing homelessness?

Where does the service funding come from?

Have you experienced any changes in working with this group during your time here?

> Has your service faced any changes?

What are your experiences of working or engaging with [name of local authority]?

How would you explain the growing numbers of individuals experiencing homelessness?

What, if anything, do you feel could be done to better assist people experiencing homelessness?

If you could talk to a policy-maker, what would you say?

Is there anything else you think I should know?

> Is there anything you would like to ask me?

Amended Schedule – TS Practitioners [Bold indicates amendment to original Schedule]

Could you start by telling me about _____, and your role here?

➢ What is a normal day like here?

What made you want to work at _____?

➢ What were you doing before this role?

➢ What do you like and dislike about your role?

Could you describe the situations/circumstances of users of this service?

➢ **Is there a 'typical' service user?**

How has your understanding of homelessness changed since starting in your role?

➢ **How would you define homelessness?**

What do you see as the main challenges facing homeless people?

➢ **Does this depend on their characteristics? Gender? Age? Background?**

What factors affect your ability to offer support/assistance to individuals experiencing homelessness?

➢ **How does the service funding influence the way in which you operate?**

➢ **How do you feel about the services you offer?**

Have you experienced any changes in working with this group during your time here?

What do you aim to achieve in working with your service users?

➢ **What does a 'success' look like?**

➢ **What are their options for moving on/securing accommodation?**

What are your experiences of working or engaging with [name of local authority]?

How would you explain the growing numbers of homeless people?

What, if anything, do you feel could be done to better assist homeless people? If you could talk to a policy-maker, what would you say?

Is there anything else you think I should know? Is there anything you would like to ask me?

Appendix E: Excerpts of reflexive diary

Example 1: Reflections following interview with service user 4-3

The interview took place in a small private room, located off the main office area and tended to be used as a medical assessment room. On arrival, I attempted to make the space less formal by rearranging chairs (which had been placed directly opposite each other at a desk). The participant, a man in his late 30s or early 40s, had been identified by the service (a first stage hostel). They expressed he would be a 'good choice' given that he regular goes out with the service to share his experiences at schools and colleges. Having had a history of homelessness and substance use, he is as of recently maintaining his own independent tenancy but continues to be involved in the service where we met.

It quickly became clear that the participant needing little prompting, and I asked only a couple of direct questions across the entire interview – I had a strong sense that he had spoken openly about his experience on multiple occasions. At points I felt that I was receiving an extremely rehearsed 'storyline' – the story was told in nearly perfect chronological order, and the participant seemed to appreciate the performative aspect of the interview. I felt slightly overwhelmed by aspects of the interview, perhaps in terms of the amount of information the participant was providing. We spent very limited time discussing homelessness in a broader context despite my questions guided towards this, but he seemed to reflect on these at a later stage – he sent a follow-up email a number of days later with a number of thoughts about how he thought homeless people could be better treated.

Example 2: Reflections following interview with local authority practitioner 1-3

The interview was held in the Local Authority housing team building in a small office. This was the third consecutive interview I had conducted that day. The participant, a woman who looked to be in her mid-40s, was a last-minute stand in for a colleague who was ill. We spent considerable time chatting about the research prior to the interview – she was keen to know about me and my background, as well as about the research itself. I found this to be the hardest interview I had done to date. The participant and I clearly come from extremely different positions with regards to homelessness and I felt that this was

apparent to both of us during the interview which was, at times, slightly combative. She openly resisted many of the more personal questions I asked, about the more challenging/ emotive aspects of the role, and seemed frustrated at my focus on these. This slowly lessened and by the end of the interview, I felt that I got more of a sense of *who she was* in her closing remarks. The distance she placed between herself as a person and herself as a professional is quite distinct to other interviews with practitioners conducted thus far — why is this? A coping mechanism for the strains of the job perhaps?

