The Evolution of the Conservative Party Organisation: Renewal and the Re-characterisation of Local Autonomy

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Abstract

This dissertation is concerned with the distribution of power within the Conservative Party, but specifically how power manifests itself. Following the devastating 1997 defeat, the party embarked on a programme of organisational change, which brought together the individual components of the party, underpinned by a written constitution. A more formal approach to organisation ensued. It was deemed the route to party renewal, in line with the Labour Party's central command model. As such, it was a direct challenge to the traditional autonomy enjoyed by the constituency parties. The research thus examines how the party responded organisationally to defeat and the attendant impact on local autonomy. The methodology employed is qualitative in nature and takes the bottom-up perspective. Interviews were conducted with local constituency officers, area officers, agents and regional officials. These were supported by statistical and documentary data. Three centrally-orientated themes emerged: the right of political determination, the development of political capability and the approach to party management. These were synthesised into a new framework to explain the evolution of the Conservative Party organisation: the managerial-network model. This recognises the move to greater central administration and control, but equally to local rights of self-organisation, as local autonomy is now conceived. Moreover, it incorporates the increasing engagement of outside supporter networks and expertise at the local level; this is an extension of the national practice. The model is appraised against the 'oligarchy' and 'party evolution' literature. Oligarchy has been strengthened by managerialism, thereby re-enforcing McKenzie's (1963) argument, but in a wider organisational context. The party evolution literature was found to be too narrowly focused, as it did not satisfactorily address organisation. Hence, the managerial-network model builds upon the electoral-professional model of Panebianco (1988), but is more comprehensive and flexible. It also suggests that the notion of 'membership party' is no longer applicable as there is a noticeable political deficit locally. It has been replaced by a local network in which the local association is the foundation. This has resulted in the blurring of its boundaries. The new organisational settlement is a logical and sustainable response to the changing political environment that the Conservative Party leadership was confronted with, but one that offers room for further development.

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Contents

Abbreviations

ACD	Area Campaign Director
AGM	Annual General Meeting
CCHQ	Conservative Campaign Headquarters
CPC	Conservative Political Centre
CPF	Conservative Policy Forum
MP	Member of Parliament
PPC	Prospective Parliamentary Candidate
PPERA	Political Parties, Elections and Referendums Act 2000
SNP	Scottish National Party
UKIP	United Kingdom Independence Party

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Introduction

This dissertation takes an organisational perspective to the distribution of power within the Conservative Party. It is concerned with how power manifests itself. The dissertation does not seek to contribute to an understanding of the concept or nature of power. However, the essence of power warrants consideration. Power relates to social relationships between individuals and their status within the organisation (Mullins 2005). It provides the ability to overcome resistance, to exert influence and to generate results consistent with objectives and interests (Huczynski and Buchanan 2006). From the political viewpoint, the works of Lukes (1974) and Dowding (1996) are apposite. Lukes conceived three dimensions of power. The one-dimensional view reflects the pluralist approach in which power is behavioural, associated with decision-making situations where there is 'observable conflict of (subjective) interests.' The two-dimensional view improved upon this by expanding the boundaries of power to include potential issues where decision-making is prevented, thereby avoiding conflict. Hence, control is achieved over the political agenda so that certain issues are omitted from the political process. Lukes argued this was still conceptually incomplete and therefore advanced a three-dimension view, which further incorporated institutionalised power. Here, elites define or shape the setting in which organisational members participate, so that the latter's real interests and potential grievances may be distorted. Power is thus employed to prevent conflict by encouraging them to accept existing organisational modes.

Dowding (1996) distinguished between 'power to' and 'power over'. The former relates to 'outcome power', the ability to bring about results, but where the impact on other actors is secondary or irrelevant. 'Power over' however, reflects 'social power' because it concerns a relationship in 'the ability of an actor deliberately to change the incentive structure of another actor' to realise outcomes. It is the capacity to manipulate others' incentive structure which is critical: the ability to change the choice menu, which may or may not be in their interests. In this way, it represents the capacity of party elites to alter the internal balance of power. The means of facilitation range from coercive to subtle in nature. However, Dowding also acknowledged co-operation, which permits power

accumulation if there is mutual recognition; although conflict may still lie below the surface. Pinto-Duschinsky argued that in the Conservative Party, the concept of power was misleading because it implied pressure, imposition and control. It thus ignored voluntarism, which formed the essential relationship between the parliamentary party and the constituencies (1972: 12). Far from trying to compel members therefore, power could also emanate from consensus. This was appropriately expressed by Medding:

> Consensual power, originating in the ability and the need of the leadership to gain the co-operation of the rest of the party, is power based upon agreement. As such, it has both positive and negative aspects. To the extent that leaders demonstrate their ability to achieve the co-operation of their followers, their power will be greatly increased. Conversely, to the extent that a leadership fails to gain the agreement and co-operation of its followers, its power has been limited (1970: 10).

Party unity for electoral success would underpin leadership drives for consensus. Activists would co-operate more fully and acquiesce to leadership positions if they came to the conclusion that such a move would bring the desired outcome. Layton-Henry pointed to an intra-party consensus reflecting the party's aims, values and beliefs, and organisational management, so that the notion of power was relatively unimportant. However, pointing particularly at candidate selection, he added that if this fundamental consensus were to break down, the 'development of formal procedures which would be more strictly enforced', would be a likely outcome (1976: 400-402). Leaders could take action, but negative power might be exercised in the sense of reduced activity, short of actual exit. Here, Dowding noted trustworthiness and reliability, manifested in repeated interaction, as crucial to co-operation (1996: 15).

The critical issue is the extent to which leaders require intra-party consensus. If they were strengthened centrally by for example, wealthy external donors, their judgement might be skewed accordingly. This reflects the literature which underpins this dissertation. Many scholars (e.g. Webb 1994), have acknowledged a trend towards the greater centralisation

of party organisations; local activists and members being deemed increasingly unimportant. This conclusion has its origins in the 'oligarchy' and 'party evolution' traditions. Foremost in the former is McKenzie (1963). His study of British political parties examined the distribution of power at the national level and in this regard afforded little prominence to the local parties. The critical political activities of policy, finance and candidates were firmly under the control of the party leadership. The views of the party members must be accommodated because of their role in selecting candidates, raising funds and campaigning, but final authority remained with the leadership. However, in restricting his analysis to the national level, he was making an implicit assumption that only political activity in this arena mattered. Yet, numerous contemporary scholars have shown that the local contribution can have a decisive impact on electoral outcomes (e.g. Johnston and Pattie 1995, 1998; Whiteley et al 1994). It could thus be construed that it was not just teams of leaders that win elections, but a more holistic party-wide effort. McKenzie did not give any weight to single member individual constituencies in the first-past-the-post electoral system. For his thesis to be sustainable, the leadership must be able to utilise central power to exercise control over politically sensitive local activities.

Panebianco (1988) made important assertions concerning the evolution of party organisation. His electoral-professional model extended McKenzie through its emphasis on centralisation. Social and technological changes both required and enabled central professionals (experts with specialist knowledge) to assimilate tasks performed by party bureaucrats, so that activists were downgraded. Professionals were deemed more adept at engaging voters, by contrast to the amateurish membership. Campaign emphasis was placed upon the personalities of leaders, particularly through the medium of television. Hence, power and resources were necessarily located at the centre, thereby permitting the leadership to direct the party organisation accordingly. However, his model was inherently product-based, reinforced for example, by the need for instant national-level responses to emerging issues. He ignored the geographical dimension in the British polity, the important battles fought in individual constituencies. The salient characteristic of these constituencies is diversity. Whilst national issues dominated a general election campaign, they had to be framed within a local context. Candidates required an

understanding of local issues in order to present themselves as appropriate to tackle them. Failure to engage locally would convey some advantage to more locally-orientated competitors. Hence, they required the support of local parties, who occupied a unique position in British politics. The Conservative Party provided a good illustration of the diversity and complexity implied by this argument.

The Conservative Party

For a long time, the Conservative Party was the dominant party in British politics, but was reduced to disarray by the devastating electoral setback of 1997; in terms of votes its worst performance since 1832 and in seats won since 1906 (Collings and Seldon 2001: 624). It subsequently embarked upon a series of organisational reforms, which challenged the traditional autonomy of local parties. They render the Conservatives as an interesting case for analysis.

Defeat had both political and organisational dimensions. Politically, the internal divisions over Europe were described as 'intractable and unsettling' (Peele 1997: 100). This led Buller to question how 'one of the most disciplined and electorally successful parties in Western Europe' could implode in the manner it did (2000: 319). The ideological legacy of Margaret Thatcher was especially apposite; her stance over Europe particularly, caused turmoil. Thus, the issue deprived the party of the unity for which it was renowned, with profound implications for party management and public image (Bale 2006a: 385). Moreover, the party became associated more with England than Britain as a whole, but importantly here, her position over local government and local Conservative parties fuelled a weakening of the party organisation (Seldon and Snowdon 2005a: 245-6). Nevertheless, it was instinctive that some blame for defeat was apportioned to the organisation; this was a typical Conservative reaction (Scarrow 1996; Ball 2005). Ball added that complacency towards organisation was a feature of mature governments, but equally once in opposition could divert attention from more pressing political problems (2005: 12-13). Kelly though, stressed that organisational renewal was essential, since it would have reduced the size of defeat; the re-adoption of the politically discredited Neil Hamilton, for example, could have been avoided (2003b: 83). It was clear that the party's

organisational ascendancy had been severely eroded. During the Major administration 1990-1997, the professional centre faltered, particularly in communications capability (Peele 1997: 107). This was accompanied by growing malaise locally. Party membership and levels of activism declined markedly, on the back of a substantial reduction in local councillors (Seldon and Snowdon 2005a: 248). Indeed, there was a marked de-energisation happening locally (Whiteley et al 1994). Politically and organisationally, the Conservative Party was not prepared for opposition.

The Conservative Party hierarchy did not view their problems to be deep-seated, opposition being a 'temporary aberration', the result of policy divisions, 'sleaze' and government exhaustion (Garnett and Lynch 2002: 31). Its self-assessment as the 'natural' party of government meant that the fundamental shift in outlook of Tony Blair's New Labour Party, together with societal changes generally, were not fully understood (Seldon and Snowdon 2005a: 248). Organisationally however, the party leadership and central professionals had watched Labour roll out its strategy with debilitating consequences. They were determined to learn lessons from its Millbank operation; in particular, the use of technology, the management of the media and the ability to deploy local campaign personnel where they were needed (Butler and Kavanagh 1997: 243; 2002: 41). The key to its success was believed to be a central command structure, which directed the resources of the party and hence provided campaign flexibility (Gould 1998: 240). This had implications for local Conservative associations, whose autonomy was deemed inconsistent with the demands of the modern competitive political environment. A reform agenda was the natural outcome. Denunciations by numerous party members of MPs' conduct during the party conference following the 1997 defeat (Cowley and Stuart 2005: 1), may have given the leadership added impetus. The party was renowned for its 'adaptability, resilience and desire for power,' characteristics that manifested themselves especially when confronted by opposition (Ball 2005: 1). As will be shown in this study, it now included a quest to dismantle the rudiments of local autonomy. This first needs to be viewed in a historical context.

Historical Perspective

Organisation was a cornerstone of the party's relentless and ruthless pursuit of power. Constituency associations emerged as a response to the 1832 Reform Act, initially to organise the registration of voters, then a complicated process, and to attract finance. They had no input into policy, nor at that stage did they select candidates, but equally, they were not administered from the centre (Hurd 2007: 179). Essentially, they were 'oligarchic groupings of notables without an extended membership or internal representative arrangements' (Tether 1996a: 98). However, it was following the second Reform Act of 1867 that serious attention to organisation emanated. Designated by Lord Derby as a 'leap in the dark', the resultant doubling of the electorate to two million meant new votes that had to be competed for (Ramsden 1998: 98). This led to the formation of the National Union of Conservative and Unionist Associations in 1867 and Conservative Central Office in 1870. The National Union's purpose was to co-ordinate the activities of local associations, to encourage new ones, and to disseminate campaign propaganda; in other words 'to support, not to question or control, the party in parliament' (Norton and Aughey 1981: 203). The term 'handmaiden' to the leadership was coined. After the 1880 election defeat, steps were taken to develop associations into less oligarchic competitive entities that, with the support of Central Office, lasted until the contemporary era (Tether 1996a: 102). Whilst giving the benefit of continuity though, this structure was hampered by resistance to change (Ball 1994b: 297). Associations were augmented by the rise of the Primrose League, founded in 1984 as a supporters club for the party, which engaged in mostly social activities and the attraction of a mass membership. Importantly, it provided a vehicle for the participation of women until they were able to fully join associations after 1918, and for mobilising an army of canvassers at election time (Ramsden 1998: 143-4). Central Office was established by Disraeli to provide professional support, quickly involving itself in forming new associations, finding candidates, and all aspects of early campaigning, including literature, statistical analysis, press relations and electoral procedure. Its leadership has always been appointed by, and accountable to, the party leader (Norton and Aughey 1981: 223).

Structurally, the organisational initiative following the 1867 Reform Act resulted in a disparate party comprising three separate bodies - the parliamentary party, Central Office

and the constituency associations - linked only by common purpose. The relationship was articulated by the Maxwell Fyfe Committee (1949): 'we have recognised the need not so much for a constitution ... as for an organisation which is an educative political force and a machine for winning elections'. It meant a focus on fundraising and campaign activities, and 'the avoidance of political discussion and controversy' (Layton-Henry 1976: 401). To this, Maxwell Fyfe added that the task of Central Office was 'to guide, inspire and co-ordinate the work of the party throughout the country, to advise and assist constituency associations and area councils and to provide such services as can best be organised centrally.' For Pinto-Duschinsky, its role was thus advisory and supportive, and not control-based (1972: 9) However, that would depend upon how 'guide' and 'co-ordinate' were interpreted; the modern era would suggest a more assertive stance to try to reconcile the different aims and interests of the party components, particularly the localities.

Associations jealousy guarded their autonomy; it was 'widely accepted as a canon of Conservative Party organisation' (Layton-Henry 1976: 396). This was strongly indicated by their attitudes to membership, finance and candidate selection. Mindful of their contribution to the party's electoral effort, any direct attempts to get centrally preferred candidates selected were strongly rebuffed (Ingle 1987: 62). In return, they sought no active policy influence and there was no attempt to control the leadership; they simply expected acknowledgement of their efforts in their own vicinity (Tether 1996a: 103). Political debate was shunted into separate Conservative Political Centres (CPC), which in terms of input into national policy, were innocuous (Byrd 1987: 218-9). Essentially, it was a local competitive advantage in membership numbers and activity rates which reduced the centre's ability to direct the associations (Rose 1974: 153, 157). This was supplemented by the strength of local finance, but also by the reality that activists were not beholden to the patronage of the centre for jobs and other benefits (Pinto-Duschinsky 1972: 7-9).

Central initiatives were commonly viewed with suspicion. Whilst Maxwell Fyfe was careful to work with the grain of local autonomy, other reformers elicited much rancour. For example, Lord Carrington's proposals for the central employment of agents in the

1970s and the 1993 Fowler Review into party organisation, which would have undermined local associations in the sensitive area of finance. Limited representation on the proposed Board of Management together with changes to the model rules, a code of practice and an annual audit brought fears of the centre acquiring information and power to annex local resources (Ball 1994b: 303). Despite this, Ball asserted that in practice, local associations were generally co-operative and worked with the professionals. The problem though, was an inability of the centre to correct weak performance; ultimately, it lacked effective sanctions (1994b: 262-3).

The electoral onus attached to associations meant that intra-party democracy was 'inappropriate' and largely shunned by the hierarchy (Byrd 1987: 218). Ingle speculated that there was a lack of demand for policy input (1987: 61). However, Whiteley et al noted the desire to attract members willing to contribute financially and campaign, but who wished no active policy-making involvement. They argued that the structure and culture of the party provided no real outlets for this (1994: 28). Nevertheless, there were numerous attempts to make the party more democratic, but these were destined for failure. In 1969, Greater London Young Conservatives produced a pamphlet *Set the Party Free,* which described the Conservative Party as 'one of the least democratic organisations in Britain outside the Freemasons' (1969: 20). It sought greater powers for the National Union to curb those of Central Office, a less stage-managed conference and more focus on political activities and issues throughout the voluntary party (Tether 1996a: 108). Whilst inevitably no action was forthcoming, it did lead to the Chelmer Committee inquiry, which reported in 1972. This recommended enhanced policy discussion, but mechanisms needed to achieve it were quietly ignored (Ingle 1987: 61). This led Seyd to conclude that the party leadership and professionals were only prepared for reform and greater democracy in order to improve electoral efficiency; any challenge to the balance of power was refused (1975: 235).[1] Despite this setback, the Charter Movement pressed on with regular newsletters and demands for more elected party officials. It established a Party Reform Steering Committee in 1992 to campaign for one half of the personnel on the National Union Executive Committee to be directly elected by members and for the National Union to take responsibility for central finances, but

these again were ignored (Whiteley et al 1994: 33). In the modern era, the quest was perpetuated by the Campaign for Conservative Party Democracy and ConservativeHome, but seemingly with the same outcome.

In the Conservative Party, democracy was deemed subordinate to the indispensability of leadership: 'hierarchy, respect for, and deference to leaders have been the prevailing values of Conservatism' (Whiteley et al 1994: 36). This was conditioned by electoral success and respect for the views of the voluntary party, leading Tether to talk of conditional trust, rather than deference (1996a: 104-8). Nevertheless, to Ingle the pre-eminence of the party leader remained 'the defining characteristic of the Conservative Party', reflected by 'an ingrained loyalty' in the localities, which was not present within the Labour Party (1987: 67, 83). To this was added the importance of party unity, nobody wanting to be accused of splitting the party (Layton-Henry 1976: 400). Hence, Pinto-Duschinsky concluded that Conservative politics was 'best seen as a continuing series of feints and manoeuvres between various sections of the party, each seeking to push forward opinions, each realising however, the immense costs of disunity' (1972: 12). Organisational change would be a test of this.

Organisational Reform

The *Fresh Future* reform programme was the organisational response to the 1997 election defeat, driven through by new party leader, William Hague. He was enamoured of New Labour's centralised command model, which was viewed as the cornerstone of its landslide victory. Change was masterminded by Archie Norman, former chairman and reviver of Asda supermarkets and a colleague at McKinsey consultants. His approach reflected business management principles consistent with Hague's vision. Concern was expressed at senior levels in the party at both the cost and the likely damage to relations with the voluntary party; Norman though, was more aghast at the resistance to change from vested interests (Butler and Kavanagh 2002: 42). However, in the membership consultation exercise, Kelly observed that the leadership was not interested in any counter-proposals; only those of the centre were for discussion and it would decide the final version (2003b: 88).

The provisions of *Fresh Future* would have profound implications for the local parties. For the first time the party components were united in a single structure with a detailed formal constitution, a repudiation of the flexible approach of Maxwell Fyfe and inevitably a future source of organisational rigidity. Importantly, the party leader now presided over the whole party, rather than just the parliamentary enclave. At the heart of the reforms was the creation of a governing Party Board, which would act as 'the supreme decision-making body on all matters relating to party organisation and management', and which would have strong membership representation (Conservative Party 1998a: 5-6). However, in its first incarnation, there were only five of seventeen, and in non-executive positions. The National Union was abolished, but regional offices were also rationalised. Kelly's appraisal was stark. The board would 'take ultimate control of all party matters outside Westminster and in essence, centralise power within the extra-parliamentary party.' As a result, central professionals reinterpreted local activities, 'hijacking' many of them (2002: 40-41). There were permanent sub-committees for candidate selection, conference and membership, but generally, the list of activities for oversight was so comprehensive that it was difficult to see any room for local initiative.

Emphasis was placed upon reduced 'layers of communication' between members and the leadership in a flatter structure. The local associations were the 'building blocks of the renewed and decentralised party' and there was an enhanced role for the constituency chairman (Conservative Party 1998a: 10). Critically however, the legal autonomy of the associations was removed, so that they became formally accountable to the centre (Webb 2000a: 196). They were provided with a new set of mostly mandatory rules. In addition, minimum performance criteria were established under the guise of producing a modern campaigning force. Failure to achieve the required standards across a range of political activities laid an association open to direct intervention under the mechanism of 'Supported Associations.' This would bring improvement under the centre's terms; it would appoint its own representative to manage the association (Conservative Party 1998a: 11). Hence, the centre held sanctions over the localities for the first time, a change which Whiteley and Seyd forecasted would transform intra-party relations (2002: 28).

Decentralisation was further undermined in more subtle, but equally significant ways. The centre would take greater responsibility for the recruitment, training and development of agents, though employment would likely remain local. Although candidate selection regulations superficially indicated continuing local autonomy, they were couched in sufficiently vague terms to permit the centre to implement future changes at will (Conservative Party 1998a: 17-20). Indeed, candidate conduct underpinned the establishment of an Ethics and Integrity Committee, which was charged with investigating individuals who brought the party into disrepute. (Conservative Party 1998a: 30). Whilst, the party needed to be able to deal with recalcitrant people, the manner of the committee's establishment represented another centralising tendency.

Fresh Future proudly displayed 'democracy: giving power to the members', suggesting ownership by them (Conservative Party 1998a: 21). The route was the power to elect the party leader and representatives to the central board. The latter as noted, was ineffectual. For the party leader, members were asked to choose from the two remaining candidates from the parliamentary party's prior process; they had no power of nomination. Kelly was again scathing, suggesting that this concession had seduced members into surrendering their autonomy to the party board (2003b: 89). Greater involvement was promised in policy development, manifested in the new Conservative Policy Forum (CPF), which replaced the CPC. Despite some member participation, Cowley and Quayle noted there was scarcely any 'direct and measurable impact' (2002: 52). Furthermore, membership ballots were introduced, but this was a cynical manipulation of the perceived more deferential passive members; they were, though, rarely used and the response rate was relatively poor.[2] Kelly observed that all five candidates in the 1997 leadership election stressed party unity and intra-party democracy, but critically, with the former taking precedence in order to ensure electoral viability. Power was thus to be skewed towards the leadership to enhance its strategic autonomy; democracy was a means to an end (2003b: 84-5). This was reinforced by Lees-Marshment and Quayle, who concluded that the democratic component was constrained by the move towards greater centralisation of power and was simply part of a quest to make the party appear more market-orientated and electorally attractive (2001: 211).

Fresh Future was a clear break with past organisational practice. Hague's stated intention was 'to revive the greatest political party of this century so that it is equipped to provide our nation with leadership and good government in the new millennium' (Conservative Party 1998a: 4). Hitherto, Ball had noted that the party chairman was charged with organising election victory without any control over the efforts of the local parties (1994a: 176). *Fresh Future* was therefore an attempt to more closely align national and local aims and interests. However, it was questionable whether it was the solution to organisational renewal or was simply a leadership ruse to enhance its power. In trying to emulate Labour, a confused command structure emerged at Central Office (Seldon and Snowdon 2005a: 252). Furthermore, by reducing local morale, the reforms may have contributed to the party's dismal performance at the 2001 general election; area campaign directors were over-stretched, area researchers redundant and in many northern cities, the organisation was vapid (Kelly 2002: 38).

A further tailing off of members and activity led after the 2005 election to the *A 21st Century Party* 'consultation' paper, proposing further organisational change. This marked a move towards even greater centralisation, showing that the leadership had not learned any lessons. Hence, local antipathy towards the proposals did not prevent the centre from taking steps to implement some of them. Aside from the attempt to recover the parliamentary party's sole right to select the party leader, the document proposed a radical change to the position of local associations through their re-conception as franchises.[3] Their role would be defined in terms of contractual rights and responsibilities in a similar manner to business practices seen in fast-food and rent-a-car chains. Part of the package was the grouping of constituencies to form larger entities covering more than one constituency and the abolition of the historic 'association' title in favour of, for example, the 'Leicester Conservative Party'. The notion of supported status was also strengthened to make it easier for the board to find reason for intervention and to do so (Conservative Party 2005a: 6-11). The paper exuded central managerial control and was the antithesis of voluntarism. Franchising has not been implemented in name, but grouping has been aggressively pursued to reap campaign efficiencies; the propensity to group had been

vaguely set in voluntary terms in the 1998 constitution (Conservative Party 1998b: 10). It is clear that the centre has been doggedly pursuing business practices within the party organisation, with the potential for tension with local activists. Under David Cameron's leadership, there have been no further proposals for structural change, but strategically he has sought to professionalise the local procedures regarding candidate selection to address the under-representation of women, black and ethnic minority people in the parliamentary ranks. Again, consultation with the membership was ignored so that upset emanated.

Research Objectives

Central to this study is organisational reform within the Conservative Party. It is acknowledged that its developments were largely a competitive response to those that had taken place within the Labour Party. However, whilst a comparative study reflecting this would be of high academic value, the approach taken in this dissertation is to examine internal relationships within the Conservative Party.

Ontologically, parties retain their position as a key pillar of liberal democracy, so that their organisations require careful examination. This need is enhanced as a result of the clear trend of membership decline at a time when there has been a resurgence of interest in the importance of local constituencies as key electoral battlegrounds. However, the traditional academic approach to assessing organisation is narrow, as it tends to emphasise local structures and people numbers. Such a stance is also inherently top-down; activists are invariably seen as actors to be accommodated by the leadership in its desire to maximise strategic autonomy. Hence, it was deemed important to delve more deeply into the party organisation to analyse its facets more broadly. The actual impact of central initiatives on party activists has largely been ignored. In the Conservative Party, organisational reform presented a direct challenge to the capacity of the local parties to sustain autonomy, here defined as the right of self-government or self-determination. The three research questions, detailed below, will thus be addressed from the local perspective, with a focus on the views and behaviour of local activists; they are an under-researched aspect of British politics. Whilst they will be augmented by the views of

regional professionals, the potential for bias is acknowledged as professionals operating out of Central Office do not form a part of this study.

It needs to be further acknowledged that the period under consideration is from the 1997 defeat until 2007, a time when the Conservative Party was in the political doldrums. The empirical work inevitably reflects this. Underlying each research question are issues concerning the purpose of party organisation and how it should be organised.

1. How has the Conservative Party responded organisationally to the crushing electoral reversal of 1997?

This study will confine itself to the Westminster electoral context. The basic assumption is that dominance of the national legislature remains the party's primary aim. Whilst minor parties have undergone solid development, the single member plurality electoral system imposes a high threshold, to a large extent protecting the position of the two major parties (Mitchell 2005: 167). Nevertheless, the Conservative Party has had to come to terms with political change. *Fresh Future* was the organisational response, but the document evinced restructuring; it seemingly neglected rejuvenation of people-related issues. Hence, the changing role and effectiveness of the local parties will be addressed.

2. To what extent has the power afforded to the leadership by the 1998 party constitution impacted upon the traditional autonomy of the local Conservative constituency associations?

Fresh Future provided the centre with the right of intervention into the constituency associations, particularly where they were deemed to be under-performing. The study will identify the extent to which encroachment has taken place and hence will provide an assessment of central attempts at co-ordination. As such, it raises the issue of the alignment of national and local aims and interests. *Fresh Future,* and more recently David Cameron's candidate changes, sought this outcome. The contemporary role and power of local activists will therefore be addressed.

3. What are the implications of the Conservative Party's revised organisational settlement for the academic models of party evolution?

The electoral-professional model (Panebianco 1988), could be construed as a foundation of modern thinking on party organisation, at least from the top-down perspective. The model though, represents one rung on the ladder of party evolution from Duverger (1959) through to contemporary authors such as Carty (2004). Most emphasise the importance of leadership and largely dismiss politically, the party membership. However, a growing body of work has attempted to alter the way it is perceived (e.g. Seyd and Whiteley 1992; Whiteley et al 1994; Denver and Hands 1997). This dissertation seeks to augment this, through an organisational examination of the Conservative Party. In this vein, the study commenced by taking a hypothetico-deductive stance consistent with Popper's (1959) thesis, thereby with a view to the falsification of the electoral-professional model within the British context. However, it became apparent that, notwithstanding Panebianco's assertion that 'no party completely fits the electoral-professional type' (1988: 265), both it and Carty's (2004) franchise concept, with its fixed contract, were too rigid and impractical. The models did not grasp adequately either the evidence that was materialising from talking to people on the ground or the apparent complex reality that is the Conservative Party. Hence, this was deemed to require an inductive-type study to unravel. The resultant model proposed in this dissertation reflects this, as it emerged from the empirical data to provide an interpretation of the new Conservative organisational settlement following the reform programme.

By adopting an organisational perspective, the three research questions are addressed from a different, bottom-up angle. The research is confined to the salient organisational activities and hence does not explicitly address policy development. Following this organisational direction, use is made of management models as organising narratives. These permit an understanding of the softer, nuanced dimensions of power and hence how it manifests itself within the modern Conservative Party. The primary model in this respect is the McKinsey 7-S Framework (Peters and Waterman 1982), which addresses

organisational effectiveness, but beyond the traditional strategy and structure variables. In addition, Porter's (1980) 'Five Forces' model of industry structure is employed in the literature chapter as an expedient way of collating the micro-environmental criticisms of the influential party evolution models, particularly those of Kirchheimer (1966) and Panebianco (1988).

Methodology

The research design for addressing the research questions is qualitative. This reflects an epistemological position that the approach to understanding parties as grassroots organisations, and to delving into their many facets, requires a design that permits a dialogue with the relevant actors locally. A qualitative stance allows an examination of the perspectives of those people who run the local parties and their interpretations of the political world as they see it. There have been relatively few qualitative studies of Conservative constituency associations, and even then they tend to be of specific associations (e.g. Bealey et al 1965; Holt and Turner 1968; Tether 1980). Much of the research has instead employed aggregate survey data (e.g. Whiteley et al 1994; Denver and Hands 1997). This has generated analysis of the socio-economic characteristics, motivations and attitudes of members. However, the unit of analysis was typically the individual member, rather than any structural element of the party. Furthermore, in asking participants to respond to preordained questions, this strategy does not permit an examination of how the organisation actually works. The identification of nuances in power structures and relationships was deemed to require a more flexible approach, where themes could be explored and developed. A more qualitative design was thus appropriate.

The primary data collection was semi-structured interviews with eight local officers in each of four constituency associations, together with agents where present, and area chairmen. Regional professionals were also interviewed, in order to acquire the counter perspective. The interviews were scheduled for approximately one hour per respondent; although some were more expansive. Secondly, to the constituency interviewees, a short self-completed questionnaire was administered to discover their skills and level of

political activity. Thirdly, a request was made to each constituency chairman for access to the executive council minutes for a twelve-month period to gauge the types of activity that associations focused upon. Three acquiesced; High Peak declined. Somerton and Frome provided much extra material. Fourthly, financial analysis required the acquisition of annual reports and accounts. This was undertaken through a stratified sample conducted nationally, the constituencies being selected in a quasi-random, systematic manner. Stratification was by type of constituency (safe, close, marginal) and by party incumbency (Conservative, opposition). The data used was for the years 2004-5, reflecting the period prior to the 2005 general election, when fundraising and campaign expenditure reached a peak. Finally, additional material was provided by the secretary of the local association in the author's constituency. He was also able to attend a number of party events and meetings, which enabled some participant observation data to be obtained. A broad array of research tools was therefore utilised for triangulation purposes.

The selection of appropriate constituency associations was the critical component of the qualitative research design. It was decided to focus on marginal seats that the Conservative Party needed to win at the next general election; it was upon these that the centre was likely to exert the most pressure in order to achieve its strategic aims. Power relationships would be more strongly indicated in these constituencies. As noted above, historically the centre had continued to chip away at local autonomy to enhance its control; the erosion of the local competitive advantage in member numbers and finance pointed to a potential to expedite this process. Moreover, organisational reform reflected a central desire to emulate the Labour Party's central command model. Local performance criteria, greater control of agents and the assumption of central responsibility over a wide range of local activities were hallmarks of this approach. In addition, there was some evidence of greater central co-ordination of local campaigns, although within the Conservative Party it had thus far had limited electoral impact (Denver et al 2003b; Fisher et al 2006). These initiatives pointed to a strong desire for organisational renewal, but as determined by the centre. Hence, in the marginal constituencies, there was likely to be scope for numerous organisational and political

nuances occurring. Activists would inevitably have different interpretations of the dynamics of organisational change to professionals. In focusing on marginal constituencies however, it needs to be acknowledged that politically, activists in safe Conservative seats, being in a stronger position, may have adopted a harder stance over issues such as candidate selection.

The core issue in the decision concerning constituency association choice was the need to enhance data validity. Validity refers to the capacity of the research instrument to produce convincing results that reflect the true position (Sarantakos 1998: 78) of the Conservative Party, and thereby thoroughly address the research questions. There are, inevitably, practical constraints in a qualitative design, a primary purpose of which is focus on the subjective accounts of individuals: interviews are necessarily lengthy and time-consuming, so that it would not be feasible to interview a large number of people (Devine 1995: 142). The narrowness of the sample of qualitative interview respondents, when compared to, for example, survey data, would additionally have implications for the external validity notion of the generalisability of the results. This problem is magnified by the issue of sample representativeness, which cannot be fully achieved through a small number of respondents from a non-probability based sampling frame. Thus, Miles and Huberman (1994) refer instead, in qualitative studies, to credibility, trustworthiness and authenticity of the data. Credibility can be improved by a quest to achieve diversity in case selection, thereby enabling the researcher to tap into a network of local people from various backgrounds, with varying levels of responsibility and interest (Devine 1995: 142).

Derived from the above discussion, constituency selection embraced three primary criteria. Firstly, constituency marginality: seats currently held by opposition parties would indicate power relationships through the key issues of candidate selection, finance and campaign strategy. Marginality was defined as the majority over the nearest challenger being less than 10%. Secondly, diversity: this would be achieved through a mix of Labour- and Liberal Democrat-held, northern and southern, and urban and rural seats; the latter were also distinguished by type, reflecting city/town and

agriculture/tourism respectively. The presence of different types of local council would also add to diversity. Thirdly, they needed to be accessible in practical terms. In addition to these basic needs, a number of desirable characteristics were sought, including: resource strength (people and money), property ownership, branch activity, Patrons Club, grouping possibilities, and boundary review activity. This resulted in four constituencies providing access for the study: Derby North and High Peak in the East Midlands, and Cheltenham, and Somerton and Frome in the South West. As will be shown below, these constituencies possess very distinctive characteristics and hence provided a good basis for exploring the research questions.

Derby North is a city constituency with an industrial outlook: Rolls Royce (engines), Toyota (motor cars) and Alstrom (heating) are large employers in the city, but it also retains a strong railway heritage. Labour prevailed in 1997 for the first time since 1983. Boundary changes have deprived the constituency of good Conservative wards, with the result that it is now considered a three-way marginal. It forms part of a merged local association, firstly with the Labour stronghold Derby South, and more recently with the new Mid Derbyshire, deemed to be a potentially safe Conservative seat. There was a constituency office and part-time secretary, but no agent. In the general election year of 2005, the association had 458 members and a financial turnover of £36,930. Its net assets were £45,100, but this included a substantial legacy, without which it would have struggled; there was no property ownership. The association had 16 branches, plus a Patrons' Club. Finally, it was structured in an unusual way, which reflected its merged status. The overall entity had the designated three senior officers of chairman, deputy political and campaigning, and deputy membership and fundraising, but the officer team also included three deputy chairmen campaigning. These people acted as chairmen of the individual constituencies for general election and candidate selection purposes; they were augmented by deputy chairmen.

High Peak is located in North-West Derbyshire. Its Labour MP has been in place since 1997. Prior to that, with the exception of one parliament (1966-70), the seat had been Conservative since 1910. Boundary changes were adverse, but the party still expected to

win at the next general election. The constituency is largely agricultural, but also encompasses the Peak District National Park, thereby attracting much tourist and leisure trade. The main town is Buxton, famous for its mineral water, but there are several smaller prime settlements. Structurally, the association remained a stand-alone one. This can be partly explained by its position as an East Midlands constituency, but with closer links to Manchester and the North West. It possessed a long-standing constituency office, which it owned, and which occupied a prominent position. There was a secretary, but no agent; the PPC was undertaking the agent duties. In 2005, it had 555 members across seven branches. Its Patrons' Club had been recently relaunched. Turnover was £57,817, with non-property net assets of £7,764.

Cheltenham is a fairly affluent urban constituency located in the Cotswolds. It has been held by the Liberal Democrats since 1992, when the black candidate John Taylor was controversially beaten, after racist remarks by a local member. Apart from an Independent Conservative who sat from 1937-1950, it had been Conservative since 1911. The Government Communications establishment is the major employer. In addition, there are high-profile service sector companies, notably building societies and insurance, and large aerospace and electronics concerns. The association forms part of the loose Gloucestershire group of six constituencies, which retain their individual identities. Consequently, it helped to fund a modern, well-equipped group office containing three agents and other staff. As an independent association, the officer structure followed the constitutional model, though the group as a whole had an overseeing committee. In 2005, the association had 789 members, eight branches and a Patrons' Club. It had a turnover of £43,974 and net assets of £2,843, but no property ownership.

Somerton and Frome is an unusual constituency. It was created in 1983 as a concoction of large parts of two former constituencies and geographically, at almost 900 square miles, is one of the largest in England. Because of its origin, local councillors are fairly evenly split between Mendip and South Somerset councils. North-south rivalry is hence a problem to constituency management. There has been a Liberal Democrat MP since 1997, an event that was looked upon with disbelief by the largely elderly membership.

Indeed, the constituency generally, is relatively densely populated with retired people. Agriculture, particularly dairy, forms a primary source of employment. The main settlement of Frome in the north has a more diverse base, but equally is regarded as a commuter town for Bath, Bristol and organisations in adjacent constituencies. Essentially though, the constituency is rural with a scattering of small towns and villages so that countryside issues are prominent. Structurally, the association had controversially entered into a joint-working relationship with neighbouring Wells. It shared the Wells agent and office, leaving open the question of whether its former constituency office in Wincanton would be disposed. In 2005, its 1149 members meant that it was one of the Conservative Party's leading associations. It had 29 branches, a turnover of £103,636 and non-property net assets of £12,389. It also had a Patrons' Club.

Chapter Outline

The dissertation commences with a literature review, which addresses the distribution of power within political parties. This incorporates both the oligarchy and evolution strands, but is further supplemented by issues concerning party membership. Four chapters of empirical data are then presented. Chapter two undertakes an analysis of the Conservative Party organisation using the McKinsey 7-S Framework. This permits an exploration of softer people issues as well as structural concerns. Chapter three examines the impact of reform on Conservative Party finance. It explores local financial capability and sources of central encroachment. Chapter four extends the capability dimension to local campaigning. Critically, in light of this, it addresses the propensity of the centre to direct local campaigns. Chapter five continues this theme, by discussing the impact of changes to the candidate selection process, a jealously guarded local activity. This empirical material is synthesised in chapter six to provide an interpretation of how the Conservative Party responded organisationally to defeat and the impact on local autonomy. From the analysis, a new model of party evolution is proposed. This is evaluated politically and with respect to the academic literature. An agenda for further research follows from this discussion.

Conclusion to Study

From the empirical data, three centrally-influenced organisational themes emerged: the right of political determination, the development of political capability and the approach to party management. These formed the basis for the 'managerial-network model', which explained the Conservative Party's response to defeat, including the dismantling of local autonomy. It is also put forward as a new organisational settlement for a sustainable future. It builds upon Panebianco's electoral-professional stance, but recognises the non-substitutability of certain local activities, and hence the importance of local parties. It offers a more flexible approach to party organisation development than the present models discussed in the academic literature.

[1] This was also strongly indicated in the leadership election following John Major's resignation in 1997. See next section.

[2] Hague employed the ballot mechanism on four occasions to decide upon his leadership, *Fresh Future*, Euro policy and the draft manifesto. However, all were presented in yes-no format with no options. Turnout was 44%, 33%, 60% and 16% respectively (Kelly 2002: 40). Aside from leadership selection ballots, the only other time the mechanism was employed was for David Cameron's mission statement *Built to Last* when the turnout was 27% ('A good day to bury Built to Last', ConservativeHome 19 September 2006). In all cases the membership have endorsed the leadership's position.

[3] The political pressure that emanated from the *A 21st Century Party* proposals eventually led to the Constitutional College, comprising MPs/MEPs, peers, members of the party board, association chairmen, area and regional officers, and other senior voluntary officers, voting upon, and rejecting, the changes to the leadership rules only; the organisational reforms were decoupled from it (Bale 2010: 266-7).

Chapter One

Literature Review: The Distribution of Power within Political Parties

This chapter examines the salient literature concerning the distribution of power within political parties. It concentrates on the two leading British parties, recognising that those with expectations of electoral success typically encounter different tensions and constraints from those without such aspirations (Schlesinger 1984: 374). Underlying the debate are questions concerning the purpose of party organisation and how it is, and indeed should be, organised. The relative position of the local parties is inherent to this. Rose identified two approaches. The 'top-down' model stressed the electoral dimension through the services they undertake for the central party. Alternatively, the 'bottom-up' model considers local political activity to be the foundation of party politics. Hence, 'party headquarters is an institution to co-ordinate their actions, but not direct them.' He saw British parties adopting the former approach, pinpointing the constituency association as the basic unit; the latter would give greater prominence to the local community or constituency ward (1974: 148).

In the Conservative Party, local autonomy was an important condition. It reflected the critical organisational tension, articulated by Maor as 'the trade-off between the freedom of action enjoyed by the party leadership and the constraints which derive from maintaining a strong and active party organisation' (1997: 92). This will be addressed in the first part of the chapter through a consideration of the 'oligarchy' strand. Both Michels (1915) and McKenzie (1963) concluded strongly in favour of leadership ascendancy, vehemently downplaying the importance of the local parties. The 'evolutionary' literature largely concurred. It purported to explain the movement of parties from one type of organisation to another in order to adapt to changing political conditions. The models of Duverger (1959), Kirchheimer (1966), Epstein (1967), Panebianco (1988), Katz and Mair (1995) and Carty (2004) are especially relevant and will be appraised. Most studied parties from a top-down, political viewpoint, with the organisational dimension underplayed. Membership issues though cannot be neglected; these will be examined in the final section.

The Dominance of Oligarchy

The focus of this section will be the work of McKenzie (1963) whose *British Political Parties* has framed academic thinking on power relations.

1. McKenzie's Thesis

McKenzie conducted a detailed assessment of power relations at the national level in Britain's main political parties and concluded that 'in practice final authority rests in both parties with the parliamentary party and its leadership. In this fundamental respect the distribution of power within the two major parties is the same' (1963: 635). Little prominence was afforded to local activists and members. In arriving at this judgement, he acknowledged primarily Michels (1915).

Drawing upon evidence particularly from the German Social Democratic Party, Michels questioned the association between democracy and organisation. Importantly, he discounted the fear of Ostrogorski (1902) that party leaders would effectively become servants of the extra-parliamentary party. Political parties were large and complex organisations that required hierarchically organised bureaucratic systems to cope with the scale of administration. This in turn necessitated a concentration of power at the top of the organisation, thereby weakening that of the grass roots membership (Lipset 1962: 16). To Michels, 'it is organisation which gives birth to the dominion of the elected over the electors, of the mandataries over the mandators, of the delegates over the delegators. Who says organisation, says oligarchy' (1915/1962: 365).

Oligarchy was intrinsic to politics. LaPalombara asserted that 'a political party is a formal organisation whose self-conscious, primary purpose is to place and maintain in public office persons who will control, alone or in coalition, the machinery of government' (1974: 509). For this, Max Weber pointed out that the essence of politics was struggle, whereby the party was attuned to the acquisition of social power. Therefore, 'since a party always struggles for political control, its organisation too is frequently strict and authoritarian' (1968: 938-9). This posed a challenge to the notion of intra-party democracy. Michels's 'iron law of oligarchy' portrayed this as a 'mere chimera' (Teorell

1999: 363). This followed Ostrogorski's (1902) view that democracy in this sense was destructive and led to mediocrity. If parties were accountable to their members, then inevitably their accountability to voters was diluted. Schattschneider indeed, concluded that 'democracy is not to be found in the parties but between the parties' (1942: 60).

This perspective underpinned McKenzie's thesis. The core of parliamentary government was a 'vertical chain of responsibility' from the cabinet to the electorate. Accountability was to the latter, rather than to any extra-parliamentary body. In the Conservative Party, policy concessions were made to backbench supporters, member influence being merely indirect in nature (1963: 645, 642). As a result, the parliamentary party enjoyed a high degree of autonomy. This was reinforced by its historically successful record in office and also by the fact that the establishment of the party organisation was itself a direct response to a political development: the extension of the electoral franchise (1963: 638). McKenzie's stance was consistent with the elite model of democracy. He accepted Schumpeter's (1952) critique of the classical concept, which argued that the notion of members of parliament reflecting and articulating the will of the people was unrealistic. To McKenzie, this ignored the importance of political leadership. The electorate's task was to judge the competence of party elites; its role was 'not to reach decisions on specific issues of policy, but to decide which of two or more competing teams of political leaders shall make the decisions'. The membership organisation's responsibility was to provide support, by developing and maintaining the candidates for the leadership, from which the electorate would periodically choose (1963: 645-7). Intra-party democracy could undermine this process. For democracy to function effectively, oligarchy within party organisations was a pre-requisite.

However, oligarchic tendencies would not negate democracy, but would be located as a 'condition occupying the ground between pure democracy and pure autocracy' (May 1965: 419). This was supported by Barnes, who argued that leaders had to operate with local officials they had not appointed or chosen and contend with events over which they had little control. In addition, he noted that parties were essentially voluntary organisations, members always having the ultimate sanction of becoming inactive, or

leaving the party altogether. (1967: 6-7). This inferred a dependency relationship between leaders and members, the strength of which was underpinned by electoral resource needs. Hirschman (1970) though, suggested that 'exit' would not necessarily occur, as the decision to do so must be credible; for example, through the availability of an alternative party or other political vehicle. Instead, 'loyalty' could encourage individuals to remain inside and fight through efforts to enhance 'voice.' Far from strict oligarchy, there was the suggestion of a more dynamic set of intra-party relationships. Nevertheless, oligarchic tendencies would prevail, as irritating proposals from below would be repelled. Party officials and members of parliament, elevated to the 'power elite', would acquire their own political outlooks and would seek to protect both their own position and the stability of the organisation as a whole (Lipset 1962: 17-18).

Oligarchy to Michels was the product of technical and psychological factors. Technically, it was underpinned by the 'indispensability of leadership' (1915/1962: 364). Leaders were formally positioned to assess the organisation's resource and co-ordination requirements. They were also able to strengthen their own grip through the acquisition of resources typically not available to occupationally time and energy constrained members. These included superior knowledge, control over the formal means of internal communication and skills in the art of politics (Lipset 1962: 16-17). Leaders could thus aspire to greater professionalism, which psychologically led members to defer to them for direction and guidance (Michels 1915/1962: 365). McKenzie employed both types in support of his assertion that for the Conservative Party, 'it would be difficult to envisage a more tight-knit system of oligarchical control of the affairs of a political party' (1963: 291). This caused barely a ripple in the party, as it largely concurred with the prevailing view, but the inevitability of leadership dominance aroused controversy in the Labour Party, through its policy-orientated conference process (Kavanagh 1985: 6-7).

McKenzie maintained that in the Conservative Party, the legitimate authority of the leader was paramount, the key to its understanding, as he retained 'sole ultimate responsibility for the formulation of the policy and electoral programme of his party' (1963: 21-2). Monarchical and baronial models have been advanced to explain this

position. In the former, the components of the organisation fell under the authority of the party leader, or in a modified form, a small leadership group. The latter was more diverse. Whilst there was inherent loyalty to the leadership, 'bargaining and occasional conflict' occurred instead of total direction from the top. Rose argued that the baronial model was more appropriate to British parties, suggesting that 'each part of the party is supreme within a given area of competence' (1974: 158-65). Lagroye pointed to a hard core of experienced and knowledgeable activists who developed close contacts with leadership groups to the extent that they had 'a key role in the life of the party at crucial moments' (1989: 368). Nevertheless, the leader role was often more important than organisation or ideology, so that it became a major source of party vitality (Blondel 1978: 160). Hence, although operating under constraints, Ingle concluded that the Conservative leader retained a fundamental strength and enjoyed 'considerable personal prestige' throughout the party. He thus concurred with McKenzie that 'this pre-eminence remains the defining characteristic' of the party (1987: 67).

McKenzie recognised that oligarchy was not an iron law as leaders could not ignore the 'moods and aspirations' of the membership. In the Conservative Party, policy formulation was never intended as a membership priority, but on account of their efforts locally, the leadership was obliged to take account of their views, albeit in an advisory capacity (1963: 226). Instances where the voluntary party achieved significant influence were rare, as the twin notions of leadership and discipline tended to dissuade such practice (1963: 638).[1] In essence, McKenzie regarded local parties as electoral machines, whose main function was 'to conduct propaganda and to raise funds with a view to securing the election of Conservatives to public bodies' (1963: 244). Their impotence was consistently reinforced by his finding that the three critical party functions, policy, finance and candidates, were under the control of the leader or his appointees (1963: 290). Overall, he confidently concluded that members were 'content to be the voluntary servants of the parliamentary party' and that 'in an analysis of the distribution of power within the party, they are of little importance' (1963: 258).

