



'Equity, Austerity and Access to Public Services'

Author: Bynner, Claire

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esharp@gla.ac.uk

Equity, Austerity and Access to Public Services

Claire Bynner (University of Glasgow)

The old dogma that said Whitehall knows best - it's gone. There will be more freedom, more choice and more local control (Cameron 2011a).

The UK government has responded to the challenges of development, in the context of public services, through policies that place greater responsibility for outcomes on local people, implied by notions of the 'Big Society' and localism. Proposals contained within the government's Open Public Services white paper (HM Government 2011) include a commitment to do more to ensure 'fair' access to public services, and a commitment to devolve control of public services down to the local level. However, recent research from Batty *et al.* (2011) has raised concerns that, given the current climate of austerity, neighbourhood services and amenities may be at risk. Low-income neighbourhoods have a greater dependence on local amenities, and are therefore most likely to suffer the greatest loss from budget cuts (Hastings *et al.* 2012). There is also a need to examine the role of neighbourhood services such as libraries in low-income neighbourhoods, and to consider how facilities can be utilised to their full potential so that they derive greater social returns (Batty *et al.* 2011). Public institutions represent an idea of common interest and opportunities for all citizens to seek self-improvement and a better quality of life (Greenhalgh *et al.* 1995; Mulgan 1993), so how can more equitable access to local services be achieved in the context of wide-ranging budget cuts?

Alongside the narrative for public service reform runs a debate over integration and new migration. At a national level, there have

been increasing restrictions on international immigration and a decline in new asylum seeker applications. In February, the prime minister claimed that ‘the doctrine of state multiculturalism’ had failed, implying a return to policies of assimilation (Cameron 2011b). At a local level, there have also been growing concerns over the resource pressures on neighbourhoods in the UK and Europe, which have experienced new forms of migration and accelerated in population growth. These pressures are particularly acute in ethnically diverse inner city neighbourhoods, which have become gateways to migrants escaping global terror, torture and extreme poverty (Vertovec 2007a; Vertovec 2007b; Cook 2008). There are currently no government policies that take account of the impact of increasing diversity at a local level and its implications for public service reform (Perry 2011; Phillimore 2011).

The research described in this article uses the theory of ‘candidacy’ to provide insight into the processes that influence ‘access to’ and more importantly ‘receipt of’ public services in an ethnically diverse low-income neighbourhood in Glasgow. The theory is useful because it describes an individual’s eligibility and suitability for a service as socially constructed, changing over time and in response to social influences and personal experiences. This is an advance on previous perspectives which have tended to separate factors that influence access to services in terms of ‘supply’ and ‘demand’, and have focussed on availability and utilisation, with no deeper understanding of why an individual might not use a service, even if it is locally available and apparently meets their needs (Dixon-Woods *et al.* 2006).

The theory of candidacy synthesizes a broad range of empirical evidence on ‘access to services’ and captures the fluidity, complexity and nuance of the relationship between service users and providers.

Most importantly, it offers a critical perspective that attempts to explain why vulnerabilities in this relationship occur. At the time of undertaking this study, the theory had not been utilised outside the field of health care. In this article, it is argued that greater understanding of the processes of ‘candidacy’, in the context of neighbourhood services and increasing diversity, will contribute to knowledge and debate on improving access to public services in times of austerity.

Background

The literature points to three broad themes or explanations as to why public service provision fails to engage the most vulnerable people living in the most deprived places. The first refers to ‘service rationing’ and how decisions affecting the level and quality of service provision occur at an institutional, reactive and political level; the second concerns the practical barriers individuals face in attempting to use public services such as affordability, availability of transport and awareness, and the third concerns cultural acceptability and political consciousness.