Appendix F: Samples of memoing

Example 1: Memo to assist theoretical sampling (December 2017)

> There is some flexibility…part of the reason I think **we've got that as a local authority**, we do have more resources, mainly in terms of the housing register, than other councils do…[in a] London authority, people wait for years to get a property. - Elaine, Local Authority Practitioner
>
> We're lucky, **we are really lucky** [compared to other LAs]. - Louise, Local Authority Practitioner

Initial interviews with local authority practitioners indicate significant regional disparities in terms of resources, demand, opportunities for 'discretion' and practitioner experiences more broadly. Within this particular context, the continued existence of social housing in the area has meant that practitioners' spoke about their ability to go above and beyond and to use creativity and discretion. How would this differ in London, for example? How do the attitudes of practitioners differ region to region? How do these factors influence the way they feel about their work?

Example 2: Memo to assist initial coding (August 2018)

> I don't use drugs, um, and the people [staff] here quite quickly worked out that I didn't belong, er, if I'm being, you want me to be honest? I woke up at two o'clock in the morning to find three men in the room smoking crack, um, I have used drugs, but I've been clean for a year, and I didn't particularly wanna be around it. I think the staff quite quickly worked out that [pauses], you know I'm not using drugs, I don't drink, you know I interact with them quite well, um, and they've managed to put me in a room now. I've gone over to the other side, with, er, normal people. - Mark, service user

There is a sense here that Mark feels he does not belong in the service and does not wish to be 'lumped' with other homeless people in the service - this is also present when he speaks about why he became homeless (i.e. it's all been a big misunderstanding!). I have

been taken as to how often negative views of other homeless people emerge, with well-known and pervasive stereotypes (beggars, addicts, untrustworthy, 'choosing to be homeless') often reproduced. There is a sense that participants wish to distance/separate themselves and their stories and in doing so, position themselves as 'deserving' and legitimate/worthy of assistance. Is this a way of responding to and managing their own stigmatised identity? And a response to the increasingly victim-blaming government/organisational rhetoric? How service users depict their own stories is clearly not divorced from this.

Example 3: Memo to assist development of categories/overall theory (March 2019)

At points through the process of analysing and synthesising the interview data, I am finding that something is getting lost. When I reflect on how I felt conducting those interviews, and how I feel on listening back to the original recordings or looking at the transcripts as a whole, there is a sense of trauma and of impact on self that seemingly becomes diluted in the process of annotating, coding, and representing work in an academic fashion. As I grapple with what I feel it is important to say about the participant's accounts of homelessness, the point that feels most pivotal was that to be homeless seems to be about much more than a lack of housing. The accounts I heard were filled with sadness, loss, fear and anger, with questions about identity and purpose and place within society, with broken and sustaining relationships and with newfound strength and hope. The experience of homelessness, then, is much more than one of material deprivation, but also represents a particular emotional and psychological state. Homelessness represents far more than the loss of material property, and often represents the loss of identities, relationships, and former lives. Exiting homelessness is often as much of an emotional challenge as it is a practical one. The notion of homelessness/housing pathways tends to refer to the 'practical' movement in and out of homelessness, i.e. routes in (via prison, sofa surfing etc.) and routes out (PRS tenancy, supported housing, social housing). In the narratives of homelessness described here, it was clear that this movement into, through and out of homelessness also carries an emotional dimension and that transitioning through and out of homelessness often involves a substantial emotional toll.

Appendix G: Samples of initial coding

Example 1: Paul (service user)

Just sometimes, I mean at night times, in the end I'd be finding myself staying awake for five nights and by that time you're going doolally, like I was hearing voices, seeing things where I hadn't slept,	**Hearing voices / Losing sense of reality**
I once went all the way to [suburb of city] and slept for three days solid where I had been awake for about ten days 'cos I was hearing voices, I thought I was being chased! It was that bad, 'cos	**Detailing difficulties in getting sleep (on streets)**
of no sleep. I went to the doctor and he said it's just a lack of sleep. It's literally just bad living, not eating, they offer you drinks and drugs every day,	**Homelessness as 'bad living'**
people offering to inject you. I mean I was terrified of needles, I don't trust trained professionals let alone some idiot on the street, do you know what I mean, but they're there, all	**Being surrounded by drugs**
the time offering it to you. I know, luckily I never give into it, not injecting, never, I mean I've had issue with drugs, I never injected, I couldn't, I'm too scared of it. But it was there all the time. And	**Resisting offers of drugs**
I did develop like a major sort of drink habit,	**Developing a 'drink habit'**
because it was easier getting to sleep being drunk, and you used to wait, if you did sleep I used	**Relying on alcohol to sleep**
to think to myself, sometimes I used to take my sleeping bag off and my jacket off just to freeze to	**Trying to 'freeze to death'**
death. And all that ever done was get me in hospital for a few days, it never killed me.	**Detailing suicide attempt**