2. Critique of McKenzie

Policy development rather than organisation is the common focus of criticism of McKenzie. For Labour, Beer (1965) contended that policies such as nationalisation were largely influenced by conference. Moreover, in his study of the Wilson governments, Minkin acknowledged leadership dominance in policy formulation and implementation, but argued that trade union input and the complexity of party procedures were under-emphasised. Hence, 'there is no simple categorisation of the distribution of power within the conference policy process which does justice to its subtlety and variability' (1978: 317). Indeed, conference power was magnified when the party was in opposition, as leaders then lacked 'authority and patronage' (Kavanagh 1985: 16). Contemporary authors offered further support, despite the Blair reforms, which were designed to weaken the power of trade unions and activists through the empowerment of the ordinary members by one-member-one-vote and through innovations such as the National Policy Forum and the Joint Policy Committee.[2] Shaw (2002) showed that once in government, as long as the trade unions remained affiliated, the leadership would be unable to achieve any monopoly over policy. Moreover, Russell found that whilst their formal power had been diluted, it was still 'exercised formally and informally at many different levels' (2005: 262). She further argued that power became more widely distributed, as the reform process itself involved compromise and negotiation, and was not wholly controlled by the leadership. It was the perception of change that was important, as it strove to make the party electorally competitive (2005: 282, 256). Conferences therefore, became 'media events, stage-managed for television and part of a permanent election campaign ... a good conference is defined by managers as one which does not have unseemly divisions or, if they do occur, results in an overwhelming victory for the leadership' (Kavanagh 1996a: 28-9).

Historically, the Conservative conference was relatively uncontroversial, labelled as a 'public relations exercise' (Ingle 1987: 58), and a 'party rally' (Maor 1997: 131). Emphasis was placed upon 'party unity, morale and publicity' rather than policy-making (Webb 2000a: 194). Attendees acted as representatives rather than mandated delegates (Byrd 1987: 218-9). However, Kelly contested this outlook, suggesting that the stage-managed rally was a centre-left comparison with Labour. He identified a 'conference system'

involving secondary gatherings, such as those of Conservative women and local councillors, which permitted members 'hidden' policy influence. Senior politicians attended to listen as well as to speak at these events. Differences of opinion were thus ironed out prior to the main conference or else were transmitted subtly during it. Party unity considerations served to translate concerns into a collective expression of 'mood', which recognised mutual trust between the membership and the leadership (1989: 184-88; 1997: 241). Dissent occurred when activist anxieties were ignored; the bitter fallout from the Europe debate in 1992 being a prime example (Kavanagh 1998: 32). Kelly acknowledged this by partially attributing it to a sharp fall in secondary conference attendance (2001: 332), but also citing it as evidence of the waning of 'loyalty' as the party's secret competitive weapon (1997: 243). Whiteley et al though, argued that Kelly was overgenerous regarding membership influence. They questioned the measurability of 'mood' and 'atmosphere' and hence their impact (1994: 35). These concepts were abstract and thus open to misinterpretation. Nevertheless, their importance could be associated with the leader's speech. Here, Thatcher's position was usually strengthened through articulating her popular brand of Conservatism, whereas for Heath and Major, it was seen as a barometer for their continuing leadership (Kavanagh 1996a: 31).

With respect to organisation, McKenzie could be accused of over-simplification by delineating the parliamentary and extra-parliamentary parties as unitary bodies. Instead, Medding stressed that a party's complexity and diversity was central to understanding 'many of the nuances and subtle forms of power and influence.' Parties, he argued, contained an array of groups defined by religion, ethnicity, region, ideology, commercial sector and so forth, and made decisions on varied activities such as campaign planning, finance, candidates and policy, typically involving different personnel (1970: 15). Kavanagh added that often, power struggles involved alliances across such groups (1985: 12). Brand though, countered that McKenzie's acknowledgement of members incorporated this; for him, it was merely a degree of emphasis (1989: 117). Moreover, McKenzie was writing in the 1950s and 1960s, when Britain was a classic two-party polity.[3] It was probably why he also omitted any consideration of the electoral system from his thesis; it 'allows voters to choose between two alternative governing teams and

then subsequently hold them accountable' (Mitchell 2005: 161). Here, one-party domination of government often arises; oligarchic tendencies within party organisations could become stronger in such circumstances as leaderships were not engaged in coalition building (von Beyme 1985: 239). Ultimately for McKenzie, membership organisation was a support. This conclusion surfaces strongly in the 'evolution' literature.

The Early 'Evolutionary' Theorists

Writers from the 'evolutionary' strand were interested in party adaptation to electoral needs and the ability of the leadership to accommodate the party organisation accordingly (Maor 1997: 93); oligarchy was seen in this light. The foundation for analysis was Duverger. He distinguished structurally between cadre and mass parties. The cadre consisted of groups of political elites who employed their status, campaign skills and access to financial resources in order to secure election victory. Quality was deemed more important than numbers and operations were conducted in a top-down manner. Parties of the right, often originating before the concession of universal suffrage, usually assumed this form. This was in contrast to the mass party concept, later adopted by Socialist parties. Here, members were actively sought for the political education of the working class and for obtaining subscriptions to provide campaign funds, thereby replacing 'the capitalist financing of electioneering by democratic financing.' Leaders were elected by the membership and hence were answerable to them, but such influence did not mean that complete democracy was implied. Indeed paradoxically, such parties tended to be more centralised and closely-knit than their more autonomous cadre type. Duverger contended that over time the mass concept would come to dominate as elitist parties would seek members to discharge campaign activities and form a political and financial support network (1959: 63-7).

However, Epstein challenged this position, maintaining that future party development would imitate the elite model. Duverger largely confined his analysis to West European parties, thereby understating their American counterparts (1967: 6-7). Epstein rectified this. Instead of 'contagion from the left', where parties adopted the mass approach for electoral success, he argued for 'contagion from the right', by suggesting there were

'strong counter-organisational tendencies represented by the increased use of new campaign techniques involving mass media, professional skills and large financial contributions' (1967: 260). Voter reach was prominent in his thesis. Specialists in advertising, opinion polling, speech writing and organisational management were better equipped to accomplish this than amateur activists (1967: 234-8). Hence, a loose and flexible organisation capable of responding to electoral 'peaks' and which deferred politically to the parliamentary party was preferable (Maor 1997: 106). Epstein suggested the 'most efficient arrangement' for a British constituency would perhaps be 50-100 active members, in essence a local cadre (1967: 117). Duverger was writing in an era when election campaigns were more labour intensive, so that if Epstein were correct, his mass party would be merely a stage in the evolution of party competition. In Britain, the Conservative mass membership strategy would be a competitive adaptation to the increasingly strong Labour Party (1967: 100). Moreover, the contemporary strengthening of the centre by Britain's parties, in order to improve electioneering, enhanced Epstein's credibility.

Epstein has been criticised for his virtual dismissal of the local element. Ware argued that strong local government provided an incentive to maintain active local parties. Secondly, new electoral technologies and the personalities of leaders were insufficient for competitiveness, as without strong local parties, important political intelligence and electoral support could be lost. Finally, in his American slant, Epstein missed the notion that parties could be derived from a broader social movement, the Labour Party being a prominent example (1987: 10-11). To this could be added renewed attempts to increase party membership in Britain. In comparing Duverger and Epstein, Meny argued that electoral needs virtually compelled parties to assume 'characteristics and practices which are in principle alien to them'. Elite parties produced programmes and recruited members in line with the strategy and structure of mass parties, who in turn adjusted their behaviour to a more elite style (1993: 97). Consequently, Ware concluded that the Conservative Party was a good example of a hybrid party (1996: 66). Webb agreed. Whilst *Fresh Future* brought increased membership rights over leadership selection, this did not extend to policy development (2000a: 198-9). Nevertheless, the adjustments made

were consistent with Kirchheimer's influential 'catch-all' thesis in terms of perceptions with voters.

Kirchheimer was attuned to environmental change, where he pointed to 'conditions of spreading secular and mass consumer goods orientation, with shifting and less obtrusive class lines' bringing about a change in political attitudes (1966: 58). Class-based, ideological parties risked loss of support to opponents with broader political strategies. Conceptually, this meant a transformation to a 'catch-all people's' party, which encapsulated a number of developments. Electorally, a slackening of ideological commitment and a de-emphasising of social class were required to provide greater policy flexibility, though inevitably at the potential loss of some members. In addition, this necessitated a further strengthening of the leadership, which at the same time corresponded with a 'downgrading' of the role of party members, who Kirchheimer regarded as a 'historical relic' with a capacity to undermine the catch-all image. This was further aligned to the courting of interest groups both for campaign assistance and to secure the necessary finance (1966: 58-9). However, he accepted that catch-all was not wholly realisable in practice, as parties would seek to retain their traditional clientele base, whilst simultaneously reaching out to 'all those categories (of voters) whose interests do not adamantly conflict' (1966: 53).

Kirchheimer has been dismissed on the basis of over-simplification. For Wolinetz, catch-all should reduce party system fragmentation, but the evidence suggested otherwise. Unpopular government policies and the emergence of new issue cleavages resulted in traditional parties being outflanked by smaller ones occupying policy space, through the articulation of political issues, but without the historical burden of decisions made whilst in office (1979: 8-9, 20-1). The revitalised Liberal Democrats and new entrants such as the Scottish National Party (SNP) served as a testament to this. Moreover later, he suggested that the notion of mass parties becoming 'ideologically bland' catch-all to maintain competitiveness was located in the 'end of ideology' literature, and did not account for subsequent political trends (1991: 113). Parties responded in different ways subject to their specific political market and the internal pressures they had to bear (1991:

125). Scarrow thus argued that Kirchheimer, along with Duverger and Epstein, did not address how party organisations would adapt, particularly how they would manage the remaining membership base. She concluded that falling member numbers did not necessarily negate their contribution to electoral success, suggesting instead that those remaining might become even more important, as leaders valued their continuing support (2000: 100-1). This debate has perpetuated through the professional outlook.

The Professional Outlook

Parties increasingly engaged outside professional expertise. To Panebianco, this was of much greater political value than the contribution of party bureaucrats. Building upon Kirchheimer, he argued that Duverger's notion of parties as membership organisations was redundant, being superseded by his electoral-professional model. This put even greater emphasis on political issues and 'personalised leadership,' which required career-minded professionals to manage effectively. It was further reinforced by the approach to funding, which would be through interest groups and importantly, state provision. Power relationships would thus become further skewed in favour of the leadership and the parliamentary party. The evolution of parties towards an electoral-professional state was underpinned by two significant trends. Socio-cultural changes, primarily educational and occupational, transformed political attitudes to leave a more heterogeneous electorate. These occurred alongside momentous technological developments, manifested in meaningful improvements in mass communications. Environmental change therefore drove organisational adjustment, but to Panebianco this meant increasing importance imputed to professionalisation, a development that Kirchheimer understated.

However, along with Kirchheimer, Panebianco conceded that parties would be unlikely to assume a pure electoral-professional form, as they possessed different legacies which would lead to differences in individual organisational settlements. Modern innovations would exist alongside traditional features. Hence, regarding the models of party evolution he argued that 'they are ideal types. No party ever completely fits the "mass bureaucratic" type and no party completely fits the "electoral-professional" type' (1988: 263-7). This

reflected his analysis of power, which pointed to nuances based upon membership incentive structures, so that:

> It was 'possible to imagine the unbalanced leader-follower negotiations within a party as being situated on a continuum where at one pole we have an exchange relationship strongly in favour of the leaders, thus resembling Michels's power-domination; and at the other pole a type of exchange which more closely resembles a relation of reciprocal influence. We never find pure cases of either of these' (1988: 32)

Position on the continuum was a function of the ability of members to find the equivalent political benefits elsewhere and the degree of control over what he termed 'zones of uncertainty'. Panebianco identified six such zones: competency, in the sense of specialist knowledge that emanates from experience; environmental relations pertaining to political issues and alliances; the internal communications network; the formal party rules; the channels of party finance; and candidate recruitment and the associated career advancement. Control over these zones of uncertainty provided the possessor with crucial resources in power relations. These tended to accumulate, so that power converged at the top of the party, but again he stressed there would be no monopoly, otherwise there would be no mutual bargaining process (1988: 30-36).

The electoral-professional model is very influential. The inference was that modern parties should be controlled from the top, from where all campaign activity would be directed. The transformation of Labour following a succession of general election defeats was presented as a vindication of his approach (Webb 1992, 2000a). Its leaders regarded organisational reform as central to their modernisation aim (Russell 2005: 1). Kavanagh argued that Blair confronted the party's structure and ethos to galvanise the party into extending beyond its traditional support base and into embracing change. Effectively, this involved 'the creation of a new party' in electoral-professional terms, the greater professionalism and discipline being highly regarded by voters (1997: 534, 539). This implied a need for greater co-ordination, which was being increasingly realised in that

'there's certainly a greater concern now by parties to manage the campaign agenda, exploit more professional methods of publicity, use polls to track the moods of voters and insist on spokesmen adhering to the strategy, to the plan' (Kavanagh 1995: 228). Greater central planning was closely associated with control. Scammell alluded to the responsibility of campaign professionals to prevent mistakes, even if visually tedious campaigns resulted. This inferred a need for tighter control of the party organisation, and hence for the leadership to further strengthen its grip (1995: 276-7).

The advent of the permanent campaign strengthened Panebianco's argument. Webb presented it in marketing terms, stating that it 'has rendered the influence of marketing professionals so pervasive that the adaptation of party messages to suit target constituencies has reached new heights. Specifically, it can be said that campaigning at least for the major parties has evolved into fully-fledged political marketing.' He talked of the 'nationalisation' of the campaign, in which resources and 'co-ordinating power' necessarily converged in the centre (2000b: 155). To be effective, political marketing required central co-ordination and control. The essence of marketing was a focus on the customer, here the voter. Politically, Harrop (1990: 279-82) identified two strands. Firstly, attention to image, recognising that trust was more important than detailed election manifestos. This was reinforced by the significance of symbols, in national politics particularly. Blair's reform of clause four was apposite; the Conservatives were deemed by many commentators to require something similar (Bale 2006b: 28). Secondly, Harrop pointed to the shared interests of voters, implying that marketing was concerned with diagnosing their needs and wants, and responding to them. The design of policies in this way to satisfy voters contradicted the traditional persuasion approach of politicians (Lees-Marshment 2001: 699). Scammell added that now 'the product is malleable' and may be adjusted to voter wants (1995: 9). For Kavanagh, the political product, unlike a bar of soap, could change dramatically as a result of leadership upheavals and events (1996b: 66). Marketing therefore required a single integrated approach, commanded from the centre. It was not the modern techniques themselves, but the discipline by which they were integrated together to provide a coherent message that was important (Harrop 1990:

286). Effective marketing meant not just a flexible organisation at the centre's disposal, but importantly an alignment of national and local interests.

The marketing synthesis was consistent with the perceived Americanisation of British politics. For the 2005 general election, Kavanagh and Butler reported the recruitment of professionals from the polling, public relations and media sectors, and a focus on message development, discipline and rebuttal. To improve campaign effectiveness, sophisticated computer software was employed, which permitted micro data analysis for pinpointed voter targeting, specifically engaged in 'cultivating' party waverers who intended to vote. This contrasted with traditional local campaigns, which were conducted for the purpose of ensuring the turnout of loyal supporters (2005: 194). The reliance on national campaign techniques for reaching voters has, in the 'digital age', been set alongside more 'focused, localised, targeted communication (Farrell and Webb 2000: 110). This was strengthened by the notion of the 'political brand', 'the public's instinctive feel for a political party', lengthy investment being needed to engender sufficient trust that policy initiatives gained acceptance (Philp 2006: 33).

Growing sophistication in these terms was reinforced by professional contribution to the perceived greater 'presidentialisation' of the campaign. Kellner suggested the 1997 general election probably saw a realisation that elections were moving in the direction of 'leadership appeal' rather than the party (1997: 628). 2005 saw its deliberate manifestation, the Conservatives favouring a presidential contest between Howard and a supposedly vulnerable Blair (Seldon and Snowdon 2005a: 267). Blair himself, was surrounded by a network of special advisers loyal to him, rather than to the party, and in whom much power was concentrated (Wring 2005: 713). This reflected a trend towards further strengthening of party leaders' offices, involving a small campaign elite and a greater concentration of resources in this domain. Parties were thus said to have evolved from membership organisations into 'campaign machines operating in support of the principal candidates', American style (Farrell and Webb 2000: 121). Poguntke and Webb crystallised this, asserting that presidentialisation was 'a logical component and vindication' of the catch-all, electoral-professional and cartel (see below) explanations, all

of which pointed to an enhancement of leadership power over the party membership (2005: 353). Kavanagh observed internal conflicts over 'turf' as a result (1996b: 64), but additionally alluded to a reluctant acceptance by politicians and a lack of empathy with professionals; indeed, they resented the dependency relationship (1995: 1).

The Local Response

The Labour Party came to epitomise the professional orientation. The Conservatives, historically the leaders in campaign innovation (Cockett 1994: 576-7), were unusually forced into catch-up mode; opinion polling for example, was embarked upon three years after Labour (Kavanagh 1997: 538). *Fresh Future* was conceived to do likewise organisationally, through the introduction of the central board to assume 'overall control' over both professionals and volunteers (Seldon and Snowdon 2005a: 251), a development deemed essential for successful political marketing. Moreover, Webb had concluded that for both parties, the drive to 'maximise' leadership strategic autonomy had rendered electoral-professional germane (2000a: 209). McKenzie's elite-orientated thesis concerning competing teams of leaders was revitalised, but for campaign-related reasons. However, for him and Panebianco to be sustainable, by inference party leaderships must be able to exercise control over important local decisions, or alternatively as McKenzie argued, local parties must be content to acquiesce to such practice.

Electoral-professional questioned the future role of members. In electioneering, Butler and Collins stressed their amateurism, in contrast to the skills of professionals, who had been engaged specifically for that purpose. Hence, members would be relegated to low-level tasks and implementing instructions handed down from above. Despite this, parties still relied on local volunteers. Their political experience and know-how, derived from years of activity, could lead to resistance against the imposition of marketing initiatives (1994: 24-5). Professionalisation might enhance oligarchy, but as von Beyme argued, the iron law remained unconfirmed as long as the amateurs continued to compete (1985: 238). Far from being redundant, Selle and Svasand suggested the local parties' role was more ambiguous. They might be less important for communication, but their mobilisation and information gathering functions could become more significant (1991: 473-4). MPs

and candidates not only required assistance with understanding local issues and community nuances, but also the increased local case work that an MP's job entailed (Norton 1994; Gay 2005), rendered strong local parties vital. Here, Ware (1989) observed that technological improvements potentially allowed activists more time for political work by releasing them from onerous administration, but this assumed they were so motivated.

The local position has not been fully clarified in the literature. The models discussed above assumed a national slant. Moreover, Kavanagh drew attention to McKenzie's methodological approach, which employed memoirs, biographies and reports (1985: 12). Minkin achieved deeper knowledge from qualitative interviews, but again with party and trade union elites. Similarly, the analyses of both Kavanagh and Scammell derived from interviews with national politicians and campaign professionals, who inevitably embodied a top-down outlook. The local perspective was largely ignored. This was consistent with Britain's political culture, which was centred on Westminster, and which was reinforced by the need for a fast response to media covered events and issues. Local parties were deemed to play a secondary role in the overall political product.

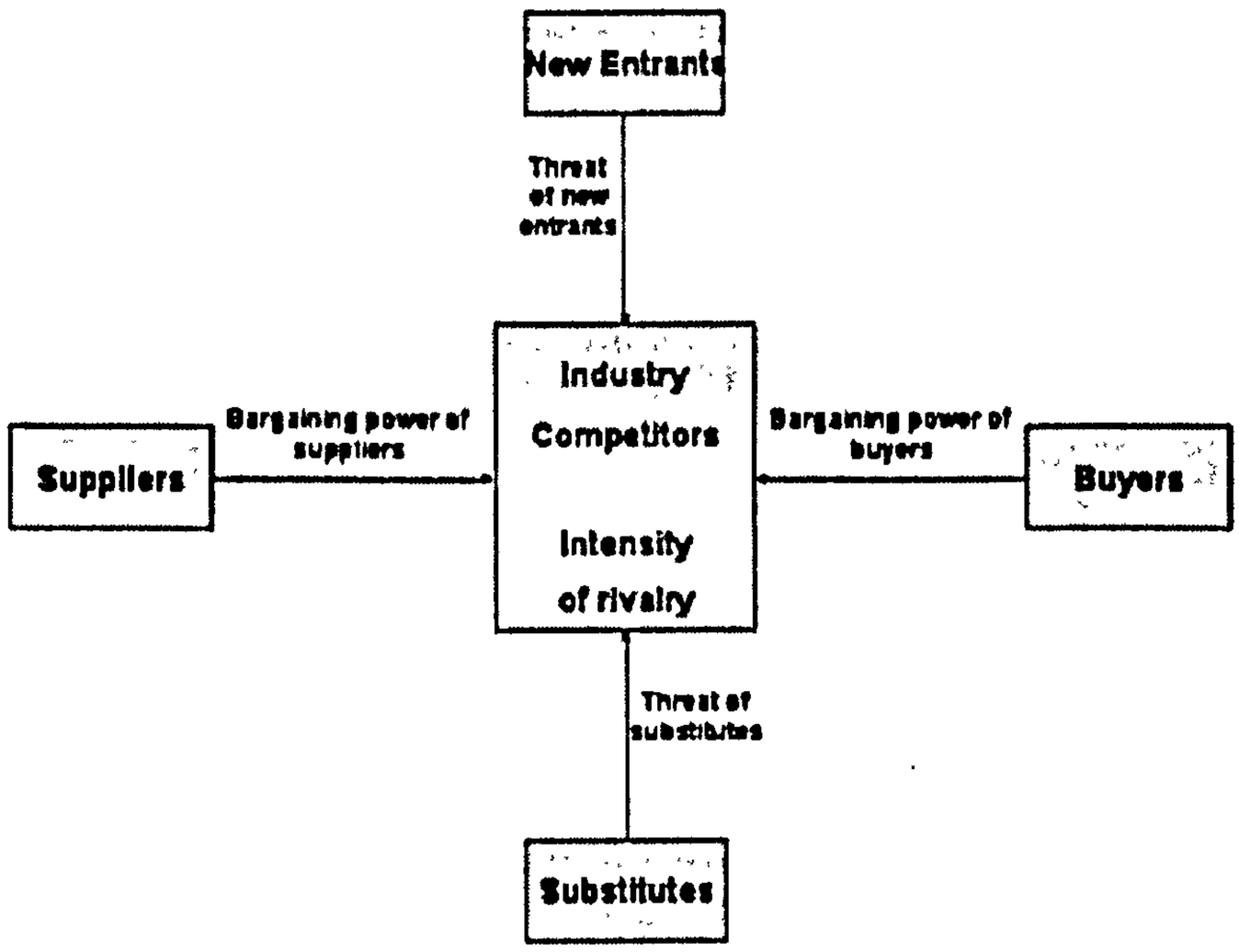
In a similar vein, Panebianco's thesis was essentially product- rather than geographically-orientated. This was unsurprising since his electoral-professional model, as noted, evolved from Kirchheimer's analysis and was a response to the macro environmental changes in society and technology. However, neither author addressed explicitly changes in the micro or competitive environment. Such changes were often the result of the broader environmental ones, but they also retained a capacity for independent influence. Porter (1980: 3-4) provided a framework for this analysis, as shown in Diagram 1.1. His 'five forces model' was developed to analyse the structure of an industry, the ultimate profit potential of which was determined by the collective strength of five competitive forces: the threat of entry, the bargaining power of buyers, the bargaining power of suppliers, the availability of substitute products or services, and rivalry amongst existing players. The model has both analytical and prescriptive properties, but it is in the former where it has achieved enduring robustness, and hence how it is utilised here. By

modifying the model to account for the electoral politics market, a more comprehensive analysis of party competition can be conducted than simply assessing the electoral strategies of the major parties. In this way, it enables the collation of the micro-level shortfalls in the influential party evolution models, that of Panebianco in particular. In the analysis below, buyers and suppliers have been adjusted to reflect voters and the providers of political resources respectively.

1. The Threat of Entry

For the Westminster Parliament, there are considerable entry barriers constructed around the single member plurality (SMP) electoral system, commonly depicted as 'first-past-the-post.' In addition to the national effort, general election campaigns consist of individual constituency battles; ultimately, it is here that candidates polling the most votes prevail. Inherently, this system favours the two major broadly positioned parties who have access to substantial resources and the media. It retains no mechanism to ensure that seats won are related to votes, so that third and minor parties are under-represented (Mitchell 2005: 160). The implication is that capital requirements and an organisational capacity to effectively service a broad range of individual constituencies provide a very high threshold to potential newcomers.

Diagram 1.1. The Five Forces Model of Industry Competition



Source: Porter, M.E. (1980) *Competitive Strategy*. New York: The Free Press (Diagram sourced from: valuebasedmanagement.net)

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Since 1970 there has been evidence of greater instability in Western electoral systems generally. Traditional parties remained dominant, but new entrants attained some success campaigning on contemporary issues (Drummond 2006). Policy convergence allowed minor parties to achieve differentiation by adopting alternative positions. Partisan dealignment in this way brought a more open market (Webb 2000b: 151). As noted earlier, the British experience embodied a revitalised Liberal/Liberal Democrat Party and the rise of nationalist and single issue parties such as the SNP and the United Kingdom Independence Party (UKIP) respectively. Their impact though, manifested itself in terms of the proportion of the vote, rather than actual seats. Webb and Fisher hence termed the polity a 'suppressed' two-and-a-half party system (1999: 27). For example, in 1951 Labour and the Conservatives received 96.8% of the vote. This had fallen to 75.1% in February 1974 and to 67.5% in 2005. In the latter election though, they still obtained 85.4% of the seats (Webb and Fisher 1999: 9; Norris and Wlezien 2005: 659). However, SMP can also result in bias against the major parties; importantly for the Conservative Party, 'electoral deserts' materialised in Scotland, Wales and the northern cities after 1997 (Mitchell 2005: 161), at least partially caused by the minor parties. Owing to their lack of resources, the progress of these parties necessarily entailed a volunteer workforce on the ground. The implication for the Conservatives is that in order to recover their electoral competitiveness, they would need to match these entrants. Party competition was now more broadly conceived than McKenzie, Kirchheimer and Panebianco maintained.

2. The Bargaining Power of Buyers

Voter power typically reveals itself at the ballot box every four or five years, although intervening contests, such as local and European elections, provide indications. Political policies and ideas are essentially intangible products with the capacity to generate sensitivity. This is magnified by an increasingly knowledgeable electorate (Electoral Commission and Hansard Society 2007: 15-17). Perceived competence to govern thus became key in an era of policy proximity by the main parties, Webb concluding that they are 'electorally motivated organisations compelled to act within an increasingly competitive and uncertain electoral market ... (they) will seek to compete by convincing electors they are reputable, competent, cohesive and credible, and have more attractive

policies and politicians than their rivals' (2000b: 168). Convincing voters therefore required a more holistic, party-wide approach.

Denver and Hands distinguished between 'persuasive' and 'mobilising' campaigning. The former was traditionally the preserve of the national party and the latter the localities. However, they noted increasing attempts at persuasion being facilitated locally (1997: 308). This would provide justification for central involvement in local campaigns, as well as initiatives to improve resource distribution. There was also the need to address tactical voting: an elector voting for an alternative party to his preferred one in order to reduce the likelihood of a disliked party winning the seat (Heath and Evans 1994: 558). Franklin et al (1994) distinguished between instrumental and expressive forms, the former to avoid a wasted vote and the latter to send a signal to the preferred party, usually at parliamentary by-elections. The presence of three or more competitive parties in a constituency permits instrumental tactical voting as voters have an opportunity for rational action to remove unwanted MPs (Mitchell 2005: 168-9). Hence, there was much anti-Conservative activity during the Thatcher and Major years; it was thought that the party lost between 25 and 35 seats to this behaviour in 1997 (Curtice and Steed 1997: 317). Moreover in 2005, there was a noticeable backlash against the Blair Labour government over Iraq policy. (Norris and Wlezien 2005: 670-1). Partisan dealignment was also a key factor in the trend to tactical voting (Heath and Evans 1994: 560).

In terms of organisational performance, Cox (1997) presented these issues strategically as a co-ordination problem. In tactical voting, support for weaker candidates typically haemorrhaged as many knowledgeable voters switched to stronger candidates to avoid a wasted vote. Information provision to enable such action was provided by political elites, both national and local. It was thus in the interests of both party elements to reconcile any divergent interests and co-ordinate their activities to gain parliamentary seats. Panebianco's solution to this problem was through top-down manàgement. His view was given support by Rose, who argued that as the electorate became bigger and campaign technology more complex, so the co-ordination problem became greater, as more tasks needed to be undertaken. The parties' response was specialisation (1974: 86).

Professionals were assigned to the key tasks; thereby questioning local capability in this regard.

3. The Bargaining Power of Suppliers

The primary suppliers to political parties were the providers of professional services such as advertising agencies, opinion pollsters and policy think tanks, but more fundamentally, the donors of financial resources to pay for them. The growing power of the contracted professionals, both external and as employees was alluded to in the previous section, their status giving them preferential access to, and influence over, the party's strategy.

Financially, the relative power of party donors was controversial. Greater professionalism both in day-to-day politics and in campaigning came at much increased cost. Spending on the latter in 1997 reached a staggering £54m for the two major parties. The British polity though, was characterised by the fact that it was essentially legally unregulated (Webb 2001: 312). This position was addressed by the Political Parties, Elections and Referendums Act 2000 (PPERA), which was designed to change party behaviour. Nevertheless, politics remained a multi-million pound preoccupation. Critically, the need to respond to opponents' campaign innovations led to an 'arms race' mentality (Neill 1998: 42). The problem for parties was exacerbated by the fact that membership subscriptions from local parties formed a relatively small proportion of central income. For the Conservatives, this was typically less than 10% and indeed, reached a nadir of 2.6% in 1997. Consequently, national funding relied on institutions and increasingly, wealthy individuals.

Institutional donations to the Conservatives accounted for some 50% of total income in the 1980s (Pinto-Duschinsky 1985: 344; Neill 1998: 32). However, this steadily declined so that by 2001, business was reluctant to contribute to a party that was not only in opposition, but showed little prospect of an early return to power (Collings and Seldon 2001: 627). Mindful of shareholder discontent, many companies preferred to channel their 'political' funds through professional lobby firms (Webb 2000a: 236). Hence, this funding was replaced by a reliance on a few very rich individuals, so that a dependency

relationship resulted. The party was desperate to retain its financial advantage against a resurgent Labour Party, which in the desire to reduce its dependence on trade unions had launched an initiative to professionalise its fundraising. Webb commented that this changed the party 'at the levels of both political linkage and organisational style' (2000b: 166). Reliance on individuals though, inevitably led to both parties suffering high-profile embarrassments concerning the potential for bought influence. The £1m donation from Formula One supremo Bernie Ecclestone was symbolic of Labour's difficulties. Intriguingly, for the Conservatives, Stuart Wheeler played an important role in the removal party leader Ian Duncan Smith by withholding donations (Seldon and Snowdon 2005b: 727). Whilst preferential treatment was often assumed rather than demonstrated (Fisher 2002: 395), access to politicians undoubtedly conferred an advantage on those who donated. Overall, it was the cumulative impact of financial incidents that brought a genuine unease about how parties raised money (Seyd 1998: 204).

Conservative leadership perceptions of the need to spend heavily to win elections meant that acquiring large amounts of money was an on-going priority. Its dependence on a relatively small number of individuals was a function of switching costs. In absence of extensive state funding in Britain, it simply had nowhere else to go. State provision was eschewed by the Neill Commission, which instead argued that spending limits, as enacted in PPERA, were a better way of addressing mounting party debts. Moreover, there was sensitivity to the idea of 'forcing taxpayers to contribute to costs of party political activities of which they do not approve' (1998: 89). Parties enjoyed considerable state funding, but it had not yet been linked to voters.[4] However, a further extension of state funding was under consideration, emanating from the Hayden Phillips Report (2007), as part of broader discussions on party funding. Nevertheless, whether it was the private system or greater public subventions, party financing could 'open the way to oligarchic tendencies in a modern party', since both 'generally co-operate with the party headquarters more than with the constituencies' (von Beyme 1985: 236). Wealthy individuals typically donated to the national party to support the offices of senior politicians and national campaigning. The exception was Michael Ashcroft's donations to the Conservative constituencies; these were controlled by his team and allocated subject

to scrutiny of a business plan and an individual association's financial position (Ashcroft 2005: 282-6). Ultimately, it was vital for the national Conservative Party to remain financially viable, but its recovery also required local competitiveness. The fundraising capacity of the local parties was not just important in this regard, but would partially offset the political damage inflicted by the presence of wealthy national donors. However, this further suggests the potential for a dependency relationship with the local parties. Critically though, as with voter strategy, effective competition required co-ordination, in this case of the party's full resources.

4. Substitute Products

Substitutes perform the same function as the industry's product and can be subtle in nature (Porter 1980: 23); the train for example, is a substitute for the motor car. Voters in this sense do not have a direct substitute for casting their vote. However, they do retain the option to express their political views by other means. It is therefore, the elasticity of expression that is important to parties. A key indicator is electoral turnout. The figures for 2001 and 2005 at 59.4% and 60.9% represented low points for parliamentary elections, the former being the lowest since 1918. Moreover, they compared unfavourably with the 82.6% recorded for 1951 and 78.8% for February 1974.

The role of political parties was questioned as a result. Webb (1996) found no strong anti-party sentiment, suggesting an enduring adaptive capacity. Nevertheless, the legacy from a long period of Conservative government was reduced confidence in politicians and the political system generally, following numerous incidents of sexual and financial 'sleaze' (Curtice and Jowell 1997). This outlook persisted. A cross-national survey of public opinion revealed continuing pessimism and distrust towards parties and the notion of party government, Britain scoring below average (Dalton and Weldon 2005). These sentiments were reflected in feelings of cynicism and displays of apathy at the 2005 general election (Kavanagh and Butler 2005: 179). Moreover, the fourth Audit of Political Engagement found a paltry 27% of people trusted politicians with 71% generally mistrustful. Only 35% were satisfied with the workings of parliament and just 33% had confidence in the political system. At 54%, approximately half the population enjoyed an

interest in politics (The Electoral Commission and Hansard Society 2007). Finally, Ellis pointedly concluded that 'party has succeeded in defending Britain's oligarchic political culture while the country's social culture has undergone a revolution, that the two cultures are now incompatible' (1999: 163).

The core substitute problem was articulated by Curtice and Seyd's (2003) observation that the malaise was more associated with ballot box politics than an unwillingness to engage. Their study of the relationship between education levels and participation discovered healthy evidence of non-electoral participation. This was echoed by Byrne, who contended that people retained interest and activity in a range of political issues, but identified more closely with single issue groups, manifested in movements such as the Countryside Alliance, fuel protest and the anti-war campaign: 'traditional institutions became increasingly remote and seemingly irrelevant to modern life' (2005: 615). His view was consistent with earlier analysis, which suggested that a new assertive style of citizen politics was not necessarily channelled through parties (Dalton 1988). The result was highlighted by the Power Inquiry, which identified citizen discontent towards the formal democratic process. This was deemed to offer insufficient influence over political decisions, to provide an electoral system riddled with unequal and wasted votes, and to contain parties that were too similar and lacking in principle (Power 2006: 17-18). The challenge for the modern Conservative Party was therefore to reinvent itself to assimilate such social change.

This analysis points to the perception of politics as a 'people' phenomenon. Indirect forms of political communication such as national advertising, and aggressive voter targeting from the centre, were unlikely to contribute to the renaissance of parties. A revitalised local effort was more appropriate in line with Coleman's (1996) contention that strong party organisations contributed to public support for parties, as they improved the linkage function with voters. Johnston and Pattie (2003) for example, demonstrated a positive link between local constituency campaigning and electoral turnout. Underpinning the substitute problem is Putnam's concept of social capital, which he defined as 'features of social organisation, such as trust, norms and networks that can improve the efficiency of

society by facilitating co-ordinated actions' (1993: 167). Mass political parties were identified with organisations such as sports clubs, choral societies and neighbourhood associations as forming these networks, which were essential to social capital. The 'denser' these community networks, the greater the likelihood of citizen co-operation for mutual gain. They bred the reciprocal relationship between trust and co-operation (1993: 171-175). Later in America, he demonstrated the link between civic norms and networks and the effectiveness of political institutions. Accumulated social capital further impacted positively on social problems such as crime reduction, educational attainment and health. However, he found a weakening in voting, political knowledge and grassroots activism (Putnam 2000). The importance of Putnam reflects the substitute argument in that a withering of local parties contributes to a fall in social capital, which in turn undermines effective government. An electoral-professional stance would propel this process further.

5. Competitive Rivalry

Rivalry between the major parties is intense, since not only is politics a fast-moving game, played out under a 24 hours a day, seven days a week media spotlight, but also they are of similar size and resource capacity. This type of environment underpinned academic explanations of party competition, which emphasised the national level. Local competition was deemed to be of secondary significance. This was reinforced by the stringent limits placed upon campaign expenditure at the local level, at least during the immediate campaign, by the Corrupt and Illegal Practices Act 1883. Kavanagh (1995) thus stated that modern campaigning involved three key groups of actors: voters, the media - both press and television - and politicians along with their campaign managers and professional advisers; he ignored the local parties. This position was underlined by successive Nuffield Studies, which maintained that constituency campaigning made little difference to electoral outcomes (Butler and Kavanagh 1992, 1997, 2002). They agreed that the 2005 election saw enhanced professionalisation of local campaigns, with micro-management of target voters from party centres, but their impact was still deemed to be limited (Kavanagh and Butler 2005: 177). However, set against them was a growing body of evidence, which highlighted the importance of local campaigns. This can be categorised by methodological approach. Johnston and Pattie employed the level of

campaign expenditure as a measure of their intensity (Johnston 1987; Johnston and Pattie 1995, 1998, 2003: Pattie et al 1995). By contrast, Seyd and Whiteley's approach involved surveys of party members to estimate activism rates locally (Seyd and Whiteley 1992; Whiteley et al 1994; Whiteley and Seyd 2002, 2003). Both of these were labelled by Denver and Hands as 'indirect', these authors instead preferring nation-wide postal surveys of election agents, the people actually responsible for organising and directing local campaigns (Denver and Hands 1992; Denver et al 1998, 2002, 2003a); Conservative agents however were largely concentrated in safe seats.

The consensus of these authors was that local activity mattered. However, consistent with the electoral-professional outlook, recent evidence suggested attempts at alignment between national and local campaigns through increased efforts by central professionals to control the latter, especially in marginal seats. There was more emphasis on central co-ordination of local campaigns, focusing resources on key constituencies and modernising local campaign organisations (Denver et al 2003b). Fisher et al (2006) found this process being extended, but their research revealed little electoral impact in the Conservative Party. This suggested a campaign tension, which they acknowledged might owe much to the continuing autonomy of the local associations. Lagroye pointed to the knowledge and expertise of local activists in their own sphere in terms of understanding what worked locally (1989: 368-9). There was therefore a question concerning their preparedness to accept direction from above. Further evidence suggested this position has persisted. Fisher and Denver (2009) demonstrated that traditional campaign methods had greater electoral impact than modern techniques, though the latter were gaining acceptance; human contact was the suggested explanation. Again, results for the Conservative Party were moderate. Nevertheless, despite their emphasis on the benefits of central co-ordination, they concluded that if activists were allowed to wither, future problems would emanate.

Whiteley (1997) argued that a major contributing factor to the Conservative Party's enormous defeat in 1997 was a lack of grass roots activists locally. This was at least partially a function of the massive losses of local councillors during the 1990s Major

government. Following the 1995 local elections, with fewer than 5000, the party had fallen into third place behind the Liberal Democrats (Rallings and Thrasher 1997: 125). Hence, much of its local campaign strength had been removed, leaving it in a weak position to fight the ensuing general election. Moreover, as the Liberal Democrats ably demonstrated, carrying the attack through 'community' or 'neighbourhood' politics could reap electoral dividends. Once elected, their campaign effectiveness rendered them difficult to defeat (Philp 2006: 88). The party's focus on the local dimensions of national issues offered competitive differentiation. Here, Seyd rued the blandness associated with the structure of politics at the national level, complaining of too much emphasis upon for example, sound-bites, focus groups and swing votes (1998: 206). Strong local parties potentially offered a bulwark against the pure form of the electoral-professional model and the Americanisation of British politics, a notion that Kavanagh respected (1995: 220-1). However, the Conservative Party has only belatedly recognised the importance of the local outlook.

The five forces model has enabled an assimilation of micro-environmental political issues into a single framework. These issues supplement the macro concerns upon which Kirchheimer and Panebianco based their models, thereby suggesting that party competition is more sophisticated than either of them recognised. Any interpretation of party evolution should therefore be more broadly based, reflecting a more integrated party wide approach. Each force revealed the importance of local parties, but equally alluded to a requirement for a co-ordination of national and local strategies. Hence, the Porter model highlights the managerial needs of the party leadership to improve competitiveness. This, in line with Webb's leadership strategic autonomy argument, would necessarily include a recalculation of the internal balance of power. In this way, the model assists in projecting the future evolution of party organisation.

By taking a holistic approach to party competition, the Porter model offers a superior framework to the Downs model of spatial positioning, which could be integrated into the 'rivalry' force. Downs examined political parties in terms of policy and asserted that 'parties formulate policies in order to win elections, rather than win elections in order to

formulate policies' (1957: 28). He argued that parties acted rationally in their decision-making to maximise political support, with the primary goal of election to office; policies were a means to an end. Citizens were also deemed to act rationally and vote for the party likely to provide the highest utility income, such that they would evaluate the 'expected party differential.' Parties would thus take account of voters' utility functions and the policy proposals of their opponents. Scarrow et al interpreted this as leading to 'policy convergence in pursuit of the median voter' (2000: 119). 'Five forces' showed this to be too narrow an approach to modern party competition; a broader array of political activities required management. Contemporary models of party evolution are moving in this direction.

Contemporary Approaches to Party Evolution

Contemporary scholars have taken different positions regarding the position of the party membership. They can be distinguished in terms of oligarchy and stratarchy.

1. Modern Oligarchy

Koole (1994) researching in the Netherlands, identified parties which had yet to reach a pure electoral-professional state, but instead could be described as 'modern cadre parties'. The parliamentarians remained pre-eminent, but the party bureaucracy had been strengthened rather than replaced by specialist professionals. Despite falling membership, the party organisation retained its importance as a vehicle for active members, the cadre. Consequently, whilst recognising the trend towards greater central control, it was not inevitable that electoral-professional would become the standard.

Building on Koole, Heidar and Saglie cited evidence from Norwegian parties for their 'network model'. Contrary to Panebianco's tight hierarchical control from the centre, they suggested that parties were 'loosening' their formal structures and 'opening up', with less strict boundaries in their operations. Leadership groups dominated, but accountability and legitimacy continued to be formally tied to the party organisation and membership. Moreover, the organisation's value was enhanced as a vehicle for leadership recruitment and policy expression. Policies and strategies were developed within informal party

networks with less emphasis on formal procedures. This approach allowed vote maximisation strategies without serious dilution of the party's political profile. Finally, funding was through both public and private sources (2003: 221-2). Their network party could not be applied to British parties, but its importance lay in the loosening of boundaries within the organisation and the potential for innovation at lower levels. Oligarchy though, remained likely, as the network required co-ordination (Heidar and Saglie 2003: 235).

In sharp contrast to the network model, Hopkin and Paolucci conceived a more extreme form of electoral-professional model. Based upon two unusual cases in Spain (Union de Centro Democratico) and Italy (Forza Italia), they observed parties dominated by a single person, their political fortunes fluctuating accordingly. The characteristics of their 'business firm model' were a high level of central control, a limited bureaucracy and tasks frequently contracted out. Membership was typically restricted to those willing to hold public office or occupy political positions within the party (1999: 333). This approach was unlikely in Britain, but the contracting out of activities to third parties was an interesting development, along with its treatment of voters as consumers rather than identifiers.

2. Stratarchy

The authors discussed to this point rooted their analysis in a party's relationship with society. Katz and Mair though, argued this ignored its association with the state, which they maintained was undergoing 'an ever closer symbiosis' (1995: 6). Social, cultural and political developments, particularly the decline of membership activity and the growth of single-issue groups, were driving parties to seek resources from elsewhere. State subsidies and privileged access to the media were important components of their 'cartel party model.' They argued that 'in short, the state which is invaded by the parties, and the rules of which are determined by parties, becomes a fount of resources through which these parties not only help to ensure their own survival, but through which they can also enhance their capacity to resist challenges from newly mobilised alternatives' (1995: 15-16). The importance of the cartel concept was its influence on elite thinking. For

example, the fear of cartel behaviour was a factor in the Neill Committee's (1998) report into party funding and the resulting PPERA. However, by its explicit distancing from the electorate, the model sparked numerous criticisms. These will be examined using Detterbeck's (2005) framework of organisational, competitive and functional dimensions.[5]

Organisationally, the characteristics of the cartel model were elite ascendancy and stratarchy. Leadership power was strengthened through control of the key party committees at the national level and an ability to appeal directly to the enfranchised passive membership. Activists were consequently unlikely to involve themselves in national politics. Recognition though, was afforded to a need for autonomous local parties to manage local issues and to encourage members and supporters (Katz and Mair 1995: 21). However, given the importance of local campaigns for winning a general election, it seems anomalous that party leaderships would operate without strong local links. Instead, Koole suggested that 'federalisation' was more likely, arguing that local involvement on national bodies was inevitable, as their contribution could not be ignored (1996: 518). Competitively, Katz and Mair advanced a revised democratic posture in which 'voters choose from a fixed menu of political parties.' National policy convergence implied reduced voter ability to punish individual parties. Unpopular ones, such as Labour in the 1980s, did not disappear because of continuing access to state patronage and the media (1995: 17). Enhanced cartelism resulted because the main opposition party would inevitably return to power provided it retained its strength, which the state assisted (Blyth and Katz 2005: 48). However, state funding did not insulate parties from competition. Furthermore, Kitschelt stressed that far from downplaying voter needs, parties were increasingly sensitive to their preferences, as weakened partisanship and the emergence of minority parties have induced strategic vote switching (2000: 174-5).

The functional dimension involved changes to the resource base of parties. Katz and Mair combined more state financial provision with a fairly brutal downgrading of the membership (1995: 20). They acknowledged that a relative lack of state funding in Britain provided weak conditions for cartel activity, but later Blyth and Katz cited the

Blair-led Labour organisational reforms as evidence of its strengthening (2005: 48). Detterbeck however, pointed to Blair's courting of business and a membership growth strategy as initiatives to moderate trade union influence, rather than turning to the state (2005: 184). Moreover, the Conservative Party retained its hostility to state funding.[6] Blyth and Katz argued that its reform programme after the 1997 defeat by-passed activists and further increased central control, thereby enhancing the potential for cartel behaviour (2005: 48). This was an exaggeration. The active membership remained an integral component of the party's campaign strategy and a means of maintaining its profile in the country. Finally, media access to the state did not necessarily afford parties greater influence. Indeed, the reverse was feasible as media pressure could influence the political agenda and thereby provided a 'powerful counterweight' to cartelisation (Koole 1996: 519).

The cartel model represented an ambitious, but erroneous attempt to suggest the rules of the political game had changed. Importantly, it also suggested that parties were becoming more stratarchic. Mair talked of organisational realignment in favour of the leadership groups: 'it is really only the party on the ground which is becoming less important or which is in decline, whereas the resources of the party in central office, and especially those of the party in public office, have in fact been strengthened' (1994: 4). Enhanced leadership power though could be misconstrued. In contrast to the opposing hierarchical models of Duverger and Kirchheimer, he pointed to a 'process of mutual and growing autonomy', in which relationships were more stratarchical, so that each level of the party was becoming more autonomous of the others. Consequently, he foresaw local parties largely confining themselves to candidate selection and local issues (1994: 17). However, the concept of stratarchy was unclear. It does not feature in the organisational behaviour literature. As the natural opposite of hierarchy, it would imply that everyone within the party organisation possessed equal status; this would be unlikely. Instead, Mair seemed to imply decentralisation, but in the sense of segregation. His hypothesis therefore, whilst addressing division of labour, neglected the other primary structural problem of co-ordination, which was increasingly vital in modern elections. This issue was addressed by Carty.

Carty argued that Duverger, Kirchheimer and Panebianco portrayed parties in hierarchic terms, power distribution being a zero-sum game, in which growth at one level weakened another. Reinterpreting Mair, he argued that 'mutual autonomy' implied interdependence between a party's units. His 'franchise model' recognised both autonomous units and a holistic concept of organisation, reconciling both stratarchy and co-ordination. Power was not necessarily zero-sum, but likely to be 'broadly shared' between party actors keen to realise their common purpose. Nevertheless, it was the stratarchy concept that underpinned his franchise idea, which he depicted as 'an organisational model that can accommodate and institutionalise the stratarchical dimensions of modern parties with their demands for internal autonomies'. However, he did concede that his ideal type was unlikely, noting that 'any party's position on the stratarchical continuum is an open question' (2004: 6-10).