Service rationing is defined by Hastings (2009) as ‘the mechanisms through which services are allocated in order to limit overall levels of demand and, crucially, to manage competing claims for particular levels of types of service’ (Hastings 2009, p.2908). Service rationing operates at distinct levels. The institutional level relates to decisions taken by national government and in relation to individual service budgets (Judge 1978). This is closely related to the political level of rationing and political efficacy. Middle-class people are better able to defend those services which they value most such as libraries, museums and parks, and are able to fund and mobilise political campaigns to prevent the closure of local services or to

complain about poor quality services (Glennerster 2000; Hastings 2007). Conversely, the poor are in the position of being more dependent upon public services for basic necessities and are often fearful of setting themselves at odds with the front-line professionals they rely on (Lipsky 1980). According to Hastings *et al.* (2012), when national government imposes budget cuts, individuals and families without the capacity to purchase other services and seek alternatives will be hardest hit: 'An across the board retrenchment of local government service provision will always have a more severe impact on disadvantaged people' (Hastings *et al.* 2012, p.65).

At the front line of service delivery, professionals ration services through their day-to-day decisions on whether the potential service user is deserving of the service and meets the necessary criteria. Hughes & Griffiths (1997) describe this type of service rationing in the field of health care as 'micro rationing'. Michael Lipsky's famous study of Street Level Bureaucracy found that professionals use rationing as a coping strategy to manage heavy workloads (Lipsky 1980). Lipsky describes how front line workers choose whether they treat certain individuals with sensitivity and compassion or others as 'categories of action' requiring a neutral, administrative and impartial response. Lipsky argues that biases in differentiating between individuals will reflect the prevailing biases of society. The affect of bias on the delivery of a service is profound because it is used as a way of controlling or rationing demand. By implication, in times of austerity, the pressure to ration services is likely to accentuate the use of bias as a means of control (Lipsky 1980).

The second explanation for why equal access to public services has failed is that accessing public services involves both implicit and explicit costs. A body of work has explored the

influence of financial, social and personal costs. Examples include the cost of transport, the cost of childcare to enable attendance, the cost of time spent using a service, the cost of gaining information to enable access and the potential social cost in terms of how others might perceive the act of using a service (Goddard 2009; Gulliford 2009; McIntyre *et al.* 2008; O'Cathain *et al.* 2008).

The third explanation concerns cultural acceptability and the alignment of attitudes and values of the service provider and service user. Front-line professionals may judge the service user in terms of age, gender, ethnicity, language or other characteristics and at the same time, the individual may have their own judgements about whether the type of provider is culturally appropriate (McIntyre *et al.* 2009). In their study of African-American women's attitudes to breast cancer screening in the US, Klassen *et al.* (2008) found that an individual's cultural and political consciousness has a profound influence on accessing services. Older black women were disengaged, lacking in social connections, ignored or accepted racial discrimination and were least likely to access breast cancer screening services, whereas younger, more educated black women with awareness of racial discrimination issues and strong connections to other African-American women were more proactive about their health and their needs. An awareness of the politics of race was a motivating factor that encouraged younger black women to take up their public service entitlements (Klassen *et al.* 2008).

The evidence from studies of neighbourhoods where there is a high prevalence of public services suggests that instead of improving outcomes for individuals, services have a negative effect by isolating people and preventing any collective or political conscience from developing: '[P]ublic taint and collective disgrace eventually produce what they claim merely to record: namely, social

atomism, community “disorganisation” and cultural anomie.’ (Wacquant 1996, p.245). Lipsky also notes the psychological effect of dependence on public services: ‘At the very least poor people who bounce from one agency to another have reinforced feelings of dependency, powerlessness, and deriving from these, anger’ (Lipsky 1980, p.66). The pressures of austerity imply a scaling back of services and place greater responsibility on individuals to overcome dependency and seek out, engage with, and (in some cases) run local services for themselves. At the same time, there is greater pressure on service providers to balance equitable access with the need to ration demand (Hastings *et al.* 2012). It is argued that, in order to assess the implications of these pressures, a deeper understanding of the dynamic interaction between service user and provider, is required.