Example 2: Leanne (third sector practitioner)

People will leave, people will not want to do this job. It is difficult enough with two, if you think, two members of staff and twenty-two residents, it takes, that's minimal as it is, and if one resident, you're trying to perform CPR, you're trying to get the door open for an ambulance, you're trying to actually direct an ambulance crew to a room, you're trying to deal with another resident 'cos there's two of them in a room and they've overdosed together, which one do you choose, which one do you save when there's only one member of staff. Um, we're already making small cuts, with some of our complex needs clients, used to be able to drive them to mental health appointments, drive them up to [local drug service], stay with them at [local drug service] to make sure they get on a script, sit with them through a mental health assessment, sit with them through a GP appointment. So actually sometimes when our clients get in them rooms with them people, they sort of shut off and go blank, and we can put our bit in. Can't do that anymore, we have to cut back on all our expenses, when we go to one member of staff, that one member of staff will be restricted to the hostel at all times.	**Expressing concern around future of sector / Losing motivation?** **Struggling with cuts to staffing** **Feeling overwhelmed by demand / Being faced with impossible choices** **Describing changes to job role / Losing pastoral elements of role** **Emphasising importance of advocacy roles** **Being 'restricted' to the hostel** **Indicating frustration at changes to job role**

Appendix H: Sample of coding hierarches

[Abridged from full version in NVivo]

Conceptual category - Moving beyond homelessness: barriers

Barriers to health/wellbeing

- ➢ 'Going through hoops' to access MH services
- ➢ Alluding to high levels of substance misuse (in hostels)
- ➢ Being surrounded by drugs
- ➢ Being unable to access mental health provision
- ➢ Criticising barriers to drug assistance
- ➢ Emphasising need for residential rehabilitation
- ➢ Encountering barriers to 'safe' drug use
- ➢ Expressing frustration at lacking availability of MH services
- ➢ Highlighting chaotic nature of hostel environment
- ➢ Implying difficulties created by hostel environment
- ➢ Lacking access to MH services
- ➢ Mental health services as 'laughable'
- ➢ Receiving minimal MH assistance
- ➢ Struggling to access Methadone script
- ➢ 'Waiting and waiting and waiting' for MH support

Barriers to housing

- ➢ 'Battling' with housing register
- ➢ Being demoralised by bidding system
- ➢ Being frustrated by setbacks
- ➢ Being limited by accommodation options
- ➢ Challenging definitions of 'affordable housing'
- ➢ Criticising affordability of rental schemes
- ➢ Criticising criteria for social housing
- ➢ Criticising greed of PRS landlords
- ➢ Criticising landlord attitudes to DSS
- ➢ Criticising move on options
- ➢ Dealing with limited move on options

- ➢ Detailing barriers to independent accommodation
- ➢ Emphasising barriers to social housing
- ➢ Emphasising lack of affordable accommodation
- ➢ Expressing frustration at accommodation options
- ➢ Expressing shock at rental cost
- ➢ Facing barriers to PRS
- ➢ Facing constant rejection (housing)
- ➢ Highlighting barriers to private accommodation
- ➢ Lacking appropriate move on accommodation
- ➢ Noting high rent prices
- ➢ Noting poor quality of accommodation
- ➢ Noting unaffordability of housing market
- ➢ Relying on social housing (to house clients)
- ➢ Rent prices as isolating clients
- ➢ Struggling to access housing
- ➢ Struggling to accommodate ex-offenders
- ➢ Struggling to convince clients to relocate