The core of Carty's franchise model was a fixed contract, which 'delineates the important party units in terms of their autonomous powers and responsibilities, identifying the relationships among them and indicating how their autonomy is to be maintained'. The franchise contract was presented as a 'stratarchical bargain', realised through the critical electoral activities of policy, candidates, campaigning and so forth. Flexibility was carefully crafted into the model to accommodate the notion that different electoral systems and party traditions could imply varying multi-level systems for candidate selection and policy development. In a similar manner to McDonalds, the centre's responsibility was overall product and communication strategy (depicted as policy, leadership and the national campaign), and for organisational management and finance. The local parties by contrast were given the more basic tasks of product delivery, local organisation, mobilising the vote and providing feedback to the centre; in this, they were supported by intermediary and specialist units. Each component of the party would execute its tasks relatively unhindered, but importantly the centre would have the authority to intervene against poorly performing constituency parties; although he also suggested that there should be reciprocal mechanisms concerning central policies and responsibilities (2004: 10-13). Carty saw the formal constitution instigated by the

Conservative Party in 1998 as a vivid realisation of his idea, as it set out both detailed responsibilities and institutional trade-offs. Importantly, the *A 21st Century Party* document explicitly outlined proposals to convert local associations into franchises, seemingly based upon his work (Conservative Party 2005a).[7]

However, Carty's model was simply a formal extension of the electoral-professional model. It firmly belittled the local parties and suggested that they have little meaningful participation. In line with McKenzie and Panebianco, he adopted the perspective of the franchisor; there was no consideration of the viewpoints and indeed the willingness of the franchisees, the voluntary membership, to embrace the concept. It was difficult to envisage binding contracts providing much incentive for membership. This would be reinforced by his assertion that within parties, the relationship between the centre and the local units, conceived in terms of the level of independence and power, could vary by size, wealth and level of importance (2004: 10). Such a move would negate the voluntary principles of democracy and fairness, but would also contravene the notion of standardisation, a primary feature of franchise systems. Moreover, the number of different types of franchises that Carty identifies to illustrate his assertion that 'there is no standard franchise party structure and the model should not be taken to imply that parties need adopt the simple central office-local outlet pattern' (2004: 14-15), casts doubt on the applicability, and indeed viability, of the whole concept of 'franchise party'. Furthermore, in a fast moving political environment, formal contractual agreements could easily become rigidities preventing organisational adaptation, as lengthy re-negotiation and bargaining might be required. The formal franchise approach ignored the complexity of relationships within political parties, as Rose observed, 'in the hot-house atmosphere of party politics, personal relationships between individuals are always important' (1974: 82). It is the nature of relationships which is hence important. This requires an examination of membership issues.

Party Membership

The status of party members has been an important focus of this chapter. This section discusses a number of specific issues relating to them. It commences with the costs and

benefits of members and then considers member incentives, membership strength and their internal democratic responsibilities.

1. The Costs and Benefits of Members

The evolutionary theorists implicitly addressed Scarrow's question of 'what level of engagement is demanded of members the party considers to be assets' (1994: 50). This implied a leadership interpretation of the costs and benefits of maintaining a vibrant membership, resulting in decisions regarding which activities to emphasise, but more fundamentally on how much effort to expend on membership drives. Over time, these issues would be subject to continual leadership evaluation. Maor (1997: 95) identified member benefits at both system and organisation levels. In terms of the political system, members enabled the continuation of democracy, in that it could not function properly without parties. They provided an indication that the party was embedded within society and hence served to legitimise it (Beer 1965), or at least allowed the leadership to present the image of a mass party for this purpose (Pierre and Widfeldt 1994). Organisationally, Maor stressed the vital voluntary work essential for party politics to succeed. Here, Scarrow noted a number of benefits, suggesting members: gave financial help through subscriptions and fundraising; provided valuable ideas for policies; engaged in the electoral tasks of canvassing and leafleting; offered themselves as candidates at both national and local levels; multiplied votes through everyday contacts; and were loyal voters themselves (1994: 46-9). In this respect, members performed the function of 'ambassadors' in the community (Seyd and Whiteley 1995: 458). However, membership also incurred costs. Direct costs included establishing representative committees, maintaining offices for recruitment and management, and organising meetings and conferences to accommodate their needs (Maor 1997: 96). These activities consumed resources that could alternatively be employed on communications with the electorate (Scarrow 1994: 46). The time and cost of involving members in political decisions through party ballots added to this. Indirectly, members could be 'a source of demands of both a policy and a personal nature' (Katz 1990: 152). Active members particularly, were deemed to be ideologically motivated, such that they could hinder leaders wishing to

remain flexible to accommodate voter needs; their role in selecting candidates underlined this (Scarrow 1994: 45).

This argument was based upon May's (1973) 'law of curvilinear disparity', which suggested that middle-level elites or activists were likely to be the most radical and policy driven of the membership. Seyd and Whiteley (1992) found some support in the Labour Party, but the evidence was not universal; other authors discovered no noticeable traces of the law's applicability (Minkin 1978; Gallagher and Marsh 2004). Kitschelt (1989) argued that Labour's position was a special case, an example of a loosely-coupled party organisation where ideologues had few constraints imposed upon them. Leaders though, have also been found to be more radical than followers to give their parties competitive differentiation, although the latter might adopt more extreme positions on selected issues (Pierre 1986; Norris 1994, 1995). Activists could therefore be located between leaders and voters, suggesting 'linear disparity' (Webb 2000a: 212).

In politics, perceptions are crucial. It would suit leadership ambitions and strategies if the activist layer were deemed the most radical. From this perspective, Mair suggested that leaderships were separating out the different elements of the voluntary party and empowering ordinary members regarded as the more docile and likely to endorse their policies. Activists were becoming increasingly marginalised, whilst at the same time the central party was enhancing its power to the extent that 'democratisation on paper may actually co-exist with powerful elite influence in practice.' A democratised party remained susceptible to leadership control (1994: 16-17). Membership ballots, controlled by party leaders, were an innovation in support of this. However, Seyd's research within the Labour Party found apathy rather than docility amongst members and moreover, little evidence to suggest that the leadership had attained greater freedom of manoeuvre from enfranchising the ordinary member (1999: 395-6). Kelly also noted apathy amongst Conservative members, though he took a more strident view regarding centralisation (2002: 40-1)[8] Ballots were more of a public relations exercise to demonstrate to the public that the party was managed according to democratic principles. Mair thus acknowledged that in this respect and to reflect the image of a mass party, as well as for

fundraising and officer occupation purposes, parties still valued their members (1994: 14-15). However, the change of emphasis implied would potentially impact on participatory incentives.

2. Member Incentives

Any re-calculation of the costs and benefits of members would impact on individual motivations. Incentive frameworks have been developed to assess them. Clark and Wilson (1961) classified incentives in three ways. Firstly, the material benefit of becoming a councillor or MP, or perhaps receiving the award of a business contract. Secondly, solidary incentives that accrued through the emotive benefits of enjoying the process of politics. These involved canvassing, social events and generally making a contribution with like-minded individuals. Thirdly, the politically relevant purposive incentives, which related to policy or ideological concerns and the desire to work to ensure the party was returned to government. Their classification was superseded by the more comprehensive framework of Seyd and Whiteley (1992) and Whiteley et al (1994). They began with the rational choice problem of why individuals should wish to participate to achieve a collective political outcome when there was the option to free ride on the efforts of others. Olson (1965) provided a solution to this 'paradox of participation' through selective incentives only available to members; these were process, outcome and ideological in nature. In addition, altruistic reasons, emotional or affective attachments to a party and social norms were integrated into their model (Whiteley et al 1994: 80-9). Whichever approach was used, it could be inferred that leadership strategies to undermine the active members would have serious implications for the attractiveness of both purposive and solidary incentives.

A reduction of purposive incentives changes the relationship between activists and leaders, thereby undermining the notion of exchange. This was articulated by Strom (1990). His basis was the assumption that leaders were political entrepreneurs seeking office. For this, they needed to accommodate the preferences of extra-parliamentary organisations. The extent of this recompense was a function of the labour-capital campaign mix and the ability of leaders to substitute professionals for volunteers; the

former receiving financial compensation in contrast to the latter's mix of incentives noted above. However, the rewards accruing to volunteers were typically 'prospective', realised only when the party was in government, thereby providing leaders with the possibility of reneging on promises once elected. Equally, members could under-deliver if they suspected the likelihood of such behaviour. Strom thus concluded that both 'have a mutual interest in mechanisms that allow party leaders to make credible compensation commitments to activists' (1990: 574-7). Electoral-professional tendencies weakened the membership's part in this relationship. However, these would enhance the potential for tension, as Ware observed that in an era of declining membership, those that remained were often motivated by purposive incentives, and hence were becoming less manageable than in the past (1992: 91). The key test remains candidate selection. Whiteley and Seyd maintained that 'as a reward for their campaigning, members have been given the power within their constituency parties to select parliamentary candidates and to send resolutions to party conferences' (2002: 27).

3. Membership Strength

Party membership level, the traditional indicator of strength, has persistently declined since the 1950s. In their study of European parties, Mair and van Biezen found widespread evidence of disengagement from party politics and a 'general unwillingness to rely on existing institutional structures to represent and articulate what appear to be increasingly particularised demands' (2001: 14). In Britain, membership of the Conservative Party declined from 2.8 million in 1953 to a mere 247,000 in 2006 and Labour followed suit with figures of 1.0 million and 182,000 respectively. Raw numbers however, offer an incomplete picture. Katz and Mair (1992) suggested the ratio of members to the electorate (M/E) provided a better measure of density. In this, between 1964 and 1998, British parties collectively declined from 9.36 to 1.92, revealing them to be close to the bottom of a league of European democracies (Katz and Mair 1992: 344; Mair and van Biezen 2001: 16). Furthermore, Seyd and Whiteley cited evidence of a de-energisation process at work amongst existing members of both main parties, with a marked reduction in time-consuming activities such as canvassing and meetings (Seyd and Whiteley 1992; Whiteley et al 1994; Whiteley and Seyd 1998a/b; Seyd and Whiteley

2004). This was linked to their explanation for membership decline, which distinguished between structural and choice-based reasons. The former related to social factors such as family and work pressure, and the availability of other leisure pursuits; these were essentially outside of the control of parties. However, they argued that choice-based explanations, relating to the incentives offered by parties, were a better predictor, to the extent of suggesting the trends can be reversed through provision of the right incentives (Seyd and Whiteley 2004: 357). Consequently, periodic membership drives tended to be 'more symbolic than real' (Seyd 1999: 384). Indeed, Whiteley and Seyd (1998b) noted a new type of member consistent with this view, one who identified with the party and donated money, but who expected others to perform the activities. Hence, party leaders seemed to be tacitly accepting decline, their widely announced commitment to boosting membership therefore being questionable.

This suggested an additional question concerning the threshold level of members needed to run a local party effectively. Scarrow (2000) argued that although decline in numbers had impaired local constituencies' communications ability, they contributed in other ways. In line with Epstein, she suggested that organisational strength should be measured in terms of the tasks to be undertaken, such as filling local government candidacies and achieving an acceptable level of constituency geographical coverage, and the resource capacity to accomplish them. A lack of members could be counterbalanced by professionals, who filled gaps where local organisations were not fully equipped. Seyd and Whiteley though, contested her argument in that it rendered parties susceptible to the greater influence of political entrepreneurs and special interests, to the detriment of responsible government. It would undermine parties' ability to discharge their linkage function with voters effectively (1995: 467; 2004: 363-4).

Organisational strength could also be assessed by its composition. Party members were not a homogeneous group. Instead, they possessed a variety of educational and occupational skills, opinions and personalities (Seyd and Whiteley 1992; Whiteley et al 1994). Moreover, Heidar observed that activists could be distinguished by the degree of time devoted to the party, the type of involvement in terms of, for example, socialiser,

ideologue or office holder, and the quality of that involvement as indicated through listener, speaker or political achiever (1994: 61). Consequently, they combined and functioned in unpredictable ways, which in amalgamation with the equally heterogeneous parliamentary and professional groups led to a complex political system of 'individuals and sub-groups with highly diverse motivations and aspirations' (Maor 1997: 134). Hence, for von Beyme 'the image of parties acting as monolithic units is a fiction which cannot be sustained' (1985: 224); a view which contradicted McKenzie.

In addition, Drucker identified a collective party ethos in terms of a set of values which emanated from the experiences of its primary group of supporters. For the Conservative Party, this manifested itself in a middle class outlook, which was an important indicator of its operations and relationships (1979: 9-11). This perspective and the degree of internal diversity suggested a potential for stubborn resistance to central initiatives to wrest control of local affairs. Unlike Labour, the party had never formalised the relationship between its constituent parts and importantly, had always functioned 'on the basis of accepted practice rather than formal rules', in contrast again to the explicit approach adopted by Labour at most levels in the party (Drucker 1979: 17). The 1998 party constitution, which included the replacement of the Model Rules by a new set of largely mandatory ones, thus posed a clear challenge to the Conservative ethos. In practice, much would depend upon the capacity of the centre for enforcement of initiatives on a voluntary body of people. Here, Drucker contrasts Labour with an army: central command in the latter would result in the merging of doctrine and ethos. However, this was not the case within parties, where relationships between the various party components differed. Hence, behaviour in the constituencies differed from that of MPs and party headquarters, thereby rendering the character and expectations of each different (1979: 18). This offered potential for internal tensions over the core democratic activities performed by the local parties.

4. The Democratic Responsibilities of Members

Candidate selection was the most critical, and visible, test of intra-party relations. Strategically, Schattschneider argued that 'the nature of the nominating procedure

determines the nature of the party; he who can make nominations is the owner of the party' (1942: 64). Given their limited influence over policy, the ability of local parties to select their own parliamentary candidate was jealously guarded, and indeed, could be regarded as a primary source of leverage (Shaw 2001: 35). Hence, for the Conservative Party, in 1988 Denver stated: 'there are unlikely to be any successful attempts to increase central influence over selection ... any diminution of local control of candidate selection would be strenuously resisted by party members' (1988: 69). It would be seen as a challenge not just to local autonomy, but also to the whole meritocratic ethos of the party. However, the need for competent, and importantly representative, candidates in each winnable seat became a contentious matter. The relative lack of women, black and ethnic minority candidates was politically sensitive following the positive steps taken by Labour in this regard and its subsequent attacks on the Conservatives for being complacent. The localities were seen as frustrating the leadership renewal strategy, as historically they were reluctant to broaden their selection beyond the stereotype middle-class, middle-aged, white male (Ingle 1987: 63). The party hierarchy had gradually increased its influence over candidate selection through mechanisms such as the Parliamentary Assessment Board, the candidate 'Approved List' and central control of by-election procedures, but initiatives consistently stopped short of any serious attempt at curtailing local choice. However, David Cameron's ascendancy to the leadership in 2005 brought fresh thinking. His introduction of a priority list of highly qualified candidates, half of whom were women, and new rules governing selection options, including American style open primaries, threw down the gauntlet to the constituencies to comply with the centre's requirements. This development could thus open a new phase in central-local relations, where continuing local autonomy became conditional on meeting central conformance criteria.

Members now had an enhanced role in the selection of the party leader. Labour had moved to an electoral college consisting of the parliamentary party, trade unions and constituencies, with an inclusive commitment to providing each individual with a vote. This brought a belated Conservative response. Traditionally, it was a parliamentary party responsibility reflecting the party's origins. Prior to 1965, there was no formal process:

the leader emerged from a consultation procedure. External criticism though, led to the adoption of formal rules operated by the backbench 1922 Committee. However, following the 1997 defeat, *Fresh Future* enshrined membership involvement. The parliamentary party was charged with conducting a succession of ballots to reduce the field to two candidates, who then submitted themselves to a one-member-one-vote ballot of grassroots members (Conservative Party 1998a: 21). Their being frozen out of the process had long been a source of discontent (Alderman 1998: 3), but the size of the defeat, the internal fallout, and the fact that the Conservatives were the only party with such a restricted franchise influenced change. Even so, members had no role in the vote of confidence in the existing leader, neither did they have any powers of nomination of leadership candidates.

The limited choice led Mair to describe intra-party democratisation as 'meaningless and/or illusory' (1994: 16). Moreover, Alderman concluded the reforms to the leadership process were 'more of a tactical manoeuvre to preserve MPs' power than a massive surrender of it' (1999: 269). The process though, was fairly prolonged, possessing the potential to visibly display the party's divisions. Denham (2009) stressed that it rendered it difficult for a unity candidate to emerge, as he would have to declare at the outset. Moreover, it could produce a leader whom the majority of MPs had not voted for or who was attached to a particular faction. Hence, against the spirit of democracy, *A 21st Century Party* (2005a) proposed to bring it back under the sole control of the parliamentary party. Its defeat by the National Conservative Convention, largely comprising constituency chairmen, suggested that the membership possessed some teeth. Organisationally, leadership candidates were now obliged to cultivate grass roots links and speak at regional conferences to enhance their chances. They would have to campaign strongly in the constituencies, particularly those well endowed with members (McSweeney 1999: 482). Importantly, it was in the interests of those with leadership ambitions to develop long term relations with local activists. Nevertheless, for the victor, despite having been elected by the membership, he or she did not become more accountable to it. Instead the winner's position could be strengthened by the greater legitimacy provided. Denham and O'Hara (2007) however, contended that

democratisation in this way had little impact. Ultimately, the leader's performance was judged by MPs; it was they alone who could remove that legitimacy.

Conclusion

This chapter discussed the primary academic literature pertaining to the distribution of power within political parties. The models identified, especially those concerning party evolution, were essentially abstractions and ideal types, and hence were not fully realisable in practice. They attempted to simplify a complex reality and explain the direction in which party organisations were moving. However, because of this, such models were often very influential: 'catch-all', 'electoral-professional', 'cartel' and 'franchise' have all found favour in the political lexicon and/or have influenced the thinking of commissions and parties. The Conservative Party, for instance, wanted to introduce the pure form of Carty's franchise contract. Therefore, it was important that a critical approach was adopted accordingly.

The oligarchy slant was the starting point; it conceived the notion of power between the centre and periphery as being one of struggle. However, scholars typically adopted a top-down perspective conversant with political competition at the national level. The local, organisational outlook was overlooked, seemingly on the grounds of its unimportance. This was equally reflected in the evolutionary literature, where activists were often presented as a potential constraint on party leaders' attempts to adapt their organisations to changing environmental conditions. Nevertheless, Porter's 'five forces' model enabled a reappraisal, by collating into a single framework important developments pointing to a renewed role for local parties. The conclusion though, suggested that they were in need of central co-ordination for effective performance in the modern political environment. The implications of this were seen in the final section on party membership, which showed that it was undergoing change both in terms of local strength and activities.

The introductory chapter provided an overview of the Conservative Party. It had long considered itself to be the natural party of government and the party for the whole nation (Drucker 1979: 117). To be suddenly confronted with a lengthy period of opposition was

therefore a shock. *Fresh Future* was the initial organisational response, but it was followed by other initiatives. The party thus had to give more attention to what Gamble termed the 'politics of support' in the country, by building an organisation to compete more effectively. It was temporarily relieved of the 'politics of power' apparent in government. Nevertheless, it was the task of leaders to reconcile the two. In so doing, they operated under constraints meaning that they were to some extent prisoners of their party and its traditions as well as of democracy as a whole (1974: 7). Importantly, resistance to change was believed to be endemic within Conservative thinking and activity (Girvin 1994: 721; Butler and Kavanagh 2002: 42; Kelly 2002: 41). Local autonomy was a constraint, in this respect, to positive party evolution. Chapter two will begin the task of examining how the leadership change initiative has impacted upon this autonomy and hence on the recovery from electoral failure. It will do so by assessing the local party organisation in terms of its strategy, structure and people.

[1] McKenzie noted the party conference of 1950 where the voluntary party had a decisive influence in committing the leadership to a target of 300,000 new homes per year (page 197). The conference of 1987 had a similar impact regarding the introduction of the 'poll' tax.

[2] The National Policy Forum was designed to provide members with an opportunity for policy discussion and influence prior to the main conference, but disputes over for example, pensions, suggested it was ineffectual (Kelly 2001: 331-2). The Joint Policy Committee was charged with overseeing the new policy process. It operated under heavy guidance from the leadership and Labour headquarters (Russell 2005 chapter six).

[3] In the six general elections between 1951 and 1970, the third placed Liberal Party won 6, 6, 6, 9, 12 and 6 seats respectively.

[4] Parties enjoyed: free candidate election address postage; 'Short money', designed to assist opposition parties in the House of Commons and the more limited 'Cranborne money', which helped the two leading parties in the House of Lords; an allocation of television media time for Party Political/Election broadcasts, estimated to be worth around £68m for the 2001 election (Grant 2005); a Policy Development Fund introduced by PPERA; and extra resources made available to MPs to undertake local case work, which could be construed as a form of electoral expense benefiting the incumbent (Gay 2005).

[5] Detterbeck's study addressed cartel behaviour in four western democracies: Britain, Germany, Denmark and Switzerland.

[6] The Conservative Party did, however, willingly accept the policy development grant introduced by PPERA. An expansion of state funding was an option being considered through the Hayden Phillips' report (2007) and discussions with the parties. The Conservative Party was an active participant in this respect (see chapter three).

[7] The *A 21st Century Party* proposals, outlining the franchise arrangements, were presented to the local parties as a response to the 2005 election defeat. They were eventually omitted from the Constitutional College vote (Bale 2010: 267), thereby permitting the centre to try to implement them on a piecemeal basis. It is questionable how far it has succeeded with this strategy since then.

[8] As noted in the Introduction, with the exception of a Europe policy ballot, which achieved a 60% turnout, membership response was lethargic.

Chapter Two

The Local Conservative Party Organisation

A primary aim of *Fresh Future* was 'to produce a modern, effective and campaigning political force across the whole country' (Conservative Party 1998a: 11). *Fresh Future* was the cornerstone of the Conservative Party's organisational renewal, its provisions articulated formally in the subsequent 1998 constitution. It was also a direct challenge to the notion of local autonomy. This chapter examines the impact and assesses the party organisation both in terms of the distribution of power and of improving organisational effectiveness. The results have implications for party evolution, which will be discussed in the conclusion.

The political science literature tends to discuss organisation in terms of the traditional variables of strategy, structure and membership numbers; organisational renewal is examined accordingly. However, Peters and Waterman argued that organisational effectiveness equally required attention to implementation, such that 'any intelligent approach to organising had to encompass, and treat as interdependent, at least seven variables.' These were not only the hard elements of strategy and structure, but also the softer management style, systems and procedures; staff or people, skills, and guiding concepts or shared values (1982: 4-11). Their model, known as the McKinsey 7-S Framework, is shown in diagram 2.1. It stresses the 'interconnectedness' of the variables, with the implication that management failure in one or more of these would most likely lead to sub-optimal performance (Waterman et al 1980: 272).[1] It can therefore be asserted that positive engagement with an organisation's human resources is essential for effective organisational performance: change requires not just restructuring, but also a rejuvenation of its people. In this, the model has sustained over time a reputation for conducting thorough organisational analysis (Mullins 2005: 961). The 7-S Framework thus permits a broader analysis of the Conservative Party, incorporating the softer people-related issues. As such, it enables a more nuanced view of management structures and power. This chapter will show that reform has embraced both political and organisational dimensions, but that it resulted in an inefficient and unbalanced organisation. Local autonomy has

essentially become operational rather than strategic, but remains in diluted form for activist motivation.

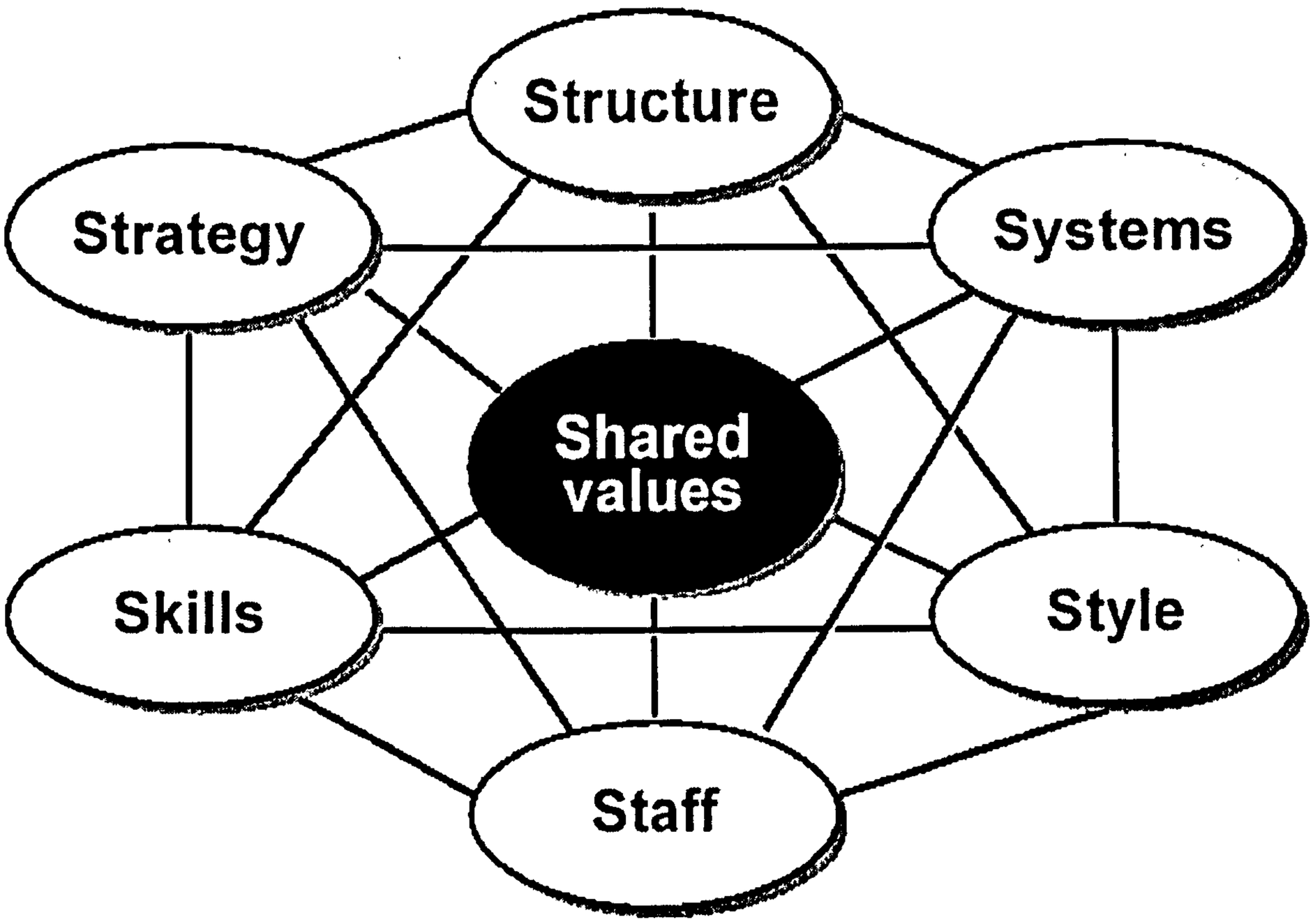
Strategy

The strategy of a Conservative constituency association was derived from its purpose. This has always been depicted in electoral terms, as now embodied in the party constitution:

> The objects of the association shall be to sustain and promote the objects and values of the party in the parliamentary constituency of ..... ("the constituency"); to provide an effective campaigning organisation in the constituency; to secure the return of Conservative candidates at elections; and to raise the necessary funds to achieve these objectives; to contribute to the central funds of the party (Conservative Party 1998b: 27).

Strategy involved the penetration of the local electoral market (the constituency) by achieving competitive differentiation. Local parties had no executive product or policy development role, except in local government. Moreover, they did not engage in market development in neighbouring constituencies; although they were encouraged to provide additional help winnable seats.

Diagram 2.1. The McKinsey 7-S Framework



Source: Peters, T.J. and Waterman, R.H. Jr. *In Search of Excellence* (1982:). (Diagram sourced from: valuebasedmanagement.net)

Maxwell Fyfe (1949) described local parties as electoral machines. Activists were believed to concur and it was certainly the opinion of the parliamentary party (Ingle 1987: 61). Evidence from the constituencies was in accord: 'that machine exists for one purpose and that is to elect the MP ... if you have any other purpose whatsoever, you might lose'.[2] Some extended it to include local councillors and to maintain the party's profile with the public, but the essence was the same. The renaming of Conservative Central Office as Conservative Campaign Headquarters (CCHQ) in 2004 substantiated it. Value creation was a function of the constituency's electoral performance, rather than any wider political achievement. Others expressed a preference for 'political machine', which subsumed the electoral perspective as the primary component in a broader framework which included information communication and social roles. The latter was recognised as part of the fabric of local Conservatism (Ball 1994b). National Conservative messages required local codification to accommodate not just geographical variations, but also whether the main competitor was Labour or Liberal Democrat. However, purpose was also interpreted as the identification and articulation of political issues important to the local community and which could not be effectively managed from London. Many in Somerton and Frome for example, believed it germane to act as a form of internal pressure group to ensure that countryside and agricultural issues remained on the political agenda. This broader perspective was consistent with why individuals joined the Conservative Party, and gave interpretation to purposive incentives. It also had potential to dilute the leadership's aim of aligning national and local interests, which re-structuring hoped to achieve.

Structure

Senior identified organisations as 'social systems' that structure people and process. Structure involved responsibility allocation, activity grouping and their co-ordination and control, but the social element also acknowledged an informal structure, built upon friendships, interest groupings and political alliances (2002: 70). The Conservative Party's solution to these structural issues was inherently political. The need for organisational flexibility was a source of frustration to the centre, underlined by the continuing presence of constituency parties: 'the reason they maintain their fundamental

importance is because parliamentary constituencies continue to be the building blocks of our parliamentary democracy'.[3] This thinking was reinforced by *Fresh Future* (1998a: 10). However another official added: 'if we were starting afresh, we wouldn't start with this system ... we certainly wouldn't start with so many constituency officers around the country ... but we are where we are and at least the party is trying to fit local circumstances'.[4] This view has long been accepted centrally. Steps have been taken to group constituency associations (see chapter four), but the underlying local structure remained quasi-fixed; it was difficult for the leadership to alter it to match strategic initiatives. The relatively static nature of local structures can be seen in the organisation charts shown in diagrams 2.2 and 2.3, which depict the Conservative Party position prior to, and after, the implementation of the *Fresh Future* reform programme. The charts delineate the formal relationships and chains of command, but the dotted lines additionally reveal the difficulties in this regard inherent in voluntary organisations, especially those that possess an emotive base such as politics. Hence, such relationships are often advisory or specialist in nature; this has been customary within Conservative Party politics. Nevertheless, a key feature of diagram 2.3 is that the party leader is now formally the leader over the entire party, thereby providing central professionals with vastly more scope to exercise formal control. This will be a recurrent theme, beginning in this section with an examination of structure through the division of responsibilities, local co-ordination and accountability.

Diagram 2.2. Organisation Chart Prior to the *Fresh Future* Reforms

National Level

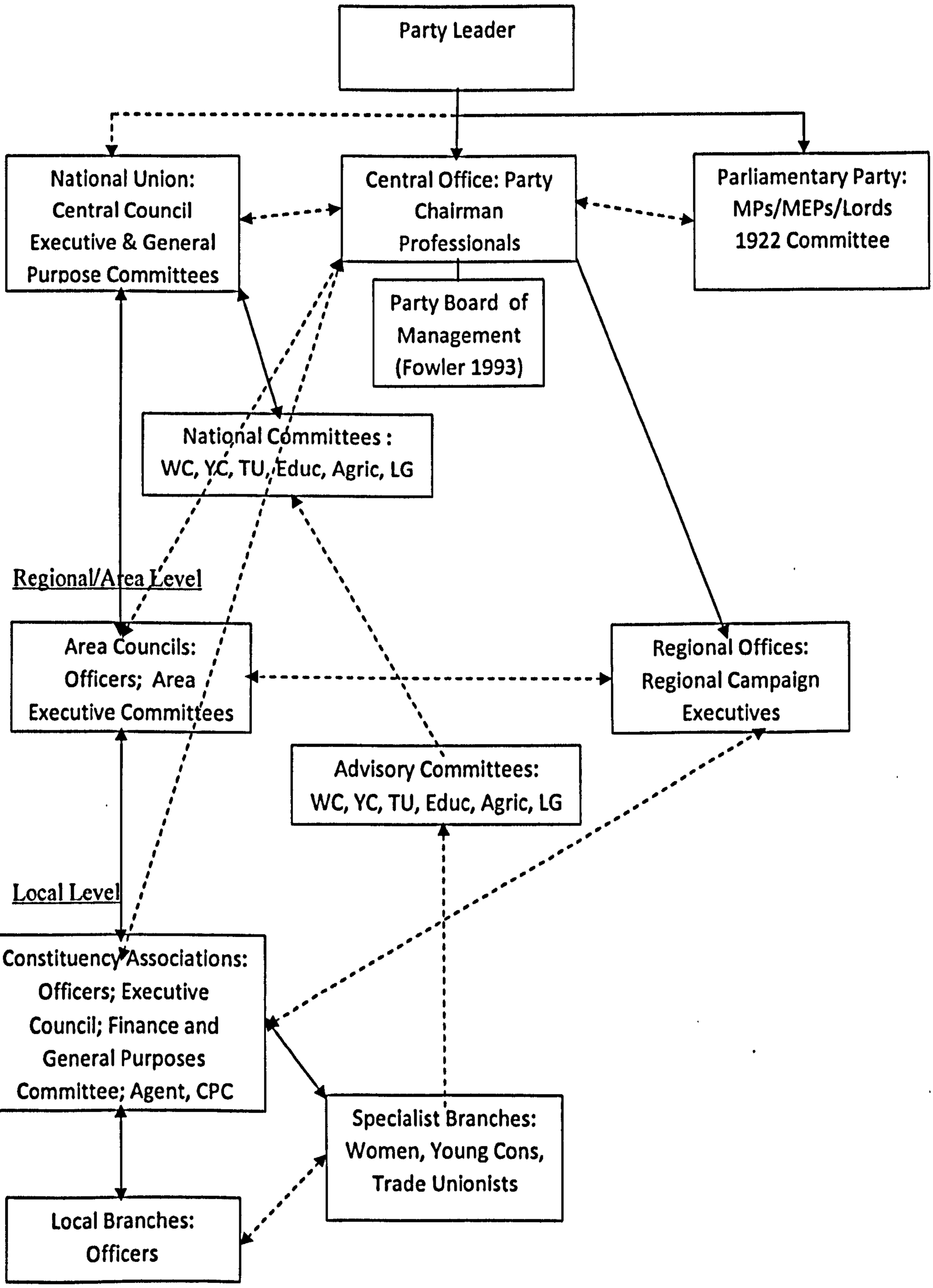
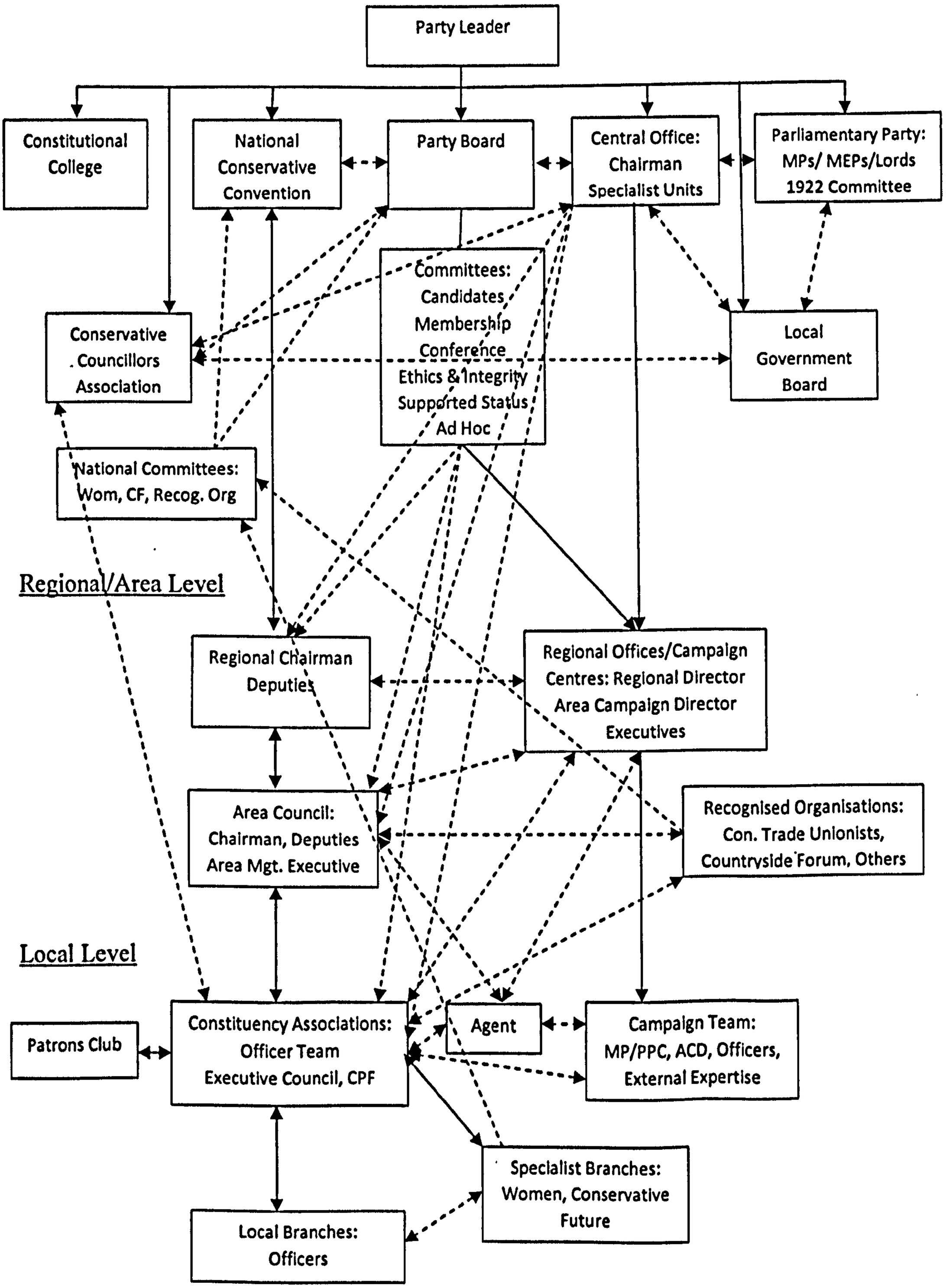


Diagram 2.3. Organisation Chart Following the *Fresh Future* Reforms



Key to Diagrams

Lines

⟶	Direct relationship or line management: formal chain of command
⟷	Direct two-way relationship
⇢	Looser one-way relationship: functional, specialist, advisory
⇠⇢	Looser two-way relationship
——	Subsidiary unit of higher entity

Abbreviations

WC/Wom	Women's Committee/Women's National Committee
YC/CF	Young Conservatives/Conservative Future
TU	Conservative Trade Unionists
Educ.	Education Committee
Agric.	Agricultural Committee
LG	Local Government Committee
CPC/CPF	Conservative Political Centre/Conservative Policy Forum
Recog. Org.	Recognised Organisations
Mgt.	Management
ACD	Area Campaign Director

Sources

Diagram 2.2: (1) Norton, P. and Aughey, A. (1981) *Conservatives and Conservatism.* London: Temple Smith. (2) Tether, P. (1996b) 'The party in the country two: members and organisation', in Norton, P. (ed) *The Conservative Party.* London: Prentice-Hall/Harvester Wheatsheaf. (3) Garner, R and Kelly, R (1998) *British Political Parties Today, Second Edition,* Manchester: Manchester University Press.

Diagram 2.3: (1) Conservative Party (1998a) *The Fresh Future: The Conservative Party Renewed.* London: the Conservative Party. (2) Conservative Party (1998b) *Constitution of the Conservative Party.* London: the Conservative Party. (3) Personal knowledge of the author.

1. Division of Responsibilities

Fresh Future introduced a revised local structure with streamlined decision-making, designed to create a more effective campaigning force (Conservative Party 1998a: 11), but a comparison of the two organisation charts strongly questioned this. Considering organisation generally, it needs to be acknowledged that there is a lack of detailed information in the academic literature pertaining to the position of the Conservative Party prior to the 1998 reforms. Nevertheless, there is sufficient to enable an assertion that the unwieldy body that was the National Union (Ball 1994a; Tether 1996b), was replaced by an even more elaborate organisational arrangement. The new structure embodied control: it shows the party board extending its reach across many areas of the party. Activities that were previously the preserve of the National Union, such as candidates, and conference, were subsumed into the board's committee structure. The result was a far more powerful entity than the 'Board of Party Management' incarnation established by party chairman Norman Fowler in 1993. However, far from being streamlined accordingly, the organisation has actually mushroomed. Structurally, the number of different party units and the complexity of the web of relationships that have materialised pointed to an inward-looking organisation which is in no way consonant with the desire to strengthen the local 'electoral machines'.

The campaigning deficiency is further evidenced in diagram 2.3 by the preservation of the distinctiveness between the voluntary and professional wings, so that a configuration of parallel structures was reinforced. This was manifested both at, and above, the constituency level. Immediately above the local association, an area tier was charged with enhancing local performance through co-ordinating activities and efficient resource management. This consisted of three elected officers: an area chairman and two deputy chairman responsible for political and campaigning, and membership and fundraising respectively. This mirrored the constituency association structure. Above them was a series of regional co-ordinators, again comprising three elected officers with similar titles. Their task was to co-ordinate activities in the areas (Conservative Party 1998b: 8-10). The professionals were set alongside. There were a number of regional campaign centres, headed by professional regional directors, appointed by, and paid for, by CCHQ.

These managers were supplemented by area campaign directors, whose function was to co-ordinate target seat strategies, and by regional staff. In the voluntary party, *Fresh Future* clarified the communication chain by confirming the area executive as the primary link between the association and the central board (Conservative Party 1998a: 12-13). However, the emphasis was switched to the regional chairmen, who retained a powerful overseeing role. This change between area and regional authority reveals the implicit weakness of organisational charts in depicting relationships and organisational nuances, as diagram 2.3 does not capture the diminished position of the area executive. It was the regional chairmen who attended important meetings in London and who sat on the new regional boards. A Northern Board for example, was established in January 2007 under the chairmanship of William Hague and another was planned for the South West. Some viewed these with scepticism: 'they get to raise and spend their own money, and each region has a project director to bring in money ... it's just a talking shop to make it look as though they are taking the north seriously ... it's just another layer ... whereas the reforms were supposed to get rid of layers, they've now doubled them'.[5]

In adopting a board approach, the Conservative Party was emulating the practice of the charity sector and becoming more business orientated. Nevertheless, by constructing an increasingly tall and hierarchical scalar chain of command, it was creating an organisational morass, which was meaningless to many activists. Many did not know the names of area and regional officers, and were in complete ignorance of those above them; typically it was the three senior association officers only who were wholly conversant with the structure. Even then, some saw their first point of contact as area, some the regional office and others simply went straight to CCHQ. Blondel noted that 'as parties grow in size and complexity, the relationship between the top and bottom of the hierarchy also becomes more complex' (1978: 148). The Conservative Party epitomised this. There was no direct line from the constituencies to the management board at CCHQ. Indeed, one senior local officer asserted: 'central command is essential, but a lot is diffused in the middle, ideas are getting swamped ... get rid of the flabby middle and take it straight down ... if you can do that, you will be successful ... you get much more dynamic responses'.[6] Overall, the revised structure was designed to improve central co-ordination,

but the complexity, manifested in a plethora of roles, has rendered it more difficult. Moreover, whilst there was much communication between the voluntary party and the regional professionals, their parallel construction suggested that the party took a political approach to structure, and not one that enhanced organisational efficiency. It was though, a structure which rendered it easier for the centre to separate out local tasks. This separation will be analysed further in later chapters, but needs first to be recognised at the basic level, locally.

The constituencies were obliged to accept a new decision-making structure. The association chairman, traditionally a powerful figure, continued at the apex in an enhanced role, supported by the agent where appropriate, and by two deputy chairmen responsible for the tasks noted above (Conservative Party 1998a: 10-11). Importantly, the association's affairs were managed by a small, focused officer team, meeting on a monthly or bi-monthly basis. This replaced the old Finance and General Purposes Committee. The wider executive council, consisting of the officers and representatives from the branches and constituency committees, remained the ultimate decision-making body, but it was the officer team that possessed day-to-day responsibility. In particular, it was the three senior officers who were focused upon by the professionals and CCHQ. Decision-making efficacy was strengthened by the presence of an agent, traditionally the catalyst for a vibrant organisation (Bealey at al 1965). He acted as the chief executive of the association and used his experience and skills to advise, to implement decisions taken by the executive council and to develop the association for the overall benefit of the party. His role was to set the template and agenda for the officer team to work to, but it also included member persuasion to accept central objectives.[7] This was given added spice by the centre's assumption of training responsibility and a development that saw agents being subject to annual appraisal by their regional director. Consequently, diagram 2.3 now depicts them separately from the constituency association structure. Ball identified the relationship between the agent, chairman and MP/PPC as being critical for electoral success; disputes could seriously undermine this (1994b: 269). In target seats, the professional area campaign director was now added to this triumvirate, thereby tipping the balance firmly towards the centre, at least for campaign purposes.

Professional infiltration of the localities was therefore taking place. Structurally, local autonomy was reduced to the appointment of discretionary personnel to the officer team. Somerton and Frome for example, totalled 10 officers including three area vice-chairmen, reflecting the geographical spread of the constituency. Cheltenham had eight, which included distribution and local government officers. The local agenda continued to address fundraising, membership, social and campaign matters; political discussion remained largely absent.

The local branch structure within associations was retained, albeit with some consolidation. The rationale behind its maintenance was the significance of councillors; they were important to local vibrancy and activist morale generally; many members had personal links to them. Critically though, they were identified as the foundation for obtaining an MP. Branches essentially reflected electoral geography, being ideally attached to wards, although in rural locations the scattered nature of the population sometimes meant polling districts within wards. The branch was the basic unit of Conservative politics. It was where politics mattered to many members. It was where they joined or were assigned, and where much of the voluntary work was undertaken (Ingle 1987: 60). Fundraising events were organised to meet quotas agreed with the association head and electioneering was co-ordinated. Branches elected their own officers and committees, but possessed no executive power (Ball 1994b: 273).

Although membership decline led some to conclude that 'they have had their day,' most area and local officers, and regional professionals, were fiercely protective of branches for their political role in party identification and as a locus for recruitment, as well as for social cohesion. Associations recognised a need to revive weak and lapsed branches and to establish new ones; in target seats, a branch in every ward was the aim. Branch balance though, was a problem. Some were 'moribund', where few people attended meetings and typically discussed the same things. They were usually located in electorally hostile areas, but the evidence also pointed to better ones. Derby, for example, listed 16 in 2006, but half contained under 10 members. The implication was that the full constituency was seldom represented on local decision-making committees. Executive council minutes

further revealed problems in finding branch chairmen and cancellations of social fundraising events.[8] One branch in Somerton and Frome was revived by a dedicated individual, but would seemingly return to a dormant state without such commitment.[9] Preventing staleness was thus difficult. The situation was further exacerbated by traditional local rivalries, commonly based upon personal animosities underpinned by 'thwarted ambitions', a characteristic of organisations containing voluntary activists (Ball 1994b: 269, 273). These were slowly diminishing, but 'troubleshooting' remained a key role of area and regional officials, to their obvious frustration. Branch dynamism was hence likened to a 'living organism' in which even relatively strong ones could depend upon one or two people, so that they tended to ebb and flow through time.[10]

Membership decline also affected specialist branches. These were typically for women and young people, but sometimes bodies such as coffee clubs were so designated. A professional noted: 'in the 50s and 60s, we had an enormous membership, so they formed lots of committees to give people things to do, to get them involved, the political committee, the ladies committee, the lunch committee ... the problem until recently was that all those committees still existed, but there was nobody there ... one person on the trade union committee, so he got on the executive and two in the area so one was on a national committee ... that all went in 1998, but there are still ladies representing the women's committee, but gradually it's going'.[11] There was evidence that many constituencies retained women's committees, but with falling numbers.[12] They were more concerned with social activities than political concerns. In Somerton and Frome, its activity was limited to a major fundraising event, the Autumn Fair. Young Conservatives was re-launched as Conservative Future to attract young people keen to serve their political apprenticeship. Provision was made for branches in constituencies (Conservative Party 1998a: 25-6), but success was patchy. The young Somerton and Frome PPC was eager to initiate one, but faced a difficult task given the nature of the constituency.

Overall branch weakness led to consolidation in some constituencies, though not without controversy. High Peak was the most radical, pruning its network through mergers from 24 to six. The received wisdom that this created poor constituency coverage and further

decline because the resultant larger, more cumbersome, committees looked after bigger areas, was not realised. Instead, closer communication and control by the officer team brought more social events and political activity, and healthy branch competition in membership and fundraising. This unexpectedly resulted in less need for constituency wide events. After numerous financial deficits, the association returned to profit and the larger branches brought greater canvassing 'critical mass', and hence impact. This showed a capacity for local innovation to improve performance; the gains at the 2007 local elections were a testament to this.[13] It also demonstrated effective local decision-making independent of the centre and the ability of the officer team to overcome initial activist resistance to a progressive proposal. The consolidated branch structure translated into a smaller executive council, which rendered it difficult to overturn the officer decisions. Derby achieved the same objective by reducing branch representation from two to one, though the vote was close.[14] Somerton and Frome merged some branches, but on an ad hoc basis, resulting in an unbalanced structure, with Frome in difficulties. Cheltenham, being more compact, possessed relatively few branches: seven. Here, innovation was reflected by officers twinning geographically weak branches with their stronger neighbours to share political activity and cover deliveries;[15] this permitted mutual political learning.[16] It might be expected that area and regional officials would be in favour of branch consolidation to achieve greater co-ordination and control. However, with the exception of non-winnable seats and redundant areas, the notion that 'small is beautiful' was advocated: 'its all about involving people, pulling people in'.[17] Branch consolidation could also founder because without local support it would lead to rivalries and animosity.[18] At this level, participation was thus preferred over efficiency.

A primary activity of branches was constituency coverage, which typically meant leaflet delivery to households (see chapter four). CCHQ recognised that good local co-ordination was needed to construct extensive delivery networks. It required contacts throughout the constituency; in every village in rural areas.[19] Such networks were social as well as political in nature. They consisted of both members and supporters. The latter either believed it unnecessary to make the full commitment to join, or who were for example, local traders not wishing to reveal any political allegiance. Their contribution

was incalculable. In addition to assisting with communications, regular attendance at social events boosted fundraising and in rural areas particularly, they permitted reach to outlying areas. These networks were a fundamental component of local Conservatism, particularly amongst the elderly. They were growing in significance, but critically they were linked to, and largely constructed by, local councillors.