The Theory of Candidacy

In 2006, Dixon Woods *et al.* published their critical review and synthesis of the vast body of literature on access to health services. The result was a new theory that encapsulates all of the perspectives hitherto discussed. Their synthesising argument is based on the notion of ‘candidacy’ which describes how people’s eligibility for a service is ‘a continually negotiated property’ (p.7). The core vulnerabilities in the relationship between local residents and services are organised into five dimensions:

- Identification – how people recognise themselves as needing a service
- Navigation – awareness of the services on offer and the practicalities of accessing those services
- Permeability – the ease with which people can use services
- Appearance – the ability to self-present, communicate and articulate the ‘need’ or issue; relates also to the ability to

voice concerns about the standard of service if those needs are not met

- Professional adjudication – professional perceptions that may disadvantage certain people

Political rationing relates to the ability to make competing demands and claims on a service and is aligned to the category of *appearance*. *Professional adjudication* refers to the construction of the individual as ‘deserving’ or ‘undeserving’ and involves moral and social judgements on the part of the service professional (Hughes and Griffiths 1997). Issues of practical accessibility, cost, ease of access to the service and cultural alignment are captured through the categories of *navigation* and *permeability*. Dixon Woods *et al.* (2006) also describe candidacy as subject to multiple levels of influence at the societal and macro levels implying recognition of distinct levels of service rationing as examined by Hastings (2009) and the importance of contextual issues such as the neighbourhood setting.

Case Study of Govanhill

The original research project involved case studies of two neighbourhoods in south east Glasgow. The neighbourhood of Govanhill provided an ethnically-diverse case study. The other case study was of Castlemilk, an ethnically homogenous area. According to the Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation, both neighbourhoods include data zones within the most deprived quintile of all Scottish data zones (i.e. the bottom 20%). The focus of this article is on the research findings from Govanhill. Recent demographic changes in Govanhill have increased the pressure on local public resources to meet rising demands and complex needs, therefore, this

neighbourhood provides a useful indication of where vulnerabilities are most likely to occur when resources are limited or insufficient.

Govanhill is a mixed tenure neighbourhood, with a large private rented sector, located close to the city centre. Between 2001 and 2008, the population of Govanhill increased by 9.5%, compared to a city increase of 1% (see Tables 1 and 2).

	Population est. 2008	White Scottish, British, Irish	'Other White' ¹	BME population
Govanhill	15,478	65.1%	5.5%	29.4%

Table 1. Source: estimates Glasgow City Council

	Population change		White Scottish, British, Irish	'Other White'	BME population
	2001	2008	2001 - 2008	2001-2008	2001 - 2008
Govanhill	14,155	15,478	-14.1%	3.7%	10.4%

Table 2. Source: estimates Glasgow City Council

The population of Govanhill is currently estimated to be approximately 15,000, although the increase in migrant workers to the area is unlikely to be accurately reflected in registered demographic data. The largest BME population are defined as Pakistani (approx 20% of the population). It is estimated that there are around 3,000 Slovakian Roma people living in the Govanhill area, and 750+ people seeking asylum; these in addition to other

¹ The population categorised as "Other White" includes all white people, who are not Scottish, British or Irish. This category includes 'Western European', Afrikaans, American, Brazilian, Croatian, Lebanese, Polish, Romanian, Slovakian and Ukrainian.

migrants account for the population increase since 2001 (Adamova *et al.* 2007).

The neighbourhood service that was selected for this study was the public library. It is ubiquitous, local and is assumed to be highly permeable. Unlike welfare services, the library is not subject to the complexity of regulations around legal entitlements that involve differential access for migrants. It is a facility which is common to most urban neighbourhoods in the UK and other countries, and therefore is widely recognised. The public library also performs the role as a space for social interaction, in the same way as shops, community centres and other neighbourhood facilities (Hickman 2010).

The overall approach was a purposive sample of library users, and staff and non-users. The sampling frame considered 'ethnicity' as the most relevant category, however in practice the stratification also fell along the type of library service use with a balance between computer users and book borrowers as well as a balance across gender. The term 'ethnicity' is used loosely in this study to refer to groups of people who identify with each other through language, heritage, culture, faith, and an idea of common ancestry. The approach to defining ethnic minorities used in this research also recognises that 'ethnicity' is socially constructed not only through the interactions of individuals but also through the act of categorisation for official data and social research (Salway *et al.* 2011).

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with seven service users in the library. Two interviewees described themselves as white Scottish, two as Pakistani (one first generation and one second generation), and three were recent migrants to the area from Libya, Italy and South America. Four members of library front desk staff were also interviewed. All staff members were white Scottish or

Irish. In addition to semi-structured interviews, three focus groups were held in Govanhill. The first group was for new migrants and included participants from Hungary, Slovakia, Poland and Malaysia. On the advice of a local Asian Community Engagement officer, separate focus groups were organised for Asian men and women to accommodate cultural and gender preferences. One group was held with three Asian women and the other with four older Asian men.