Barriers to work

- ➢ (Clients as) struggling to shake past
- ➢ Alluding to limited job opportunities
- ➢ Barriers to work (re hostel costs)
- ➢ Barriers to working whilst in services
- ➢ Being tainted by criminal record
- ➢ Clients as being limited in options (work)
- ➢ Explaining barriers to accessing work
- ➢ Feeling judged (at JobCentre)
- ➢ Feeling overlooked in employment market
- ➢ Noting illiteracy amongst service users
- ➢ Noting stressfulness of JobCentre
- ➢ Struggling to access employment market
- ➢ Struggling to access work options

Appendix I: Development of conceptual categories

PATHWAYS THROUGH HOMELESSNESS

Aiming For Independence Versus Contesting Aim of Independence

Valuing 'Small' Achievements/Disputing Definition of 'Success'
Funders vs. Services + SUs

(Service Users as) Lacking Motivation

Struggling to See a 'Way Out'/ Getting Stuck in Services
Questioning the Appropriateness of Hostels

Facing Barriers to Progression
Being tarnished by history (work + housing). Questioning viability of PRS

Prevalence of 'Revolving Door' Clients

Drawing Strength from Experience

Needing Time (to rehabilitate)

Valuing Social Housing
Placing importance on security

The Deterioration of Wellbeing/ Disintegrating Self
Mental health issues, loneliness, physical impacts, "walking around in circles"

Contextualising 'Negative' Behaviours

Challenging Normative (Mis)Perceptions

Homeless Population + Services as Increasingly Chaotic

(Services) As Struggling to Manage Needs + Numbers

Struggling to Access + Engage External Services (MH, Drug)
Increasing thresholds, 'Passing the Buck'

Experiences at the Local Authority
Debating the power of discretion; avoiding local authority assistance, contextualising/ rationalising gatekeeping behaviours

Expecting Deception (from Service Users)

Unstable Lives
unstable/insecure work, unstable housing (lack of tenure), unstable social network, backgrounds of abuse + institutionalisation

Feeling Like a 'Burden'
Relying on friends/ exhausting options

Requiring Assistance in Navigating System
Needing an advocate

Lacking Knowledge About Rights + Services

Encouraging Education Around Homelessness + Rights
Targeting young people, dispelling stigma

Being 'Scared' To Ask for Help
Shame, denial, embarrassment; difficulties in coming to terms with situation

Appendix J: Scoping literature search strategy

In conducting the initial scoping review of the literature, University of East Anglia and SCOPUS databases were searched as a starting point, using Boolean search strategies with key terms for each chapter area. In some cases, search terminology was informed by prior knowledge of the research topic (e.g. homelessness pathways, orthodoxy in homelessness research). Where relevant sources were identified, I then used snowballing techniques (cross-checking reference lists) to explore and develop the literature base. I also conducted specific searches within a number of sources/ publications identified as particularly relevant to the research topic, as follows:

- European Journal of Homelessness
- Housing Studies
- Housing, Theory and Society
- Housing, Care and Support
- Critical Social Policy
- Voluntary Sector Review
- Crisis
- Homeless Link
- Joseph Rowntree Foundation

Initial search term examples:

Homeless* AND research AND orthodoxy

Homeless* AND pathway* OR career* AND UK OR England

Homeless* OR "rough sleeping" AND risk OR indicator OR cause AND UK OR England

Homeless* AND narratives OR "experiences of" AND UK OR England

Homelessness OR housing AND policy AND austerity AND UK OR England

Homeless* AND "housing policy" AND UK OR England

Homeless* AND "local authority" OR LAHOS AND UK OR England

Homeless* AND VCOs OR TSOs OR "voluntary sector" OR "third sector"

General guidance for inclusion / exclusion of literature:

Include	Exclude
Written in English	Unavailable in English
UK policy documents + 'grey literature' (including academic authors writing for third sector organisations)	International policy + 'grey literature'
Peer-reviewed books and journal articles	Non-peer reviewed books/ journal articles
UK focus, but draw on comparative + broader theoretical pieces from international authors. *Empirical research post-2010 [w/ exceptions where data maintains relevance]*	*International focus* *Housing-specific, rather than homelessness* *Empirical research pre-2010*