2. Local Co-ordination: The 'Pyramid'

The importance of local councillors and networks contributed to an intuitive feeling amongst many activists that the party was built from the bottom. Instead of the constituency association, as asserted by the leadership, it was the branch that was deemed as the basic building block of the party. High Peak, for example, argued that councillor gains followed an intensive campaign of leafleting, surveys and canvassing; they were not simply a reflection of the national political picture. Local success was believed to provide the foundation for future general election success, as councillors become known, generated branch activity and helped co-ordinate the campaign. They related to local people and could portray an integrated team with the PPC.[20] Defeat meant that local networks withered, branches fell apart and coverage waned. In this way, some activists pointed to a form of reverse co-ordination, with requests to the centre to support their locally conceived strategies.

The concept of organisational 'pyramid' was cited by a number of activists, area and regional officials. The councillor dimension meant that many of the former stressed that it peaked at the top, whilst the latter not surprisingly countered that any campaign - membership, fundraising or election - ultimately required higher co-ordination. Critical decisions originated high above the constituencies, initiatives being transmitted down through a 'cascade' process in which the branch structure was the final component; it was the local task to operationalise them. Whether this was undertaken at constituency or branch level was of no concern: 'I'm not fussed about which way they do it ... I'm not going to be prescriptive ... at the constituency level, they make their own judgements'.[21] Hence, the function of local people was strategy implementation; this was largely

accepted by senior local officers. Nevertheless, the dichotomy of feelings meant that co-ordination was not as straightforward as for a business organisation.

3. Accountability

The existence of parallel structures affected accountability, both within the localities, and in terms of their relationship with the central board. The striking observation was that democratic accountability was not generally a concern of activists; becoming the party of government was more crucial. Accountability though, was murky and imprecise. Locally, the officer team was accountable to the executive council and was elected each year at the annual general meeting (AGM). Hence: 'the process is clear and most people buy into it'.[22] Members had participation opportunities, but often one nomination only was received for each post, few being prepared to take on the senior positions. The importance of 'an agent to hold it all together and ensure the jobs are done' was thus stressed.[23] Indeed, one viewed it as his task to find and develop individuals to hold the key offices: 'with the ability to carry on the roles they are expected to achieve ... an association without a constituency agent sometimes ends up with less able, less qualified officers'.[24] Despite this, at least in target seats, officers either achieved or they were dispensed with by a combination of local and higher official pressure.[25] It was evident that voluntary association officers had, through the party constitution, become more accountable to higher officials for their decisions and actions.

Accountability of councillors was less clear. Ultimately, it was to the electorate, but they could be removed by the association for political mistakes. Some survived with the minimum of effort, whilst others were deposed through personal disputes. Concern was expressed over the quality of councillors, good ones felt to be in the minority. Moreover, the councillor group was a distinct entity, so that a situation could be reached whereby neither fully understood the other's position. High Peak encountered such a problem and addressed it by the chairman and council leader sitting on each other's committees.[26] There was inevitably some overlap in personnel, but for managerial purposes the councillor group was separate, and consequently enjoyed some autonomy. In Cheltenham, most of the association officers were councillors, so the issue did not arise.

Nevertheless, the question of whether councillors should be separated or integrated within the association was apposite.

The central management board appeared to be accountable to nobody, except perhaps the leadership through the party chairman. The 1998 constitution charged it with 'the oversight of the management and administration of constituency associations' (Conservative Party 1998b: 7). It was given ultimate responsibility over a wide range of activities, enabling it to encroach at will on local affairs. Kelly maintained that given its powers to co-ordinate and discipline the constituencies, it was not surprising that members were alienated and that it won 'few friends' locally (2003a: 112). However, whilst a number of activists agreed with his sentiments regarding an accountability deficit, there was scant concern locally. At best, the board was described as intolerant, but most of the criticism was directed at its performance; for example, in its perceived unwillingness to listen to local concerns and suggestions, and in its role as a provider of central services. In particular, there was no mechanism for auditing its level of effectiveness: 'it's more of an understanding at the centre of what the capacity of the organisation is and how it delivers ... if you want to get out a national piece of paper in the constituencies, there is a lead time, particularly if that message is to be localised to a greater or lesser degree ... understanding what the strengths of the local organisations are and using them'.[27] Nevertheless, to area and regional officials, it kept the party moving and made the necessary campaign policy decisions and appointments. It took action only where constituencies were perceived to be under-performing, but on its terms. For this role, there was also support locally, as taking a lead from the business world, there was a need for some authority. One local officer likened it to the civil service, therefore no requirement for elections.[28]

The Campaign for Conservative Party Democracy took the opposite position, but the proprietors were regarded by professionals as being out of touch with reality: 'they start with a fairly entrenched position and are often just articulating their own opinions and prejudices. Politics is a hugely fast moving environment ... it isn't practical to have Greek style democracy'.[29] Board membership required individuals with the necessary abilities

and time, so that a wholly elected approach might result in inappropriate people. Dissenters were perceived to be on the fringe: 'a small minority of people that have got excited about something which the vast majority of members don't care about'.[30] Many had no time for such sentiments when much work needed to be done for electoral success. As one area officer put it: 'why don't members kick up a stink?' [31] The board was either not seen to impact upon what happened locally, or else activists resignedly maintained that they had lived with central initiatives for years and simply ignored them; for example: 'the board makes suggestions and we interpret them as we wish'.[32] It was only when the centre was seen to be interfering locally that upset was caused. Many members though, were simply unaware of what happened above the association level.

Parallel structures meant a clear distinction between volunteers and paid staff regarding accountability. Democracy underpinned the former, but professionals were governed by traditional line management practices. This reflected a political settlement regarding organisational structure. Division of responsibilities was inefficient and lacked adequate flexibility, ultimately being designed to keep the volunteers motivated. Democracy in the localities was also germane for public consumption. Central co-ordination of the localities was improved, but remained imperfect. This was further apparent in the organisation's systems.

Systems

Systems refer to the procedures that enable the organisation to operate effectively and will be examined in terms of decision-making, communication, performance and rules. Local weakness could also result in the application of supported status.

1. Decision-making

Structural reform was designed to improve local decision-making by relegating the executive council to the task of approving officer proposals. As such, it highlighted the tension between the need for efficient decision-making and the quest to involve as many people as possible, as it was the members who facilitated political outcomes.[33] The officer responsibility was to prepare an annual strategic plan containing objectives and

activities such as leaflet campaigns, membership drives, finance and so forth for the forthcoming year (Conservative Party 1998b: 28). In Cheltenham, this was agreed by officers and endorsed by the executive; amendments could be made, but rarely interfered with the broad thrust. The executive thus performed an important information function to maintain commitment to the association's direction.[34] Operationally, executive minutes revealed a formal approach of reports and discussion by officers and branch representatives, in a manner similar to a public sector meeting. Effectiveness could be hampered by officer non-attendance. Moreover, specific issues such as joint working were delegated to sub-committees. The process though, was often frustrating, as deliberations could result in a 'vacuum' with much 'dithering', leading to, for example, a shortfall in campaign funds.[35] Somerton and Frome embodied much executive council decision-making. A consensus was usually reached, with officers' recommendations upheld, but sometimes only after lengthy and fractious discussion. With 23 branches, 40 or 50 people could attend the executive: 'many with their own pet agendas, so that trying to reach agreement on one issue can be difficult, and renders the process unwieldy'.[36] Despairingly for the officers, a protracted debate occurred over the raising of the annual membership subscription from £15 to £25 in line with a central edict. It happened when the newly selected PPC was attending her first executive council, thereby presenting a poor collective impression.[37] The evidence thus revealed different decision-making styles across constituencies, which were shaped by historical precedent and personalities. They rendered professional co-ordination of local efforts harder.

In its desire for improved co-ordination, the centre preferred control by the officer teams. There was a desire for 'small group decisions which then filter out', as the centre was adamant that 'considering what's at stake (electoral success), you can't allow a situation to develop where you get important decisions, such as the sharing of facilities, overthrown by the executive'.[38] Critically, an analogy was presented of the three senior officers 'forming a strong nucleus' and 'sticking to their brief' in the manner of a small business.[39] This was reinforced by central instruction guides, detailing the objectives, roles and responsibilities of these officers.[40] A strong chairman could also manipulate or guide committee decision-making in a preferred direction. He could still set an agenda for

achievement during his tenure. In addition, there was evidence of a capacity to circumvent the executive council to realise necessary change. Decisions were taken with limited consultation and explained at a later date to the executive, at which point they were difficult to overturn. In Derby, the 1997 defeat left the association in a fairly moribund state, action being urgently required. Members generally accepted the restricted decision process as they could see progress being made, but as long as senior officers kept within accepted behaviour tolerances.[41] The lack of an agent was apparent here, and in High Peak where similar action was effected to improve a deteriorating position. It was difficult to conceive disregard for local democracy happening in Somerton and Frome, where tradition was important. In normal circumstances however, the consensual democratic approach was almost universally accepted as the only way of running a voluntary organisation without resorting to dictatorship: 'it is a good way of decision-making because it takes it down to the lowest possible level'.[42]

The focus of responsibility on the three senior officers led in practice, to many activists being largely omitted from the communications loop, so that they were often ignorant of party developments until after decisions had been effected. However, an agent asserted that generally: 'not that many significant decisions have to take place locally'; it was more the implementation of the constituency plan that formed the basis for discussion.[43] Local decision-making autonomy must now be seen in these terms.

2. Communication

Communication, explicitly the lack of, was a persistent problem in the Conservative Party and rankled a good number of activists. *Fresh Future* was supposed to bring improvement, but nowhere in the document or the constitution was it formally addressed. Communication discrepancies could, at least partially, be traced back to this failure. The problem concerned both process and content. Professionals and some senior local officers argued that the communication process to the constituencies was good. They pointed to the widespread use of e-mail and the depth of material available on the party's website. Moreover, despite the number of levels in the structure, reassurances were offered that information was communicated down quickly through 'cascade' and without dilution.[44]

They highlighted a rump of activists who liked to 'whinge' about a lack of consultation, when: 'you can only communicate with those who are prepared to be communicated with'.[45] Refusal to use e-mail was symbolic of this. In addition, some constituencies ignored central requests for campaign-related feedback. Pointedly: 'the local party doesn't listen because they don't understand, as they have not been to a regional meeting ... they don't understand how the whole system works ... central communications are just put to one side'.[46] This would not be tolerated in future, especially in target seats, owing to the electoral imperative; it was a regional task to rectify the problem.

The main grievance was that the centre saw communication in campaign terms, whereas activists wanted broader political dialogue. Whiteley et al found 43% of members believing the leadership did not pay much attention to the views of ordinary members (1994: 63). Activists complained vehemently that it persistently did not listen. In terms of feedback: 'the chairman and myself get e-mails, but it's more like instructions of what you have to do to comply with this, more than what is exactly going on ... we rely on our agent to feed back what he can, but I haven't seen a lot of direct feedback ... with a sitting MP in Wells, he's probably picking up more from talking to the MP than we ever would'.[47] Two-way communication was lacking. In the 2001 election for example: 'they especially asked us for comments from the doorstep ... as the campaign went on, William Hague and the shadow cabinet were banging on about keep the pound and nobody on the doorstep was mentioning it; all they were talking about were education and health ... we kept sending messages, they didn't want to know'.[48] Such neglect resulted in much anti-London feeling. This was combined with perceptions that the professionals thought only they could win elections; the local input was not deemed worthy. Regarding political content, one officer commented: 'my experience is that they've got their own agenda and the rest of it is just trying to keep people encouraged ... it is very rare that they listen to what people have to say ... it's very frustrating'.[49] The grammar school fiasco in summer 2007 was viewed as badly handled, with a lack of engagement with the constituencies. Some observed this shortfall practically, saying the party was 'a bit London-centric' as 'people working there do not necessarily see what goes on out there in the field', a problem that was not uncommon in large organisations.[50] However, a senior local officer

concluded: 'as far as the national organisation is concerned, it's a cultural shift seeking views of local associations'.[51]

The communication problem was not just vertical. Some activists complained of a lack of information sharing locally, with much being confined to the senior officers. This could be attributed to individual officer style, but equally was a reinforcement of the practice by the centre of focusing on the key local officers. Undoubtedly, an agent ensured better communication beyond the officer team: 'if you take the agent out, then communication falls away'.[52] Someone locally needed to understand the importance of communication.[53]

For this, informal systems were important. Those who made the effort to develop contacts higher in the party felt they could get their point across, but again it was activists in senior officer positions who thrived as it was they who possessed the opportunities to develop contacts. Following Heidar (1994), it was a product of the quality of the officer, essentially: 'being persistent and having good evidence ... if you can put forward a persuasive case, then most people will listen'.[54] In this respect, there was: 'a mutual dependency, the influence is not massive, but they will listen if the information is important to them'.[55] Nevertheless, it was the personal dimension, reflecting the importance of individualism within the Conservative Party; it was commonly agreed that constituencies as a whole had no influence with the party nationally. Generally, this was not a worry: 'they will voice their concern over something like grammar schools and if it is perceived to be an inappropriate way to have done it, but it's done in a very gentle way'; essentially, the localities stuck to their own sphere of operation.[56] Undoubtedly though, intra-party communication was a problem. It indicated power politics over organisational effectiveness; the localities were deemed politically inferior by central professionals and communication reflected this.

3. Performance

Performance was focused upon increasingly, especially in target constituencies. The foundation was the centre's power to audit associations. This originated at the 1984 party conference as an annual request to provide information on resources and campaign

activity, but the response was typically poor, being seen as Central Office interference (Tether 1991a: 29-30). Since *Fresh Future*, audits have been compulsory, undertaken by a CCHQ team on a periodic basis. One was conducted in 2006 to identify the strengths and weaknesses of target seats and hence campaigning gaps that could be filled by regional campaign centres.[57] Indifference was the local response. High Peak were pleased with their top three placement, but were disappointed with the lack of feedback on their achievement and areas for further improvement; another example of the communications deficit. This shortfall was seen elsewhere, being indicative of how the centre viewed its constituencies.

Derived from the audit was a growing culture of target setting, particularly in winnable seats. However, there were differences in approach. One regional officer asserted: 'we want these targets to be assisted, supported and directed by a professional whose full-time job is that'; the regional campaign centre was there to help the associations achieve the targets.[58] By contrast, an area officer talked of agreed targets as: 'more of an accepted standard to aim for ... for example in money, membership and pledge base ... I cannot direct them how to do it'.[59] This view was more consistent with the constituency outlook: 'if the ward or association feel they cannot achieve these targets, it just won't happen'.[60] Hence: 'you need a realisation of what is achievable and what isn't ... by not placing too onerous demands on people with unrealistic targets about how much money to raise or members to generate ... whereas you've got to keep a gentle pressure to keep them performing ... you can't go too far otherwise people will walk away, so it's a fine balancing act'.[61] There were still sufficient higher officials who appreciated the goodwill of voluntary members, but the desperation to get back into government was beginning to corrode this.

Local judgement was important in target setting. High Peak viewed targets positively, tasking branches to increase membership and fundraising, and monitoring them closely. Cheltenham's focused performance model pointed to willing adherence to the centre's campaign-orientated objectives, their continuing independence being judged accordingly. There was evidence of 'benchmarking' against other constituencies, performance

indicators thereby being useful to those willing to embrace change. It was an area role to facilitate this: 'the number of Conservative votes, number of members, how many leaflets they've put out and press releases, coverage for certain issues, how many councillors ... all these statistics ... we compare so we can encourage them'.[62] Resistance came from older experienced activists particularly, but was slight. In Derby however, people were generally oblivious to performance indicators: 'they don't know ... they've not really taken a lot of notice ... they've basically passed them by'.[63] They made little difference to local operations, as the professionals were: 'quite happy to let us do our own job and they're available to help if we need it, which is very good'.[64] The presence of periodic audits and performance indicators had the potential to constrain local associations, as argued vociferously by Kelly, who pointed to their negative impact on local autonomy and membership retention (2002: 42). The evidence though, was more varied. Both local and higher officers maintained that they neither constrained their activities nor stifled new initiatives. Nevertheless, local acceptance of the target culture was mixed.

4. Association Rules

In contrast to previous practice, the new set of association rules articulated in the party constitution were largely mandatory, covering structural and campaigning issues: membership, officer appointments and responsibilities, committees and meetings, branches, agent status, dispute procedures, finance and candidate selection (Conservative Party 1998b: 27-39). Area and local officers reported a high degree of adherence and even contentment, providing they did not mushroom into instructions. Important was the local slant: 'there will be an interpretation of the rules and regulations, then we apply them to the best of our understanding and ability, with a view to ensuring that local consideration is given'.[65] Nevertheless, a regional professional noted: 'we have some who just don't know what the rules are because they've never bothered to read them ... some of these we turn a blind eye to because it doesn't matter, but others we have to step in and remind them'.[66] Moreover, there were other associations 'who attach themselves slavishly to the rules' to the point where 'we had to spend a bit of time troubleshooting'.[67] This could also lead to officer frustration: 'there is too much formality in the Conservative Party ... we still have a lot of people who say we cannot discuss so and so because "it

isn't the right forum" ... we still have area meetings where they try to say "we do it this way", yet they don't engage with you unless you go to an area meeting'.[68] Another complained that he did not receive minutes of meetings he was unable to attend.[69] Central power at the micro level though, was indicated by the three-year officer position tenure rule (Conservative Party 1998b: 28). When a senior officer attempted to extend the duration against the wishes of a significant number of activists, the centre through regional and area officials could prevent it; although it was usually undertaken jointly with other local officers. Somerton and Frome encountered this problem when the president attempted to stand for a fourth year, supported by a number of activists, because of the dispute regarding the sale of the Wincanton office (see chapter three).[70]

The three-year rule was designed to encourage a healthy turnover of officers for improved local management and the generation of fresh ideas, but, with the partial exception of High Peak, associations were relying upon the same group of people to fill the positions. The workload of the three senior officers was especially burdensome: 'after three years as chairman, including an election, which is a full-time job, I had run out of energy, so it's healthy to reinvigorate'.[71] Nevertheless, even in Somerton and Frome, there were few to choose from, to the extent that the association experienced difficulties in persuading people to take up positions or stay on. Most were content to undertake lesser tasks or else to free ride on the efforts of others. This was reinforced by the nature of politics itself: 'the stronger people tend to come through at the AGM'.[72] In electoral terms, there was concern for the loss of experience after a chairman or deputy retired from the post; the rules thus served as a competitive rigidity.[73] Nevertheless, a process of 'musical chairs', with little challenge once elected, discouraged new blood. Indeed, it could lead to complacency and might serve to reinforce parochial tendencies.[74] Politics tended to attract 'title seekers,' individuals committed to enhancing personal local standing.[75] This was summed up by: 'the same people going round and round as if they have a need to feel they are a senior part of the ship ... whether indeed they've still got a real purpose, not necessarily'.[76] Pointedly: 'some people like to hold power, whereas others actually get things done'.[77] Related to this was the problem of personality clashes. Long regarded as a key factor in local Conservative politics (Ball 1994b: 269), this issue

perpetuated and could be exacerbated without the presence of an agent. Strong personalities and misperceptions could bring: 'great rows, with blood on the carpet'.[78]

Sensible application of the rules usually occurred where a CCHQ-trained agent was present. Ultimately though, they were a subtle form of control, enforced against volunteers, even if applied loosely. They reduced the need for officers to have to think for themselves and hence impacted on creative thinking. By tightening up association rules, the centre has tipped the balance between formality and freedom in its favour. Poor adherence to the rules could lead to supported status.

5. Supported Status

Desperation for power meant that weak performance in target seats was unacceptable. *Fresh Future* introduced the 'supported association' concept to rectify this. None of the constituencies in this study had been put into supported status, although but for strong and sensitive leadership by its chairman, it was clear that Somerton and Frome could have been (see chapters four and five). Local knowledge of this mechanism was therefore restricted, but there was sufficient to advance a plausible interpretation. Difficulties were usually political in nature, organisational ones being derivative. That associations were designated as campaigning organisations, rather than political ones, provided the justification for intervention. A regional professional explained the thinking: 'activists are the local face of the national party and as such they trade on its reputation ... therefore, they have responsibility to the party nationally and sometimes where things have gone very awry, it will step in and take them over ... a decision would be made by the board of the party ... one of my campaign directors might say there's such a seat, they're just killing each other ... I would see if there was a nice way through it ... I would be asked to make a recommendation in conjunction with the voluntary officers in that area to the board ... we would try to find a former chairman of a nearby and preferably successful association, and we would ask him to effectively manage it until ... it's a bit like putting a small business into receivership ... you would appoint corporate administrators and they would go in there and sort it out ... (power to remove officers and put someone in their place) ultimately, yes ... (re-build) ultimately, yes ... (in target seats) by and large

because that is where the maximum interest is and therefore the greatest potential for identification, but we are increasingly conscious of under-performing safe seats, because where we have places which are demographically and politically obviously very Conservative-inclined and they are not conducting themselves in a manner which maximises their contribution ... a safe seat with 10,000 plus majority, Conservative councillors, well-off people and only 200 members and pay no quota and above all these days contribute nothing to the highly target seat next door, then it's time to do something about it and we will use supported status to do so'.[79] Ball alluded to the notion that local parties could not be treated like retail outlets to be managed, as the centre relied upon activist goodwill to make progress (1994a: 215). The supported status concept reverses this perception from the professional viewpoint.

Supported status though, was stressed as exceptional: 'if people have mismanaged the association, supported status can happen, but that's normally a last resort where things have gone completely wrong'.[80] An association: 'when it's functioning well, it's adding value ... it only detracts if you have someone in a public position who is not perceived as doing the job'.[81] A professional noted: 'if the association does the right things, it is left alone ... if not, the party board from a recommendation of myself and area officers can close an association down overnight, take all the funds and put people in to reform it ... it has not happened in the East Midlands so far ... intervention is for all sorts of reasons: officers acting in an incorrect manner or useless, maliciously or not, or they are standing in the way of making progress, a chairman and wife running it who don't want members, association with no funds and making no attempt to raise them, not putting candidates up in local elections, or entire income spent on the office with nothing left to campaign, or not wanting to share offices to save money ... we can threaten them if they do not group together ... it's all been done so far by agreement, persuasion and money ... if you do this, we are able to give you money ... there were a couple of associations they've had discussions with, it didn't get as far as a threat before the penny dropped'.[82] However, another official added: 'some associations shouldn't be trusted to look after themselves, because they can't ... Westmorland and Lonsdale slipped so far from where they should be and yet up to the last election they had a Conservative MP ... they had to have some

autonomy taken away because they were not carrying the Conservative brand well enough and that's what they should be doing, that's all they should exist for ... in business, if they were performing well, you'd let them get on with it, if they weren't you'd be breathing down their neck and that's what's going to happen ... too many associations forget who we are actually meant to be fighting'.[83] A business orientation was clearly being applied by professional staff, reflecting campaign priorities. As such, it was not necessarily compatible with the perceived interests of activists.

Activist views on supported status were equivocal: 'if they are under-performing then the centre has to do something, I don't object to that ... the difficulty arises where they change policies and procedures without consulting us ... they change the rules or change the way they are doing things without coming out to us first and saying what do you think about this?'[84] Moreover: 'there's got to be some control ... if you've got a wayward constituency, you close them down, their candidates will not be approved ... it's the ultimate sanction ... it is a trend of centralisation happening in all spheres of life, not just party organisations, which should be resisted ... I'd rather have an imperfect organisation with lots of mistakes than where nobody is allowed any initiative'.[85] Equally, the Campaign for Conservative Party Democracy observed: 'occasionally constituency associations are put into supported status, which effectively means that Central Office takes control of them. There are often good reasons for this', but reportedly 'in quite a few cases a constituency association is not told why ... or what it has to do to get out of it'.[86] There is also no appeal procedure. This emphasises the political, rather than organisational, motivation behind supported status. The centre prefers to employ it as a threat to bring associations into line, but it is clear that action is increasingly being effected.[87]

Organisational systems are inevitably diverse as they cover a range of issues. However, the central theme across them is formalism. This is occurring in a piecemeal manner as the centre tries to impose a more performance-orientated culture. This posed a direct challenge to voluntarism. Supported status evinced a stigma with the potential to undermine activism. The centre was sensitive to this and the need to keep members

motivated. That few important decisions were now made locally meant it should not happen for organisational reasons. Activists though, joined to engage in politics, allowing potential for conflict. Nevertheless, the changes made to the organisational systems suggested that the party leadership had recalculated the costs and benefits of members, reflecting Scarrow's (1994) question of the level of engagement demanded of activists. They were expected to conform to the centre's express instructions. The style of management reinforced this.

Style

Style is concerned with the manner in which leaders manage and communicate with the organisation, and how the latter perceives its approach (Waterman et al 1980). Formalism was a key development. This was combined with a change in the approach to control from socialisation to a more mechanistic style. Moreover, there was evidence of a very dismissive stance taken by the centre towards the localities.

1. Formalism

The advent of greater formalism in the party's systems percolated the style of management. In this, it undermined the traditional informal mode of 'accepted practice' (Drucker 1979). However, formalism was not universally dismissed locally because of the perceived need to modernise: 'we had failed miserably ... something new had to be created'.[88] Indeed: 'the party has to get into the 21st century ... there are so many associations that are so way behind'.[89] It enabled some localities to achieve greater focus: 'the formal aspect is what sets the agenda, drives it, and should be leading it ... the informal relationships between people are what makes it work and provides the workforce'.[90] This sentiment reflected how the party was trying to address the competitiveness-voluntarism tension: 'if you were a business, you'd just do it and in some circumstances that is what the Labour Party have done ... they've said this is what we're going to do and if you don't like it, tough ... we've taken the approach that we know what we want to do, but we prefer to persuade people, to keep people with us, because if people join any voluntary organisation, to a certain extent it's to support it, but it is also to enjoy themselves'.[91] Party management was about: 'getting the right people to take office

who can make the best use of informal contacts and relationships, so that the organisation doesn't become too bound by rules and structures'.[92]

Some activists however, expressed concern over greater formalism: 'in the past, it was much more free and easy, a more informal arrangement, which worked imperfectly, but well ... I don't like this rigid structure we have now'.[93] In addition: 'they are trying to make us function like a business and we're not, we're a voluntary organisation, more like a charity ... they should respect that and let us do our job in our own way'.[94] Moreover: 'it can't be formal, you can't issue an order, you have to encourage'.[95] Indeed, Conservative 'people have other lives, other focuses beyond politics'.[96] As a result: 'there's a certain sensitivity in the way you handle them ... they have varying abilities and different expectations, and differing levels of time they can give, so its managing these to get the best possible result'.[97] Essentially: 'you are relying on people's goodwill', so that 'its impossible to enforce formalism ... in this part of the country (Derby), we would just ignore it or rebel against it'.[98] Despite the introduction of formal systems therefore, people and individual relationships remained vital; voluntarism was still valued. A professional thus conceded that to achieve progress, managing the personalities of volunteers was: 'a question of balance between pushing, persuading and threatening'.[99]

The importance of local goodwill meant that the professional approach to influencing local decision-making was both formal and subtle. Constituency officers commonly agreed that area and regional officials had no influence on local decision-making, unless invited to contribute. Therefore, employing benchmarking, a regional official viewed his role: 'to monitor, to challenge and to encourage the localities'.[100] As a professional, he could be 'an ally to senior officials having difficulty making progress' on campaigning and organisational matters, but also in disputes.[101] Area officers and professionals used their experience to suggest alternative courses of action in an advisory capacity, thereby acquiring influence through rational argument. This was reinforced by an 'information conduit' role from central and regional meetings to which constituency chairmen were not invited.[102] However, as noted above, both paid and unpaid regional officials were now invested with powers of intervention into perceived failing constituencies; the threat

would influence behaviour. Hence, for a membership drive: 'unless we have a regional approach as part of a national campaign, it won't happen on the ground; too many constituencies will pass it over'.[103] Higher officials pointed to the inevitability of improvement through technology and the benefit of a focus on officer teams, but equally alluded to associations that have gone backwards.

2. Control

In the Conservative Party, 'control' was a sensitive word. However, increased central pressure on target seats, backed by the threat of supported status, meant that control through socialisation was yielding to a more mechanistic approach. Most activists believed the balance remained with the former. One official stressed that the centre was only: 'really interested in you doing what you should do and make sure you win elections ... they would only be more strong-armed if you were not'.[104] A local officer though, retorted: 'it's just control, but we're a belligerent lot and it won't alter anything ... too much encroachment and people will not do anything'.[105] Nevertheless, the need for some control was alluded to: 'I accept that the board needs to have a say in what happens locally to make sure the party is singing from the same hymn sheet ... it is important for association chairmen to understand that so they are better able to sell the necessity for it in the constituency ... how you conduct a campaign ought to be on the local side, what is good in one area may not be good in another, so there has to be some flexibility ... but there are some things that the national party should have jurisdiction over'.[106] It was also made clear that the 'thirst for power' would mean greater formal control if another general election setback occurred. This would be assisted by the new Merlin network computer system which provided the centre with a comprehensive databank on local campaign-related activity.[107] A regional officer also asserted: 'you are a volunteer', but in future 'you are a professional volunteer ... that is, we've got to be a lot sharper'.[108] This interpretation overstated activist development, but it was a good indication of central thinking regarding the future of local parties. For those who already viewed CCHQ as being 'too dictatorial', it would be too direct, but such members were not necessarily the concern of the centre.

The change in the approach to control was indicative of an intensification of a centralised style of management. Most officers concurred, but did not always view it as a retrograde step. They preferred a decentralised stance, but typically interpreted it in operational rather than strategic terms by focusing on a local presence and maintaining local identity; they did not expect to take significant political decisions. Incisively: 'you could have a centralised decision-making organisation with local activity, so having local decision-making is not necessarily crucial to that ... take a branch of a bank, very little power is desired, but it would have a presence on the high street, which would be important'.[109] Other officers were practical: 'they are trying to increase centralisation, but we know the problems locally and we know how to handle things locally and we've got the skills to do it, so why should they take that away from us'.[110] In addition: 'decentralisation is a strength in line with our philosophy or approach to government and therefore a very high proportion of the membership want to work in that way ... if you try to impose on people a way of doing things which goes against their beliefs, you're going to get trouble, but if you allow them the flexibility they want, you'll get a happy organisation'.[111] However another officer was perceptive: 'it depends on the calibre of the people you have decentralised to ... get someone who acts like a professional and who drives the constituency and who can relate to people ... we've nobody like that in Derby ... we could do with some younger talent'.[112] Nevertheless, for voluntarism: 'decentralisation is very strong, it's very important and I would back that all the way because people can identify with the local association, and ward officers too, and after all, that's what you need'.[113] Concern was hence expressed over the managerial approach: 'its basic instincts are to centralise, they're capable of it ... it will be harder because of the more disparate base ... power in the Labour Party has been concentrated for 100 years, the unions ...'.[114] Moreover: 'it is more centralised ... if there were better performance, co-ordination and communication it could benefit the party, but they are doing it in spite of the associations rather than with them ... because it's all co-ordinated and planned at a higher level, you have the flexibility and freedom to do your own thing, but based within the overall campaign, so you have to write messages nationally and locally working together rather than diametrically opposed'.[115] Again though, the decentralised approach was interpreted operationally.

3. Dismissiveness

The more control-orientated and centralised style was reinforced by the outward manner adopted by higher officials towards the localities. This was symbolised by certificates of excellence for financial contributions (see chapter three), but importantly by the condescending language employed. Patronisation was indicative of the stance taken by some officials to the perceived lack of competence of local activists. They were labelled amateurs in an increasingly professional game: 'telling us silly little people what we should be doing'.[116] Moreover: 'you, the voluntary party will do better if ...' and an exhortation of the effectiveness of the team concept to an audience of business and professional people.[117] Furthermore, the statement that 'all the constituencies have to do is follow the plan',[118] suggested that activists were only good for mundane tasks such as leaflet delivery, and lacked the capability to add value themselves. This formed part of a wider view that CCHQ assumed constituencies could be managed in a standardised form. Many activists though, were: 'strongly independently-minded people, particularly chairmen who are used to doing things and know what they want'.[119] Characteristically: 'it's not a party which attracts people who are going to listen to central organisations ... we're not socialists'.[120] These sentiments stressed the philosophy of Conservatism and gave support to the rejection of *A 21st Century Party* because 'it was presented as a fait accompli'.[121] Most local officers shrugged off condescending behaviour and pursued their electoral task. However, patronisation was a subtle contextual factor in intra-party relations.

Patronisation contributed to definite feelings of remoteness and insignificance: 'there is the M25 barrier ... London, in many cases they don't want to know northern people ... they don't understand the local ... some in London just don't want to get out or they want to go back again as soon as they can instead of finding out what people feel ... they forget it's about people'.[122] Hence: 'they've got difficulty understanding the needs of areas outside London ... they work on everything as though it's London based, when it isn't ... they have these whiz-kid graduates in Central Office who come up with these ideas, who haven't got a clue how it operates in real life ... if they came to us, we would tell them,

but they don't ... (causes frustrations) sometimes, yes'.[123] Moreover: 'they've got to do their learning as well, which they are not doing ... you can't just do it by sitting in Central Office and saying this is how you should'.[124] This was stressed in rural constituencies: 'living in London, Central Office was a visible place and you knew and had dealings with people in it ... out here in the rural areas, you don't ... it's a remote place ... so the perception is different ... it is them, whereas in London it was HQ ... if you were in town, you popped in for the latest pamphlet or a chat to somebody ... it's not part of life down here, there's the South West regional office, that's the connection, you don't tend to deal direct with CCHQ apart from receiving edicts which are given to you generally speaking by e-mail or by the agent'.[125] Practical implications for local officers derived from this: 'you have to go to London, because they won't go to you anywhere outside the M25, it's difficult ... all the council and LGA meetings are in London, the national ones, they never take place anywhere else ... anything Central Office does tends to be in London, it's normally within the Westminster village and you are expected to go ... but to get there for a 6pm meeting is difficult, the cost of train and taxi ...'.[126] It was clear that such feelings were also historical; they had perpetuated over decades. These feelings represented a barrier to improving organisational effectiveness, but equally were a clear indicator of how the centre interpreted the power structure within the party.

The style of management mirrored the formal approach to systems outlined in the previous section, although the importance of informal relationships was still recognised, even if in weakened form. The treatment of activists closely reflected the ascendancy of the Westminster model. Patronisation and remoteness were thus not surprising, but the party needed its volunteers and had to retain motivation. Style was a significant soft issue in intra-party relations. The centre's stance in this respect would inevitably adversely impact on the party's overall recovery prospects.

Staff

Staff relates to the people at the party's disposal. There are paid personnel and voluntary members. These also have to be viewed in activity terms in order to give an indication of quality.

1. Paid Personnel

Many associations had part-time 'organising secretaries', but they were administrative personnel and were given scant training; the poor salary level reflected this. They worked alongside agents, but were often replacements for them. The importance of agents was alluded to above, but the party's movement towards a more electoral-professional stance led to a waning of their numbers, with severe implications. There were believed to be only 82 in early 2006,[127] the majority being employed in safe seats and hence under-utilised. A shortage of money was one explanation. However, as a regional official stressed: 'in the late 1990s, the decision to run down our field force of agents was a terrible, terrible mistake ... it is a quite easily established fact that our highest membership is in the constituencies where we employ professional agents'.[128] Where they were lacking, the administrative and campaign burden transferred to local officers: 'because there are fewer constituency agents to do the administrative leadership in the office, it tends to be an organising secretary or just a typist or someone who's in there part-time, the chairman has to do a lot himself these days, so he needs to be efficient and well organised ... local autonomy is important on that basis'.[129] In High Peak, financial considerations meant the role was being performed by the PPC, but the officers felt this might be unsustainable as the general election approached. In Derby, tasks were fulfilled by the officers, but they were also laden with other commitments. Co-ordination and communication were hence inconsistent, and time constraints led to some perceptions of a lack of professionalism.[130] Where agents were absent, it was clear that the de-energisation process (Whiteley et al 1994) was being exacerbated. Agents were belatedly recognised by the centre as being important to both control the campaign and manage activists. They were still largely employed by constituency parties, a practice the centre continued to push on financial grounds, but increasingly leaned towards the centre.

2. Membership

Chapter one noted a marked decline in voluntary membership. The 247,000 in 2006 for the Conservatives exceeded Labour's 182,000, despite the latter's brief ascendancy under Blair; the Liberal Democrats were substantially weaker, reporting around 69,000 (Liberal

Democrats 2006). However, the statistics masked a wider Conservative problem that three-quarters of members lived in the South and the Midlands.[131] Moreover, Pattie and Johnston (2009) presented evidence of reduced membership and flat fundraising in marginal constituencies, so that central support was required. Member retention and recruitment efforts thus warranted examination.

Local officers attested to a lower membership turnover rate than other parties; once committed, people tended to stay. Inducements included newsletters, correspondence, personal contact and traditional political and social stimulants such as discussion groups, leafleting, coffee and luncheon clubs, dinners, quiz nights and so forth. However, the link between membership and fundraising, whilst unlikely to bring 'exit', did deter some from activity (see chapter three); one officer ruefully remarked that there was an implicit assumption that 'you will put your hand in your pocket'.[132] Morale was a further problem, being linked to the fortunes of the party, particularly events nationally: 'its a virtuous cycle: the party's doing better nationally, so people are more motivated, so they're prepared to go out and leaflet and canvass more, that brings in more new members, that improves morale'.[133] Here, the importance of the leader could not be underestimated, many stressing the Cameron effect. To this, was added the revival of councillor strength; the previous loss of councillors, many of whom were personal friends of members, adversely affected willingness to campaign. Nobody alluded to Kelly's (2002, 2003a) analysis that organisational reform had demoralised activists. However, Whiteley calculated that recent membership loss peaked in 2006, suggesting grassroots' dissatisfaction with Cameron's modernisation strategy (2009: 249).

Membership recruitment was a jealously guarded local responsibility (Whiteley et al 1994: 20-1). However, professionalism was often lacking. It was described as 'a bit hit and miss', and one officer observed: 'we almost expect people to turn up and ask to join'.[134] A lack of money and presentation skills was a problem, with 'roll your own, scruffy letters' producing a corresponding response.[135] Somerton and Frome achieved some success by writing to lapsed members, but there were complaints that the pledge base was out of date; in other constituencies it was under-utilised.[136] In 2006, party

chairman Maude reported that the party knew the location of approximately half of its voters, reflecting the potential.[137] There was though, a general absence of national-local co-ordinated membership drives.

Despite protestations to the contrary, it was clear that membership was afforded a low priority in the Conservative Party. The centre linked it strongly to finance. *Fresh Future* had established a national database permitting central members; a membership and marketing department was set up to manage the process (Conservative Party 1998a: 27-8). Local upset ensued, but also frustration at being unaware of national members living within the vicinity, thereby rendering the party 'silly' by revealing a lack of national-local communication.[138] The counter-productiveness of national recruitment subsequently led to its abandonment, the centre emphasising its consequent loss of £400,000 per annum;[139] this was compensated by the increase in subscription levy (see chapter three). All members were now allocated to their local association.

Curiously, membership was omitted from the list of constituency association 'objects' in the constitution. Most local officers outwardly treated membership equally with fundraising, a dearth of membership drives being explained by a lack of activists and a reluctance to divert campaign money. However, there was low confidence in their ability to boost numbers, even though fundraising potential would be enhanced. This was compounded by wide acceptance of the membership decline thesis, with many citing other leisure pursuits, a lack of interest in politics and scepticism towards politicians. The evidence though, also pointed to a lack of innovation in recruitment; it was commonly agreed that the party was better at retention. Whiteley and Seyd maintained that since the 1960s, recruitment drives were essentially 'symbolic', reflecting their unimportance (2002: 16). This remained the inescapable conclusion.

Executive council minutes acknowledged membership concerns, but gave little attention to specific drives.[140] Even then, the methods employed usually resulted in the attraction of like-minded people both in terms of political outlook and age profile. Typical recruitment vehicles were social events and 'cut-off' invitations in campaign literature.

Associations were permitted access to central data from 'Voter Vault' technology to target high-value potential Conservatives, but the results were mixed, one officer noting that this meant anonymous letters to 1000 people, which did not elicit any 'sense of community'.[141] Presence in the community was critical: 'you need ambassadors to expand, and we haven't got that'.[142] High Peak attempted to engage the new University of Derby campus at Buxton, but was repelled as the institution disallowed political activity, though a lack of contacts and an anti-Conservative bearing were apposite. Fairs and advertising initiatives were additionally attempted locally and constituencies launched a membership drive following Cameron's accession to the leadership in 2005, but officers reported only sporadic activity since. Such developments were isolated departures from traditional procedures. Instead, co-optation was most apparent through connections with family, friends, neighbours and work associates, and Somerton and Frome actively sought referrals. A regional official added: 'the number one way of recruiting new members is still face to face ... we'd stopped doing it and relied on computers and direct mail, but having a membership drive by knocking on doors will still find more members than writing to people'.[143]

Recruitment neglect was an explanation for the ageing membership profile, which was apparent. Whiteley et al had revealed the average age of Conservative Party members to be 62, just under half being 66 or over (1994: 42-3). An aspiration of *Fresh Future* was to encourage young professional people to become chairmen.[144] However, local inability to recruit sufficient individuals under 40 was attributed to the factors noted above, but also to a lack of preparedness to take responsibility generally. Britain had ceased to be 'a nation of joiners'.[145] Moreover: 'there is a reluctance, particularly amongst the young, to hold office and give something back'.[146] Parties were suffering in the same way as other voluntary and community organisations. Local associations though, were failing in the socialisation process, as it could be 'immensely difficult to break into the association', receive the necessary support and adjust to meetings full of middle-aged and older people.[147] There was also a political dimension to the problem, articulated by: 'there is a great difference between the membership in High Peak and the potential voters we need to attract as Conservative voters of the future ... we need to lose a few members in order

to gain others, which is quite radical and is happening to a certain extent ... this is what Cameron is doing ... he's bringing the party more towards the centre ground of politics'.[148] *A 21st Century Party* echoed the age gap in terms of representativeness of society generally (Conservative Party 2005: 4), but contained no concrete proposals for resolution. It merely couched local incentives in financial terms through the subscription ratio.[149] Overall, it was clear that the party itself, both nationally and locally, was contributing to Putnam's (1993) thesis concerning the decline in social capital.

Membership monitoring by higher officials was undertaken using the ratio of party members to party voters at the previous general election (M/V). This was an indicator of market penetration which assumed, incorrectly, that the party had a fixed electorate (Katz and Mair 1992: 331). It enabled comparisons as a basis for challenge and encouragement. CCHQ ambitiously sought 10%, but on the ground 5% was deemed realistic. A flexible approach was taken: 'if we are going to measure an association's performance, we will expect to see it in this sort of range ... there are always going to be local factors which will adjust the position ... that's mainly being applied to the target seats which we need to win to regain power'.[150] In Gloucestershire however, where significant electoral gains were expected, only two associations exceed this threshold, the majority being down in the 1-2% category, and lower in some cases.[151] High Peak achieved some success through branch targets, but elsewhere these could be unrealistic and demotivating.[152] Moreover, the presence of a Conservative MP was not a strong indicator. The very affluent south-west constituency of Woodspring for example, with a large majority, possessed around half the membership of Somerton and Frome which lacked one; performance was the most important predictor.[153] Higher officials reported that gaining the co-operation of some associations could be difficult. Overall, local capability in membership recruitment was severely lacking. Without an agent and a fully equipped office, it tended to be neglected; even then, it was afforded low priority status.

3. Activity

In terms of activity, there was a political deficit locally. Whiteley et al found that approximately 22% of members devoted some time to the party (1994: 68). Local officers

in this study were similarly consistent in their appraisal of 20-25% being active in some way, though a few believed it closer to 15%. Activism was described as 'loose' depending upon the task or event.[154] Attendance increased significantly for the AGM, a high profile guest speaker and particularly for the candidate selection meeting; in Somerton and Frome for example, this attracted around 30%. However, these were not politically productive activities from a campaigning perspective. Associations found difficulty in encouraging individuals to become politically active. Those who were usually attended social events as well, but the reverse was not true; no more than 10% contributed politically. Responsibility thus fell on the 'same few people', with the implication that an insufficient amount of quality political time was being expended to provide a good constituency presence. Just 30 of Somerton and Frome's large membership turned out for a NHS action day. This burden could be further illustrated by 40% of officers admitting to over 30 hours per month activity, rising to 60% for over 20 hours. Officers tended to be very active in the standard activities of social events and fundraising, leafleting, canvassing, newsletter contributions and campaign planning, but contribution tapered off when it came to member recruitment and political debate.[155] Essentially, it was the senior officers and senior councillors who were the 'political animals'; for them it was a way of life.[156] The implication was that only a core group was continually aware of party issues and events. Hence, there was a clear political deficit locally in the Conservative Party.

Some officers alluded to a re-balancing of the social-political mix amongst newer members. Younger people particularly, had greater political expectations from their membership than previously, so that some left the party if their political ambitions or expectations were not realised within a reasonable timeframe. Importantly, there was a common agreement that a 'political spark' was needed to join.[157] The politically committed then gravitated towards officer or councillor positions and could be described as political self-starters. Of the interviewees here, just over 60% joined from their own initiative, becoming 80% when co-optation, usually by existing officers, was accounted for.[158] Nevertheless, a regional official lamented: 'the trouble is, as we have become more political, we've become less social and less social means less financial and therefore we want to do more politically, but can't always afford to do so ... local government has

become much more political'.[159] The existing 'any member is welcome' outlook was hence unsatisfactory for meeting the party's needs.

The party's commitment to membership accumulation was lackadaisical. There was a political deficit, but a shortage of political incentives to join. Maude alluded to the likely future strategy: 'we have not given the emphasis to membership growth in recent years that we should have done ... I'd also like to see us being better and more systematic in building up our non-member people'.[160] Supporter networks had a lesser stake in the party. However, supporters needed connections to the party in order to be engaged. Without existing members, these would not happen in the numbers that the party required. The natural consequence is that the Conservative Party would become even less embedded in local communities.

Skills

The quantitative political deficit implicitly suggested a need to examine the local skills base. Here, there was evidence of a purposeful de-skilling of local activists for political reasons. This was reinforced by the centre's opinion of local capabilities and its focus on local leadership skills.

1. Membership De-Skilling

Whiteley et al provided aggregate socio-economic data for all members, which revealed a preponderance of salaried individuals working in business-related organisations (1994: 43-5). The present study found that the party was attracting enough professional talent to occupy the officer roles; although higher officials maintained this was not universal. A broad cross-section of occupational expertise was apparent, many individuals having supervisory or management experience, some at director level.[161] It was thus easier to identify skills that were lacking. Legal, media and information technology were the primary areas of deficiency, though marketing generally was weak. A regional official noted: 'we are probably as a party, the best e-campaigners in the country, certainly the computer press acknowledge that the Tory website is the best ... but (locally) there is still a reluctance to embrace new technology'.[162] A survey of association websites indicated

this, revealing a wide disparity from excellent to mediocre; some in target seats could not be found.[163] The presence of an agent and regional campaign centre were important for covering skills gaps. Central training provided agents with a comprehensive set, which included electoral law, campaign management, media and communications, constituency management, fundraising, political structures and personal development.[164]

However, there was redundant capability locally. A few officers reported appropriate skills that they had not transferred to the party, some in the deficient areas; although insufficient to enable a definitive conclusion. Many had important occupational links and had held office in a range of voluntary community associations and local groups.[165] An officer declared: 'Conservatives generally are people who do things in the community'.[166] Activists possessed a wide variety of skills, experience and contacts, but there was doubt over whether the party was making the best use of them. From this, it could be postulated that CCHQ did not require or wish them to become creatively involved, preferring the key tasks to be performed by their centrally trained professionals. Indeed, it was clear that technology combined with the central board's assumption of responsibility for many local activities have led to a de-skilling of the constituency function, with the resulting implication for the quality of members needed.

This was supported by the dearth of local training. Other than the website-based Conservative Training College, there was little formal assistance. It was acknowledged as a function of political success, but would have been more valuable when the party was struggling: 'we used to run regular area and regional training sessions, but as our fortunes diminished a lot of that just fell by the wayside', so that 'we've got to pick it up and learn it all again'.[167] Training was now recognised. The problem was: 'there are opportunities for ordinary members and for councillors and campaigners, but they tend not to go'.[168] Lethargy was present, but training tended to be infrequent and associated with basic campaign skills such as get-out-the-vote, postal voting, canvassing and so forth, rather than more comprehensive political skills.[169] Moreover, activists were encouraged not to talk politics on the doorstep.[170] This was wise advice, as there were not enough politically-minded members to compete with the 'political zealots' of Labour and the

Liberal Democrats. Evidence from each of the constituencies revealed that apart from the very committed, Conservatives did not like canvassing.[171] Hostility after 1997 offered a partial explanation, but equally the middle-class disposition was apposite (see chapter four).