The original recruitment strategy had included a focus group with white long-standing residents of Govanhill. However, at the time of the research, the residents groups were not meeting, and there was no possibility of arranging a group. Three of the library staff interviewed in Govanhill were white Scottish, British, or Irish, and lived in the area or had lived in the area, and two interviews were held with white Scottish service users. These interviews provided some insight into the issues for white residents in the area; however, the failure to achieve a focus group placed a limitation on the findings for white residents. The timing of the research also coincided with the Muslim fast of Ramadan. During Ramadan people are unable to take part in normal activities because of the demands of fasting. Older people and people with health issues are exempt from the fast resulting in an under representation of working age and younger people in the Asian men's focus group.

ESOL tutors in the area estimate that over fifty-two languages are spoken in Govanhill, therefore it was impractical to engage translators. Research participants were required to have a level of English that would enable them to understand the information provided on the purpose of the research and consent forms and to express their thoughts and experiences in an interview or focus group. Communication issues inevitably limited the depth of description respondents were able to provide; despite this, the

privacy of the interview situation enabled many respondents to become more confident and fluent in their responses as the interview progressed. Photographs of local services were used in the focus groups to encourage discussion. It was anticipated that photographs would be useful aids especially for people with a basic level of English. This strategy proved to be far more effective than anticipated. The photographs enabled the discussion to get started easily, retain a clear focus and gave participants more control over the process.

The overall purpose of the study was not to generalise from this case to all deprived neighbourhoods, rather the methods were selected with the aim of testing whether the theory of candidacy could cope with the conceptual demands of a specific neighbourhood context. The small sample size is therefore justified by the need to overcome communication barriers and explore experiences and perceptions in-depth.

Neighbourhood and Community

Research participants cited the availability of cheap, poor quality private rented accommodation and the practices of rogue landlords in Govanhill as leading to problems of poor cleansing and the physical deterioration of the buildings and fabric of the neighbourhood. Stigmatisation of the area as a dangerous place was described by respondents as having a particularly negative effect on the long-standing white and Asian communities. A highly publicised murder of a woman in a local park and other incidents of violent crime, have caused fears of safety and community mistrust. Groups of Roma people congregating on street corners and visible drug and alcohol problems in the white community added to feelings of insecurity and intimidation.

The findings from this study emphasize the value residents place on neighbourhood services. In Govanhill, respondents from all ethnicities cited the amenities, public services and transport connections in the area as the strengths of the neighbourhood. These amenities served local needs and gave a sense of connection to the rest of the city. Despite ongoing problems of violence, litter and vandalism, many of the white and Asian community that have lived in Govanhill all their lives still have a strong attachment to the area. However, with increasing immigration by EU and international migrants, long-term residents of the area perceive that problems have been escalating with new arrivals placing increasing demands on housing and local services.

The research found that patterns of social interaction in the neighbourhood were complex. The Asian and white communities have long established social networks, whereas new migrants and asylum seekers have a functional attachment to the area and operate in micro-communities or as isolated individuals. In the context of diversity and high population turnover, trust-based relationships are weak. There is a sense of insecurity and unpredictability in the area. A white, male resident of Govanhill compares the area to a more settled neighbourhood:

You get a community within a particular area [and] everybody knows the rules in these communities, everybody has cars, they have their own gardens, the local shop and things like that. Everybody knows a particular way of working, a particular way of living, a particular way of settling down. When you live in a community like this, with different communities, you don't get that. Anything could happen and so much is happening everywhere you go, you turn one corner and there's another thing happening and [again] when you turn another corner.

Despite the tensions, many respondents cited the ethnic diversity of the area as a neighbourhood strength, associated with a multicultural, contemporary and vibrant community. Elderly white Glaswegians, who declined to be interviewed when approached in the library, may not have shared this view. The secondary accounts of staff that had lived in the area and had contacts in the white community suggested that elderly white long-term residents felt marginalised and threatened by their new neighbours, and had withdrawn from local facilities and services. On the other hand, Asian communities appeared to cope relatively well with the challenges of diversity through strong community bonds and networks of informal social support. These connections were reinforced through the local Mosque, Sikh temple and Asian community organisations.

Identification with the Service

In Govanhill, where there are high levels of overcrowding (Glasgow Centre for Population Health, 2008), a place of peace and quiet away from family life and stress was of particular importance. The library also provides a space for young children, which is of particular value to parents (often women) with low confidence and language skills, who have very limited social contact. Most respondents felt that the most successful attempts at promoting cross-cultural interaction had been through activities for children such as the ‘Bounce and Rhyme’ nursery activity for babies and children under three. A local Pakistani woman explains the benefits:

I think it's brilliant. I really do. It is a thing [where] people can get together, mothers can get together; otherwise, sometimes they don't get out [...]. The boys and girls interact with each other, which is good as well [...]. It's much easier for children I think, than it is for adults to interact [...] Children seem to break the ice.

Access to the internet becomes a vital resource for new migrants in Govanhill. The internet can be the link to finding accommodation, employment opportunities and maintaining close relationships and communication with family and friends in countries of origin. For people without the stability of residence or economic means to afford to have the internet at home, the library is central to their social and emotional life in the neighbourhood. The only way of maintaining transnational attachments is often through the library internet service. A library assistant describes the sense of urgency:

They are desperate for a library card and they are desperate to get on that internet, I don't know what they are doing on it, I mean two hours a day, every day, some of them, so you are talking about twelve hours a week. I mean I have had guys begging me for a library card.

Navigating local services

This research found that awareness of local services and amenities was predominantly through word of mouth. Respondents explained that in order to access services, you need to know in advance what the services provide. This assumed knowledge of local services favours longer-standing members of the community, who have longer established social networks and familiarity with local institutions. Information and advice services for different ethnic groups and communities used to be available in Govanhill to help new migrants navigate the area. Previously imposed funding cuts have affected these services, and most have closed, placing a greater dependence on small social networks and informal support. In a community characterised by strong ties between small social networks, the opportunities for information to be shared and spread across social groups are very limited. Therefore the promotion of services and new activities requires direct communication with a wide range of highly diverse and fragmented groups. Cultural

understanding and language can also present a significant barrier to raising awareness of new initiatives (Granovetter 1973).

Permeability

Despite wide-ranging discussions in previous research on physical access and availability of services, this study found that respondents were more concerned with the norms of civility in public space (Vertovec 2007b). Social norms were highlighted as important factors which influenced how easy respondents felt the service was to use. All research respondents noted a relaxing of rules in the library over the years, reflective of wider reforms to public services in general. For some this change was positive. The service is now less strict and more open and accessible to a wider range of people. A library assistant explains:

[I]t's probably more attractive for people to come in [now], because of the lack of the silence and forbidden atmosphere, which is the way it used to be.[...] It's much more of a community hub/facility type thing rather than a place for quiet study

However, members of staff, long-standing residents and new migrants expressed strong support for clear norms of behaviour and civility in the library, especially regarding quiet and privacy. For some this was an issue of respecting and appreciating the library as a public institution, for others this was a practical concern regarding the ability to read, study and seek employment without being disturbed. One white Scottish respondent describes her understanding of appropriate conduct in public space:

You should be quiet and dignified in the library. That's the way the library's always been. It's the same when you go to the doctors, but people don't seem to teach that nowadays.

Respondents also felt that public services could do more to clarify expectations and to avoid assumptions that new migrants will understand the basis of the relationship between service users and service providers. An Asian care worker described the gap in understanding during the focus group discussion:

[W]ith the continued migration of people, of different types of people, adding that to the mix of people who have been here for a long time, there's a bigger spectrum of expectancies [...] I think that [the services] should be more focussed on getting people to understand exactly what their service is capable of and what it should and shouldn't provide. It is presumed that people know what to expect on quite a basic scale... for example these are the things we are responsible for, these are the things we do, if we can't do this then these are your next steps.