Canvassing remained important to area and regional officials, but required confidence and political knowledge. Policy detail though, was not a traditional role for local parties, a notion officers re-confirmed. Despite this, there was some frustration at the lack of meaningful political discussion and political action committees locally: 'the more serious members, who we ought to be retaining, would like to feel that they have an intellectual input on policy discussion'.[172] The primary vehicle was the CPF. It was run locally by the deputy-chairman political, but was separated from the association mainstream. It was regarded as lightweight, involving peripheral subjects and being too much dictated by CCHQ.[173] A central council, controlled by leader appointees, decided the topic for discussion, which was circulated to the constituencies on approximately a quarterly basis. It was presented as a policy brief with accompanying questions for discussion and answer; the local remit was not to suggest further questions or issues. Contrary to Kelly's (2001) evidence, local officers believed the CPF was ineffectual, CCHQ largely ignoring it, or more tersely: 'we might as well have thrown it in the bin ... they may see them, they may read them, but whether or not they take any notice ... my experience is they've got their own agenda and the rest is just trying to keep people encouraged'.[174] To some, the CPF was simply a vehicle for policy 'anoraks'.[175] Turnout figures supported this. Cheltenham reported no more than 15 people, less than 2% of its membership, High Peak similarly, around 12 individuals, whilst Somerton and Frome acknowledged just 'a few' of its large membership. This was consistent with practice elsewhere.[176] The party thus relied on the personal knowledge of the highly committed, who generally professed to having a fairly deep understanding of political affairs.[177]

2. The Centre's Stance: Local Leadership

The centre's attitude regarding the CPF was consistent with the notion of patronisation identified earlier. Indeed, there was much evidence that the centre had a poor regard for

local capabilities: 'they think we haven't a clue what we are doing and there is an element of they know best ... I can't remember the last time they came to me and said what do you think about this or would you like to join this working party and help us formulate policy on that, so their loss'.[178] Moreover: 'the professionals at Central Office think they are the only ones that know how to do it ... they don't tap into the innovative potential at the local level, on how to promote the party locally'.[179] This translated into an understanding of local issues: 'it tends not to be the senior guys, it's often the flunkies they bus in particularly for general elections, some of the media people who haven't a clue what the issues are, but because they've been told you have got to do this ... so it's a case of sorry it's not going to happen, they just don't understand why'.[180] Equally: 'the trouble is, if the professionals have never functioned in associations, then their judgement could be skewed'.[181] Finally, an area officer summed up the problem: 'they're not all that interested, they've got their own agenda ... they find volunteers in many cases a bit of a waste of time, a bore, they much prefer things to be run professionally ... they should pay more attention to the volunteers than they appear to do'.[182] Activists were thus seen very much in support terms, rather than as equal partners in the quest for electoral success.

This outlook reflected the observation that instead of activist expertise, the centre valued the leadership skills of senior local officers as the primary capability. These were unique. There were hard and soft skills. Strong leadership was required to provide a sense of direction, to take decisions, and to overcome adverse political circumstances, vested interests and branch-level cliques. Here, there was an expectation that officers would utilise skills transferred from business. It was the softer skills though, that were difficult to replicate. Politics was an emotive pursuit, arousing much passion locally, so that in line with voluntarism, a very sophisticated set of skills was essential. It was necessary to lead by example, to understand the critical issues, and to communicate decisions and explanations effectively, so that 'people become a part of what you are doing'.[183] Diplomacy and empathy were important competencies, as individuals needed to feel appreciated; managing some was like 'walking on eggshells'.[184] From the centre's viewpoint, there was the critical ability to motivate members to canvass, deliver leaflets and fundraise; this was a 'balancing act' of encouragement and applying gentle

pressure.[185] Moreover, a gradualist approach was needed for future officer development, 'you need to encourage people, carefully bring them on, be very subtle'.[186] Ultimately, local management required local leadership; it could not be achieved by central or regional professionals, who were inherently distrusted by many. Constituency chairmen represented the membership, so that in discussions with the agent and higher officials, judgement was needed when to follow the latter's view and when to proceed in a different way; local democracy needed to be seen to be operating.[187] Nevertheless, they were expected to lead in their own domains. That was their remit; it was not to indulge themselves higher in the party. Hence, a chairman confirmed: 'I want to focus on how we are organised within this association ... how we are able to develop the organisation and our campaign ability on a local level'.[188]

Essentially, there was a skills deficit locally with regard to providing a full electoral capability. This was partly the result of a conscious effort by the centre to ensure its professionals were ascendant. Hence, the focus on local leadership skills in its terms.

Shared Values

Shared values are the guiding concepts, 'a set of values and aspirations, often unwritten', (Waterman et al 1980). In the Conservative Party, there were higher and lower order values. The undoubted higher one was simply to win: to acquire power, to govern the country, to control local councils. For some, a win at all costs mentality meant that perceived anachronisms such as local autonomy should not be allowed obstruct electoral success: 'we've got to be absolutely brutal ... Labour had to be and won a general election ... we have never been so brutal and it upsets some of our members ... its because politics are about power, without power we're nothing ... I will do what is necessary and I've got the backing of the party chairman and the board'.[189] This approach would be denounced in a constituency like Somerton and Frome, where the party needed local co-operation. Middle class values of independence and personal competence combined to present an argument that they should be left alone to get on with the task of maximising the local contribution. There was genuine confidence in their capacity to achieve success, but this would not be at the expense of local autonomy.

Local autonomy was the core lower order value. Ball stated that 'the principle of local independence has been vital to the health of the whole body and to the maintenance of the voluntary members' morale and commitment' (1994b: 262). This remained the case. To local officers, it meant the right of self-governance, specifically: 'rights to select, rights to deselect, rights to raise and spend money within the bounds of the rules and regulations, the constitution and the political manifesto'.[190] Another added: 'within the framework laid down about the way we should properly behave and financial propriety, that we've got complete freedom to act as we think appropriate, and we do ... I can't think of an example in the last couple of years where I've gone to Central Office and said can we do this or that, because we wouldn't do that ... we all do things in different ways and that's healthy for the organisation ... local autonomy is the basis in that it makes people want to be involved, because they've got more say about what happens, it retains members, it gives them an interest and a commitment to do things because they're making the decisions ... it's the glue that holds it all together ... if it became centralised without the local presence and local autonomy, people would just walk off'.[191] Furthermore: 'it has to be this way ... it would not work if we were controlled totally from above ... we need advice from above, we need direction from above ... we do not need to be told what to do, we don't need to be micro-managed'.[192]

Higher officials moderated this stance: 'with autonomy goes responsibility and a requirement to perform ... you get the awkward squad, people who turn up at party conferences and bang on about autonomy and democratic rights ... I need to be convinced that those people are also out delivering as much literature as our other workforce, raising as much money, recruiting as many members, finding local government candidates'.[193] This was reinforced by: 'they can run their own organisations as long as it fits into the bigger picture ... in the 21st century, key performance indicators are the norm'.[194] Presented in this form, local autonomy was not a hindrance to achievement if local knowledge and expertise were applied appropriately. Nevertheless, far from being an impediment, local autonomy was believed: 'to add to leadership strategy ... if we didn't have that autonomy, if they tried to regiment it or organise it in a

different way, people wouldn't do it', so tasks would not be accomplished.[195] The Conservative philosophy did not like central control. Nevertheless, it was clear that local autonomy meant different things to different parts of the organisation, thereby rendering it difficult for any management initiatives aimed at fully reconciling their respective interests.

Most local officers and higher officials however, believed local autonomy was waning. A few of the former were content: 'the one thing I would say about our members is that they are pretty astute ... they know they have to move with the times'.[196] They found it easy to reconcile local autonomy with the higher order value of success, provided some local leeway was allowed. This reflected perceptions of living in the past: 'this area hasn't recovered from the John Major defeat ... some activists are still behaving as though the Conservatives are in power ... it was that attitude that lost us power ... something has to change'.[197] A local official asserted that these people typically formed a rump of 'traditionalists who don't like change ... they're the most vociferous.' He thus added: 'local autonomy means a more complicated relationship between the centre and the local party than there would be in a big business organisation and that's not always a good thing ... it means that there is sometimes a lack of trust between the centre and the local party and some scepticism ... but the alternative is a more centralised party ... I'm not sure that would be the answer ... you might lose some able people from the senior side of the local party ... it will become more centralised, but may be in terms of groups so that local autonomy may be group based ... it is gradually happening ... as long as you don't do things too quickly, then the resistance wouldn't be crucial'.[198] The common belief was that local autonomy would survive in a weaker, more performance-related form; but with intervention in those deemed unfit. It was the professionals nevertheless, who decided what was, and was not, a competent level of performance.

The collective middle class ethos that Drucker (1979) articulated with respect to the operations and relationships within the Conservative Party was under challenge from a more performance-focused central party. To the professionals and some activists, winning a general election required a modification of local autonomy to reflect a close

alignment of national and local interests consistent with the more competitive political outlook. Not all activists, however, concurred.

Conclusion

This chapter conducted an assessment of the party organisation to understand how reform had improved its effectiveness and impacted upon the balance of power. The McKinsey 7-S Framework facilitated this. It permitted an examination of softer issues such as systems and management style, as well as structure and people. It was clear that organisational change accommodated both political and organisational dimensions, and hence the result was inefficient and unbalanced. Business principles were introduced, but were not wholly compatible with voluntarism. Activists could not be engaged on such terms.

Fresh Future reinforced the parallel structure separating the voluntary and professional wings, but along with later modifications created an organisational morass not suited to effective communication and co-ordination. Progress was made towards the latter through focused decision-making on the officer teams, the three senior ones particularly, and a belated recognition of the importance of agents. However, in other areas the organisation was coasting. Membership recruitment was not a priority. The skills of existing members were also underutilised and undervalued, reflecting a central preference for the expertise of its professionals. Critically, a de-skilling of activists was taking place, largely for political reasons; leadership was deemed the core skill locally to facilitate central instructions and to sell them to members. Furthermore, the centre's approach to management systems and style was lacking. Whilst greater control was needed, more mechanistic procedures, to the detriment of traditional socialisation, would not endear activists. Moreover, mandatory rules, compulsory audits and supported status, all part of a performance culture, would not encourage higher activism rates, especially as there was scant feedback. Despite this, many local officers simply tolerated central initiatives and carried on regardless. Nevertheless, the organisation that emerged was one that was geared towards improving the alignment between national and local interests; it was unlikely to dramatically improve campaign effectiveness. It would not contribute to any

enhancement of Putnam's (1993) social capital in local communities. Ultimately, it reflected the conflictual nature of politics, rather than purposeful organisational development.

The systems and style changes alluded to above, significantly modified the form of local autonomy to a position where it now reflected operational, rather than strategic concerns. This was reinforced by additional soft initiatives and stances by the centre such as benchmarking constituencies, subtle alterations to local decision-making procedures, omitting activists from the communications loop, the disparaging of their capabilities, patronisation and remoteness. In this way, the 7-S Framework has highlighted nuances in power relations not immediately apparent from a structural analysis. Moreover, the role of the localities was more closely being defined for them and attendant instructions handed down through the cascade process. This reflected Carty's (2004) franchise model design; although it was repulsed by activists. The evidence though, pointed to enhanced hierarchical management rather than stratarchy, and the organisational complexity implicitly revealed negated the simplicity and standardisation of franchise systems. Nevertheless, the centre was now conceiving local autonomy on its terms, whilst being conscious of the need for its outward preservation for activist motivation purposes. The reduction in member numbers and their purposeful de-skilling rendered it difficult for them to counter the centre's initiatives; greater emphasis on building supporter networks, rather than members, compounded this. Change had undermined Drucker's (1979) observation of 'accepted practice' in the Conservative Party, but the stubborn resistance associated with the middle class ethos ensured that local autonomy would not disappear altogether.

The change in status of local autonomy has implications for party evolution. It was clear that the centre has re-calculated the cost-benefit ratio of members. In Maor's (1997) terms, it was keen to emphasise the perception of democracy at the system level, but organisationally local parties had seen tasks removed and creative decision-making curtailed. The issues identified above pointed towards an adoption of Epstein's (1967) looser flexible organisation, but not for the voter reach reason he suggested. Instead, his

advocacy of 50-100 active members per constituency to enable the party to manage electoral peaks was coming to fruition; it was they who will organise the supporter networks. Here, the officer team represented the cadre, with the hoped for quality in the three senior officers and councillor group. It was their job to co-ordinate the local effort.

The revision to local autonomy needs to be interpreted in electoral-professional terms. As noted, the new organisational settlement was political to effect greater alignment of national and local interests, consistent with the discipline needed for political marketing. This would facilitate greater professional control from the centre, reflecting the perceived amateur status of activists. However, the command model was not compatible with voluntarism. Despite the political deficit locally, activists were still required for campaigning and for occupying councillor positions. Indeed, the centre has finally recognised the importance of councillors, to the extent of seeking to retain local branch structures. Critically, Ball's assertion that Central Office 'depended upon the goodwill of the voluntary associations if they were to achieve anything' (1994a: 195), remains apposite, albeit in diluted form. Activists compete to ensure that their local issues remain on the political agenda. Electoral-professional has thus been pursued centrally, but has not been realised in Panebianco's (1988) pure form. The centre has instead sought to influence local activities in a variety of direct and subtle ways. This will be shown further in chapter three, which looks at finance.

[1] The original 7-S Framework was published by Waterman et al (1980). However, this version employed 'superordinate goals' as its central and linking variable, rather than 'shared values'. The Peters and Waterman (1982) model used in the text here is the refined version. It was deemed more suitable for the study.
[2] South West officer - 20.
[3] Regional official - 42.
[4] South West local official -35.
[5] Area officer - 36. *Fresh Future* stressed: 'The guiding principles behind the reform of the party are that there should be the fewest possible layers of communication between party members and the party leadership, and that there should be a much greater degree of involvement for party members' (Conservative Party 1998a: 10). This was discounted by the evidence.
[6] East Midlands local officer - 9.
[7] South West local official - 35.
[8] Some of these cancellations were prestigious, such as golf days which have the potential to attract quality members and donors.
[9] South West local officer - 32.
[10] South West local official - 34.
[11] Regional official - 41.
[12] From the sample conducted for the financial analysis (see chapter three), 46 out of 120 constituencies (38.3%) still possessed a CWCC or women's committee.
[13] The Conservatives gained 14 seats to take overall control of the council ('The Times', 5th May 2007).
[14] Derby Executive Council minutes for AGM 29 March 2007.
[15] South West local officer - 19.
[16] South West local officer - 22.
[17] Regional official -42.
[18] This was felt most strongly in Somerton and Frome.
[19] South West local official -35.
[20] South West local officer -20.
[21] Regional officer -40.
[22] Area officer - 37.
[23] Area officer - 38.
[24] South West local official - 35.
[25] South West local officer - 34.
[26] The problem was the proposed closure of the Buxton Octagon Theatre. Councillors were prepared to see it become a supermarket. The association officers intervened against the councillors because of the reaction of the public.
[27] South West local officer - 19.
[28] South West local officer - 28.
[29] Regional official - 42.
[30] South West local official - 35.
[31] Area officer - 36.
[32] East Midlands local officer - 12.
[33] Regional official - 43.
[34] South West local officer - 23.
[35] South West local officer - 23.
[36] South West local officer - 28.
[37] South West local officer - 29.
[38] Area officer - 36.
[39] Area officer - 38.
[40] Conservative Training College 16th March 2005 (Conservative Party 2005d). The documents relate to 'chairman', 'deputy chairman political and campaigning', and 'deputy chairman membership and fundraising'. They stress adherence to party rules and detail all the officer functions and ways to proceed.
[41] East Midlands local officer - 6.
[42] East Midlands local officer - 8.
[43] South West local official - 34.

[44] Regional officer - 40.
[45] Regional official - 42.
[46] East Midlands local officer - 6.
[47] South West local officer - 28.
[48] Area officer - 36.
[49] East Midlands local officer - 15.
[50] South West local official - 34.
[51] South West local officer - 25.
[52] East Midlands local officer - 14.
[53] South West local official - 35.
[54] South West local officer - 19.
[55] South West local officer - 22.
[56] South West local official - 34.
[57] Regional officer - 40.
[58] Regional officer - 40.
[59] Area officer - 37.
[60] East Midlands local officer - 4.
[61] East Midlands local officer - 8.
[62] Area officer - 39.
[63] East Midlands local officer - 6.
[64] East Midlands local officer - 3.
[65] South West local officer - 18.
[66] Regional official - 42.
[67] Regional official - 43.
[68] South West local officer - 23.
[69] East Midlands local officer - 9.
[70] Somerton and Frome correspondence and South West local officer - 25.
[71] South West local officer - 26.
[72] South West local officer - 21.
[73] Regional official - 43.
[74] East Midlands local officer - 6.
[75] Personal observations of, and discussions with, party officials by the author.
[76] South West local officer - 20.
[77] Regional official - 43.
[78] East Midlands local officer - 13.
[79] Regional official - 42.
[80] Area officer - 39.
[81] South West local official - 34.
[82] Regional official - 41.
[83] East Midlands local officer and campaign official - 16. A CCHQ audit found a weak and divided association that lacked a campaign team and a website. The PPC subsequently resigned as the constituency was placed in supported status. Association officers had to sign green forms to accept central authority imposed upon them and pink forms if they didn't. The latter meant instant resignation from their position ('CCHQ's action against Westmorland and Lonsdale is warning to all associations', ConservativeHome 5 December 2006).
[84] East Midlands local officer - 8.
[85] East Midlands local officer - 2.
[86] 'Supported Status', The Campaign for Conservative Party Democracy 18 March 2007.
[87] The Conservative Party does not publish information concerning how many associations have been put into supported status. The National Conservative Convention annual report, for example, alludes to it happening and being managed; the party board has also set up a sub-committee for this purpose. The incidence of supported status is also somewhat haphazard: some areas make every effort to achieve practical conciliation (e.g. East Midlands), but in others (e.g. North West) the local professionals, and indeed voluntary regional chairman, are more 'trigger-happy' to show that they are exercising their authority to bring the associations into line and hence impress the party leadership. Moreover, the duration

that associations spend in supported status is variable depending upon the magnitude of the problem, as again determined by the professionals. It was thus estimated that since the 2005 general election, between 10 and 15 associations have succumbed to supported status.

[88] East Midlands local officer - 10.
[89] South West local officer - 17.
[90] East Midlands local officer - 16.
[91] Regional official - 41.
[92] South West local official - 35.
[93] East Midlands local officer - 2.
[94] East Midlands local officer - 3.
[95] South West local official - 34.
[96] South West local officer - 31.
[97] East Midlands local officer - 8.
[98] East Midlands local officer - 3.
[99] Regional official - 41.
[100] Regional official - 42.
[101] East Midlands local officer - 6.
[102] Area officer - 37.
[103] Regional officer - 40.
[104] South West local official - 34.
[105] South West local officer - 33.
[106] East Midlands local officer - 13.
[107] The Merlin system would enable central professionals to see which constituency associations were delivering on their promises, as it accumulated information on leaflet deliveries, canvassing, surveys and so forth. It would therefore become an important control instrument.
[108] Regional officer - 40.
[109] South West local official - 35.
[110] East Midlands local officer - 12.
[111] East Midlands local officer - 3.
[112] East Midlands local officer - 6.
[113] South West local officer - 20.
[114] South West local officer - 31.
[115] South West local officer - 23.
[116] South West local officer - 32.
[117] Delivered at an area AGM, which the author attended 12th September 2005.
[118] Area officer - 36.
[119] South West local officer - 31.
[120] South West local officer - 33.
[121] Area officer - 39.
[122] Area officer - 38.
[123] East Midlands local officer - 8.
[124] South West local officer - 17.
[125] South West local officer - 29.
[126] South West local officer - 19.
[127] Somerton and Frome Constituency General and Political Report 5th March 2005 to 3rd March 2006. The report attributed the low number of agents to the financial position of the local parties after the 2005 general election and to constituency grouping (see chapter four). Somerton and Frome complained that finding an effective agent, should they have the money, would be difficult because of the shortage. The accuracy of the figure of 82 agents is questionable, but is given some credibility by a steering committee briefing in January 2006 which stated that 'we expect to have 200 agents in the field by summer 2007, double our present number'; this suggests a figure of no more than 110. 'Briefing about FRAC meeting on 12 January 2006' document that the author had sight of. FRAC stands for Farming and Rural Affairs Committee. Known to have been in attendance were: Party Leader David Cameron; Party Chairman Francis Maude; Paul Marland, a former MP who was attending on behalf of Raymond Monbiot, the Chairman of the National Conservative Convention and a deputy chairman of the party; Simon Mort,

member of the party board 2004-2008 and Vice-President of the National Conservative Convention; Gavin Barwell, the Director of Operations in 2006; Jeremy Middleton, an influential volunteer and future chairman of the National Conservative Convention; and Bernard Jenkin, Deputy Chairman candidates 2005-2007 and Chairman of the Candidates Committee. The subjects discussed were: organisational weakness and agents, policy, information technology, mergers and groupings, candidate selection, membership subscriptions and recruitment, supported associations, conference and the reorganisation of the regional professionals.

[128] Regional official - 42.

[129] Regional official - 43.

[130] East Midlands local officer - 2.

[131] 'The Times' 13 March 2001. Cited from Cowley, P. and Quayle, S. (2002) 'The Conservatives: Running on the Spot', in Geddes, A. and Tonge, J. *Labour's Second Landslide: The British General Election 2001.* Manchester: Manchester University Press.

[132] South West local officer - 24.

[133] East Midlands local officer - 3.

[134] East Midlands local officer - 2.

[135] Regional official - 41.

[136] Area officer - 36.

[137] Report from a national meeting, January 2006.

[138] East Midlands local officer - 2.

[139] Conservative Party internal document August 2006, which the author had sight of.

[140] Executive council minutes for Derby, Cheltenham, and Somerton and Frome identify member gains and losses, but generally detail only social events for membership initiatives.

[141] East Midlands local officer - 5.

[142] South West local officer - 28.

[143] Regional official - 41.

[144] Area officer - 36.

[145] Regional official - 42.

[146] East Midlands local officer - 6.

[147] East Midlands local officer - 5. For this study, only two young activists/officers were interviewed. The author though, has also witnessed this kind of socialisation problem within the party.

[148] East Midlands local officer - 13.

[149] Whilst *A 21st Century Party* was rejected by the National Conservative Convention in September 2005, the proposal for an 80:20 local:national subscription ratio was introduced in January 2007. This was given more meaning with the minimum increased from £15 to £25. Previously though, local parties kept all the subscription.

[150] Area officer - 37.

[151] Area officer - 39.

[152] The author had sight of a document of a constituency whose branches were each given a target of a 25% increase in membership for the year 2007.

[153] Regional official - 42. The membership numbers for Woodspring for 2005-7 were 643, 592 and 539 respectively. Those for Somerton and Frome for the corresponding period were 1139, 1092 and 1104.

[154] South West local officer - 18.

[155] Results from the Political Activity and Skills Questionnaire administered at the time of interview.

[156] Area officer - 38.

[157] South West local official - 34.

[158] Political Activity and Skills Questionnaire.

[159] Regional official - 42.

[160] 'Challenge the Chairman' 4. Tory Radio 29 November 2006.

[161] Political Activity and Skills Questionnaire.

[162] Regional official - 42.

[163] A view of 40 constituency association websites was undertaken in June 2007. They were selected randomly from the constituency finance sample (see chapter three).

[164] 'Training to be a Conservative Party Agent', Conservative Training College, 28 September 2005.

[165] Political Activity and Skills Questionnaire.

[166] South West local officer - 27.
[167] Regional official - 42.
[168] East Midlands local officer - 6.
[169] Author's question to regional party officials attending North West Bow Group meeting 9th November 2007.
[170] Reported by several Somerton and Frome activists. This advice was given by the speaker, a senior frontbench politician, at an area dinner.
[171] Acknowledged by both local and area officers.
[172] East Midlands local officer - 2.
[173] Examples of topics included: 'Policing, working out an agenda for reform' (September 2006); 'International Development' (December 2006); 'Uniting the country' (March 2007); 'Cities and Local Government consultation' (July 2007); 'Fixing our broken society' (August 2007); 'Transport' (December 2007).
[174] East Midlands local officer - 15.
[175] The view from a North West Bow Group meeting 11 November 2005, and supported by several local officers.
[176] For example, at the CPF in Altincham and Sale West, a safe Conservative seat, the maximum attendance during the two years 2006-7 was nine, but usually it was six or seven.
[177] Political Activity and Skills Questionnaire. In a question which asked for a judgement on their level of political knowledge on a scale of 1 (basic) to 5 (deep), local officers recorded average scores of: 4.0 Conservative Party policy; 3.9 Conservative Party organisation; 4.0 British politics generally; 4.2 Current affairs generally. Only knowledge of Labour and Liberal Democrat policy was lacking at 3.2, but this knowledge is needed for effective canvassing.
[178] East Midlands local officer - 8.
[179] Area officer - 38.
[180] South West local officer - 19.
[181] South West local officer - 20.
[182] Area officer - 39.
[183] East Midlands local officer - 16.
[184] Conversation between the author and an experienced officer in his constituency. The author also observed some instances.
[185] East Midlands local officer - 8.
[186] South West local officer - 20.
[187] South West local officers - 22, 25.
[188] South West local officer - 25.
[189] Regional officer - 40.
[190] East Midlands local officer - 15.
[191] East Midlands local officer - 8.
[192] East Midlands local officer - 9.
[193] Regional official - 42.
[194] Regional officer - 40.
[195] East Midlands local officer - 8.
[196] South West local officer - 22.
[197] South West local officer - 28.
[198] South West local official - 35.

Chapter Three

The Local Conservative Party Finance

Conservative electoral success was historically built on the strength of constituency associations and a capacity to outspend opponents (Smith and Ludlam 1996: 4). The belief that money wins elections is prominent in Conservative thinking. *Fresh Future* was partially a response to the financial problems the centre had endured prior to the 1997 general election. Pointedly, it had been unable to access local funds to support its desperate attempt to retain power because of the legal autonomy of the associations (Webb 2000a: 195-6; Garner and Kelly 1998: 95). Moreover, in the introduction to *A 21st Century Party*, party chairman Maude called for the party 'to focus resources on the seats we need to gain to form the next government' (Conservative Party 2005a: 2). This would require some redistribution of local assets and as such was a direct challenge to local autonomy, under which associations determined their own finances. Rose declared that 'how money is raised and spent is at least as important as how much is raised, and from whom the money comes', and that 'the process of transferring funds within a party reflects power relationships as well as assumptions about economic effectiveness' (1974: 219). This chapter will examine the impact of reform on Conservative Party finance. It will commence with a review of the national party's position, especially in light of the new regulatory framework manifested in PPERA (2000). Local finance needs to be related to the national context and will be explored in section two. Local financial capability was important for both the party's recovery and local autonomy; this will be examined in section three. The final section will address central encroachment into local financial affairs to try and realise its aims. It will be shown that for electoral recovery, the centre was unable to fully co-ordinate local finance, so that an alignment of interests was not achieved; the local property portfolio particularly, was an obstacle. Consequently, the party's financial strategy remained sub-optimal with local autonomy preserved, albeit in diluted form.

The National Financial Position

National finance sets the context for examining the local parties. This section addresses the financial position of the two major parties and discusses the culture of deficit expenditure in the Conservative Party, its sources of funds and response to regulation.

1. Financial Data

Table 3.1 shows the major parties struggling to raise the income needed to finance expenditure. Modern politics is commonly perceived to be expensive, accounted for by the explosion in campaign spending. However, Table 3.2 questions this, once adjustments have been made for PPERA and for Labour starting from a relatively low position. It was the increase in overall expenditure that was pertinent. The advent of the permanent campaign reflected a need to continually understand, and communicate with, an increasingly fragmented electorate. The micro-targeting of key voters was added to the costs of satisfying the requirements of the mass media (Denver et al 1998: 173). This involved significant investment in technology and new marketing techniques. In striving to achieve a competitive advantage, parties would argue for the most productive media available, to optimise information provision to voters (Ewing 1992: 47). In turn, this required the employment of highly skilled professionals. For the Conservatives, they accounted for 24% of total expenditure in the election year of 2005, and 43% in 2006. The party's accounts also revealed a rise in regional staff from 18 in 2001 to 46 in 2006, part of a move to establish regional campaign centres to provide constituency support and manage target seat strategies. Cumulatively, it was the failure of the parties to match their high expenditure with income that resulted in large accumulated deficits. Table 3.3 provides the key statistics from their balance sheets for 2005. Notwithstanding the liability position (F), the current ratio (H) and debt ratio (I), measures of cash flow and debt coverage respectively, reveal virtual insolvency; it was difficult to imagine any company being allowed to trade in such circumstances.

Table 3.1. Conservative Party and Labour Party Income and Expenditure 2001-2006

Conservatives

	Income	Expenditure
	£m	£m
2000/1	31.2	23.8
2001/2	23.3	24.7
2002*	9.9	10.5
2003	13.6	16.0
2004	22.3	27.4
2005	24.2	39.2
2006	30.9	26.7

Labour

	£m	£m
2001	35.5	44.4
2002	21.2	22.0
2003	26.9	24.3
2004	29.6	32.2
2005	35.3	49.8
2006	25.8	26.6

* The Conservative figure for 2002 is for nine months, when the party's accounts were brought into line with Labour and the Liberal Democrats in order to comply with the reporting requirements of PPERA. The previous year-end was 31st March.

Source: Conservative Party and Labour Party Accounts 2001-2006.

Table 3.2. Conservative Party and Labour Party National Campaign Expenditure in General Elections 1974-2005

	Conservatives	Labour
	£m	£m
1974*	1.5	0.9
1979	2.3	1.4
1983	3.8	2.1
1987	9.0	4.4
1992	11.2	10.2
1997	28.3	25.7
2001	12.8	10.9
2005	17.9	17.9

* The figures for 1974 include the combined expenditure for both elections.

Sources: Pinto-Duschinsky (1985, 1989); Neill (1998); Electoral Commission (2002, 2006).

Table 3.3. Selected Statistics from the Main Parties' Balance Sheets 31st December 2005

	Conservatives	Labour
	£m	£m
A. Fixed assets	11.58	9.65
B. Current assets	2.31	4.90
C. Current liabilities	(16.80)	(29.70)
D. Net current liabilities (B – C)	(14.49)	(24.80)
E. Long term liabilities and provisions	(15.17)	(12.10)
F. Total liabilities (D + E)	(29.66)	(36.90)
G. Net liabilities (A + F)	(18.08)	(27.25)
H. Current ratio (B ÷ C)	0.14	0.16
I. Debt ratio (C+E ÷ A+B)	2.30	2.87

Source: Based upon Conservative Party and Labour Party Accounts 2005.

2. Deficit Expenditure

The Conservative Party exuded a culture whereby expenditure drove income. Pinto-Duschinsky noted that the central budget for the 1983 general election was not accompanied by any guarantee of how to finance it (1985: 330). This outlook persisted. Parkinson acknowledged that the party was close to bankruptcy following the 1997 defeat, noting that local parties were 'particularly exercised by our expenditure of £28m during the campaign' (2003: 218). Furthermore, Michael Howard's 2005 election spending spree contributed to the sale of the emblematic 32 Smith Square, Westminster, in March 2007; the £15m profit though, did not remove all debt.[1] Commentators typically argued that parties lacked the finance to perform their functions effectively. Webb, the most vociferous, pointed to their 'chronic underfunding' and citizens consuming their party politics 'on the cheap', especially compared to European parties (2000a: 238-9). However, this was misleading. There was no compulsion to spend heavily on campaign technologies, high-salaried professionals and national advertising. Such expenditure failed to prevent the landslide defeats of 1997 and 2001. Moreover, Fisher (1999) showed that the impact of national advertising was unclear; although his methodology of relating annual spending data to opinion polls was simplistic; voter opinion analysis was more complex. Charities attracted funds and communicated their message on significantly lower budgets than political parties. Unlike them, parties had free access to national television on a daily basis. Ultimately, it was the ruthless and desperate pursuit of power which brought a cavalier approach to financial management.

The belief that money wins elections pervaded the party. A need to outspend Labour was viewed desperately by some. Most local activists were personally against high national spending, expressed doubts over its effectiveness and wanted more stringent caps, but adhered to the competitive reality: 'you've got to have money to campaign ... money wins elections whether you like it or whether you don't, it makes a huge difference'.[2] In addition: 'general elections are turning into giant advertising promotions and that costs money ... if you're going to win elections, you have to spend large amounts of hard cash, nationally and locally, unfortunately'.[3] Concern was expressed about: 'costly media politics ... but, it's very difficult to back out now we're in that era ... if you unilaterally

did, you'd get wiped out by the other crowd ... survival is the issue'.[4] The intensity was echoed by: 'there's no doubt during an election the party centrally goes all out to win ... it wants to be the leader of the day, Prime Minister, everybody wants to be ministers ... Central Office's job is help that happen the best way it can ... so they spend as much money as they can, probably more than they should ... and they end up with a massive deficit and wonder where the money's going to come from'.[5] There was also a calculated strategic dimension: 'if people who give think we are rich, they are not going to give any more, so you've still got to say we are in debt to keep the money rolling in'.[6]

Nevertheless, many advocated more specific local spending: 'we've seen national parties raise and spend millions of pounds and it's made zero difference ... you can chuck money at anything, we espouse this as a party ... it's how you spend it, how it is used ... all parties waste money ... I've seen how money can be used effectively on the ground, and that's where it should be used'.[7] Locally though, additional funds were always desired for extra advertisements and leaflets. The national-local dichotomy portrayed here did not seep into any financial tension between centre and periphery. Instead, there was a clear financial separation between the two: 'the big bucks don't come into the local associations, they go to the centre, so it doesn't cause us any problems'.[8] Local parties operated in their own sphere, raised and spent their own funds. This outlook however, underpinned national difficulties in trying to align national and local expenditure aims.

3. Sources of Funding

Heavy national spending inevitably highlighted funding sources. The Conservative Party procured the bulk of its finance from corporate and high-value individual sources; membership contributions were mainly symbolic (Scarrow 1996: 122). As far back as 1976, the Houghton Committee reported they no longer featured strongly in the budgets of major parties (Katz 1990: 152). Table 3.4 provides contemporary evidence and Table 3.5 shows the ascendancy of wealthy individuals as the primary income source, although as many are businessmen or retired company leaders, it was merely semantic.

Table 3.4. Percentage Contributions to Total Conservative Party Income 2004-2006

Income Vehicle	2006	2005	2004
Donations	64.5	56.0	59.9
Membership/Subscriptions	2.9	3.5	3.7
Fundraising/Commercial	4.3	10.8	6.1
State Grants	16.0	18.9	18.7

The balance comprises investment, notional and other income.

Source: Based upon Conservative Party accounts.

Table 3.5. Number of Donations to the National Conservative Party by Type 2004-2006

A. £50,000 and over

	2006	2005	2004
Individuals	45	46	22
Companies	26	15	9
Unincorporated Associations	8	7	4
Total	79	68	35

B. £10,000 - 49,999

Individuals	83	98	78
Companies	44	54	36
Unincorporated Associations	3	7	0
Total	130	159	114

Source: Based upon returns to the Electoral Commission.

The Conservative funding strategy epitomised Seyd and Whiteley's concern over the strengthening of 'political entrepreneurs' at the highest level of British politics (1995: 467). Participation in the 2002 Policy Renewal Programme was dependent upon the size of contribution to party funds, members being sidelined (Kelly 2004: 400). Moreover, the role of a donor in determining a party's electoral strategy was controversial (Fisher 2004: 409). Since 2004, Michael Ashcroft had bankrolled the marginal seats, thereby bringing irritation within the party over the excessive power held by an unelected individual; this was enhanced after David Cameron became leader through his appointment as deputy chairman in charge of the target seats campaign.[9] Secretiveness was also inherent; historically, details were released only as a response to pressure (Byrd 1987: 212). Disquiet over the Midlands Industrial Council, a major donor and an unincorporated association that did not have to publish accounts or disclose donor details, showed a continuation of previous practice.[10] The party had to respond to Labour's more aggressively commercial approach, which targeted individuals to become less dependent on the trade unions (Fisher 1996: 80). Initiatives included emulating Labour's donor club concept. The elite Leader's Club and Shadow Chancellor's Club formed the apex and provided opportunities for dinner with Cameron and Osborne respectively.[11] Others were established for the less affluent, with similarly tiered benefits.[12] In addition, there was a programme of dinners and balls; for example, a Blenheim Palace dinner at £5,000 and the Summer Ball at £800 per person.[13] Moreover, wealthy individuals helped to finance the offices and travel of members of the shadow cabinet.[14] Hence, a segmented approach to funding was adopted, which discriminated politically in terms of national influence, and which would seem to undermine local parties in terms of potential for influence.

This interpretation of wealthy donors was dismissed locally. For example: 'we wouldn't be in existence without them'.[15] Moreover: 'there is nothing wrong with wealthy individuals contributing vast sums of money to parties because we live in a democracy (sic) and a free country'.[16] There was a shrug of: 'influence out of all proportion or in proportion to the money they give ... it's always been that way, nothing will change'.[17] Nevertheless, there was frustration over the level of indifference shown by the centre to the localities: 'they've always had large donations, it hasn't made any difference ... the

centre party has always been strong ... a lot of people have been anti-Central Office because they don't take any notice'.[18] It was generally held that this was a national issue which did not impinge upon the localities or threaten local autonomy in any way. However, the centre's ability to accumulate funds reduced its need to listen and importantly, indirectly assisted its capacity to intervene following changes to financial regulation.

4. The Response to Financial Regulation

PPERA (2000) was enacted to address national funding concerns and was signalled by Fisher as 'a huge sea change in terms of regulation and established practice' (2001b: 11). It addressed donations and expenditure, and established the Electoral Commission to monitor the process. Party accounting units, including local, whose turnover exceeded £25,000, had to submit accounts to the commission. Donations, including those in kind, above £5,000 nationally and £1,000 regionally and locally, had to be publicly declared on a quarterly basis; weekly during election campaigns. Anonymous donations in excess of £50, foreign ones and blind trusts were all banned. For the first time, national campaign expenditure limits were imposed through a ceiling of £30,000 per constituency contested during the preceding 365 days before polling day for general elections. Hence, for the 628 seats in England, Scotland and Wales in 2005 a maximum for each party of £18.84m, still extremely high. Transparency was enhanced, but with the consequence that apprehension over adverse publicity deterred some individuals and companies from donating; Maude complained that raising money was more difficult.[19]

Income difficulties and expenditure limits nationally would impact upon the local parties. Firstly, Fisher (2001a) noted that the national campaign limit brought a redistribution of parties' spending priorities as they strove for greater electoral value from their budgets. This meant more attention to the local arena. Here, campaign expenditure was regulated by the Corrupt and Illegal Practices Act 1883, which imposed tight limits and disallowed paid canvassers, but this was confined to the defined election period, allowing heavy spending between elections. The Conservatives were exploiting this gap. Many candidates were selected early in the marginal seats for the likely 2010 campaign, most

being sufficiently financially endowed to be working intensively.[20] Importantly, it meant closer attention to the composition of local expenditure. Secondly, problems of income generation were magnified by the secret loans scandal. PPERA covered donations only. Labour and the Conservatives solicited approximately £14m and £24m respectively in secret loans for the 2005 general election campaign.[21] Lenders' identities were thus protected. Legally, this was acceptable provided the loans were at commercial rates of interest, but the definition of commerciality was contentious.[22] The justification was competitive. Labour needed money to counter Conservative resources, and donors, upset with media attention, wanted anonymity.[23] Riddell asserted that the spirit of the law was contravened as the loans 'amount to a massive avoidance scheme'.[24] Labour bowed to pressure and revealed its lenders, but the Conservatives were characteristically evasive; treasurer Marland, saw no reason to do so.[25] The electoral fallout though, was articulated by the Campaign for Conservative Party Democracy: Cameron 'could have disclosed everything from the start, but he has had to be dragged kicking and screaming into the 21st century and he has still a long way to go'.[26] Nevertheless, the adverse publicity impacted on fundraising nationally, with the inevitable subsequent increase in pressure on the local parties.

Local activists could be expected to be attuned to the intricacies of national financing issues. However, knowledge was typically selective, few understanding PPERA and most exuding partisanship. Again, they were able to maintain separation: 'it didn't have any practical effect locally, it's a central thing ... there should be transparency, but people don't always want the general public to know that they have given money to political parties ... it might be fairer to have a list of donors who wish to remain private, which is available to the parliamentary ombudsman to see and various officers of the crown, but not blasted all over the papers'.[27] Competitively: 'the Labour Party has driven party funding to extremes ... Blair has stretched all the rules and conventions to the absolute limit and as a result it's turned into a major problem ... now people are chipping in as they can see an advantage ... you've got a far more conscious commercial outlook and that's made it very dangerous ... I don't know how they can regulate it ... Blair is totally shameless'.[28] The Conservative Party's own proclivities were ignored. Nevertheless,

astute officers were concerned about electoral image: 'the perception is that all parties, particularly Labour and Conservatives, have been doing it for years (including cash-for-peerages[29]) and it entails the whole political process that humans can be bought ... the perception of people that wealthy donors to any political party must be doing it for a reason and not because they are philanthropists'.[30]

Several reports have addressed the inadequacies of PPERA. The primary ones were the radical Cain and Taylor (2002),[31] the insipid Electoral Commission (2004)[32] and the confused Hayden Phillips (2007). They all tinkered with donations, expenditure and state funding in varying degrees, but it is the extension of the latter that would impact significantly on local parties. Hayden Phillips (2007), commissioned against the background of 'secret loans' and 'cash-for-peerages', warrants consideration because it was influential at the time of this study. There were enhanced powers for the Electoral Commission to improve regulatory performance. Critically, he emulated a Conservative proposal from Andrew Tyrie's (2006) paper *Clean Politics*[33] for a £50,000 donation ceiling from any one source, individual or organisational. Under Phillips, unincorporated associations would also have to identify the participants. However, he was imprecise on expenditure, contemplating a return to pre-2001 general election levels. This would involve both major parties cutting their spending by £20m each over the life of a full parliament, but he prescribed no actual limits. He was more specific on state funding. Donation limits would impose financial hardship, so two mechanisms reflecting public support and engagement were proposed. Subject to agreed donation limits, parties would receive 0.50p a year for each vote at the most recent general election and 0.25p likewise for the devolved Scotland and Wales elections, and for the European Parliament. Importantly, he suggested a matching scheme to encourage parties to recruit supporters via the internet. A minimum £5 subscription would be matched by £5 public funding, up to an annual maximum of £5m. It was thus directed at supporters rather than members; there was no incentive for parties to strengthen their organisations. The political establishment was, in effect, preparing the ground for an enhancement of the state role. This was accepted by the Conservative Party, Tyrie proposing similar provisions. As

such, it was a remarkable retreat for a party that was traditionally hostile to state funding because of its financially advantageous position.

The ability to implement financial reform depended upon the competitive position and political circumstances confronting the parties (Scarrow 2004: 669). Phillips faced two obstacles. Firstly, the donation limit would wreck Labour's relationship with the trade unions and severely undermine its resources. Table 3.5 revealed the Conservatives receiving 149, 227 and 209 donations over £10,000 for the years 2004-2006. By contrast the figures for Labour, considering the unions singularly, would be 56, 77 and 44 respectively.[34] Tyrie's proposal, emulated by Phillips, was clearly strategic. Secondly, and critically for the local parties, Maude stressed that any modification of Conservative spending in the marginal constituencies prior to the election campaign depended on Labour reforming its trade union link and that any cap on constituency spending must 'not be set at a level which gives an unfair advantage to sitting MPs, who now have tens of thousands of pounds of taxpayers' money in parliamentary allowances to spend in their constituencies'.[35] The average expense claim for the year to April 2007 was £135,850. Labour's Shalid Malik was the highest at £185,421 in a marginal seat. He stressed this allowed him to provide a better service to constituents.[36] Local Conservative officers offered a different slant. In Cheltenham: 'the Liberal Democrats are well resourced because they have an MP who takes advantage of his MP's allowances and gets £170,000 a year ... okay within the rules which exist, but we know the rules can be played with'.[37] Furthermore: 'an MP's office and allowance and the ability to put out information in the way MPs do, means you are at a disadvantage if you cannot keep up with the incumbent ... so there is a need to get money in place'.[38] Local financial competitiveness was thus a critical issue and one the centre party was determined to influence.

Ultimately, the Conservative Party would do whatever it took to achieve a financial competitive advantage both nationally and locally. Persistent national deficits and new regulation meant greater attention to local finance. However, the party leadership was hampered by the historic separation of national and local finance.

The Local Financial Position

Given the national context, the capacity of the local parties to compete financially was essential to the Conservative Party's recovery, but also had implications for local autonomy. After reviewing their financial position, asset utilisation will be examined, as this was a critical test of financial alignment between the centre and the localities.

1. Financial Data

Nearly three decades ago, Pinto-Duschinsky calculated that local financial independence placed the centre in a relatively weak position; his income estimate for 1981-2 of £8m (£13,000 per constituency), was almost double that of Central Office. He did though, acknowledge steady decline in real terms from falling membership (1985: 330-2). Contemporary data, which also enabled an assessment of the constituencies' capacity to maintain an adequate local presence and to campaign effectively at the 2005 general election, is shown in Tables 3.6 and 3.7.[39] The figures for opposition comfortable and safe in Table 3.6 should be treated with caution, as owing to the party's inherent secrecy, a representative random sample could not be obtained for them. Consequently, the means are believed to be a little high. In many seats the Conservative Party needed to win, there was financial strength, but this diminished in those extra constituencies required for good working parliamentary majority. Wealth was clearly skewed towards the safe seats. An adjustment for the opposition seat difficulty was made in Table 3.7 to calculate the overall income and expenditure position.[40] The £25.1m for 2005 just exceeded the £24.2m raised centrally (see Table 3.1). At an average of £39,977 per constituency, the turnover figures were below Fisher's 1992 estimate of £44,304 (Neill 1998: 39). Allowing for inflation, the position was clearly waning in line with corresponding reductions in membership. If finance was critical for local autonomy, it was in the approximately 330 constituencies who exceeded the £25,000 threshold for reporting results to the Electoral Commission. Here, there was still sufficient to suggest that local parties mattered and that money would remain a sensitive resource. These statistics though, related to a period when Conservative political fortunes were at a low ebb.

Table 3.6. Average Conservative Constituency Association Income and Expenditure by Seat Type 2004-2005

N = 120

Type of Seat	Income		Expenditure	
	2005	2004	2005	2004
	£	£	£	£
Conservative Safe				
a) Mean	80,114	73,849	77,655	69,034
b) Standard Deviation	45,678	50,194	50,813	47,367
c) Range 2005	29,051-266,782		28,505-289,165	
Marginal: Held/Target				
a) Mean	73,934	60,768	77,087	59,235
b) Standard Deviation	33,667	29,297	36,209	27,806
c) Range 2005	24,573-169,083		30,897-185,857	
Opposition Comfortable				
a) Mean	51,716	40,081	53,987	43,593
b) Standard Deviation	17,867	16,573	19,603	18,769
c) Range 2005	23,123-91,021		20,500-102,318	
Opposition Safe				
a) Mean	28,548	23,108	19,907	22,010
b) Standard Deviation	26,175	25,754	27,392	22,967
c) Range 2005	861-100,859		183-107,274	

Sources: Based upon Conservative constituency association accounts; Electoral Commission.

Table 3.7. Estimates of Overall Income and Expenditure for Conservative Constituency Associations 2004-2005

Type of Seat	No. Seats	Income 2005 £	Income 2004 £
Conservative Safe	124	9,934,136	9,157,279
Marginal: Held/Target	116	8,576,344	7,049,088
Opposition Comfortable	100	3,855,198	2,981,131
Opposition Safe	288	2,739,782	2,213,378
Total	628	25,105,460	21,400,876
Mean		39,977	34,078
		Expenditure	
Conservative Safe	124	9,629,220	8,560,216
Marginal: Held/Target	116	8,942,092	6,871,260
Opposition Comfortable	100	4,034,181	3,261,983
Opposition Safe	288	2,730,108	2,144,132
Total	628	25,335,601	20,837,591
Mean		40,343	33,181

Sources: Based upon Conservative constituency association accounts; Electoral Commission; Conservative Party (2005a).

Most local officers believed a satisfactory local presence was maintained, but with some anxiety. For example: 'somehow, things get pulled out of the bag, that's the uncanny thing about it'.[41] In Derby: 'we have an office, but that's a struggle at the moment ... we keep our head above water, but only just ... we ought to be self-sufficient and we need an agent, but we had to dip into legacy funds'.[42] Similarly in Cheltenham: 'we managed to do it and maintain the subscription to the (Gloucestershire) group, but additional money for other things was a close run thing ... the problem is you always need more and more money when you are not winning elections and you don't have a huge prospect of winning them'.[43] For active campaigners: 'I would never admit to having enough because every penny you raise, you merely put out another bit of paper'.[44] In Somerton and Frome, the move to joint working with Wells helped. The association felt it could raise enough, but less than preferred. Greater concern was echoed over the practicalities of managing a large constituency: 'last time, funds were sufficient for new initiatives such as advertisements in the local newspapers and we did not lose the election through lack of funds or lack of literature ... it was more the lack of members to do the campaign work and the ageing profile'.[45] Finance and membership were intertwined locally: poor member recruitment performance, identified earlier, thus had financial repercussions.

Turnover figures need to be considered alongside asset strength. Details of current assets are revealed in Tables 3.8 and 3.9. These include liquid cash balances, and stock market investments, which just under 10% of the sample indulged in. Liquidity was variable, but generally healthy in the important seats. Adjustment was again made to the opposition comfortable and safe figures in Table 3.9 to address the sample problem. Fixed assets include property investments and office equipment. 45.8% of the sample were found to own a property, usually on a freehold basis, almost a third receiving an income from it. Putting a value on the collective property wealth of the constituencies was difficult. The buildings were known to be in variable states of repair and some associations owned more than one. Furthermore, officials told of off-balance sheet properties held in trust by dormant local branches. The likelihood of property holding being skewed towards the safe seats was also discounted by the sample evidence and by local officials. Hence, a reasonable estimate was 288 properties, with a value somewhere in the region of £57.6-

86.4m.[46] Total constituency assets would therefore be in the £70-100m range, with the actual figure probably closer to the upper amount. It was clear that some local parties stockpiled assets to the detriment of those that needed money to campaign effectively against well-financed incumbent MPs, and hence disadvantaged the Conservative Party as a whole. Local autonomy in this way hindered the recovery process.