Appearance at a Service and Communication with Staff

In a dynamic and ethnically diverse neighbourhood such as Govanhill, many people struggle to communicate their needs and this can lead to pressure on staff and preferential treatment for familiar customers who speak good English. For new migrants and people who are not able to speak English, appearance at a service presents a significant challenge to candidacy. New arrivals often feel intense embarrassment at being unable to communicate. For some people their confidence to appear at services increases as their language skills improve; for others, often older or more isolated people, illiteracy and the inability to communicate prevents them making any claim to candidacy. A young Pakistani man explains:

People who cannae speak English, they mostly don't go. They cannae speak English and they don't know how to use computers and all that, so they just stay away. My mum doesn't go to the library, she wouldn't go herself... she cannae read English. She cannae read Urdu either.

One of the most controversial subjects raised in both the migrant and Asian focus groups was the issue of whether public services should provide translation services. Views were split on the issue. In both groups there were some people who felt that more could be done to provide translation services while others felt that translation of written materials had improved and that an extension of translation services was costly and unrealistic.

Therefore, the ability to make an appearance at a service in an ethnically diverse neighbourhood such as Govanhill often involves a reliance on informal community support for communication. In the Asian community, this type of support is normally provided through the Sikh Temple or the local Mosque. Some people in the Asian men's focus group felt that the informal support of the community with language and communication complemented and supported the provision of services by the state, and that this was an appropriate balance. However, there was also concern expressed that as Asian communities had become more settled, the balance between support provided by the community and public services was shifting, resulting in greater dependence on the state and a loss of traditional family and community self-reliance.

Adjudication and Professional Perceptions

In theory, libraries are services where anyone in a community is welcome to: 'sit, read, browse, sleep and remain un-harassed; nobody is judged and therefore, nobody is found wanting' (Greenhalgh *et al* 1995, p. 52). In practice, however, adjudication at the front line can exert a strong control over candidacy. Newer arrivals in Govanhill described the difficulties of navigating services. Migrant women with young children and unemployed men tended to limit their sphere of activity to the immediate area. This

dependency on local services had led to an intensity of demand despite the poor quality of resources in the library and an obvious shortage of IT equipment. Resource pressures compounded by poverty and unemployment often leads to tensions and frustrations, as a library assistant explains:

I guess some people maybe see us and we are the frontline, and if the system doesn't work the way they want it to work, like the system of the library or the system of public services or society in general, they position that upon us, which is frustrating because I think we are just as powerless.

However, front-line professionals are able to exert a form of control over demand in subtle ways. When service demand exceeds capacity, front-line library staff can use the qualification of providing evidence as proof of address to restrict access. In the past people without an address could be issued with a temporary library card. A decision to remove this provision has had the effect of preventing the most recent migrants from using the service. If an individual is unable to prove local residence, they are not eligible to borrow a book or use the internet. This 'residence restriction' applies to the most disadvantaged individuals and is based on the assumption that if an individual does not have residence in the neighbourhood, he or she is not deserving of access to the service. Those who can afford to use alternative services in the private sector such as internet cafes are not subject to this eligibility criteria.

Most of the front-line staff interviewed indicated a preference for book readers and long-term (often white) residents who they perceived to be the 'true' candidates for the service. However there was one member of the staff team who recognised bias in the judgements of colleagues. He describes the behaviour of other staff members towards BME and migrant service users:

People are dismissive when they see people of a different cultural background and they are just tired, they are tired of dealing with different people day in day out, so people [...] become dismissive and judgemental.

The pressures and demands on the service lead to a rationing of energy directed at individual needs. People become reduced to 'categories of action' based on perceptions of eligibility and 'deservingness' (Dixon-Woods 2006; Lipsky 1980).

There was a clear contradiction in the account of one member of staff between professing to find the behaviour and attitude of Asian people uncooperative and difficult and then later describing white Glaswegians as the most aggressive. The aggressive behaviour of Glaswegians was perceived by this staff member as normal and was therefore considered acceptable:

[Asian people] are just always trying to get one over on you and get away without paying for things. They'll not pay for nothing, they don't want to spend any money [...] Nine times out of ten, you have just got to use your common sense and try to keep your temper. Don't get me wrong, normally it's the normal Glaswegians, that end up effing and blinding: "You can stick your effing computer up your...". stuff like that. They are basically just Glaswegians being Glaswegians.