2. Asset Utilisation

The extent of asset accumulation, particularly the property portfolio, was a test of the centre's capacity to align national and local interests. Its seeming inability here was a huge irritation and brought a curt response from Maude, who argued there were 'still a lot of associations sitting on cash mountains they don't spend or on properties they don't use, and its not the right way to run things ... we only exist as a party to make life better for people and the main way of doing that is campaigning to win elections'.[47] Support was expressed by some area and regional officers: 'I agree totally, there's an absolute fortune stashed away in Surrey ... one or two constituencies have got hundreds of thousands ... they hold on to that money and what for ... just think what benefits it could have for target seats ... it's terrible ... I don't know the way around it ... it is a great problem for the party'.[48] Moreover: 'I remind constituencies regularly, they don't own any assets, they are the assets of the Conservative Party ... the Conservative Party is about government ... so let's translate those assets into governments ... until we get to that point, none of us should rest'.[49] They acknowledged a responsibility to persuade localities to sell.

Table 3.8. Average Conservative Constituency Association Net Current Assets by Seat Type 2004-2005

N = 120

Type of Seat	2005	2004
	£	£
Conservative Safe		
a) Mean	46,825	43,527
b) Standard Deviation	28,239	26,843
c) Range 2005	5,726-140,410	
Marginal: Held/Target		
a) Mean	28,135	31,068
b) Standard Deviation	28,226	27,300
c) Range 2005	-17,188-132,512	
Opposition Comfortable		
a) Mean	15,714	11,740
b) Standard Deviation	20,609	14,089
c) Range 2005	-7,878-105,239	
Opposition Safe		
a) Mean	21,047	20,508
b) Standard Deviation	28,669	26,511
c) Range 2005	-7,849-128,271	

Sources: Based upon Conservative constituency association accounts; Electoral Commission.

Table 3.9. Estimates of Overall Net Current Assets for Conservative Constituency Associations 2004-2005

Type of Seat	No. Seats	2005 £	2004 £
Conservative Safe	124	5,806,300	5,397,348
Marginal: Held/Target	116	3,263,660	3,603,888
Opposition Comfortable	100	1,407,699	1,094,192
Opposition Safe	288	2,332,631	2,311,899
Total	628	12,810,290	12,407,327

Sources: Based upon Conservative constituency association accounts; Electoral Commission; Conservative Party (2005a)

Local support for Maude was mixed and tended to be stronger in the non-property owning constituencies. For example: 'he is right where we have an asset that is being wasted ... a million pound property which is not used for campaigning ... I don't believe in frittering it, but if there's a gap in funding to do the necessary campaign work ... the Conservative Party exists by winning elections, where it doesn't win elections we don't need assets'.[50] For a young activist, the stockpiling of assets was a revelation: 'I didn't realise that until recently ... I was shocked ... the money would be better spent than tied up ... we're supposed to be fighting to get back into government, so it doesn't make much sense'.[51] Whilst acknowledging the core argument, some objected: 'it's difficult, if they've got a lot of money tied up in property which isn't properly used, then that's right ... but, it comes down to autonomy, it's up to the association ... Francis Maude and the centre can persuade as much as they want to, but they shouldn't be in a position to dictate'.[52]

Several reasons were advanced for local resistance to property sales. Firstly, the temporal argument suggested that national politicians took a short-term approach, desperate to win the next election, even when there was little hope, as in 2001 and 2005, whilst the localities adopted a longer-term perspective. In High Peak: 'if we hadn't owned this building during the very lean period, when the bank looked upon us very favourably because we had this as collateral, we might not be here now ... I can see what he's (Maude) saying in principle, but it's a very short-sighted view ... I wouldn't consider this one building is over the top as far as this association is concerned ... it has been discussed within the officer team over the years many, many times and comparisons have been made if we rented a property down in the town, the pros and the cons, and we have remained where we are ... we have offices downstairs which are on a separate lease for rental, so that's a help as far as funding is concerned'.[53] In addition: 'having been around the executive for 15 years, there's never been a serious desire to want to sell it ... we don't need income from the centre'.[54] The building's importance in the main constituency town was underlined: 'you can see us, we have a focal point, we're fairly high profile ... it's important to have an office in the constituency, a presence ... the top may wish us to have no assets, but we don't intend to live like mercenaries going from pub to pub holding little meetings'.[55] Financial stability was also noted in Somerton and Frome: 'the property was

given to us in trust by somebody who very much wanted the association to have a sizeable asset, so we just can't sell it effectively ... beyond any emotional thing like that is the sheer fact that it gives us some measure of financial long term stability ... I would take the long term view ... take it and blow the money on campaigns and it's gone ... I wouldn't go along with that'.[56]

Secondly, the notion of money being usurped by the centre and subsequently poured down a 'black hole' aroused particular dismay: 'Central Office would love to get its hands on it ... they say we're not in the property business, we're in the political business ... I'm opposed to that ... if we sold any of it, they'd say you don't want a million pounds in your bank account, it should come to the centre ... they would spend it, it would be gone forever ... people gave that to us years ago because they wanted to help locally ... they didn't give it nationally ... that was meant to give a safe haven for local activity ... property should be earning money one way or another ... if it's not used for the party and you do sell it, buy something else and make sure that it's producing a good income which could be put towards local activity'.[57] Suspicion was further echoed by: 'the centre wants us to sell the property ... they would want the money in London, there's no argument about that ... the regional director's said that many times: "why can't you sell this place and we could have the money in London" and we say "not likely" ... the biggest problem is to make sure you get your "share of the cake", the financial position helps us to do that'.[58]

Thirdly, any sale would impact on local morale. Ball noted that maintaining an office was crucial to member commitment (1994b: 285). This outlook persisted: 'I can understand selling it off, but equally putting myself in the position of a chairman, with your members saying why are you going to sell our office or our club ... I can see why people wouldn't do that ... I'm not sure we should be so desperate to asset strip ourselves for one election, when we might need to have a slightly longer game plan'.[59] It was further underlined: 'now we're a target seat, Central Office have said if you have any capital available, it has to be sold or they won't give us any extra money towards fighting the campaign ... it's blackmail ... I believe in fairness, it's like being told you've got to sell your house to put

your granny into care ... why should we ... if we win the seat back, we shall have more funds coming in, then we would like our office back ... you don't sell the family silver and it would be very, very unpopular ... a lot of people would resign because they have a strong feeling ... if we do get an MP, we could sell it and buy somewhere else with better parking, better facilities ... it's a little foothold and a presence'.[60] The latter argument was flawed, as: 'a Conservative MP is not forced to have an office which is in conjunction with the association ... I do not understand the ethos of running two offices ... you need members to do the legwork, you need that organisation underneath you, but there's no guarantee that they wouldn't set up an office elsewhere and contribute nothing to the association'.[61] In Somerton and Frome, a senior officer confirmed: 'if we succeed in getting an MP at the next general election, she will want some kind of constituency presence, but she will not want Wincanton ... there's £150,000 tied up in that ... we're here to fight elections'.[62]

The core tension revolved around the availability of funds in target seats. Little pressure was exerted on High Peak because of its rental income and because the association was perceived to be doing a good job. However, there was much conflict in Somerton and Frome. Its office was closed following a controversial move to joint working with neighbouring Wells (see chapter four). An under-utilised asset meant pressure: 'Francis Maude had Annunziata (PPC) in after she was selected and told her to try and persuade us to flog the office'.[63] Whilst the officer team was generally comfortable with disposal, it faced much opposition. The chairman was despairing: 'I'm still suffering from moving the organisation from Wincanton because there are a number of die-hards, including some vice-presidents and ex-chairmen of the association who want to move us back to the good old days of being in Wincanton ... the hidden message (from the centre) is that we should be spending our money on campaigning ... we, the officers, wanted to sell the property and use the money for campaigning, but a large number in the executive were concerned that CCHQ would grab hold of our money and we would never see it again ... "over our dead body" would CCHQ have our money, so we've come to a compromise that for the time being we could rent out 2 Market Place ... I've agreed with the regional director that this would not be seen by Lord Ashcroft and the target campaign team that we have got a

capital asset and not using it for campaigning'.[64] This was a practical solution to avoid loss of active volunteers: 'I well understand his (Maude's) point of view, but he would ... talk about having a riot on your hands ... if we tried to sell the Wincanton office, it would generate a huge amount of angst ... we couldn't sell it at the moment and I'm not sure that we should ... I would rather let it as a commercial exercise to generate income for the association on-going ... it's short-sighted ... we're not holding the property to be property holders ... it's to generate income to fight future elections ... if you cash in your chips, it would gradually dribble away and the motivation to raise money would be much less because everybody would look at the balance sheet and see £200,000 in cash sitting there and say why should we have our coffee morning next week'.[65]

A further dimension was the competitive importance of a constituency office. Activists in those possessing one stressed the benefits of a physical presence. However, professionals presented a rational counter-argument: 'having an office and a focal point doesn't get more leaflets on the streets, it only provides a face'.[66] Moreover: 'it's irrelevant and always has been because people care more about their candidate being local and how much work he does ... they don't care where the office is ... they do care if we put a leaflet through the door telling what we're doing'.[67] In addition: 'the trouble is what gets lost at the bottom end is people's focus on why they are doing it ... they're not raising money or knocking on doors so there can be an office or a secretary ... unless that is actually winning us votes, it's a complete waste of time ... we're gradually getting that across'.[68] These arguments were strengthened by the poor state of properties in some constituencies: 'if you look around the country and see some of the ghastly buildings which have got Conservative signs outside, hanging off, looking derelict because they've got no money'.[69] That in Somerton and Frome was in a fair condition, but: 'you have to ask how 'salubrious' is the property ... there's no parking space, it's right in the heart of town, the town's not a very attractive town by standards round about'.[70]

However, properties were typically controlled by local trustees, who would prevent sale. To some activists, they were symbolic of local autonomy: 'ownership of property gives us a strength ... if we sold it and put the money into political funding, it would cause upset

... there are four trustees and we would not allow the building to be sold for that purpose'.[71] Professional frustration resulted: 'we're there to fight elections, we're not a property company ... the trustees of these portfolios of property see it as holding on to a bit of power and that's why they're reluctant to give up on them ... I suspect it is a symbol of their autonomy ... Liverpool has a lot of property and what good is it doing?'[72] Monetary and property assets were seen as an important condition for retaining local autonomy: 'it is very much part of the Conservative philosophy that we are independent associations ... we can only be advised by Central Office, not told what to do ... it doesn't quite work like that, but money gives us the ability to say no, plus there's nothing Central Office can do if we do say no'.[73] This was supported by: 'our financial strength isn't massive, but as regards leaving us alone, that's probably correct',[74] and 'financial strength ... I'm fairly sure that is right'.[75] Therefore: 'if you've got money in the bank, you're not having to scrape and do anything to them',[76] and in stark terms, independence: 'depends on how much money they've got basically, if they haven't got much, they can't do much at all'.[77] Other officers differed in emphasis, believing strongly that local autonomy was the only way that it could work, otherwise people would walk away: 'wealthier constituencies can do more than less wealthy ones, but whether it's a wealthy or a less wealthy constituency, if the people doing it aren't bothered, money isn't going to make it that necessary ... it's a people situation, it's the voluntary, I can't see how it can be any different'.[78] There was much central dependence on the localities: 'they probably do rely quite heavily, but that reliance is local ... they don't rely on the local contribution to the centre, but without the local funds they have a problem'.[79] However, there was no evidence of this dependence transferring into influence: 'it hasn't given us much influence at all ... the lack of a parliamentary MP has lost the influence completely'.[80] Even for Cheltenham: 'as a group, I wouldn't say influence, but we're probably listened to slightly more'.[81] The group though: 'ironically does enable greater independence because we are able to do what we want, because there's an infrastructure and back-up'.[82]

Superficially, there was a strong asset base locally, but the distribution was skewed and much was tied up in property assets. Despite continuing pressure and persuasion attempts, the centre could not bring about wholesale disposals, to its obvious frustration.

Local autonomy thus hampered the broader recovery aim and meant failure in the centre's attempts to align national and local interests. As such, it exuded financial parochialism, so that the availability of liquid funds for campaigning depended upon individual association fundraising capability.

Local Fundraising Capability

Local competitiveness depended on the fundraising capability of the associations. This embraced subscription income, activities and contributions from bodies such as Patrons' Clubs. Critically, it required perseverance and leadership.

1. Subscriptions

Membership subscriptions were the basic income source. In 2005, the minimum was £15, though many associations accepted £25 for joint membership. From the constituency sample, the individual mean was £20.09 (2004 = £20.24), with safe seats recording £23.58. Activists generally viewed the increase to £25 positively, especially as there had been no change for eight years and it was still less than Labour (£36) and the Liberal Democrats (£42). The primary concern locally was for the elderly. Somerton and Frome's average was £23, but the chairman was anxious to retain everyone for their overall contribution. Of the few dissidents, an activist argued: 'the minimum subscription was a retrograde step because before you had somebody who's prepared to deliver literature, vote ... now you haven't got them because they are not members ... they don't have to deliver your literature and you lose touch with them'.[83] This raised the question of the purpose of membership: money or people contact. Even at this basic level, loss of members in this way would have implications for community involvement in Putnam's (1993) terms. Falling membership levels undermined subscription income, thereby putting pressure on fundraising activity.

2. Fundraising Activity

Local Conservative associations were deemed synonymous with fundraising. Ball noted that along with financial benefits, it provided a 'sense of purpose', improved 'confidence and cohesiveness' and aided recruitment by maintaining a 'visible and active profile'

(1994b: 290). Whiteley et al found that for many, 'membership of the party principally means giving money and not much else' (1994: 77, 164). Fundraising and donations contributed the largest proportion of income, as shown in Table 3.10. There was greater activity in seats the party needed to win; the lower percentage in Conservative safe seats owed much to investment income.

However, in common with approaches to membership recruitment, there was a lack of innovation in local fundraising. When viewed against the variety of fundraising ideas offered by CCHQ (Conservative Party 2007), the local menu was fairly restricted. Activities ranged in price from quiz evenings, coffee mornings, strawberry teas, sausage and mash suppers, pig roast, themed afternoons, drinks parties and garden parties, to the more expensive annual dinner and functions with high-profile political speakers such as Hague, Letwin, and Widdecombe. Southern constituencies had much more success in attracting them than northern ones; for the former, such visits were an expectation, for the latter, they were a bonus. Derby particularly, suffered in this respect. Many associations also ran coffee and luncheon clubs, and the perennial 200 club where 200 people, not necessarily all members, paid a subscription to a monthly prize draw; they often formed part of the leaflet delivery network.[84] 56% of the sample identified at least one of these clubs. Finally, appeals, termed 'fighting fund' at election time, were solicited from a network of local contacts, both individual and corporate, and were often linked to specific events. Nevertheless, from Table 3.10 it can be calculated that omitting opposition safe seats, the average fundraising per member in 2005 was merely £33.10. At just over double the then £15 subscription, this could be interpreted as poor, but with only 20% of the membership socially active, and many aged, this could be harsh. Associations might also raise just enough to meet their needs. Importantly, the label 'social organisation' could no longer be attached to local parties. Indeed, some politically motivated members actually avoided such activity, one officer commenting: 'it's a shock to people when they go into politics and find that they have to get involved in fundraising'.[85]

Table 3.10. Conservative Constituency Fundraising 2004-2005

A. Fundraising Activity and Donations as a Percentage of Constituency Income

Type of Seat	2005			2004		
	Fund.	Don.	Total	Fund.	Don.	Total
Conservative Safe	35.5	20.2	55.7	41.9	13.8	55.7
Marginal Held/Target	35.2	33.1	68.3	42.9	17.6	60.5
Opposition Comfortable	33.5	32.4	65.9	42.1	19.1	61.2
Opposition Safe	25.6	28.9	54.5	38.0	22.4	60.4

B. Average Fundraising per Member (£)

Type of Seat	2005	2004
Conservative Safe	32.0	34.6
Marginal Held/Target	34.5	34.4
Opposition Comfortable	32.8	32.3
Opposition Safe	25.1	34.1

Fund: Fundraising.

Don: Donations

Source: Based upon Conservative constituency association accounts; Electoral Commission.

A common solution to the fundraising problem was target setting, but the evidence was inconsistent. In High Peak: 'fundraising is so important and so easily neglected because it isn't the most popular job ... to meet the central £5 levy (see below), branches have £51.72 per member targets (including £15 subscription), which equals the expenses of the association plus £5,000 to ensure a profit'; the result was improvement, with one poor failure.[86] There were awards for attainment, but some dismissed them as irrelevant: 'we are all in the same boat and they have the potential to cause divisions between members'.[87] Derby's branches were set fundraising quotas of just £10 per member. It was stressed that these were targets to aim for, and not compulsory.[88] The association also relied upon contributions from councillors to bolster its finances, currently at 3% of expenses, though the move from £25 was controversial.[89] Somerton and Frome produced a branch quota ladder, detailing total contribution, itemised by subscriptions and events, but listed them in performance terms against target rather than the highest achievers.[90]

3. Fundraising Shortfall

Professionals expressed concern at the deterioration in local fundraising: 'it's a mantra I've been preaching to associations ... there's been a big decline in the number of social events ... 20 years ago there were many, now it's a few ... this is important as local government has become hugely more political'.[91] An area officer concurred: 'they don't make enough effort, they don't really plan ... but there aren't as many activists as there used to be, so when constituencies are being asked to plan their election campaigns well in advance, fundraising goes by the board, but you need the money to campaign ... you get loads of suggestions to them and it will be always no, done that, tried that ... they don't really want to do it ... people look to cancel events if the money doesn't come in quickly ... it's just that negative, negative attitude'.[92] Support for Whiteley et al's (1994) de-energisation thesis was evident.

Political and organisational explanations were advanced for the shortfall. Politically orientated events, such as golf days, were cancelled due to lack of support; the absence of an MP often cited as the reason.[93] The localities emulated the national situation: 'there is a need to concentrate more on the business community, but they do not want to be seen to

be political these days'.[94] Routine events such as coffee mornings also suffered without an MP, as there was an expectation of his attendance. Similarly: 'the loss of councillors had an impact, as we cannot easily then go to business for a donation ... why would they want to'.[95] The political explanation thus linked fundraising to local interests, suggesting influence seeking. However, associations now also had to compete not just with charities, but with bodies raising funds for community projects such as playing fields, previously funded by government.[96] Problems with the national funding strategy, such as 'cash-for-peerages', further hindered local efforts.[97]

Age was the fundamental organisational problem: 'the wards are finding it difficult because of the malaise of the older generation ... to come up with new ideas is difficult',[98] and 'it's hard work ... it's becoming more difficult as it's not easy to raise the price of events'.[99] In Somerton and Frome, an officer complained: 'everything is geared towards the elderly, there's a lot of rich pensioners here'.[100] Another though, was amazed that some opened their houses to 500 people; in Derby, such residencies were no longer available.[101] Moreover, a race night was withdrawn because it did not appeal to the elderly and the association annual dinner due to lack of support after the 2005 election defeat.[102] Consequently: 'there's a lack of fundraising innovation in Somerton and Frome compared to London ... the same people recycling at events, not attracting new people or younger people, but it's very difficult to break the mould'.[103] Staleness was a problem: 'to an extent, we have been very complacent in asking the same people for the same money and after so many years, you can't keep doing it ... you have to find new blood, new interest ... fundraising events tend to have been organised by the same people for the same people ... you are not going to have a disco for a bunch of geriatrics ... so, as an association, we have tried different types of events, moving away from coffee mornings and scones to a Thai night'.[104] An area officer agreed: 'fundraising tends to be historically driven ... what they did before ...: the Autumn Fair, a big fundraising event run by a branch or the association ... there's a tendency not to change it and do something different ... when you've invested the organisational time and effort, it's easier to repeat than do something different ... but we don't set targets from area'.[105]

Importantly, the purpose of membership was questioned. In Druckerian terms, some saw it purely as fundraising, which should be ruthlessly pursued. This was highlighted by their approach to events: 'the expensive dinner ... if you lose 20 people, you still make money'.[106] Moreover: 'the association does not have enough expectations of what it can achieve ... officers were under the impression that people will not pay much for tickets, but if events were made special enough at £40-50 a ticket plus sponsorship, they would enable a movement away from the £3 garden party'.[107] CCHQ reinforced this outlook: 'maximising your profits should be the number one priority on any large event' (Conservative Party 2006b: 3); member socialisation and acquisition were not priorities. A number of activists though, disagreed: 'in the past, it was literally membership, pay your money and that's it ... there's always been a strong emphasis, too much, on holding an event, you've got to make money out of it ... we're here to make money ... you can't afford to keep asking people for money, you have to give something back, people having a good time, not necessarily always make it a strictly political fundraising event ... people like to socialise as well, get together politically'.[108] Hence: 'a £50 dinner organised by the higher echelons who come from a good job or money ... two people £100 plus drinks, coffee, raffle, transport ... they often don't pitch it right ... a mistake because the whole idea is not just about fundraising, it's about getting people together, the political discussion, the socialising ... it's hard to make money, but they get greedy, a meal for £17.50, they charge £25, so they try to make £7.50 out of everybody'.[109] Achieving a balance was vital: 'keeping the social going is important, the right balance for young and old, a mix of £30 and £2.50 events'.[110] There was evidence that the "£50 dinner" segregated members: 'I could describe the Conservatives as a two-tier party ... people like me don't go to these events ... pressure has been put on me and I have to say no, I haven't got as much money as you ... these people are not really understanding ... it's a huge problem'.[111] An area officer was practical: 'we had Oliver Letwin for a day ... different functions ... he charges a reasonable amount for a buffet supper and he met many people ... William Hague, well worth it, but can the man in the street afford it ... you have to look at where you are raising money ... each constituency will raise money differently because they are so different ... does the cost upset people, no they just accept it ... I don't go to the £75 conference dinner'.[112]

The monetary focus, and indeed the relative unpopularity of fundraising, did not adversely affect membership and political activity: 'we didn't find people leaving for that reason ... there are enough political activities to get involved in'.[113] Moreover: 'we do a newsletter every month, so they are kept up to date ... people realise that without money, we're sunk, but we try and make sure it's political as much as the money because some people can give more than others ... you don't want people to feel that because they can't give much money, they're not as important as somebody who can ... you have to be very careful there'.[114] However, concern was expressed over recruitment: 'there's a very great danger that they only want us for one thing ... they're always in the "ear-hole" for money ... they wouldn't leave, but they might not be willing to recommend their friends to join ... people don't become active because they are lethargic ... you need to take people for what they can give'.[115] Nevertheless a senior officer suggested: 'a politically astute person, if he didn't move on quickly to become a candidate, local councillor or didn't take some active role on the political side, would have nothing of interest in the average fundraising event, apart from meeting a few people who might be there for other reasons ... politically, it's as dull as dishwater ... they (the Liberal Democrats) are more political ... to most of the officers who are politically minded, going to these events, which we do to show our faces, it can get very tedious ... it's a concomitant necessity of my role'.[116]

A further organisational impediment was an ingrained financial parochialism manifested in the ownership of local funds: 'the purpose of fundraising is not to give people jobs, but to win elections ... I did find it difficult when wards wouldn't give the association the money because they said "we need the money" ... they don't need the money ... none of them should have bank accounts ... all the money they raise should go straight into the association, but they won't do that ... if you did instigate it, they would stop fundraising ... but it's not their money, it's the association's money ... they think it's theirs ... there's a huge problem and it's not just here, it's everywhere ... it's really difficult to get money out of them'.[117] This was reinforced by: 'there's a tendency for wards to try and keep the money for themselves ... they need to take a more constituency wide view ... it is changing now ... people wanted it just spent in their own ward rather than in a pooled

fighting fund ... frictions because people say they worked hard to collect the funds to give to someone else ... we all need to be working as a team ... it needs to be spent on us moving forward'.[118] The motivational aspect though, was strong: 'it's more rewarding for people if they go out and raise money because they know it's being spent locally'.[119] Parochialism though, clearly hindered local effectiveness. The evidence revealed that the party did not just face difficulties in aligning national and local interests, but also interests within the constituency parties themselves.

Finally, regular central appeals to members also undermined local efforts. Frustration resulted because they were seen as 'tapping' into local money: 'we get deluged ... central mailing may go out at the same time as a local appeal, so there's a doubling up and it upsets our members ... though, it is difficult to co-ordinate'.[120] Such missives typically asked for donations rather than ideas or active help; for example, a David Cameron appeal: 'I am asking you to help the party. The most practical way to do this is by making a financial contribution to our work. Anything that you feel you can afford from £10 to £10,000 will be put to good use'.[121] In addition, the centre introduced a £1,000 weekly and £5,000 quarterly draw, operated in a similar manner to the local 200 clubs, thereby threatening the latter.[122] Many associations already partook in two national draws. They received 80% of the income (Conservative Party 2006c), but after the 2005 election this was reduced to 75%, without consultation.[123] Annoyance with such practices was articulated: 'Central Office advice on fundraising is unfortunately one for you and two for me ... the summer draw and Christmas draw, we are allowed to keep 75% which is alright, but we have had circulars sent out to people within the constituency saying support the Conservative Party, send a cheque to Central Office ... no, it's our money, we can raise it ourselves, we are happy doing that ... we had a circular that if we needed any assistance approaching wealthy members of the community, Central Office would send somebody and we could retain 40% ... no, we're quite capable of doing that ourselves ... so there's a definite resistance there from the association to Central Office, it has a nasty habit of being patronising and greedy'.[124] The centre saw members at least partially in monetary terms, but it could equally be inferred that whilst it was encouraging localities

to raise more money, it was simultaneously de-vitalising them. It rendered any attempt to align national and local interests more difficult.

4. Patrons' Clubs

The centre was also influential in promoting local Patrons' Clubs. They were an additional source of finance and were the local equivalent of national donor clubs. Additional titles included Westminster Club, Churchill Club or Business Forum. Some associations afforded them branch status, but most kept them separate. The purpose was to attract 'new money' from wealthy people in the constituency, who may not be members. An aristocrat, major business figure or celebrity was suggested as the figurehead, but clubs should be made 'unashamedly exclusive' and members' businesses should be used for shadow cabinet tours (Conservative Party 2008). The business link was emphasised locally: 'it's a Patrons' Club for business people in essence ... an active way of getting into industry'.[125] In Somerton and Frome, the importance of allowing Patrons to participate in the candidate selection process and to know the PPC or MP personally was accentuated.[126] History therefore, revealed their fickleness. The Cheltenham club was vibrant under Thatcher, but dwindled with party fortunes. High Peak: 'had a successful Patrons' Club until we lost Charles Hendry (MP) ... obviously, with such a landslide away from the Conservative Party, business was not interested in Patrons' Clubs because basically they expect help of some kind, quite reasonably, to come from it'.[127] Fundamentally: 'it's about getting their voices heard'.[128] Political links were now more sensitive: 'they want to be seen in the right place and they might need the MP later ... it's vested interests, not necessarily their politics ... a lot of companies will not now nail their colours to a mast'.[129] Part of the attraction was a dinner at the House of Commons, with the party leader or other senior figure in attendance, a practice now outlawed following charges of abuse of parliamentary facilities, an inquiry by the parliamentary standards commissioner and a reprimand.[130] Influence was thus associated with access to local and national politicians, rather than the functioning of the association, but it would exceed that of ordinary members. Nevertheless, by attaching such importance to them, the centre was clearly accommodating the link between donations and interests.

In 2005, there were believed to be slightly more than 100 Patrons' Clubs.[131] The current sample identified 46.7% of constituencies possessing one. Discounting the very weak, the total number was likely to be 170-180; although not all were thought to be productive. There was little data in constituencies' annual reports on participants. Somerton and Frome had 25, High Peak 30. Officers felt that between 20 and 40 were preferable, as exclusivity needed to be maintained to ensure meaningful access to senior politicians. Information on their financial contribution was also patchy. They alluded to substantial extra funds accruing from the £250 subscription fee (£100 in High Peak): 175 clubs at say £200 average, with 25 members each realises £875,000. In addition, Patrons provided donations and cash from their functions, worth probably at least a similar amount, bringing the net contribution close to £1.75m. Officers also noted the qualitative benefits: 'it motivates people who are our key voters, key supporters'.[132] Moreover, Patrons: 'provide a different viewpoint on the association's activities because by the nature that they are in a position to donate more money to the party, they tend to be higher powered people in business and so on'.[133] Contacts and business experience were important; for example, help with venues for fundraising and an offer of media assistance to the PPC of Somerton and Frome.[134] Patrons were thus a form of community development for the Conservative Party, in a similar way to supporter networks. However, the viability of Patrons' Clubs was questioned. Margins could be very thin and success required good political speakers on a consistent basis, which could cost money.[135]

Tether suggested that Patrons constituted 'an elite inside some Conservative associations' (1991b: 291-2). However, this was not the case: they were located on the periphery of local parties, divorced from ordinary members. There was also little evidence that members felt discriminated against. Instead, Patrons were accepted as an integral part of Conservatism: 'why shouldn't they get extra ... it's part of the Conservative Party's philosophy that if you pay more for something, you get more, in a similar manner to health provision and education'.[136] Politically: 'if one of the benefits of being a Patron is to get more access to visiting MPs, then that's what they are paying for ... it's up to the visiting guy to meet as many people as he can ... you won't get me to support equality'.[137]

Practically: 'it undoubtedly does discriminate, but then the market place discriminates against anyone who cannot afford anything ... they being wealthy run in circles of people who have influence ... they know what raises money and they expect a high quality speaker ... so they get what they want, which is access to senior politicians'.[138] Importantly, it was: 'nice to give people that want to make a contribution extra access to events and to people ... but equally, they don't buy influence locally'.[139] Indeed: 'most ordinary members are not aware of the Patrons' Club and it doesn't pervade'.[140] It was kept separate from association functions and 'as long as there are alternative outlets for members to also meet senior politicians',[141] it worked well. Dissenters though, maintained that Patrons received 'the more discerning events politically'.[142] Concern was also expressed about the damaging image of perceived elitism and status portrayed by some Patrons; this was felt to possibly deter some younger members.[143] Nevertheless, it was the preservation of the link to business that was stressed, along with their contribution. Patrons could assist the party's revival locally. It was the task of local leadership to facilitate this.

5. Leadership Co-ordination

Local leadership was highlighted as essential for fundraising generally, especially in target seats where the permanent campaign meant limited volunteer time: 'it's the person running it and thinking of different ways of raising those funds ... getting people to focus, one person to run the 200 club, one the country fair'.[144] A former chairman noted: 'I was good at raising money ... I concentrated on local wealthy individuals ... the association was in a strong position when I left office ... now it's slipping, they have not raised any donations in the past year'.[145] Close monitoring was required: 'we have drifted over the last three or four years ... it has been run on a very ad hoc basis at the constituency level, left to the personal preferences of the officer responsible who will run one type of event and not another ... (the agent) advises a lot and I'm vocal to ensure many events are run in the windows planned for them ... you need to keep badgering people ... the incumbent only runs events that make money, I say run as many as you can'.[146] Fundraising required a certain type of individual. It was: 'often the same people who raise money for charity, people who generally get involved ... the people I deal with

on a political level are generally the people who work for Lifeboats or whatever ... they're all involved, they're the same people raising money'.[147] However, the numbers of them were dwindling. Putnam's (1993) thesis on the decline of social capital was again apposite. Consequently, an area officer stressed: 'it links to community work, community politics ... you need a good figurehead and team ... a lack of an agent is a problem ... I have been advocating consistently for more full-time paid agents ... it needs to be enjoyable ... people need to have a good time to raise money'.[148]

The absence of an agent was lamented in the northern constituencies. A funding trap was apparent as no agent meant reduced activity, but reduced activity meant no agent. For example regarding the national draws: 'all you need is to send the tickets to members and pledgers and use the return tickets to see if they want to become members ... it just needs somebody to sort it out ... this is where we are suffering from a lack of agents'.[149] In addition: 'there doesn't seem to be the initiative or interest for the big constituency events now ... if we had an agent, we would be motivated into doing more, because he would do the donkey work'.[150] This was confirmed by an agent who saw his 'role to suggest fundraising activities, to raise more income and reduce expenditure and suggest how they can make more from an event, plus a hands-on role in constituency events'.[151] Derby might get an agent: 'by some pump priming from Central Office, but the association would have to match it ... at the moment, nothing is happening ... a few coffee mornings ... they don't do much ... there may be one or two a year in four branches, very little else ... it makes affording an agent difficult ... you can move mountains with an agent, as members can be co-ordinated ... there is a shortage of fundraisers in the constituency, less and less people to do it'.[152] The implication was that the PPC had to organise some events to raise campaign funds, which questioned the definition of her role. Looking forward: 'with the merger, three constituencies, fundraising will increase, so it's more likely that we will get an agent, but if we employ now, it would impact on leaflets and not all agents are good'.[153] Constituency accounts seldom revealed the status of staff employed, so accurate data could not be obtained. CCHQ recommended an agent salary range of £20,560-38,084 in 2005, suggesting a successful agent would earn somewhere in the middle of this band (Conservative Party 2005c).[154] Competent individuals would have

to be dedicated to the cause to accept such a salary. A declining membership base would also hinder local affordability, and hence their earnings.

Overall, there was a fundraising deficit at the local level. Local capability was lacking, summed up by: 'diminishing returns with diminishing members'.[155] Financially, local associations could not play a full part in the party's recovery. If the centre still perceived fundraising as a mechanism for deflecting members' attention from policy matters, it would be disappointed at the evidence. The presence of strong local leadership was therefore, critical to maintain financial buoyancy and to develop outside agencies such as Patrons' Clubs. A weaker financial position would make associations more susceptible to central influence, by reducing the capacity to sustain local autonomy. Moreover, it had implications for Johnston and Pattie's work, which used constituency expenditure as a measure of local campaign intensity.

Central Encroachment into Local Finance

The financial position of both the national and local parties revealed in this chapter led the centre, through the constitution, to continually encroach on the constituencies in terms of both their contribution requirements and expenditure.

1. Local Contribution

The local contribution to the centre was relatively minor. Until 2000, the constituency quota scheme was the sole intra-party transfer mechanism. Established in 1948, Lord Woolton 'was determined to make the party spend and not hoard ... he deliberately resolved to overspend on publicity, propaganda ... and thus force the local party organisation to raise the necessary funds'.[156] Quotas were determined centrally for each association as a function of the number of Conservative voters at the previous general election, set against those of the most successful opposing candidate. However, Pattie and Johnston (1996) found that not only did many associations fail to meet their targets, frequently by a substantial margin, but also a good number sent nothing; defaulters often being in strong Conservative seats. An analysis of central statistics for 2004 revealed almost 94% of the overall target reached, but this masked discrepancies. Only the Greater

London and Southern region exceeded its target and much of the income received comprised interest credits from constituency loans to the centre. Consequently, it received just £540,000 in new money. There was no consistency in the targets, some being set very high and others a token amount, including some Conservative-held seats. Moreover, the paltry contributions of some rich localities suggested deliberate avoidance.[157] Recognising inflexibility, the rules were replaced in 2000 by affordability, but little changed. Some high turnover constituencies did not pay because of agent and office costs, others saw a high target, could not pay it, so paid nothing at all, and some of the weak, seeing rich ones not giving much, became annoyed and sent less.[158]

Voluntary payments were a source of central irritation. *Fresh Future* thus initiated a redistribution of subscription fees (Conservative Party 1998a: 27-8). Associations were initially charged a £200 affiliation fee and £1 per member levy; from 2004 they were combined into £1.50 per capita, but with quotas remaining in place. These were subsequently renamed 'campaign subscriptions', couched in terms of funding the central marketing team, the area campaign network and target seat strategies. Nevertheless, the critical point was the stipulation to constituencies that the £1.50 'formalises your membership of the Conservative Party' (Conservative Party 2005b: 1); the implication being that membership benefits such as conference attendance and voting rights in party ballots would be withdrawn if the invoice was unpaid. Annual dialogue and agreement of targets with area officers replaced central imposition, though a minimum £100 was set. Consultation however, could be a letter from regional office with an arbitrarily set amount and a comment: 'if we do not hear from you to the contrary, then we assume it is okay'; the association was then put under pressure to achieve it.[159] The approach, which set regional officials an overall target, was managerially astute. They determined individual constituency amounts based upon their understanding of local areas, but being keen to achieve advancement in the party, they would work to ensure their quota was fulfilled.[160] Local payments though, remained low.

The formal relationship underpinned further change. From January 2007, the member levy was increased to £5 and was linked to local servicing. Associations that had

previously contributed significant amounts were expected to continue; the new scheme would not work if they used the revision to make reductions.[161] Campaign subscriptions though, were retained for European elections; Derby for example, was asked for £3,000 towards the 2009 campaign.[162] A constituency association consultation survey was undertaken. From the 290 responses, almost half opted for the £25 minimum subscription and 90% selected £5 as the tariff to the centre, but only two choices were offered: £5 and £10.[163] Justifying the increases, Maude argued that constituencies forwarded a mere £900,000 per year, whereas CCHQ spending to support them was in the region of £1.5m, so that 'we clearly give in terms of value more to the constituencies than they pay to us'; many associations, some of whom were sitting on cash mountains, were contributing nothing.[164] The current situation, he argued, was 'inefficient and unsustainable'.[165] However, this measured constituency value purely in monetary terms, rather than their full contribution, and hence was disparaging. If the membership figure of 247,000 remained constant, the £5 levy would raise £1.235m. The more generous constituencies would not make up the difference.

The local response to change was acquiescence, albeit with some dissent. The outcome of the acrimonious debate in Somerton and Frome was concessions for senior citizens, benefit recipients and those in full-time education, whose rate remained at £15.[166] High Peak chose to retain £15 for all as a motivational tool to give the membership 'a feeling of ownership that we could defy Central Office ... it's encouraged them to carry on donating and attending events'.[167] The centre took a relaxed view of these initiatives, as long the £5 was adhered to. There was though, some support for the increase: 'it's perfectly acceptable, leaving aside that our opponents do the same, it's only reasonable for people who want to benefit from party membership to make a financial contribution to it ... Central Office needs substantial resources to fight a general election and do the things a modern political party has to ... we can raise the extra funds we need'.[168] Furthermore: 'if you leave things to the voluntary and they're not doing well, then they're not going to pay anything ... so they (levy and increases) had to come in ... over the years, associations have done their own thing, they didn't answer to Central Office ... we are now the

Conservative Party and working together, but there are some old-fashioned ones who don't want to be told a damn thing ... we've got to get away from that'.[169]

Officers were confident they could raise the extra funds, but the increase hardened their stance towards further contributions. It undermined constituency goodwill: 'I wouldn't advocate paying extra money to the centre ... I would want to use the money to campaign locally and support our candidate'.[170] Affordability and putting local interests first were apposite: 'it has effectively taken £3.50 for each member out of the association, which we have to replace by additional fundraising ... we are working and we'll replace it, but there is no reason why we should be putting any more to support them, when they have national donations, national members and national fundraising campaigns ... there is a place for that, but they cannot have it both ways ... if we were awash with cash, it might be different ... we've enough to do what we want, but we don't have any surpluses'.[171] Moreover: 'suddenly asking for £5 per head affiliation fee instead of £1.50 is a bit heavy ... it doesn't threaten our independence, it does threaten the financial stability ... they ask for a campaign amount as well, this hasn't been paid recently ... it would be a bad thing to suggest that we should give more than our fair share ... every penny raised goes towards paying the group quota and it just about makes ends meet ... the central party not only gets the affiliation fee, but very importantly, a lot of money goes to central funds in the summer draw and Christmas draw, and if you haven't got a strong energetic and willing association who will get those tickets out, then the central party will not get the benefit it needs ... it brings in hundreds of thousands of pounds annually, that's very important'.[172] Formalism annoyed another officer: 'we've always paid a sum of money every year ... it's now much more of a laid down rule by Central Office that you will pay this much ... that's not the way it should go ... there's the running cost of our organisation and if we don't have enough to give them the £5 ... you'll hide members if they're not careful ... after all, what do they get, a vote now and again, but not very often ... a vote on the leadership ... half of them are not interested in it anyway'.[173] Acquiescence with irritation was a fair summary of the position of many activists.

There was also further evidence of patronisation. For local contributions, CCHQ awarded annual certificates of excellence and five-year plaques. In addition, the treasurer's reception at the party conference served as a 'back-slapping' event for the faithful. Here, it was traditional for large cheques from wealthy associations to be presented and long-term awards over 10 years received, accompanied by big cheers.[174] Examples included Runnymeade and Weybridge 55 years, Horsham 40, Sheffield Heeley 20 (Conservative Party 2006d: 12). A CCHQ official highlighted a local party which had not defaulted in 40 years, missed three years due to new local leadership views, but at the next change asked to make up the difference in order to reaffirm their loyalty.[175] Most officers though, had either not heard of the certificates or else concurred that: 'it's irrelevant ... they are never mentioned ... it just lies on the table',[176] or more starkly: 'we've got our own wallpaper'.[177] CCHQ also allocated associations to five divisions, headed by a Premier Division for payments over £10,000 per annum. Premier associations received the use of treasurers' VIP facilities at conference, two invitations to treasurers' department events, an annual premier league dinner for association chairmen (formerly at the House of Commons) and long term awards at conference; the winner also received two rooms at the main conference hotel.[178] Those placed in other divisions received lesser benefits, but as these were at the discretion of regional officials, usually meant nothing. Importantly, many local officers were not aware of them.[179] For the election year 2005, 28 associations (including two federations) featured in the Premier Division, five more than the previous year. The mean payment was £17,774, the Cities of London and Westminster being the highest at £38,114 (Conservative Party 2006d: 12). The local chairmen automatically received the benefits, giving personal incentives to push fundraising. It was also another indication of the centre's approach of focusing on the local leadership. Most officers however, treated the divisionalisation in the same manner as the certificates of excellence. Younger members were unimpressed: 'I was shocked because unfortunately it just smacked of the Conservative Party and the negative vibe ... if you raised £10,000 you were in the premier league and you get to go to the conference for free, you get this, that and the other ... every so often, I see something like that and it's not right'.[180] Certificates of excellence and financial divisionalisation were clear examples of the patronising management style to which members were subjected.

A similar conclusion could be applied to the constituency loan scheme. Associations were induced to deposit money at CCHQ by interest credited originally against campaign subscriptions, but later the levy;[181] although the loans were unsecured (Ashcroft 2005: 226). From the constituency sample, 40.8% provided a loan to CCHQ in 2005, in the range £1,430-62,500, with a mean of £17,667 (standard deviation £13,106); the non-sample Esher and Walton association lent £262,000. However, resultant influence was discounted by officers. Instead, for Derby who had a significant loan from a legacy: 'we're having trouble getting some of the money back ... it's a loan they don't want to repay', one officer having to personally pay for leaflets in the interim.[182] In Somerton and Frome similarly, a local officer was forced to pay 200 Club prizes out of his own pocket until CCHQ could afford to return the loan six months later. Much acrimony resulted, the constituency being treated with disdain.[183] They withdrew the money. The loan scheme was also modified in the centre's favour.[184]

In monetary terms, local transfers to the centre were of little importance either to the party's recovery or to undermining local autonomy. Instead, it was the new formal relationship that was significant; it enabled the centre to impose contribution changes at will, although it had to be mindful of the impact on the motivation of volunteers. The evidence suggested that it had already sacrificed some goodwill.

2. Expenditure Influence

PPERA led the centre to monitor the localities more closely. However, officers concurred that this was to ensure compliance with the law, rather than for political reasons. Indeed, a positive view was taken: 'we have to provide accounts ... that's a very healthy thing'.[185] Moreover: 'I have to send in my reports on our finances, on our political make-up and membership every year ... so there's a degree of monitoring and there should be'.[186] CCHQ did not intervene, but neither did it provide financial training. Activists insisted that central managers had no influence over their expenditure: 'we seem to be given pretty much freedom of action to do what we want ... we're expected to organise our own affairs, our own finances, which I like'.[187] Critically, if they tried to influence: 'we

wouldn't do it ... we might take helpful hints from them, but we wouldn't take any direction'.[188] This was because: 'it's more rewarding for people to go out and raise money if they know the way it's being spent and there's absolutely very little direction on how you spend your money ... if the centre gave us money, we would probably take direction, but not for our own money'.[189] Some though, linked this to performance: 'as long as you can show that you are improving and doing the job properly ... if not, that is where the area chairman comes in and the area agent (regional director) ... they will have a word before it goes to Central Office'.[190] Nevertheless, that the localities were content to supply financial and other information to the centre was in stark contrast to the secrecy of the pre-*Fresh Future* era.

The key issue was the prioritising of expenditure. One local officer related: 'they think all money raised should be spent on campaigning ... but this requires an organisation, it requires support, so it's a difference of emphasis ... we are theoretically all heading in the same direction ... if we have to spend £200 on a new tombola to do our monthly 200 club draw, that might be seen as frivolous expenditure, but it helps the fundraising, which helps the campaigning'.[191] Regarding the professionals: 'regional directors don't sway any great influence, but they do guide to a degree ... they'll say you should be spending a certain percentage of your income on election campaigning ... it's good ... it's a touch of security and at the same time you know that you are heading in the right direction and you refocus slightly ... they realise that it's a voluntary organisation'.[192] An official added: 'campaign directors, their role is to get target seats campaigning ... they have to spend money, so they are there to influence ... in those associations where we have worked with them and gained their trust, we have made headway ... they realise that if you spend the money wisely it pays dividends ... but a lot of associations sit on nice amounts of money for a rainy day ... well, it's been pouring down for the past ten years, they are beginning to realise that'.[193] Indeed, a campaign professional asserted that even 'in membership and fundraising campaigns, we won't support them anymore, even in target seats, unless they are prepared to sign up to the things they are supposed to do'.[194] Despite local protestations to the contrary therefore, professionals were increasingly

involved in directing local expenditure. Benchmarking and spending parameters were the preferred means, but supported status was available for the recalcitrant.

The target seat scheme established by Michael Ashcroft underlined the centre's assertive financial strategy. He had been appointed deputy chairman with this responsibility soon after David Cameron's accession to the leadership. This provided him with the power to stipulate how the target seats campaign was to be managed; local associations were obliged to follow his guidelines.[195] Money was allotted for specific tasks aimed at communicating the party's message: 'we have to provide them with a business plan of how we are going to operate our campaign and they put that into financial assistance after Ashcroft has evaluated it'.[196] Grant size was subject to a financial audit of the constituency and a range of criteria relating to electorate size, household numbers, pledges collected, postal voters, deliverers and actual leaflets delivered, member numbers and fundraising.[197] Hence, greater formalism was apparent: 'we've had to give a statement of how we're going to run ourselves and run the election ... we've been a target seat before and got no help ... this time we will get a huge amount ... that is conditional on us running our affairs carefully and not wasting money'.[198] For progressive officers: 'it needs central co-ordination on how money's allocated ... it's based on real plans, on the monitoring of those plans to make sure you are actually doing it ... Ashcroft has seen evidence we spend it in the right ways and it makes a difference'.[199] It was also seen as a two-way process: 'it is a dialogue ... what they have been open to is perhaps trying something different, a bit risky, because if it works they've got a model that can be put across all target seats'.[200] Assistance did not extend to help for fundraising or other purposes and the money awarded: 'cannot be spent on people or equipment, only on campaigning ... we spent ours on a leaflet and telephone canvassing ... the regional agent authorises it ... we spend the money and then we get it reimbursed'.[201] Central influence, through regional professionals, ultimately ranged from subtle to more direct, subject to perceptions of individual constituency performance.

Ashcroft's approach potentially threatened local independence. Officers though, vehemently discounted any problem. His money was received enthusiastically; some

indeed, were desperate for it. In Cheltenham, activists were able to cover the town with 45,000 leaflets. However, there was a danger that his finance would become a substitute for local fundraising rather than a supplement. The ageing membership and the dislike of fundraising by many underlined this: 'I fear we're not going to be very successful in raising money ... we might get some Lord Ashcroft money as a result, but that's got to be to the detriment of the party as a whole ... the more constituencies that are self-sufficient the better it must be for the centre'.[202] Moreover, in Somerton and Frome, despite the stipulated purpose of their grant, a number of executive council members questioned why it could not be spent as the association desired, for example on council election posters and leaflets; much patience was needed by the management team.[203]

It was unlikely that the centre will ever receive a substantial monetary contribution from the localities; collectively they forwarded less than 10% of their annual turnover. Therefore, its strategy was to direct local expenditure towards campaign-related activity. This was typically undertaken in an advisory manner; although supported status was now available for the errant. The Ashcroft finance initiative reinforced the centre's stance; this was aligned to the campaign team concept (see chapter four).

Conclusion

The Conservative Party's approach to financial management, and hence its recovery, was founded on the belief that money wins elections, so that a competitive advantage both nationally and locally was essential. The leadership deemed that this required a holistic effort. William Hague ensured the signature of the National Union chairman was on the *Fresh Future* document, so that the voluntary party would share the financial burden; member representation on the board could be similarly interpreted. However, for the purpose of tightening up local finance, reform has only been partially successful; there has not been a full alignment of national and local interests. The centre has only been able to acquire a token amount of local funds to shore up its massive deficits. Critically, it has been unable to effect massive sales of local properties. Consequently, its desire to redistribute local resources to satisfy electoral needs has been impeded. Financial parochialism at the constituency level, and indeed at branch level, remains a significant

problem in the Conservative Party. However, the key change was the new formal relationship. This enabled the imposition of central levies as well as continuing campaign subscriptions. The need to retain member commitment meant that thus far these have not been onerous; although some local goodwill has been lost. Nevertheless, the new relationship has permitted central encroachment into local expenditure, through the setting of campaign parameters. The Ashcroft target seat scheme similarly demanded this. Organisationally, the centre's approach focused upon the local leadership. It was its task to co-ordinate local fundraising, particularly the development of outside supporter networks and Patrons' Clubs, and expenditure priorities. Overall however, it can be stated that the solution to the party's recovery remains sub-optimal financially.

This was exacerbated by a weaker local fundraising capability at a time when the cost of campaigning was increasing. Whilst local parties continued to raise significant sums, they could no longer be perceived as social organisations; many activists indeed, did not enjoy fundraising. Decline reflected an ageing membership and a reliance on the same people and types of event, but the lack of an MP was significant, demonstrating the salience of the political dimension and hence local interests. Financial capability though, was revealed as a primary, but not the only, factor contributing to the maintenance of local autonomy. Localities jealously guarded the right to raise and spend funds as they saw fit. Despite the abolition of the legal separation of the party components, activists still distinguished between national and local finance; national deficit financing was its problem. It was thus easy to discern why there was resistance to property sales and that they were regarded by many as symbols of local autonomy. Much of the localities' near £100m assets were tied up in properties. To the centre, these were unproductive and an organisational rigidity to be removed. Financial separation in this way reflected the parallel structures identified in the previous chapter and hence undermined leadership attempts to align national and local interests. Nevertheless, local autonomy has been eroded in expenditure terms. Moreover, the provision of Ashcroft finance not only required local parties to act with financial responsibility, but also depended upon property sales or at least their being used for income generation. Despite activist utterances to the contrary, wealthy donors impacted upon their status. However, as chapter four will show,

his money went to local campaign teams who were separated from the association mainstream, enabling officers to still claim autonomy in expenditure. Ultimately, it was in the centre's interests to have financially self-sufficient parties for campaign purposes. Local autonomy was hence preserved, albeit in diluted form.

The financial dichotomy discussed above has implications for the party evolution literature. Local parties exerted no influence over national finance, but equally the centre has not achieved full control locally. The lack of alignment undermined the electoral-professional stance and political marketing generally. In order to respond to changes in the political environment, central professionals were unable to effectively co-ordinate local resources. The progress made over expenditure, and as chapter four will show in improving efficiency, was offset by the property issue and hoarding money. As a result, Carty's (2004) franchise concept was also inadequate as the centre does not retain overall responsibility for finance: activists, the franchisees, would not permit it and the centre needs their continuing commitment. Hence financially, local parties have not been marginalised in the sense that Kirchheimer (1966), Panebianco (1988) and indeed, Katz and Mair (1995) intimated. Funding was not wholly by interest groups and the state. Despite the likely extension of state funding in Britain, local finance will continue to play a key role. On Panebianco's mass bureaucratic to electoral-professional continuum, finance remained a zone of uncertainty in which neither centre nor periphery enjoyed full control.

However, the decline in local fundraising capability needs to be seen in the context of greater persuasive campaigning locally (Denver and Hands 1997). There was evidence of de-energisation (Whiteley et al 1994) in the mundane tasks of membership and fundraising. The Ashcroft finance was hence a necessity for many associations. The centre's approach in view of this trend was to emphasise local leadership and to ensure that it actively pursued development of supporters and Patrons. This strategy marked a revision of the local cadre in Duverger's (1959) terms. It meant a renewed emphasis on the quality of local leaders in order to secure the necessary resources for campaigning. Importantly, it also meant that the centre was separating out the types of members and

focusing on the politically productive ones. This process will be further discussed in chapter four.

[1] Hencke, D. 'Tories make £15m profit from sale of old Smith Square HQ', The Guardian 9th February 2007.
[2] South West local officer - 26.
[3] East Midlands local officer - 3.
[4] South West local officer - 28.
[5] Area officer - 39.
[6] South West local officer - 27.
[7] South West local officer - 23.
[8] South West local officer - 19.
[9] Hencke, D. 'Tories split over Lord Ashcroft's rise to power', The Guardian 27 August 2007.
[10] Winnett, R. and Watt, H. 'Tories forced to name club of millionaire supporters', 15 October 2006; Blears, H. 'Tories must end secret donations', labour.org.uk 14 October 2006. The Midlands Industrial Council donated £770,000 to the centre in 2005-6 and in the first two quarters of 2005 made at least 27 donations to local constituencies, mostly in the Midlands region (source: Electoral Commission). Secrecy was a particular characteristic of the Thatcher and Major years. For example, foreign donations, some reportedly linked to tax assurances, were a feature of the Major leadership (Fisher 1997: 238).
[11] Summers, D. 'Cameron effect helps Tories amass election war chest', The Guardian 11th January 2007. The Leader's Club was £50,000 a year and the Shadow Chancellor's £25,000.
[12] The other funding clubs were (1) Party Patrons (£600 per annum) which yielded an annual reception attended by Cameron and key shadow cabinet members, plus regular information; (2) Team 2 Thousand (£2,000 per annum) which provided a programme of receptions, dinners and discussion groups, some of which were attended by Cameron and the shadow cabinet; (3) Front bench Club (£5,000 per annum) which in addition to Team 2 Thousand events, enabled participation at a number of lunches and receptions in which a contribution could be made towards the party's quest for office. 'Conservative Party Donor Clubs'. Letter to party members 22 June 2007.
[13] Hencke, D. '£5,000 dinners, £800 dances: how Tories are partying towards power', The Guardian 3 March 2007.
[14] Hurst, G. and Boyle, C. 'Wealthy backers put Conservatives on the defensive', The Times 22 August 2006.
[15] East Midlands local officer - 14.
[16] South West local officer - 18.
[17] East Midlands local officer - 2.
[18] South West local officer - 27.
[19] 'Challenge the Chairman 4'. Tory Radio 29 November 2006.
[20] Riddell, P. 'If the cap fits, party heads can control their spending', The Times 19 July 2006.
[21] Pierce, A., Charter, D. and Webster, P. 'Loans to Tory Party dwarf the £14m lent to Labour', The Times 18 March 2006.
[22] For example, Labour negotiated loans below the market rate and saved over £200,000 per year.
[23] Charter, D. 'From donations to loans', The Times 18 March 2006.
[24] Riddell, P. 'A solution that failed the whiter-than-white test', The Times 21 March 2006.
[25] Webster, P., Syal, R. and Pierce, A. 'Labour's secret backers', The Times 21 March 2006.
[26] 'Party funding', Campaign for Conservative Party Democracy 2 April 2006. The Electoral Administration Act (September 2006) now requires parties to disclose all loans in the same way as donations.
[27] South West local officer - 29.
[28] South West local officer - 31.
[29] The Labour government became embroiled in the 'cash-for-peerages' row and subsequent police inquiry in 2006. Many of the party's high value donors had received either a peerage or a knighthood.
[30] South West local officer - 25.
[31] Cain and Taylor's report recommended a very low £5,000 donation limit, a lower £12m general election limit and controversially a £20m annual limit on overall expenditure. Tax relief was to be given on small donations.
[32] The Electoral Commission's report represented a lost opportunity. It talked of a general election expenditure limit of £15m and a £10,000 donation limit, but only in aspirational terms.

[33] Tyrie was the Conservative MP for Chichester. His report proposed a general election expenditure cap of £15m, but critically a donation cap of £50,000 from any one source including institutions such as trade unions.
[34] Source: Electoral Commission.
[35] Tempest, M. 'Phillips review calls for state funding for political parties', The Guardian 15 March 2007.
[36] 'Marginal MPs prove the biggest spenders in review of expenses', The Times 26 October 2007; Branigan, T. and White, M. 'Record claim prompts plea for greater transparency', The Guardian 26 October 2007
[37] South West local officer - 23.
[38] South West local officer - 19.
[39] From the Conservative perspective, there were four types of constituency: safe Conservative seats with greater than 10% majority; marginal seats targeted intensely by the parties, 10% either way; further seats the party needed to win to form an administration, opposition majority between 10% and 20%; and safe opposition seats, majority over 20%. As far as possible the sample was random within each category, 30 constituencies being selected in each. However, the Electoral Commission only reports accounts for turnovers greater than £25,000. It was difficult to obtain a fully representative sample for opposition comfortable and safe seats because of the inherent culture of secrecy in the Conservative Party. The names of the constituencies are featured in appendix five.
[40] *A 21st Century Party* identified 168 constituencies with an income less than £1,000 per year (Conservative Party 2005a: 6). This was for the pre-election year 2004. These constituencies were assumed to be in opposition safe seats. This category was therefore adjusted to reflect this fact, with an increase assumed for the election year 2005. The estimates for non-Electoral Commission opposition comfortable seats were also adjusted proportionately in line with the opposition safe figures.
[41] South West local officer - 21.
[42] East Midlands local officer - 6.
[43] South West local officer - 22.
[44] South West local officer - 20.
[45] South West local officer - 26.
[46] The lower property figure represents a value of £200,000 per property and the upper figure £300,000. Whilst some are in a state of disrepair and hence worth relatively little, some properties are thought to be worth up to £1m. Hence, the true value is likely to be close to the upper amount.
[47] 'Challenge the Chairman 4', Tory Radio 29 November 2006.
[48] Area officer - 36.
[49] Regional officer - 40.
[50] South West local official - 34.
[51] East Midlands local officer - 5.
[52] East Midlands local officer - 2.
[53] East Midlands local officer - 10.
[54] East Midlands local officer - 14.
[55] East Midlands local officer - 9.
[56] South West local officer - 31.
[57] Area officer - 39.
[58] South West local officer - 30.
[59] South West local officer - 22.
[60] South West local officer - 32.
[61] East Midlands local officer - 4.
[62] South West local officer - 29.
[63] South West local officer - 26. Annunziata Rees-Mogg was the recently selected PPC.
[64] South West local officer - 25. Lord Ashcroft's financial campaign assistance required associations to consume their own capital first (see later discussion).
[65] South West local officer - 26.
[66] Regional official - 43.
[67] South West local official - 34.
[68] Regional official - 41.
[69] Area officer - 39.
[70] South West local officer - 28.

[71] East Midlands local officer - 9.
[72] East Midlands local officer and campaign professional - 16. Liverpool is a safe Labour area; the Conservatives have little prospect of winning any seats there.
[73] East Midlands local officer - 9.
[74] East Midlands local officer - 3.
[75] South West local officer - 20.
[76] South West local officer - 30.
[77] Area officer - 39.
[78] East Midlands local officer - 15.
[79] South West local officer - 18.
[80] South West local officer - 28.
[81] South West local officer - 18.
[82] South West local officer - 19.
[83] South West local officer - 33.
[84] The aim of the 200 club is to get 200 people to contribute on a monthly basis. Typically, half of the income goes in prizes whilst the other half goes to the association. However, Somerton and Frome for instance, were having difficulties in retaining 200; it dropped to 176 at one point. Some associations run a lesser 100 club.
[85] Area officer - 36.
[86] East Midlands local officer - 9.
[87] East Midlands local officer - 12.
[88] Derby Executive Council minutes 1 February 2007.
[89] Derby Executive Council minutes 30 November 2006.
[90] The Somerton and Frome quota ladder consisted of: target, branch name, subscriptions, events, total and percentage of target reached. They were ordered in terms of performance against target.
[91] Regional official - 42.
[92] Area officer - 36.
[93] Minutes of Derby Executive Council 26 July 2007; Derby local officer - 6.
[94] East Midlands local officer - 2.
[95] East Midlands local officer - 4.
[96] South West local officer - 33.
[97] South West local officer - 30.
[98] South West local officer - 21.
[99] South West local officer - 27.
[100] South West local officer - 28.
[101] South West local officer - 29; East Midlands local officer - 6.
[102] Somerton and Frome officers report 7 February 2006; Somerton and Frome Constituency General and Political Report 5th March 2005 - 3rd March 2006.
[103] South West local officer - 28.
[104] South West local officer - 18.
[105] Area officer - 37.
[106] South West local officer - 28.
[107] East Midlands local officer - 16.
[108] South West local officer - 18.
[109] East Midlands local officer - 4.
[110] South West local officer - 19.
[111] East Midlands local officer - 5.
[112] Area officer - 38.
[113] South West local officer - 19.
[114] South West local officer - 17.
[115] South West local officer - 20.
[116] South West local officer - 29.
[117] East Midlands local officer - 6.
[118] East Midlands local officer - 7.
[119] South West local officer - 31.

[120] Area officer - 39.
[121] David Cameron appeal to members letter 22 May 2006.
[122] 'The Conservative Weekly Draw', letter to members asking them to join, 28 November 2006.
[123] The author had sight of a letter which confirmed this change.
[124] East Midlands local officer - 9.
[125] East Midlands local officer - 14.
[126] Somerton and Frome 'The Patrons' Club' newsletter, September 2006.
[127] East Midlands local officer - 10.
[128] South West local officer - 17.
[129] East Midlands local officer - 4.
[130] Hencke, D. 'Tory diners, donations and Westminster ethics', The Guardian 27 December 2006. Tempest, M. 'Cameron reprimanded over misuse of office', The Guardian 29 March 2007.
[131] Conversation with CCHQ official 7 September 2005.
[132] East Midlands local officer - 3.
[133] East Midlands local officer - 8.
[134] South West local official - 35; South West local officer - 25.
[135] South West local officer - 20; Area officer - 38.
[136] East Midlands local officer - 3.
[137] East Midlands local officer - 15.
[138] South West local officer - 29.
[139] South West local officer - 22.
[140] South West local officer - 20.
[141] East Midlands local officer - 16.
[142] East Midlands local officer - 1.
[143] East Midlands local officers - 12, 5.
[144] South West local officer - 25.
[145] South West local officer - 26.
[146] South West local officer - 23.
[147] South West local officer - 33.
[148] Area officer - 38.
[149] Area officer - 36.
[150] East Midlands local officer - 14.
[151] South West local official - 35.
[152] East Midlands local officer - 6.
[153] East Midlands local officer - 3.
[154] Where an agent was responsible for more than one constituency, such as in a grouping arrangement, it was recommended that the salary could be increased by up to one third for each additional constituency. Moreover, from 28th March 1998, all new agents' contracts have been determined by the central party board, even though they are actually employed and paid for by the local association (Conservative Party 1998b: 32).
[155] East Midlands local officer - 2.
[156] Letter to *The Times* 23 April 1965. Cited from Scammell (1995: 40).
[157] Analysis of 'Constituency Quota Analysis' document, December 2004, sent to the author by CCHQ.
[158] Conversation with CCHQ official 7 September 2005.
[159] Conversation with local association treasurer in the author's own constituency 27 August 2005.
[160] Conversations with officers in author's own constituency: treasurer, and deputy-chairman membership and fundraising.
[161] Letter to constituency associations from J Middleton, chairman of the membership committee 18 August 2006.
[162] Derby Executive Council minutes 26 July 2007.
[163] Membership consultation survey sent to associations with the J Middleton letter 18 August 2006. The results from the relevant questions were: (1) Minimum subscription level (a) £15 - 20%, (b) £20 - 26%, (c) £25 - 49%, (d) £30 - 5%. (2) The per member fee (a) £10 - 10%, (b) £5 - 90%; there were no other choices.
[164] 'Challenge the Chairman 4', Tory Radio 29 November 2006.
[165] Letter to constituencies 12 October 2006.

[166] South West local officer - 25.
[167] East Midlands local officer - 9. The membership consultation survey had also found 93% in favour of the minimum subscription being recommended rather than mandatory.
[168] East Midlands local officer - 3.
[169] South West local officer - 17.
[170] South West local officer - 25.
[171] South West local officer - 19.
[172] South West local officer - 20.
[173] South West local officer - 33.
[174] This insight is the author's observation at the treasurer's reception at the 2005 annual party conference in Blackpool.
[175] Conversation with CCHQ official 7 September 2005.
[176] East Midlands local officer - 5.
[177] East Midlands local officer - 9.
[178] Details accompanied letter to the constituencies 12 October 2006. However, this was merely an up-date of an existing divisional structure based upon monetary contributions.
[179] Conversation with local association treasurer in the author's own constituency 27 August 2005, supported by local officers in the study.
[180] East Midlands local officer - 5.
[181] For example in 2004, the total loans outstanding at CCHQ were £4.316m, which at 8% interest equalled £345,000 credited against campaign subscriptions.
[182] East Midlands local officers - 2,3.
[183] South West local officer - 26.
[184] From January 2006, the loan scheme was amended. Existing loans were repayable on demand, but any new ones were for at least five years. Letter to the constituencies by J. Marland, chairman of treasurers, 9 December 2005. The grading scale for the new five year loans was: £0-5,000 - base rate plus 2%; £5,000-30,000 - base rate plus 2.75%; £30,000 and over - base rate plus 3.25%. The existing loans were similarly graded, but at lower rates. The grading approach mirrored that of the contribution divisionalisation, thereby discriminating against the weaker associations.
[185] South West local officer - 22.
[186] East Midlands local officer - 9.
[187] East Midlands local officer - 3.
[188] East Midlands local officer - 8.
[189] South West local officer - 31.
[190] South West local officer - 17.
[191] South West local officer - 29.
[192] East Midlands local officer - 5.
[193] East Midlands local officer and campaign professional - 16.
[194] Regional official - 41.
[195] When Michael Ashcroft started allocating money to local constituency associations prior to the 2005 general election, he did not hold a senior office within the party. Indeed, he was at odds with party leader Michael Howard who almost demanded that the money be given to the centre, saying it was unacceptable to be given locally. Senior Tories wanted Ashcroft's money, but without him with it (Ashcroft 2005: 282-285). However, in December 2005, shortly after Cameron became leader, Ashcroft was elevated to the position of Deputy Chairman with responsibility for target seats and given wide ranging powers accordingly. For example, in a memorandum (23 August 2006) he confirmed the establishment of a Field Campaigning Department under his control with instructions for constituencies to comply with 'strict deadlines' and to provide regular feedback. He had assumed responsibility for the professionals in the field and was organising regular focus group and polling activity. Kite, M. 'Ashcroft's hold on party raises fears of Tory rift', Sunday Telegraph 26 August 2007.
[196] East Midlands local officer - 12.
[197] Letter from Lord Ashcroft to target seats 11 December 2006. The author also had sight of an Ashcroft constituency report on Derby North.
[198] South West local officer - 27.
[199] South West local officer - 23.

[200] South West local officer - 19.
[201] East Midlands local officer - 6.
[202] South West local officer - 26.
[203] South West local officer - 25.

Chapter Four

The Local Conservative Party Campaign Capability

Denver and Hands distinguished between 'persuasive' and 'mobilising' campaigning. The former was traditionally the preserve of the national party and the latter the localities. However, they observed increasing attention to persuasion at the local level (1997: 308). Justification for central involvement in local campaigns followed from this, as well as initiatives to improve resource distribution. Michael Ashcroft was charged with overall co-ordination of the target seats strategy, opinion research, field campaigning activities and the work of regional and area campaign directors; this was supported by extensive financial input.[1] Nevertheless, Whiteley and Seyd argued that actual campaigning remained a local function: 'while some features of election campaigning will be the same, regardless of the locality, there are enough variations in campaigning efforts, styles and intensities across the country to make it necessary to describe the election in terms of a set of different campaigns' (2003: 638). This chapter will assess the centre's capacity to direct local campaigns in the critical target seats. As the local purpose is defined in campaign terms, this has implications for local autonomy. New evidence which supports the importance of local campaigns will first be presented. From this basis, section two will consider the steps taken by the centre to achieve greater local co-ordination. Continuing local autonomy would become a function of the ability of local parties to add campaign value; this will be examined in sections three and four. The result was clear campaign weaknesses, leading to a conclusion that the centre had to become involved locally. One implication of this was structural change to group constituencies together; this will be addressed in section five. Overall, to improve electoral performance, local autonomy had to be dismantled, but it has persevered in a modified form.

The Importance of Local Campaigns

Chapter one identified two trends which suggested campaign polarisation. Firstly, it was widely reported that general election campaigns have become 'presidentialised' (Kellner 1997; Butler and Kavanagh 2002; Kavanagh and Butler 2005). Hastings forecasted continuation. Few voters discerned Conservative policy positions and made judgements solely on leader perceptions; this was understood by the Cameron team.[2] A former

director of marketing encapsulated the thinking: 'the brand of the Conservative Party is 95 per cent defined by the man in charge ... the other 5 per cent is the look and feel of the party'.[3] Secondly however, there was much evidence of the renewed importance of local campaigns (Denver et al 2002; Johnston and Pattie 2003: Whiteley and Seyd 2003). This dichotomy will be examined here.

1. Presidentialisation

The presidential scenario was acknowledged locally, but there was strong evidence that the local effort should not be dismissed: 'we have been going that way for a long time ... Thatcher was such a strong personality, very high profile, her whole attitude, very autocratic, that was her style ... Blair seemed more presidential ... national politics is getting more and more important, but you don't disregard what is happening at the grassroots'.[4] There was a fear that: 'if you move towards a more presidential style of government, which Blair has been doing, the electorate turn against ... they've tried to short circuit parliament, they've marginalised even the roles of senior cabinet ministers ... all power's been driven into the centre and when that happens you lose contact between government and people ... in our culture that's fatal'.[5] Others were supportive: 'the borough recycling and everything ties in nicely with national, so when people read leaflets, the two becomes one ... they don't see it as the Conservative Party, but as David Cameron's Conservative Party ... they like the idea of a leader, the president that communicates, the prime minister ... it's always been leaders, it's not, it's groups, the whole system, but people like to focus on one person, it's a comfort ... a good leader that people warm to is very positive ... successful periods of politics have always had strong leadership'.[6] Nevertheless, when 'David Cameron's Conservatives' appeared on the Ealing Southall by-election ballot paper in July 2007, it caused upset; many stressed they were members of the Conservative Party.[7]

The outlook was transfused into electioneering: 'Blair has presidentialised the role of prime minister, so you have to counter that with someone who can be seen as presidential ... you would then have a presidential-type or personality-led campaign ... we have to fight the incumbents ... if it's their style, then we have to at least demonstrate our

capability to match that'.[8] Hence: 'the country is, you could argue the party is in its selection of David Cameron as our leader ... we have to go the way we have to go and that's what we've done'.[9] In stark terms: 'we keep hammering Cameron-Brown ... whether we like it or not, it's with us ... that's the premise on which we're fighting the general election ... we've got the new brand'.[10] There was some unease: 'policies are what we should be leading on, but I suspect because of the contrasting figures ... by 2009, Brown is likely to be absolutely mired in what he created himself and Cameron should be able to exploit it'.[11] Overall: 'in a general election, the work has to be done locally, but our efforts will be puny by comparison ... the relationship between people and the Conservatives is the perception of the national party, of David Cameron and his people which will determine which way the vote goes and move the floating voters'.[12] Few activists doubted presidentialism, but they did not see campaigns so holistically.

2. Local Contribution

Qualitative support was added here to the resurgence of local campaigning literature. Activists indicated three reasons why a strong local effort was needed to compliment presidentialism. Firstly, electoral politics required a local presence: 'without a strong local presence and people willing to make a difference locally, we can't expect people to vote Conservative nationally ... people vote on national issues, what David Cameron and Gordon Brown say and what they've seen on TV, but a good chunk of voters will be more persuaded to vote a certain way if there's a strong local effort being made ... that increases confidence in the Conservative Party'.[13] To an official: 'the local effort is secondary ... when people go into the polling station, they're not thinking am I voting for Andrew Bingham or Tom Levitt, but would I prefer David Cameron as prime minister or ... in that respect it's presidential, but there's no doubt a popular local candidate and a good local campaign can buck the national swing ... there are people who think you don't have to run a local campaign because it is presidential, that's rubbish ... where the electorate doesn't hear from the Conservative Party, they will think Cameron is irrelevant, they don't do anything around here ... it (local campaign) goes towards influencing what they think of the leader'.[14] This reflected the 'spiral of silence' thesis, where those who were active appeared stronger than they really were, whilst others who remained silent

appeared weaker (Noelle-Neumann 1980: 4-5). To this argument, a local officer added: 'the reduction in community spirit means that people look at things from a national point of view, they don't tend to think of local people and local things ... but it can't all be done through national campaigning because there are people who aren't looking ... you have to raise the flag in front of them and you can only do that locally'.[15] This was underlined by: 'you cannot guarantee that we are going to get to everybody through that (television) screen ... that is what (the centre) thinks ... it's the letterbox, the knock on the door ... workers on the ground must still go in tandem'.[16] Indeed, Kavanagh and Butler acknowledged that in 2005, less than half of voters saw the party leaders on newscasts; only a fifth though, had any doorstep contact (2005: 168).

Secondly, a strong local effort was needed to combat opposition strategic ground offensives, particularly of the Liberal Democrats; this required local investment in a local candidate. An agent argued: 'they're electing the president, so they want the party leader to be a credible alternative ... but if the organisation on the ground, if the candidate is a weakness, that can affect the result ... any candidate who thinks things will just happen on a national swing hasn't been watching the variations in the election results for the last 15 years ... in Cheltenham, Somerton and Frome, North Devon and every other Liberal Democrat seat, they will not be punished in the same way as the Labour Party appear to be on the road to being for being in government ... you very much need local and the local candidate, because if you are perceived as being an outsider, particularly in a Liberal seat, they will crucify you'.[17] Hence: 'in the High Peak, we have invested in our parliamentary candidate ... he will have been in post for four years in 2009, and fought the last election, so he has a high profile which is probably why he did so well at the local elections'.[18] Diversity was emphasised: 'the statisticians always say that a local candidate only takes a small personal vote ... but David Cameron is not having as much effect in the north as the south ... a good local candidate in a target seat who gets a lot of publicity and who gets out and about, can swing the vote ... a good constituency MP and an excellent campaign can hold onto a seat ... if we were to rely on a presidential effect, we wouldn't win a lot of seats up here'.[19] Moreover: 'in the modern world, television is where elections are fought ... but local candidates getting themselves round and known ... if

voters look at a name and they've shaken that person's hand, and another they haven't met, I'll guarantee if there's a waiver the cross will go to who they've spoken to or shaken hands with'.[20]

Thirdly, electoral fragmentation required sharper competitiveness through the candidate assimilating local issues and communicating a localised message. A local officer stressed: 'voters will get the majority of their headline information via the national media ... a national campaign is incredibly important, but a lot of the ground work is put in by associations ... hence, a flexible national-local co-ordination ... we can't have the national campaign divorced from the local campaign, giving high-level messages without local campaigns putting those messages into how it will translate for people locally ... for Cameron to say we'll put more money into the NHS and we'll do it this way, without that being translated into what it means for local people ... money can save that unit locally, we can build a unit there ... it's that co-ordination ... the electorate has become more fragmented and you've got to tailor your message to that fragmentation'.[21] Competitively: 'you have to look at individual areas ... the Liberal Democrats say all things to all people ... their whole approach is to take local issues, forget national issues because they can say anything on national issues ... local issues is what they concentrate on and they're what we need to concentrate on'.[22] Another officer agreed: 'the electorate can be fickle ... there is no doubt that local issues can get people going ... it's one of the things the Liberal Democrats have had great success in, doing a single issue to death raises awareness and gets them votes ... we're not very good at it, when we are, which we are occasionally, it tends to be useful'.[23] Hence, it was asserted: 'for the Liberal Democrats to have the support they have in Derby North, it has to be based on local issues and what they are doing locally ... if you ignore that in a general election campaign, you would probably be onto a thumping'.[24] Overall therefore, for maintaining a local presence, enhancing local competitiveness through a local candidate and putting a local interpretation on political issues, activists remained convinced of the value of local campaigning. The evidence also pointed to a need for an alignment of national and local campaigns. A corollary however, was that localism was often viewed specifically as the local candidate. For the centre, this meant that local campaigns should be professionally co-ordinated.

Campaign Co-ordination

The revival of the local arena as an important campaign front led to the centre taking steps to enhance its influence over local campaign strategies, structures and systems.

1. Campaign Strategy

The local general election strategy was determined centrally and communicated down. An agent stated: 'in target seats, Central Office works out the strategy and allows local agents and activists to implement it, make tactical decisions, tailor it to the local community based on their local knowledge'.[25] A professional confirmed: 'the outline of the strategy is done nationally, with me putting that across to the local associations ... people are not going to make policy up locally ... we try to take as much off local associations as possible, in templates and leaflets ... if they want to do a newsletter, they just do the typing ... that is a way of ensuring our house style, the blue and green, the tree logo... in the past it's taken some associations 10 years to change over'.[26] This was politically significant, as it enabled professionals to reinforce the brand and set the policy parameters in electoral communications. It also showed the purposeful de-skilling of local activists. Practically, direction meant: 'we'd gather the key figures together, the chairmen and deputy political especially ... we'd say what is going to be their strategy, messages, seats to target and they would fall in, but sometimes in a little way ... we would hear from the top people in the campaign department and they'd be spelling out what they wanted the constituencies to do and we'd also get written information'.[27] Strategically therefore, activists were reduced to a subordinate role; although local autonomy meant that convincing some was difficult.

Broader mechanisms were also employed to enable the centre to stamp its authority on the campaign. In his role as deputy chairman with responsibility for target seats, Michael Ashcroft established the framework, stipulating the assistance localities could expect to receive: campaigning advice, campaign director support, access to the battleground research programme, campaign support from Conservative-held seats and financial support.[28] Moreover, the party organised an annual "TakeYourSeats" conference, run by

central professionals, which brought together candidates, agents, association chairmen and council leaders in target seats. Themes discussed included 'funding your campaign', 'handling the media' and becoming 'community champions'.[29] Local officers described this as helpful.[30] The same people were further invited to regional campaign meetings to add reinforcement.

There was a general acceptance of the centre's right to determine the local campaign strategy. Contentment and local autonomy were reflected in the capacity to adapt the central thrust to fit local conditions: 'they set the overall campaign for us ... the newspapers were set in a certain way, we filled them with news ... the main advertising is done centrally, the main push, the associations cannot dictate policy ... because they are dictating policy, they are controlling the election campaign ... we put our slant on what they tell us'.[31] In addition: 'for a general election, there has to be some co-ordination, the glue needs to be there nationally, even though we need to run very different strategies in Derby North and Mid Derbyshire ... you wouldn't want to contradict anything David Cameron's pushing or the party nationally because the issues that people will be going to vote on will be national and we would be silly not to tie in with them ... so it's a compromise, a working relationship, Central Office attempting to understand the demographics and issues at stake, and local to be open minded enough to take on board the ideas and general strategy ... whether we agree with it all, you have to go along with it because the last thing you want is contradictions'.[32] Practically therefore: 'you have dialogue with an area campaign director to plot what you are doing locally to ensure it ties in nationally ... you're given a template to work to ... there may be a bit of tailoring, it's not Central Office saying here's the Cheltenham campaign'.[33] Hence: 'we tweaked it to local issues ... the closure of the Battledown Children's Centre which was changed subsequently ... we were able to put those nuances into the campaign and we specifically got shadow ministers to come down on them'.[34] Strategically, local officers acquiesced to central control of the campaign.

However, in 2005 this approach brought frustration for activists in Liberal Democrat contested seats. In Cheltenham: 'Central Office has been far too slow to realise the threat

from the Liberal Democrats and to act upon it ... we've been telling them for years, but every time it's about how we fight Labour, we don't fight Labour ... they are beginning to change it ... the Liberal Democrats are a stronger party and a lot of us are fighting them ... they think because they can fight Labour, it will automatically do, and it won't'.[35] Officers in Somerton and Frome echoed this sentiment, arguing strongly that this narrow focus cost the party a number of potential gains. Neglect was manifested in front bench visits, designed to encourage voters and incentivise activists: 'we were a target seat, but had hardly any calibre shadow cabinet members coming into the constituency to support our candidate ... the chairman felt let down by that'.[36] Moreover: 'we'd get short notice and they'd suddenly appear ... somebody would be going to Wincanton for half and hour with half a day's notice ... how could you get a crowd or press coverage to see him ... so his time was wasted and so was ours'.[37] A further strategic affect was highlighted in trying to contend with the Liberal Democrats' campaign style: 'as long as nobody does anything about Yeovil, they are able at each election not to spend much time canvassing there and send all their councillors into our area ... we used to have the seat ... build up Yeovil and they will be forced back to defend it'.[38]

These problems illustrated not just central control of the campaign, but also provided further evidence of the tendency to ignore the views of local officers. Critically they reflected the separation of formulation and implementation of campaign strategy; the centre was responsible for the former, the localities the latter. Politically, they showed a lack of alignment of national and local campaign interests, and the potential for local anger based upon campaign neglect.

2. Campaign Structure

The concept of separation fed into campaign structure. In this, the centre's influence over campaign strategy was cemented through the establishment of local campaign teams headed by trained candidates. This permitted closer scrutiny of local performance, as they were individually accountable to the candidates' department. An area officer related: 'it's down to each PPC to form a team ... you can get a forceful candidate in one, who's getting the press coverage, and another who is not ... it works through the candidates,

who are under review from Central Office at all times ... they're given targets ... they have to put in a report on what is being done ... three East Midlands constituencies recently had visits, one got top marks and one they're going back to have a look at ... the constituencies have to make sure they're street seen, they've communicated with the public'.[39] A professional added: 'in target seats, the strategy is controlled from the top through the PPC in a monthly campaign meeting and local put their slant on it ... I deal with candidates rather than chairmen because our campaigning strategy is much more focused on the candidate ... I will speak to Andrew Bingham (PPC) half a dozen times a week, I may not speak to the chairman more than once a month ... if they've got an association problem which isn't connected with campaigning, they telephone the regional director ... I usually go to campaign team meetings, whereas I won't go to the association executive or anything like that ... money from Central Office doesn't go to the association ... they send what they've done to me with the bill and it gets paid ... one of the candidates wants letterheads, we've got a draft on the computer, we put in her photograph and say that's going to cost you £500 against your money ... nobody else in her association is involved'.[40] Conceptually, an agent asserted that the campaign team was: 'still evolving ... I wouldn't use the word control, but certainly target seats are helped to achieve their political goals, partly because it's focused only on winning at the general election, partly because the regional director attends those meetings and partly because of Lord Ashcroft funding which focuses attention on campaigning projects ... the last two general elections, target seats have been asked to set them up and my experience is that they work well as long as the right people serve on them ... they form a good communication with the centre ... in 2001, it provided recommended agendas, with tasks for each of the directors on that committee, so it was even more formulaic ... of course, a lot of target seats then and now didn't have somebody like myself to provide that, and so in Somerton and Frome, they might have more difficulty in focusing on what really mattered'.[41]

Central capacity to direct local campaigns was further indicated by the composition and management of the campaign team, and its separation from the association. Each member had a specific role, co-ordinating for example: canvassing, delivery networks, pledges,

postal votes, posters and so on. Activist participation was a function of individual skills and dedication; the candidate could look elsewhere. Either he or a professional usually chaired the meeting. A professional noted: 'sometimes there is something nasty to be said and it's better I say it rather than the candidate ... Andrew Bingham chairs the High Peak one, whereas in North West Leicestershire I chair it because it's a new candidate ... (the agenda) is set by me or the candidate ... candidates set up the campaign teams and not the association officers ... in many cases, they're deliberately not the officers ... the officers have their role in running the association, the campaign teams have theirs in winning the next general election ... in one constituency I didn't know anybody, there were businessmen who offered help and somebody from a branch committee, but not the chairman because they thought he would be no good ... campaign teams are hand picked by the candidates'.[42] In Cheltenham, the team largely comprised the association officers, reflecting the progressive nature of the constituency; there was though, an agent in attendance. By contrast, High Peak, which lacked an agent, illustrated the broader approach: 'they shouldn't necessarily just be people from the association ... Andrew has a couple of candidates from parliamentary seats bordering High Peak because he wants their expertise, how they did things in 2005, there's someone from Sheffield, the chairman's on it ... most of them are quite active in the association ... he's got people with different skills and he wants them to take on different aspects of the campaign ... they are encouraged to run teams separately from the association ... the ACD is the link with Central Office, that's how it's co-ordinated, a two-way thing through him'.[43] The separation of the campaign team from the association was confirmed by its absence from the minutes of executive council meetings for any of the constituencies.

Leadership by the candidate was stressed: 'they want the candidates now to be leaders of the campaign, whereas in the old days they just followed like a lap dog and you told them what to do'.[44] In Somerton and Frome: 'Annunziata and the agent were tasked by CCHQ with putting together a campaign plan, which lists objectives, suggested campaigning projects, how these will be funded and what the likely shortfall will be'.[45] They were assisted by the regional director, the plan being subsequently presented to the chairman for agreement.[46] For a regional professional: 'some campaign teams have worked

brilliantly, others have been absolutely useless ... it comes down to leadership and the calibre of the people involved ... what has changed in the last 10-20 years is the expectation of the candidates themselves to provide leadership has gone up hugely ... the one single factor why we regained Weston-Super-Mare was John Penrose because he was a good candidate and because he led the team himself'.[47] Similarly, in Derby North: 'Richard Aitken-Davies put himself about, was in the paper and it paid off in that he cut the majority of the Labour candidate, but it would not have been done without his hard work ... he had the backing of the office, but he was such a good candidate, him and his wife could have run the whole thing without any support'.[48] Leadership was further indicated by: 'campaign skills should be with the candidate and agent ... campaign teams if set up with guidance from regional officers can be very effective ... but they are only as good as the candidate ... we had a candidate in South Derbyshire who was idle ... we could have won if he had worked in the areas asked ... campaign teams did work but without the candidate ... a candidate should be working from now until when a general election is called, working in the Labour areas, knocking on doors'.[49] Localism was again viewed from the candidate perspective. This was being ratcheted up, Ashcroft asserting: 'my team will deliver a highly focused campaign working with our candidates from the day they are selected ... the best way to professionalise local campaigning is to select high quality candidates, to provide them with the best quality training and support, and then let them drive local campaigns'.[50] In Mid Derbyshire for example, the candidate was instrumental in obtaining an Ashcroft grant, was involved in the Uganda social action project at Cameron's invitation and led the quest for greater press coverage.[51] Overall, it was clear that through both the candidates and the campaign teams, Ashcroft and his appointees were managing the roll out of the campaign strategy at the local level in the target seats.

The campaign team concept reinforced the separation of formulation and implementation of strategy; it was the centre's means of ensuring that it was adhered to. The switch to candidate leadership effectively curtailed local autonomy in campaigning; although separation meant that activists could save face by claiming autonomy over other local functions. The employment of outsiders on the team suggested a lack of a full set of

campaign skills locally. It would also be potentially de-motivating to those activists not invited onto it. Nevertheless, the approach suggested a new type of local cadre, set alongside the association.

3. Campaign Systems

A candidate-led and accountable campaign rendered it easier for the centre to measure constituency performance than when it was under local control. Performance indicators, based upon the Ashcroft criteria identified in chapter three, were developed; it was to him that progress reports were sent.[52] The result was: 'some are willing and open, and to do what Central Office would like them to, some need persuading, others won't be and therefore you have to use other methods (smiles) ... we have a general set (of criteria) that's the same for every association, decided jointly with Central Office, the campaign directors put in suggestions ... you've got to have a national standard, but if they don't reach it, it isn't necessarily bad, they may be doing things another way ... it's difficult to increase your canvassing in a target seat if there's only three people canvassing, so it's down to me to see how we can help'.[53] Hence, an agent related: 'we are left to get on and do what we need to win, with the proviso that we are being checked that we are performing in certain areas ... I'll be in contact with (the ACD) weekly, just a chat, get an up-date, but it's not formal, has this been done, has that been done, because you cannot micro-manage in that way'.[54] For officer teams, it meant that performance was linked to the PPC and the campaign team, rather than the association. That separation was meaningful: 'unfortunately, the strategy, and how the PPC approaches it, is divorced from the association, so the ACD comes ... at the strategy meeting, we go over the plans, what's going on, what have we done, that's performance based, that's directed from CCHQ and it's fed through by the region and the ACD ... the ACD gives advice on how we're doing and what's the big plan, what are your comparisons like with benchmarked seats elsewhere ... it's a different level ... I don't get approached as an association officer to say how are we doing on that'.[55] The campaign team concept thus strengthened the performance culture alluded to in chapter two. However, the removal of responsibility clearly irritated those officers who were able and committed to making a valuable contribution.

Performance monitoring of the campaign team was not reciprocal. There was no mechanism to audit central co-ordination performance. Judgement was instead typically exercised over implementation issues such as campaign guidelines and literature distribution, rather than overall process. Here, evidence from the 2005 election was varied: to some there was improvement, but to others it was lamentable. In Cheltenham, performance was: 'fairly good ... the communication's better than it used to be ... even though they tried, as they've always done, to give support on literature packs, they made it sensibly flexible enough where it didn't need to be done that way ... it gives greater support when it is required'.[56] Moreover, the centre: 'was not involved as such, but they sent papers of how to do it and there were seminars, advice and encouragement ... you had a list (of tasks) ... it was physically impossible to do the lot with the numbers we had ... but it gave us an idea of what we should be doing ... they sent in people, but it was a bit hit and miss'.[57] However, another officer added: 'I could say what co-ordination, there's very little at a general election ... campaign strategy stuff coming through and outline timetables of when things are supposed to happen, but apart from that there's nothing, which I'm fairly happy with because you have to run your own campaign locally ... the centre aren't going to help'.[58]

Campaign material was the source of much anger and frustration in Somerton and Frome: 'so many things went wrong ... posters never came or they got them wrong, or when it rained they fell off ... we bought them from the centre because we wanted to act as a team and it was less expensive ... we also went with their recommendations for posting pledge letters, but our second one got lost somewhere ... it should have gone out a week before the election, about half of them went out a week before and the other half after the election ... we paid for this, we did everything we were asked to do when we were asked to do it ... a complete shambles, it really was appalling the things that went on in the centre ... people in the constituency warned me, they'd been through it in previous elections ... it was chaotic ... I've found this so many times dealing with Central Office ... it's not true of everybody, but the general impression is always "it's those bloody activists out there, we're the professionals ... what a damn nuisance they are, try to get rid

of them" ... the impression you get the whole time of an organisation that really doesn't know what it's doing'.[59] Furthermore: 'the other parties, including UKIP, got their stuff into people's houses before we did, and that was entirely down to CCHQ ... we were a target seat which would mean lots of help ... we got none, financial or otherwise, so quality, performance, input, co-ordination, it just didn't happen ... the (South West) office confined themselves to asking lots of irritating questions at busier times of the campaign'.[60] A local official though, suggested: 'I can understand Somerton and Frome because certain staff at the centre can be London-centric ... if it's not happening in London, it's not happening ... it's the middle in almost every general election ... five days before polling day, a constituency which is 70 miles long ... to distribute to your branches and get them delivered, it's going to take at least three days ... they don't understand that you can get it out quicker in Putney than in Penrith and the Border'.[61] This was though, an illustration of the perceived relative insignificance of local people and their efforts.

Systems problems were hence regarded as managerial, rather than strategic. An officer commented: 'it wasn't well co-ordinated ... the ability to supply printed material at the correct time, several inabilities to do things correctly ... the people who do the masterpieces, (the young professionals) think they know best, they don't always ... the provision of information and their speed of reaction ... leaflet printing they do for us and computers, blue chip and its replacement, they are having problems, they don't seem to have any project management ... that is the co-ordination problem'.[62] The lack of two-way communication was also reinforced: 'changing policy in the middle ... as a result, a lot of new material came out half way through the campaign when everything's been printed, everything's out with the deliverers, the timetable's in place ... you should establish your national campaign in terms of what you are delivering on the ground and the message in advance and stick to it ... other nuances you put through national press conferences, deal with it at that level, but do not expect the troops on the ground to do a 90 degree change simply because someone is panicking in Central Office that the message is wrong because it is too late at that point ... when Central Office panics, it seems they don't understand the practical implications of what they are asking the

constituencies to do'.[63] Ultimately, local systems evaluation represented operational concerns. Nevertheless, the problems showed the impact of local campaigns on electoral turnout and outcomes, as shown consistently by Denver and Hands, Johnston and Pattie, and Seyd and Whiteley, would have been enhanced with better co-ordination. The evidence also revealed that the patronising management style, alluded to in chapter two, fed through to campaigning.

The key to campaign co-ordination was separation. There was separation of formulation and implementation of strategy, of the campaign team from the association mainstream and of literature design. PPC leadership was accepted because it was his campaign, and a broadening of the participant base to harness outside skills likewise. These developments were recognised as the means to electoral success. Local frustration was instead directed at the centre's capacity to deliver on its promises. Importantly, it was clear that national and local campaign interests were not fully aligned. The localities acknowledged their role in a general election campaign was implementation only. For campaigning therefore, local autonomy did not mean political autonomy. Instead, it meant standard association activities such as membership and fundraising, and the organisation of campaign activities. Here, autonomy would reflect the extent to which they could add value.

Added Value 1: Basic Campaign Activities

From the above discussion, it can be discerned that the centre was simplifying the local campaign function. A weakening of local capability and hence a capacity to sustain local autonomy was inferred. This will first be examined through Denver and Hands's categories of local campaigning: candidate introduction, canvassing and polling day mobilisation, and promotion through leafleting (1997: 306).

1. Candidate Introduction

The local role in candidate introduction has withered. Public meetings have declined so that at the 2001 election, Butler and Kavanagh reported door-to-door canvassing as the primary point of contact for candidates, some also pursuing walkabouts in town centres (2002: 217). As noted, local campaigning was now candidate-led, many being selected

early. An officer hence stated: 'you can do a lot of the ground work ... the PPC was selected last year and he's going out meeting people, you can't do that in three weeks ... you'd be struggling to meet 500 people ... you can meet 5-10,000 people in the time between being selected and the election is announced ... then put the cream on the cake during the election'.[64] That the onus was on the candidate to make himself known was further indicated by the lack of local media capability. Chapter two noted variable quality of websites. However, it was in the local press where the problem was acute: 'we're not strong enough in our access to local media ... it is culturally not in favour of us ... campaigning is hardly ever mentioned ... even Annunziata's selection was more or less ignored ... I put it on our website, complete with photograph, and nobody picked it up'.[65] Moreover: 'we have to address how we get our political viewpoints across ... our new candidate has issued 15 press releases, none of which have appeared'.[66] It was further agreed: 'we're not good at marketing ourselves ... we could do with a full-time marketing director to cover things like media, poster campaigns, local radio ... we're getting that from the current candidate, which we didn't have in the previous one, but it's a tall order for him to carry it on his shoulders'.[67]

2. Canvassing

Activists were a means of enhancing impersonal media messages through personal contact (Scarrow 1996: 147), but with 70,000 voters per constituency, this would require sizeable manpower no longer available with an ageing membership. Canvassing was also a skilled activity requiring knowledge and dedication.[68] However, there was a natural Conservative aversion to it: 'very few members are comfortable with door knocking and discussing with anybody, but they will deliver ... canvassing, if you are prepared to do it, you tend to go where it's needed ... people will only want to canvass where they feel they are likely to get it right, they may not know the local issues outside of their own area'.[69] This was further aligned to the character of activists. One officer drew: 'a distinction between Conservatives with their own lives to lead, but who've got other focuses and Labour where you've got far more motivated activists whose life is about union structure ... you're getting slightly towards the religion in the way they believe in it with a level of fanaticism which you don't get from Conservatives ... we've got far more independently

minded people'.[70] This extended Drucker's (1979) analysis of the Conservative disposition. There was though, intense partisanship. Many showed genuine hatred for Labour and were convinced that it had devastated the country. Moreover, canvass sheets still indicated Labour by 'S' for socialists.[71] Nevertheless, an agent stressed: 'canvassing has never been a very popular undertaking by any activist ... there are less people willing to canvass because people are sharper on the door, they don't like to be bothered, there's more pressure because it's sales, so if you don't have the money to do more mail canvassing, your ability to get the information out is affected ... it is fine now we're popular again, people are fairly nice on the door even if they don't like you, but it has been difficult'.[72]

A lack of canvassers raised the dilemma whether to pursue critical mass to demonstrate presence in a specific area or to spread out thinly across the constituency, but also questioned the activity's value: 'canvassing is rewarding and interesting, but it doesn't do much, it's time consuming, it looks good that you're all out on the streets ... mob-handed is less efficient, but it looks better'.[73] The solution in Derby was: 'at the last election, we couldn't do mass coverage, so we went to certain streets in every area and had a good reception ... always two or three streets away ... "spots of infection" strategy because of the limited manpower ... it matters for local morale to get round the whole area ... people in areas where they say no politician comes here, are pleased to see you'.[74] The aim was to create an impression that the party was 'active, alive and had some vitality' at the local level.[75] Moreover: 'it's important that we are seen, so it ceases to be an elitist identity'.[76] Furthermore: 'it definitely matters because most people would prefer to speak to somebody face to face than getting a telephone call or a face on the television or even a letter ... showing your face, being able to talk to people improves matters tremendously'.[77] Nevertheless, the inescapable conclusion was a very weak Conservative canvass capability.

This led the centre to increase its telephone capacity. It provided reach into flats and institutions, but was hampered by number unavailability. There were mixed views from activists. In 2005: 'telephone canvassing was an absolute fiasco, it didn't work then, it

doesn't work now ... they did it from Coleshill and gave us the results, which were poor ... they even called our PPC ... it irritates the electorate terribly'.[78] Moreover: 'people got "cheesed-off" because they'd already postal voted and they were rung up again ... you don't know whether people have sent them in ... it didn't seem very co-ordinated ... Central Office should listen more to local people ... we should be able to say we've done a leaflet drop in X and can you do a telephone hit in that area to back it up'.[79] Some however, praised the telephone campaign: 'it's a tough world out there, we have to be practical ... the call centre during the 2005 election was very valuable'.[80] Here though, there was further evidence of a lack of national and local campaign alignment.