Contrary to these examples, some library users rejected the idea that candidacy was influenced by the attitudes of front line staff or was amenable to changes in public policy. For these individuals the issue of candidacy for public services was an issue of individual psychology and perception often related to religious or moral values. The individuals that held this view were from entirely different cultural and social backgrounds implying that individual values and psychology may have a strong mediating influence on candidacy processes.

Conclusion

The findings from this study suggest that for residents in diverse low-income communities, public spaces such as the library have an important role in providing alternatives to home and spaces for social interaction, as well as the opportunity to maintain transnational connections. Through regular use of the library, people unconsciously come into closer contact with each other and habits of interaction are formed. There is the possibility of connecting people who are otherwise strangers (Amin 2010; Hickman 2010). However, appearance at a service, and by implication assertiveness, is a challenge, particularly for people whose ethnicity or culture does not match that of the service provider or for those who suffer from low levels of literacy. A lack of language skills causes embarrassment and defensiveness and can compound disadvantage.

Candidacy for services in Govanhill often relies on informal networks of support from co-ethnics or people who share a similar migrant channel. UK government policies on public service reform suggest that more responsive and equitable services can be achieved through greater involvement of local communities. These policies assume that the problems in deprived communities are at least partially related to a lack of capacity for collective action (Forrest and Kearns 2001). The findings from this study and Batty *et al.* (2010) have shown that informal community support already underpins the ability for residents in deprived areas to access mainstream services. For new migrants and ethnic minorities in Govanhill, the ability to find out about a service and make an appearance will often depend upon strong bonds and social contacts in the neighbourhood. This informal coping mechanism is likely to be under increasing strain with cuts to public services. In this context, it is highly unlikely that there will be capacity for communities to take on the additional

responsibility of engaging in the delivery of public services through the 'Big Society'.

This research supports findings from previous studies by Dixon Woods *et al.* (2006), Lipsky (1980) and Hughes & Griffiths (1997), which have shown the important influence of adjudication by front-line staff. Lipsky (1980) shows how perceptions of staff are particularly vulnerable to the pressures of rationing caused by under-resourced services. Despite operating an ostensibly permeable service, this study found that in practice, library assistants have the ability to restrict access and exclude individuals who are believed to be undeserving or undesirable. Managing a public space also entails balancing the needs of different sections of the community and encouraging norms of civility and consideration for others. Set against a background of public sector funding cuts and service reform, these uncertain times for services have led to an atmosphere of uncertainty for officers at the front-line struggling to cope with service reform, increasing diversity, communication challenges, and insufficient resources.

The potential to develop services that provide equitable access will be influenced by both the political and institutional context as well as wider social biases (Hastings 2009; Lipsky 1980). Hastings *et al.* (2012) have recently published research on the impact of the recession on local authorities in England. They found that institutional approaches to rationing services tend to fall broadly along two lines. The first dilemma concerns whether the approach to rationing should be to target only the most vulnerable clients and communities or to distribute cuts evenly across all services. The second dilemma regards whether to adopt an approach to rationing that focuses on the needs of particular localities, or alternatively an approach that is a-spatial. Their findings suggest that policies which

focus on rebalancing resources in favour of the most vulnerable individuals and the most deprived neighbourhoods have the best chance of offsetting the severe effects of recession (Hastings *et al.* 2012).

This research has demonstrated how the theory of candidacy is effective in capturing the dynamic nature of relationships between service users and service providers and in exposing the particular vulnerabilities that can occur at the front line when services are under pressure. These vulnerabilities are sensitive to processes of rationing, and are likely to be intensified by the indirect effects of austerity on perceptions of deservingness and eligibility. Resource uncertainty increases pressure at the front-line, resulting in the greater use of bias to differentiate between clients, and to manage the service. Navigation and appearance at the service often relies upon the support of social networks to overcome language and cultural barriers. Clarity regarding expectations and norms of behaviour in public space may help to reduce the potential for conflict. These dynamic processes are examples of how a deeper understanding of candidacy can provide an important contribution to the debate on the challenges of development, despite these austere times.

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