Canvassing weakness affected get-out-the-vote capability. There was concern because: 'at the grass roots level you have your vote and the vote is what it is all about ... the more activists you have, the better the turnout will be'.[81] A professional added: 'we have a greater understanding than previously of the importance of local campaigning ... it's about finding out who your supporters are and making sure they vote ... that is increasingly important, lower turnout elections, differential turnout, it's getting more people to the poll ... it's all about people, we will have a good organisation where we have the right people to lead and encourage it ... the problem is when they become very dependent on a small number'.[82] Overall, there was a clear political deficit in face-to-face communication in the Conservative Party. This has further implications for the local campaign work of Denver and Hands, Johnston and Pattie, and Seyd and Whitelely. Competent local leadership could improve canvass performance, but practically leafleting was viewed as the primary competitive weapon.

3. Leafleting

For many activists, local capability equated to the production and delivery of campaign literature. Central encroachment into the former was alluded to, earlier. It was politically motivated, a professional asserting: 'most local associations still say they're independent, even if they're not (laughs) ... the party has chosen to make life much easier to toe the line ... the easiest way to produce branch newsletters is through the computer ... it's things like that where it's so much easier to do it the right way ... you find the odd

"stroppy" person who'd sooner spend two hours doing it just because it isn't Central Office, but those are getting few and far between now'.[83] Regional campaign centres reinforced this: 'in the Conservative campaign centre, the artwork is there so you only have to put in your own words, you don't have to design the leaflet, the layout is there ... but we need professional staff on the ground, trained agents can monitor, pull back and control ... now, in whatever constituency, people will recognise a Conservative leaflet, a Conservative brand ... some might call it indoctrination, it is, but it's necessary because you've got to have that brand coming across very strongly ... the media is not based in a single constituency, it is 24/7 and a much wider base, we've got to have that standard'.[84] An area officer added: 'the professionals say to constituencies you need to develop this ward and will you put out a leaflet, they know the issues and the campaign centre produces a good effective leaflet ... we need good design because a lot of constituencies put out rubbish'.[85] In a conference speech to activists, party chairman Caroline Spelman suggested the campaign centres were there 'to give you the "support" you need';[86] the evidence though, pointed to greater control. Local disputes over leaflet content and wording were common.[87] There was a tension between central branding and policy co-ordination, and activist political motivation in which the professionals were imposing their will. Activist de-politicising would have implications for the party's ability to attract quality members.

Delivery capability meant maximisation of coverage. In Somerton and Frome, two-thirds was deemed acceptable, which given its size, could be construed as creditable. However, the strategically important town of Frome, where the Liberal Democrat MP was strongest, recorded 'abysmal' levels of activity. Similar gaps were reported in other associations, with some areas having little or none. The issue was critical. At Cheadle in 2005, the centre bombarded the association with leaflets, CDs and posters, but there were insufficient activists to cope and co-ordination was poor.[88] It now desired complete constituency coverage once a year and target wards quarterly.[89] However, a demand for a further intensification of this was putting delivery networks and thus voluntarism under strain.[90] In Cheltenham, the agent noted: 'the number one priority is to increase our ability to deliver leaflets', and 'in a marginal seat, 500, 1000 votes, your organisation really is

absolutely key because if you did an honest assessment of the last time we put out a leaflet in this village and that town, you'd be shocked by some of the results ... people's desire or willingness to become committed has changed ... the key to changing that organisational weakness is to say "we want you to deliver 100 leaflets in this road once every two months" so the commitment is small ... that will not give us 100% coverage, but if we get near 70-80% we'd have done very well ... we need local leadership to push ... on the margins it's how that organisation gives you that extra per cent'.[91] Hence, an officer stressed: 'it's "bums on seats", it's activists ... another 30 active people and we'd be able to wipe the place clean, we would have Conservatives in every (local) seat ... that's why mutual aid between Cotswold, Tewkesbury and ourselves, which we are planning over the next three years, is going to be vitally important'.[92] In Derby, the problem was encapsulated: 'it's sporadic, some areas are stronger than others ... it's not a lack of skills, it's not a lack of members, it's a lack of able members because a lot are older and have neither the ability nor the inclination to do the things we need, it's a disparity in the age profile'.[93] Another officer though, demurred: 'it's in the implementation ... we're good at talking about it, too many talking shops, not enough action seen'.[94]

Leafleting was believed by volunteers and professionals alike to be the optimal way of communicating the party's message locally, but concern was expressed over relative performance. The Liberal Democrats particularly: 'have been very good over the last 20 years working the constituency and the wards ... we've found through trial and effort that if we get a piece of literature through the doors every two months our vote increases, paper with our name and an issue gets brand recognition and it overcomes some of the cynicism that we only see you at election times ... even if simply potholes, a letter saying we've noted it and will do something about it ... to show there is an on-going presence'.[95] Moreover: 'plenty of paper, holes in the road, it does strike a chord, there's no doubt they've got in using this ... they do it very cleverly ward by ward ... when it comes to manpower and what we can deliver, we are fairly much on a par, but they have used their imagination, their intelligence, they've got a lot of enthusiastic supporters ... we tend to be reactive, the Liberals are proactive and they run a good campaign'.[96] In Somerton and

Frome: 'it's hard work ... it would take me three days in my car to letterbox stuff ... nine times out of ten somebody's going to bin it, but if you don't give them something, a lot will say they had a Liberal leaflet but not one of ours'.[97] However, there was a cultural barrier: 'it's a long haul against the Liberal Democrats ... people don't realise how much work you've got to do on the ground to beat them ... you've got to out Lib Dem the Lib Dems and once you start doing it they get disheartened ... but you need commitment and heart, you've got to get out and do it week by week ... a lot of our older members don't see it that way because they are used to national campaigning rather than local campaigning'.[98] An area officer agreed: 'parts of a constituency are unlikely to return a Conservative councillor, but there will be Conservative voters there ... they need to be engaged, canvassed, supported, given the literature and not forgotten ... that takes a disproportionate amount of effort in comparison to walking down a leafy avenue in a richer part of town ... nonetheless, it has to be done, you have to put the effort in to get the vote out ... if you have insufficient activists, then the less Conservative parts are likely to drop off ... there is absolutely no chance that you can do without politically active members to deliver the paper ... I get hundreds of e-mails and don't bother to read them ... you're still going to need people on the ground, the ability to persuade and to campaign would still need local contact ... they have to be volunteers ... then you still have to move at the pace of consensus'.[99] However, if a greater proportion of these volunteers were non-members, this pace could be quickened.

Modern constituency campaigning in target seats required energy; in this the Conservative Party was lacking, so more emphasis was placed upon the engagement of outside help. Agents reported: 'there's more I'd like to do if we had greater human resources ... it means we have to look beyond the people we've got to get our communication across, spending money for instance in certain parts of the constituency to deliver leaflets, using the postal service ... we're always striving to strengthen the political, the campaigning organisation, but ever was thus'.[100] Moreover: 'the lesson we're just beginning to learn is that it's not just members that are prepared to do the work for you, the Liberals were prepared to do this a lot earlier ... you can't do it in the membership, they've always understood the need for involving other people'.[101] This

meant increasing supporter networks, co-ordinated by local leadership, a task which entailed much effort. One officer stated: 'I have a delivery network of 32 people, some may do 15 streets, some less, some more ... you've got to take from people what they are willing to give, however small it is'.[102] In Somerton and Frome, it was also controversial: 'last time we had support from the Countryside supporters who did an excellent job putting up signs for us ... I am hoping for support from them for future campaigns'.[103]

In other ways the local Conservative organisation was not attuned to realities of modern politics. For example: 'the night before the election, they (Liberal Democrats) put out a leaflet with a whole pile of "porkies" about our cabinet which was quite appalling ... the trouble is that Conservatives are inclined to be too nice'.[104] Moreover in Cheadle, local Conservatives were uncomfortable in responding to the removal of banners and taking credit for Conservative initiatives.[105] This added to the relative shortfall in candidate introduction, canvassing and leafleting, leading to a conclusion that in the basic campaign activities local capability did not fully fulfil the party's needs. This position was exacerbated by activity parochialism.

4. Activity Parochialism

Local performance was undermined by members declining to campaign beyond their own vicinity. Conceptually: 'parochialism is a state of mind ... very hard to get rid of, you have places where people won't step out of their wards to deliver leaflets in the adjoining street because it's in a different ward, you get that everywhere, you get it at constituency level, you've just got to work to break it down'.[106] Attitudes could be ingrained: 'there are many examples where you wouldn't get people coming from one constituency to help in another with target wards because they just don't work together, they have a history of not liking each other ... it can hinder the campaign'.[107] The phenomenon was strongest in rural areas: 'a lot of people identify the party with their little local patch or village ... I come from an urban constituency three miles across, a London borough, and nobody had that attitude ... they would happily drive two miles ... drive two miles here and you're still in the same village ... it's not parochialism, it's merely that I volunteered to help here and here happens to be a very small place.[108] Critically, parochial tendencies rendered

activist co-ordination and hence electoral targeting strategies difficult: 'it's a struggle ... the region rings up and asks for volunteers to go to target areas, but people haven't the time or the inclination ... there's so much work to be done locally that unless you are a real activist like people who do politics for a living or councillors who feel strongly about it ... they don't tend to want to go into other areas unless they want the other areas to come back to us ... it's not a significant problem, but one we've got to overcome'.[109] Fundamentally, the issue was: 'a few of us put our efforts into wards elsewhere, but not everyone ... until we get the average age coming down from 65 to 35 ... it will take a long time to get there'.[110]

Local leadership was essential to reducing parochial tendencies: A professional noted: 'it comes down entirely to the calibre and nature of the people involved ... in South Gloucestershire, we made spectacular steps forward and defeated a Liberal council ... one of the keys was getting people from safe wards to move into the swing wards, but it requires leadership from the top of the association, the ability to think strategically and to execute a strategy once it's determined, it's not something you can do overnight ... it's often more difficult when you already have sitting councillors because they do become very parochial'.[111] Nationally, Cameron established a Volunteer Task Force to assemble committed campaigners willing to contribute at least one week a year to fight by-elections.[112] There was some replication locally. In Cheltenham: 'we formed a central flying squad of people within the constituency who were generally younger and nimbler ... they would be deployed in areas where the organisation was not as strong and that worked quite well ... with our members the spirit is willing, the flesh is weak, but generally we're getting there ... it's been getting better probably because we went through a doldrums period and that is behind us'.[113] Similarly in Derby: 'we're fighting it, it's becoming less, we're beginning to break the barriers down ... at the last election there was more willingness for people to move into different areas, they understand the need to do that'.[114] Importantly, parochialism was becoming 'less of an issue at a general election because every vote is of equal value'.[115]

Overall, local campaign capability was considered better, but area officers and professionals alluded to variation: 'in Cheltenham, they're geared up for an election whenever, but it varies throughout the country ... some places are in a dismal state'.[116] Capability was: 'massively diverse and doesn't directly correlate to the size of membership or the amount of money they have ... some small associations are very good at campaigning ... but our local campaigning capability is improving ... a lot is to do with local government'.[117] Nevertheless, professional involvement was essential. The evidence revealed a political deficit locally in the basic campaign activities. The centre though, had a political motivation to achieve greater control of local operations in order to achieve greater campaign alignment. Its approach was to ensure that local people no longer had to think for themselves. In addition to professional advice, there was a mass of instruction documents covering every aspect of campaigning and constituency management.[118] Hence, there was both a de-skilling and a de-politicisation of local activists occurring. The tasks that activists were now involved in were now largely mundane. The centre measured local capability in terms of leadership and human numbers rather than skills. Local autonomy was thus diluted in campaign terms; its strength would depend on specific value adding activities.

Added Value 2: Distinguishing Capabilities

A core distinguishing attribute was tacit local knowledge. This was accumulated particularly by the councillor base. However, there was a deficiency in the application of knowledge in the more advanced campaign issues such as tactical voting and electoral boundary reviews.

1. Local Knowledge

Local knowledge was not replicable by the centre. This reflected local, as well as regional, diversity. A professional agreed: 'the best job for the party is done locally because they know the local situation and the population, or they should do ... a constituency like High Peak has its own climate, what will work there won't work in the centre of Nottingham ... it's that involvement ... we do a national press release, send it to them for changing to make it their flyer'.[119] As noted earlier, candidate assimilation was

the ultimate goal: 'each constituency has different areas and the PPC has to be very clever to adapt to the different ways ... he gets in because he works the local knowledge ... works with local people in the local wards'.[120] Moreover: 'the value of the local party is put back into your candidate ... when Annunziata comes here, I don't want her to speak on health ... we've got a new hospital ... we want her to pick up on the roads, transport ... a lot of people in Frome work for the MOD and they're struggling ... to get her speaking with the right balance, the management and the election committee will guide ... if we can identify UKIP supporters, she will visit them'.[121]

In addition to candidate assimilation, local knowledge ensured the preservation of local issues on the national political agenda. In Somerton and Frome: it's 'how to feed back what people think locally because there are always special considerations in any locality ... rising sea levels, abattoir closure, transport issues, and their local impact ... it is vital because people have a sense of belonging to their own community, it's what matters to them, even though we live in a more mobile world and people have less roots, there's always going to be room for that ... if the Conservative Party is seen as a party of London traders with big bonuses, then there is a role locally to suggest otherwise'.[122] Another officer added that the localities: 'give a fresh perspective, fresh insight ... it's not a party with a metropolitan outlook ... how do you get a broad church view if you only take a one-eyed look at things ... it's a question of bottom up'.[123] Competitively therefore: 'it's different from the model that CCHQ would see ... you cannot have a "one size fits all" policy for how each constituency should run ... you have to look at each area and have a unique strategy which should be made up by the people on the ground because they fully understand the situation ... whether you are fighting Labour or the Liberal Democrats or both ... in the south, you could put out leaflets that mirror what David Cameron says and you'd be very successful, but the further north you go, the more difficult it gets to do that ... there is a divide there'.[124] Empathy with the electorate's concerns could only be achieved locally. The presence of councillors underpinned it.

2. Councillor Base

Much of the local knowledge resided in councillor groups. Hence, the recovery in local government representation was critical to the revival of local campaign capability. Falling councillor numbers in the 1990s had meant 'a major attrition of the party's local electoral base' (Rallings and Thrasher 1997: 120). In Derby: 'everything dropped away, it had been since 1992 as councillors disappeared ... it's all down to the quality of councillors and officers ... it's the councillors who do the campaigning by and large ... we went down to three from 22 ... you lose a huge campaigning base of people who are interested in politics because your councillors are your troops on the ground and they bring friends and family to campaign with you, and keep the branches going ... we'd lost councillors because they were complacent ... you are not there as of right, you've got to work hard at it and the councillors are realising that now'.[125] In Cheltenham, the councillor loss was debilitating: 'every time we went out on the streets, we were frightened because some idiot had put his foot in it in parliament ... it was a knock-on effect ... morale was low, it was cruel ... we had people who were extremely strong, very active and were determined to turn things round'.[126] Similarly in High Peak: 'as we lost public sympathy, it made campaigners less willing to go out, people became ashamed to be Conservatives as we lost more councillors and became more insular, which was a protective move because people were simply being rude to us on the doorstep ... now we're seeing a recovery ... good local councillors will make people more sympathetic to vote for you nationally, councillors who can't be bothered and you won't make a vast amount'.[127]

Councillors formed an important link to an MP, the presence of which strengthened campaign capability further. Local erosion thus accelerated following defeat: 'after we lost the MP in 1997, things turned quickly, people drifted away ... it's the kudos of having an MP ... it was the perception of not having a presence'.[128] Moreover: 'when Labour took power, activity dropped off, people lost interest because generally they felt there was no purpose to be trying to be active'.[129] To an agent: 'it affects you because of local knowledge ... however good you are as an agent or however good your officer team is, you need local contacts, local information your candidate needs, so that's the critical local organisational base gone ... you should never underestimate how much people regard the MP as being very important ... if you've lost that, you've lost that great

connection ... get a seat back and the phone doesn't stop because everyone wants the MP to come along to this and that'.[130] Consequently, the presence of an MP strengthened local autonomy, and vice-versa. This was particularly apparent where there were experienced MPs: 'in a lot of these strong Conservative seats, where the MPs have been there "donkeys years" and they hold the power, but once they retire, it might become a little less autonomous ... Macclesfield and Congleton'.[131]

3. Advanced Campaign Activities

Increased councillor numbers improved local campaign capability, but had little impact on more advanced activities such as tactical voting and electoral boundary reviews.

Whiteley suggested that in 1997, 'tactical voting and differential swings in the marginals are evidence of the effect of local campaigns on the vote' (1997: 353). In Somerton and Frome: 'last time there were about 1400 people voting UKIP ... tactical voting was crazy because they didn't want Europe and yet they made sure the Liberal Democrats got back in'.[132] Activists however, viewed this as a national problem: 'very difficult, people are more skilled at it now ... you can't influence it'.[133] Moreover: 'we've not always been good at it ... in Cheltenham, there's a lot of Labour people that vote tactically Liberal Democrat to keep us out because the Labour vote is depressed, it rarely changes at a general election ... for the first time, Cameron has parked his tanks on the Liberal lawn which is entirely right for winning seats like this and he will start to bring back people who have voted Liberal Democrat'.[134] From the Conservative perspective at least, Whiteley's conclusion was undermined. Local views revealed not just deficient expertise but also a failure to accommodate leadership needs; a neglect of activist training reinforced this state.

Local expertise was further lacking in countering opposition tactics in electoral boundary reviews. Rallings and Thrasher (1994) noted that parties could influence Boundary Commission decisions through counter proposals based on interpretations of 'local ties'. Conservative weakness was shown by for example: 'they made representation to the Boundary Commission ... whether it turned out any good for us ... we get Mid

Derbyshire, but it has definitely made Derby North vulnerable ... it's the same with South Derbyshire ... they've taken a good area and put that into Derby South which is a weak'.[135] Local expertise was at the individual level: 'I know about seats in the North West ... someone can mention a ward and I can tell you how critical it is, which gives me more of an insight than many others have'.[136] Other councillors also alluded to an extensive individual experience.[137] Nevertheless, the strategic importance of the boundary process saw it brought under central co-ordination, through the regions: 'I have represented the party at a number of boundary enquiries ... there is a national co-ordinator, but in the West Country we worked very closely and once we knew the dates of the hearing in a county, we would call a meeting of the local association chairmen, the local council group leaders, the area officers and so on who had expert, substantial knowledge ... we would create a 'straw man' model and then invite people to tell us where we've got it right and wrong ... not only would we involve them at that level, but we would also encourage them to make written submissions to the Boundaries Commission'.[138] For the local input, an agent commented: 'it depends on the local chairmen and whether they've got any background in local government ... it is my role to advise and be responsible for putting the party's best interests forward in boundary reviews, closely working with CCHQ and its representatives'.[139] Activists were acquiescent with central co-ordination: 'we didn't do very well, even though we had a coherent strategy, it's the first time we had ... before it's been left to local people, but this was much better to have somebody who saw it all through ... every county he went to, he made a big difference ... I gave evidence with one or two other people and him from the centre went round and talked to the key people in each constituency and put it all together, but he sounded it off quite a few of us because he didn't have the intimate local knowledge'.[140] Ultimately, local people on their own were not sufficiently adept at addressing issues that had significant electoral implications. On this basis local autonomy had to be diluted.

There was thus some justification for the centre trying to find competent local leadership to co-ordinate local knowledge and those activities that could be undertaken effectively. Nevertheless, despite good intentions, leadership expertise was sometimes lacking. For

example, a former chairman related: 'I learned on the hoof ... Clive Allen (PPC) had been through an election previously but wasn't an experienced old hand ... we both worked hard, but we could have done with some guidance ... the area agent I tried to involve, but he was running around ... the regional office didn't help us, they didn't have time'.[141] Hence, there could be several dimensions to weak local campaign capability, necessitating professional intervention. However, the de-skilling and de-politicising exercise conducted by the centre exacerbated this. Local weakness though, led to structural change, designed to improve campaign performance.

Local Structural Change

In order to improve local campaign capability, the centre has been aggressively pursuing constituency grouping. However, the outcome was a more flexible approach than it originally envisaged, such that the issue was significant for intra-party relationships. Implementation of grouping ultimately reflected constituency strength.

1. Constituency Grouping

Grouping was advocated by *A 21st Century Party* to generate economies of scale, to enable efficient utilisation of property assets, and hence to increase campaign resources. 200-300 local parties were foreseen, operating from modern equipped offices with trained staff. Association mergers were the preferred mode. The new entity would controversially be called the X Conservative Party; the word 'Association' would be dropped. Importantly, more agents could be engaged (Conservative Party 2005a: 6-7).[142] This was emphasised by a regional officer: 'key staff are funded from the centre, additional staff have to be funded from associations ... groupings are to increase efficiency and get agents'.[143] As such, it reversed a long-held desire for central employment of agents; the precarious financial position of the national party was apposite. Professionals were keen to articulate the benefits of grouping: 'it's critical to do it ... we don't have the high membership that we used to ... therefore, there are less funds and things cost more money ... if all you are doing is maintaining the constituency office which is never staffed, you're mad ... it stops us duplicating things and allows us to put

resources into actually speaking to the public'.[144] In this context, the centre's capacity to compel associations to group together was a test of their continuing autonomy.

2. Flexible Structures

The four constituencies in this study illustrated why flexible structures were inevitable. In the stronger associations, measured by people and finance, local agreement was essential.

2.1 High Peak

High Peak remained a single entity because: 'it wouldn't be practical ... it's a constant problem that we are in the East Midlands, but in a geographical sense we have far more in common with the North West ... it wouldn't be very easy to twin up with the right people, the local links are to Manchester rather than to Derby or Nottingham'.[145] Hence, a professional added: 'it's horses for courses ... the London boroughs could easily be one association, but you wouldn't necessarily want to put two of them together ... in Nottingham, you've got the city council, so it makes sense for the three of them to have one association ... although this office is for Broxtowe, Bassetlaw and Gedling, they run their associations separately ... at election time, one organisation can't run four different elections, it just wouldn't work ... there are lots of places where you can get associations working together, there are other places where you can get them to merge ... in High Peak, it's pointless getting them to merge or to join with anybody and if they're doing a good job then leave them alone ... there isn't one answer, it's judgement of people like me which works best on the ground'.[146]

2.2. Derby

Derby was a merger of two associations, with a third added, driven by necessity: 'when we (Derby North) lost our MP, it was decided we should merge with Derby South, then Mid Derbyshire came on board ... without that there wouldn't be an office ... we couldn't afford to run it because all our good areas went to Mid Derbyshire ... getting a bigger office and having more associations together is better financially'.[147] Moreover without change, activity: 'would have died even more, so it was from a benevolent point of view that we went down that route ... no-one has ownership of any area, it helps to see the

bigger picture, whereas before they become very navel gazed ... so it's going to prove quite useful'.[148]

However, the Derby experience highlighted structural parochialism: 'Derby South and North tried before, but it badly fell apart ... Derby North had a large legacy and an agent, Derby South didn't have a great deal to offer in potential wins, so there was an argument that we are disseminating our money for not a lot of gain, except for appearing united ... if I was a member of Mid Derbyshire, I'm not sure how happy I would be'.[149] This was also because: 'the new association's made up roughly 70% of Derby and it felt like the extra bits were added to it ... members and councillors felt like a Derby city take-over and there was a lot of animosity, but we're all on the same side fighting for the same cause'.[150] Scope was an additional concern: 'the bigger you become, the more unwieldy you become ... Mid Derbyshire is spread over three local authorities - Amber Valley, Erewash and Derby City - so you've got lots of conflicting loyalties ... we need compromise as we've got an association based upon the parliamentary structure, which is only partly related to the local authority structure ... you've got to have strong leadership to make that work ... we have, but the moment you get somebody whose not, you can see people almost declaring "UDI" and going off and doing things because they will be wanting to sort out their local concerns'.[151] For an area officer, leadership was crucial: 'you've got to have a strong person to control it, who's got the contacts with Central Office and who's efficient to raise the money, work community politics ... you've got to have constituencies that can work together ... Derby, three constituencies, there's no way you'll get them to work together, that's a headache ... they haven't got an agent, which is a problem ... it takes a full-time professional with the backing of Central Office to make it work'.[152] Despite the merger, there was little confidence locally in being able to win the now three way marginal of Derby North. Derby thus provided a good example of where structural parochialism, underpinned by local politics, rendered campaign alignment between national and local parties difficult.

2.3. Somerton and Frome

Somerton and Frome was also hindered by structural parochialism, which brought intense conflict. This was linked to the property issue discussed in chapter three. It entered into a joint-working arrangement with neighbouring Wells to reduce duplication by sharing an office and agent, so as to increase money for campaigning activities. Both constituencies retained their independence.[153] Cameron's endorsement of grouping was a trigger for action.[154] The attraction of access to an MP was additionally cited: 'he can legitimately fund things for communications with constituents, they have an extremely capable office ... I chair the joint-working party between the two associations ... apart from the resource benefits, we have better staff coverage ... the acid test is the election, if you win there are no faults with the machinery, but if you lose there's always a scapegoat and it's often the office ... access to a sitting MP enables us to lobby shadow cabinet ministers, which is harder to do yourself ... the joint dinner with William Hague wouldn't have happened, which is the lesson we've learned about co-operation'.[155]

Strong leadership was vital to manage the protracted squabbling. For the chairman, joint working: 'was supported by the vast majority of the executive as an essential part of us continuing being an effective association, with the ability to win at the next election ... it wasn't without pain ... the old guard, they call themselves "the old and the bold", want us to review our joint working and to insist who is on the joint-working parties ... so they can move back to Wincanton and have a full-time agent and we say fine, how are you going to afford to do that'.[156] Their motion to the AGM was couched in terms of winning the election. It tried to halt progress towards joint working, pending a review followed by a special general meeting, thereby undermining the officer team. Doubt was expressed whether a successful campaign against the Liberal Democrats could be originated from outside and there was belief that they would make political capital out of the office closure. This was discounted on the grounds that campaign and membership activity occurred in the branches, and not the constituency office.[157] The motion failed: 'some of the real old stagers hate the thought that we've always had an office in Wincanton, they liked to pop in and talk to the secretary, have a cup of coffee, leave their shopping, use it as a social centre, but I don't believe it got us one more vote ... 75% of the executive voted for it ... at the AGM they were defeated more heavily by 85% ... some still want to

turn the clock back and re-open the Wincanton office ... I hope it never happens'.[158] Hence for the officers: 'we said to the executive council that we will review how the arrangements are going ... they are going well, the review will say there's no way of going back ... there's still a groundswell of people who want to go back to Wincanton because Wells takes the first grab and we're second fiddle ... it isn't true'.[159] To another progressive officer: 'if you have older, intransigent, members who'd been chairman and the rest, and who'd worked wonderfully hard for the constituency ... their views are not necessarily those of people who have joined more recently ... to "the old and the bold", we are losing our constituency, but of course we're not, it's still Somerton and Frome and we do all the things in it ... it is only the office which is involved'.[160]

The strength of opposition in Somerton and Frome was contrasted with the new candidate selection procedure: 'that's not the resigning aspect, it's the move from Wincanton that's the resignation aspect ... "the old and the bold" will say that I'm for selling 2 Market Place and I said "no" because the executive has agreed the process that we go through and I'm sticking with what it says ... I will not try and undermine it ... that's what "the old and the bold" are trying to do, undermine what I'm doing and what the Conservative Party is trying to do nationally as well'.[161] On the same comparison, a professional added: 'bizarre, and it's absolutely not fit for purpose, you compare it to the Gloucestershire establishment and even Wells, which inside is an efficient working operation ... so bizarre, bizarre, bizarre ... the problem is they're just lines on a map, they had an office in Wincanton and they were all arguing that it should be in Frome ... it's ridiculous ... if it was a case of should we pull the troops out of Iraq or out of the office in Wells'. Moreover, on the stance taken by "the old and the bold": 'they would vehemently deny it, but it's almost a Luddite approach ... I am espousing the merits of localism and you might say surely grouping is absolutely the opposite of that, but not at all ... grouping has enabled us to reinvigorate ourselves locally ... Forest of Dean in 1999 couldn't afford to campaign ... we only contested five seats on the council, now we have 31 councillors, so don't tell me grouping stops you performing at the local level ... I devote quite a lot time to grouping, it is a key activity ... the constituencies that make up the shire of Somerset, I would have all of them operating out of one state of the art office, somewhere off the M5

between Bridgwater and Taunton, just as Gloucestershire are doing ... do we want them to buy new curtains for the meeting room when they can't afford to print an *In Touch* newsletter, no ... if trying to persuade them of the error of their ways is perceived as interfering, then I plead guilty because my job is to try and lead them in the direction of political success and one of the lessons we learnt from the Liberal Democrats over the years is that you don't need a fantastically snazzy office to win a parliamentary seat'.[162] Somerton and Frome therefore, showed a clear lack of campaign alignment between the centre and parts of the association; the professional's frustration was a stark illustration of this. Persistent local autonomy is thwarting his aim.

2.4. Cheltenham

Cheltenham's approach was more progressive. Importantly, it reflected the belief that the optimum structural model combined efficiency gains with the projection of local identity. The association was part of a looser grouping of six north Gloucestershire constituencies which retained their individual identities, and which were supported by a single office containing three agents. The group espoused mutual aid, Cotswold, the wealthiest and with a large membership, assisting the weaker constituencies.[163] The aim was to achieve a full complement of MPs; currently, there were three. Competitively: 'Cheltenham has never been a rich association, Gloucester similarly ... the Liberal Democrat operation in Cheltenham has a town presence and an MP's resources ... we had to come up with something to enable us to battle with them on at least a par ... as much as you rely on your volunteers, it is not the same as a resourced operation ... we would not have got there on our own'.[164] Furthermore: 'for the county council elections, one piece of standard literature goes across all six constituencies with a localised page relating to that ward and that council candidate ... when there were six independent constituencies, we were each doing our own literature, it all looked different ... now, you'll get one consistent message, the brand is being reinforced'.[165] Local identity was more effectively promoted under a flexible grouping arrangement.

The four constituencies revealed different approaches to grouping. Local autonomy meant that it was not practical for the centre to impose its preferred merger solution

across the country. Flexibility was a requirement to keep active members involved. Even then, the Somerton and Frome experience saw pockets of intense structural parochialism from a rump of older members. This meant that the outcome has fallen short of the centre's desire to achieve full campaign alignment between national and local interests.

3. Implementing Change

The grouping solution was essentially related to constituency strength. A campaign department memorandum authorised regional directors to 'work to strengthen the party organisation by promoting grouping and mergers'.[166] For this purpose, differing leadership styles were observed, ranging from strong-arm tactics to traditional moral persuasion: 'I have the power to impose structures on associations ... federations where the Conservative Party is very weak, such as Leigh and Wigan, but in central Lancashire a loose grouping would be better'.[167] Moreover: 'we've got rid of constituencies in Manchester because we had a serious situation, the vote was declining rapidly for years and it was in the hands of people who were doing the party no good ... the party will merge constituencies more and more, so they're gradually going to lose their autonomy ... the party chairman wants target constituencies to employ agents and share facilities, so a lot of pressure is put on the officers of target seats'.[168] By contrast: 'there is a groundswell of resistance in a variety of places ... there's no doubt these things will come, but because of the tradition of local autonomy you can only persuade and endeavour ... there are a couple of associations in Somerset where we are gently increasing the level of persuasion without getting anywhere near blackmail ... "wouldn't it be better, you could do so much more" ... we're hoping they see the moral case rather than feel they are having their arms twisted ... it is my job to try and make it happen because it will give us a more suitable campaign base, but the actual form of the grouping is down to the various associations'.[169]

The stronger associations could exercise judgement on the form of grouping adopted, but only this. Localism, reflected particularly by candidate selection, was a key factor. Thus: 'in some places, it may make sense to federate ... it makes no sense here (Cheltenham) ... it goes back to why don't you merge a branch, you don't because people have quite a

pride in their own area ... if you want to make it an amorphous, you're not creating more talent, you are creating less'.[170] For a professional: 'merger becomes inexorably linked to the idea of take-over and loss of identity ... Swindon have merged the two associations because they make up one clearly defined geographical town, Swindon North didn't feel they were being taken over by Swindon South and vice-versa ... in Cornwall, even the idea would have been a disaster, because they would have said what's us in Torpoint got in common with them down in Truro, but of course what they have in common is Cornwall and Conservative ... so, I certainly favour grouping rather that mergers ... the single most jealously guarded right of any local Conservative association, and it's another argument against merger because of the signals it sends, is the right to select your own candidate ... anything that erodes the perceived authority of local associations could quickly turn into disaster'.[171]

For the centre, the principle of grouping was non-negotiable. It was the structural solution for stronger local campaigning organisations. In this, it will prevail, in spite of the parochialism seen in Somerton and Frome. The moral case was accepted by most officers as essential for electoral progress. Nevertheless, local autonomy in the stronger associations ensured that flexibility was pursued, even if full alignment of national and local campaign interests was not realised. Importantly, the preservation of local identity was a driver, and was accepted at least by regional professionals. Overall, grouping was a further illustration that the centre controlled the strategy, local the implementation.

<u>Conclusion</u>

Qualitative evidence was presented to support the survey data of Johnston and Pattie, Denver and Hands, and Seyd and Whiteley on the importance of local campaigns. It stressed the maintenance of local presence, improving local competitiveness through a local candidate and local interpretation of political issues. This dimension was now recognised by the Conservative Party leadership who, correctly seeing local campaign weaknesses, proactively sought to wrest control of the local campaign strategy. Several organisational mechanisms were revealed to assist the party's recovery. Firstly, and critically, there was the establishment of the local campaign team, under the leadership of

a centrally trained candidate. This enabled direct transfusion of the national campaign strategy, more effective campaign monitoring and control, and the engagement of outside expertise. Secondly, the centre employed technology to issue campaign guidelines and control of literature templates. This initiative was supported by professionally-managed regional campaign centres, to ensure the reinforcement of the Conservative brand, as conceived by the centre. Thirdly, the increasing importance of persuasive campaigning locally (Denver and Hands 1997) induced central involvement in activities that were previously the local preserve. These included the electoral boundaries review and telephone canvassing to counter local deficiencies. Finally, the centre has aggressively embarked on a programme of constituency grouping to achieve campaign efficiencies and increase its agent portfolio. All of these initiatives were designed to produce a greater alignment between national and local campaign interests and improve performance, but progress has been varied; in each case, there was an important local dimension. Campaign team performance ultimately reflected its composition, in terms of both candidate and local skills and commitment. Moreover, there was much evidence of local literature disputes, related to both content and distribution co-ordination. Telephone canvassing was badly co-ordinated and generally not liked. Finally, the centre was obliged to accept grouping arrangements that were more flexible than it desired. The projection of local identity was the aim, but the outcome often related to individual constituencies rather than a combination. It can thus be concluded that the organisational response to defeat, in terms of campaigning, has fallen short of the leadership's ideal.

Local autonomy accounted for some of this shortfall. For the leadership, progress required its dismantling, but for the purpose of activist motivation, its preservation in a different form. The evidence from this chapter revealed this. Firstly, the campaign team concept enabled the separation of formulation and implementation of strategy consistent with the formal strategic planning model (Andrews 1980). Local parties were now responsible for implementation only; they could make adjustments to suit local characteristics, but not alter the central thrust. Secondly, that the campaign team itself was separated from the association mainstream reinforced this change; although it permitted activists to claim continuing autonomy over membership and fundraising.

Ultimately though, they accepted the centre's right to organise the campaign, as being the best approach to ensuring success. Thirdly, the advent of grouping meant that many constituency parties either merged or became part of a larger network. The result for them was a degree of shared autonomy, but the fact that the grouping concept was non-negotiable - only the type was subject to agreement - meant that local autonomy was diluted. Nevertheless, they retained some independence. In campaigning it was a function of their ability to add value. Here, the evidence pointed to a political deficit driven by two inter-related processes. Firstly, a natural reduction in local capability, underpinned by an ageing membership combined with technological change. There was a shortfall in the basic activities of candidate introduction, canvassing and leaflet distribution; for the latter, external supporter networks became increasingly essential. Moreover, activists lacked media and marketing expertise, and demonstrated inabilities in advanced activities such as tactical voting. Secondly, a purposeful reduction in capability, manifested in the de-skilling and de-politicisation of activists, undermined the local position further; technology was again the key to change. This would likely have an impact on the party's ability to attract competent local officers in the future. The overall capability deficit was only partially offset by the local knowledge accumulated, especially by councillor groups. Progressive associations, such as Cheltenham, though, could achieve extensive membership of campaign teams and exert a good degree of independence. Because of the renewed importance of local campaigns, activists had to retain a substantial input into them, and hence some autonomy. The conclusion however, was that owing to the capability shortfalls, central professionals had to become involved.

The modified form of local autonomy warrants interpretation with respect to the literature. Firstly, equating the control of campaign strategy with policy meant a re-affirmation of McKenzie's stance that final authority rests with the leadership. PPC leadership of campaign teams and initiatives such as template design represented nuanced approaches to re-emphasising oligarchy. However, the continuing local input meant that this was not absolute. Secondly, the evidence seemingly underlined the electoral-professional model, with its centralisation of campaigns. Top-down planning, campaign teams, campaign guidelines and constituency grouping were all consistent with the

tightening of the organisation for the better resource utilisation and discipline associated with political marketing. The local role conceived in delivery terms was also consonant with Carty's (2004) franchise model. Finally, the twin processes of de-skilling and de-politicisation of activists were a natural development of not just Panebianco and Carty, but also Kirchheimer, and Katz and Mair. However, the evidence again suggested that such a conclusion would overstate the reality. Local parties were not co-ordinated in the manner of an army that electoral-professional and political marketing pure forms required. Moreover, constituency diversity meant there could be no 'one-size-fits-all' approach to the campaign; activists indeed, strove to ensure that local interests remained on the political agenda. The annoyance caused by a central decision to neglect the Liberal Democrat-held seats also showed the folly of a centralised approach. In particular however, parochial tendencies, both structural and activity, indicated that local activists would not wholly succumb to central direction. These have the potential to drain the organisation, but local insistence over grouping brought benefits. Here, Harrop's (1990) interpretation of political marketing was apposite. The need to project a local identity to cement a positive local image and to understand local needs and wants was deemed to require continuing strength in individual constituencies; local people took more pride in their own area than a greater one. Hence, Philp's (2006) interpretation of the political brand as voter instinctive feel was reinforced by strong local entities. There was a need to be actively seen locally; otherwise the party would be deemed to be irrelevant in Noelle-Neumann's (1980) spiral of silence terms. Knowledge and experience provided the local parties with some control of Panebianco's competency zone of uncertainty, thereby negating the pure form of the electoral-professional model. Local autonomy had been reshaped, but the result was a more messy structure than the centre would have wanted.

The advent of campaign teams and the engagement of outside expertise and supporters brought a loosening of local boundaries. Structurally, these developments fundamentally undermined Carty's franchise concept, revealing also a strengthening of hierarchical relations. Instead, what has emerged is a revised cadre structure with the campaign team, containing the appropriate internal and external expertise, operating alongside the association officer team. This approximated more closely to Epstein than to Duverger.

However, it has evolved for different reasons to Epstein's electoral peaks. The permanent campaign meant a need for continuing voter reach locally, so that organisationally, skilled local officers were still valued by professionals to co-ordinate the necessary expertise and the local effort; volunteers were not receptive to professional direction. The developments discussed in this chapter have indicated nuanced power and management structures in the Conservative Party to achieve progress. Candidate selection reveals a further manifestation of this and will be discussed in chapter five.

[1] Kite, M. 'Ashcroft's hold on party raises fears of Tory rift'. Sunday Telegraph 26 August 2007.
[2] Hastings, M. 'The Tory party is the main obstacle to a Cameron win'. The Guardian 30 January 2007.
[3] Will Harris, Director of Marketing for the Conservative Party 2003-4. Speech at 'Marketing Political Parties' symposium, Keele University, 8 December 2004.
[4] East Midlands local officer - 2.
[5] East Midlands local officer - 3.
[6] East Midlands local officer - 11.
[7] 'David Cameron's Conservatives', Campaign of Conservative Party Democracy 22 July 2007. It suggested that Cameron probably authorised it and questioned whether it was the result of arrogance or inexperience.
[8] South West local officer - 18.
[9] South West local official - 35.
[10] Regional officer - 40.
[11] East Midlands local officer - 9.
[12] South West local officer - 20.
[13] East Midlands local officer - 7.
[14] East Midlands local officer and campaign official - 16. Tom Levitt is the Labour MP for High Peak, Andrew Bingham the Conservative PPC.
[15] South West local officer - 18.
[16] South West local officer - 30.
[17] South West local official - 34. At the 2005 election, the Conservative performance showed regional variations, but also individual constituencies with differing swings.
[18] East Midlands local officer - 13.
[19] Area officer - 36.
[20] South West local officer - 17.
[21] South West local officer - 23.
[22] South West local officer - 26.
[23] South West local officer - 29.
[24] East Midlands local officer - 7.
[25] Conversation with Birmingham agent at 'Marketing Political Parties' symposium, Keele University, 8 December 2004. The author witnessed this central direction at a local campaign strategy meeting 17 April 2005. The regional chairman outlined precisely the strategy that the constituency association would be following. As it was a safe Labour seat, it was essentially about establishing a presence and strengthening promising wards for the following year's local elections.
[26] Regional official - 41.
[27] Area officer - 36.
[28] Lord Ashcroft 'TakeYourSeat' letter to constituency chairmen of target seats 11 December 2006. The campaign director for Somerton and Frome was the regional director rather than an area campaign director (ACD). This appears to be because of numbers. The restructuring announced 30 January 2006 in a letter to all appropriate personnel including constituency chairmen created nine regional director posts and 15 area campaign directors. Clearly, there was not enough of the latter to cover over 100 target seats.
[29] 'Candidates Association holds annual conference on 10th November'. ConservativeHome 15 October 2007.
[30] Minutes of Executive Council, Somerton and Frome 20 November 2006. It was described as a helpful introduction to the target seats campaign. The conference took place on 4 November 2006.
[31] East Midlands local officer - 9.
[32] East Midlands local officer - 7.
[33] South West local officer - 18.
[34] South West local officer - 22.
[35] South West local officer - 17.
[36] South West local officer - 25.
[37] South West local officer - 29.
[38] South West local officer - 33.
[39] Area officer - 38.
[40] Regional official - 41.
[41] South West local official - 35.

[42] Regional official - 41.
[43] East Midlands local officer and campaign official - 16.
[44] Area officer - 36.
[45] Minutes of Officers Meeting, Somerton and Frome 27 November 2006.
[46] South West local official - 35.
[47] Regional official - 42.
[48] East Midlands local officer - 1.
[49] Area officer - 38.
[50] Michael Ashcroft 9 June 2006. ConservativeHome question and answer exercise.
[51] Minutes of Derby Executive Council 26 July 2007.
[52] Michael Ashcroft's report on Derby North for the first quarter 2007 and communication from regional director to Somerton and Frome chairman, date unknown but believed to be late January 2007. The full list of criteria were: total electorate; number of pledges collected since 2001; number of Conservatives since 2001 with a permanent postal or proxy vote; number of items of literature delivered each quarter related to the number of households; number of available deliverers related to the number of households; proportion of voters for whom the party has an e-mail address; number of qualifying members relative to the 2005 Conservative vote; income from fundraising per member for each quarter.
[53] Regional official - 41.
[54] South West local official - 34.
[55] South West local officer - 23.
[56] South West local official - 34.
[57] South West local officer - 17.
[58] South West local officer - 23.
[59] South West local officer - 26.
[60] South West local officer - 29.
[61] South West local official - 34.
[62] East Midlands local officer - 12. The author witnessed regional campaign centre control of leaflet content and organisation during the local elections in 2006. Local officers were either by-passed or told to stay out the way. The result was inaccurate leaflets and inappropriate emphasis of local issues.
[63] South West local officer - 19.
[64] South West local officer - 22.
[65] South West local officer - 31.
[66] South West local officer - 30.
[67] South West local officer - 21.
[68] The author's experience and conversations with local activists in his constituency.
[69] Area officer - 37.
[70] South West local officer - 31.
[71] Author observation in Cheadle.
[72] South West local official - 34.
[73] East Midlands local officer - 4.
[74] East Midlands local officer - 2.
[75] Conversation with local officer in author's own constituency.
[76] East Midlands local officer - 11.
[77] East Midlands local officer - 12.
[78] East Midlands local officer - 9. Coleshill is where the party's Constituency Campaigning Services is located. Along with a call centre, it provides constituencies with a range of other services. For example: literature production, design and printing; information on Liberal Democrat campaigning; advisory services to constituencies, PPCs and MPs.
[79] South West local officer - 32.
[80] South West local officer - 22.
[81] East Midlands local officer - 10.
[82] Regional official - 42.
[83] Regional official - 41.
[84] Regional officer - 40.
[85] Area officer - 36.

[86] Speech as Party Chairman to the party conference 30 September 2007.
[87] Conversations with local activists in the author's own area, as well as study interviewees.
[88] Conversation with Cheadle organising agent during the 2005 election campaign.
[89] 'Delivery Network', Conservative Training College 24 September 2006.
[90] South West local officer - 21.
[91] Minutes of Cheltenham Executive Council 21 February 2007. South West local official - 34.
[92] South West local officer - 19.
[93] East Midlands local officer - 8.
[94] East Midlands local officer - 5.
[95] South West local officer - 19.
[96] East Midlands local officer - 2.
[97] South West local officer - 32.
[98] South West local officer - 23.
[99] Area officer - 37.
[100] South West local official - 35.
[101] South West local official - 34. A good example is the Bromley and Chislehurst by-election where they devised one simple election message and delivered it through intensive leafleting by an army of volunteers who descended on the constituency from all over the country (Hurst, G. 'Analysis: Lib Dem black arts left Tories in disarray', The Times 30 June 2006).
[102] South West local officer - 20.
[103] South West local officer - 25.
[104] South West local officer - 27.
[105] Conversation with Cheadle organising agent during the 2005 election campaign.
[106] South West local officer - 23.
[107] East Midlands local officer - 16.
[108] South West local officer - 29.
[109] East Midlands local officer - 1.
[110] South West local officer - 21.
[111] Regional official - 42.
[112] Campaigntogether.com 2007 (date unknown, but believed to be early summer).
[113] South West local officer - 22.
[114] East Midlands local officer - 8.
[115] South West local official - 35.
[116] Area officer - 39.
[117] Regional officer - 42.
[118] In addition to documents covering constituency association officer positions noted earlier, there were ones on for example, 'Targeting Your Campaign', 'Get out the Vote', 'Campaigning Events', 'Making the Most of Volunteers', 'Canvassing' and even 'Sample Canvassing Script'. Conservative Training College: assorted dates 2006 and 2007.
[119] Regional official - 41.
[120] Area officer - 38.
[121] South West local officer - 30.
[122] South West local officer - 29.
[123] South West local officer - 23.
[124] East Midlands local officer - 7.
[125] East Midlands local officer - 6.
[126] South West local officer - 17.
[127] East Midlands local officer - 9.
[128] East Midlands local officer - 1.
[129] East Midlands local officer - 11.
[130] South West local official - 34.
[131] East Midlands local officer and campaign professional - 16.
[132] South West local officer - 27. The Liberal Democrats are the most pro-Europe of the major parties. The actual UKIP vote was 1047. This was greater than the winning margin of 812 votes.
[133] East Midlands local officer - 12.

[134] South West local officer - 22.
[135] East Midlands local officer - 1.
[136] Regional officer - 40.
[137] Conversations with officers in author's own constituency and at the Bow Group meetings.
[138] Regional officer - 42.
[139] South West local official - 35.
[140] East Midlands local officer - 6.
[141] South West local officer - 26.
[142] Research into the party's Blue Book of constituency addresses showed 71 instances of office sharing arrangements, though there were no details about whether they were mergers or looser groupings.
[143] Regional officer - 40, speaking at the North West Bow Group meeting 9 November 2007.
[144] South West local official - 34.
[145] East Midlands local officer - 10.
[146] Regional official - 41.
[147] East Midlands local officer - 1.
[148] East Midlands local officer - 6.
[149] East Midlands local officer - 4. Mid Derbyshire is expected to be a safe Conservative seat.
[150] East Midlands local officer - 5.
[151] East Midlands local officer - 2.
[152] Area officer - 38.
[153] The association would retain its officers, executive, branch structure and finance; only the office was affected. The officers skilfully set this as a separate issue to the joint-working arrangements, though their opponents were quick to link the two. The conversion of the Wincanton office to a flat would bring in an estimated income of £4-5000 per annum. Estimates for the building work ranged from £17-32,000 and would mean the association taking out a mortgage as the cost savings from the joint working would take time to generate (Somerton and Frome Executive Council minutes 13 February 2006; Somerton and Frome Constituency General and Political Report 5 March 2005 - 3 March 2006; Somerton and Frome paper on 2 Market Place, Wincanton, 18 January 2007).
[154] Somerton and Frome Constituency General and Political Report 5th March 2005 - 3rd March 2006.
[155] South West local officer - 29.
[156] South West local officer - 25.
[157] Somerton and Frome Executive Council minutes 13 February 2006.
[158] South West local officer - 26. The original vote was 30 for joint working, 10 against and 2 abstentions. One member queried whether this was a matter that all association members should vote on, but this was rebuffed under the association rules (Somerton and Frome Executive Council minutes 13 February 2006). The motion for 'the old and the bold' at the AGM contained four points: no further action until the joint-working decision had been reviewed by a special general meeting, a full appraisal of the future use of the Wincanton office, all members to be invited to submit views on the joint-working proposals, and a special general meeting to be held within three months of the AGM. 'The old and the bold' couched their objections in electoral terms and professed to be echoing the concerns of the membership. The previous chairman however, retorted that they were seeking to undermine democracy, as the executive council had given the officers authority to proceed. He thus viewed their action as 'unnecessary, unwelcome and divisive', and effectively a vote of no confidence in the officers. (Internal association correspondence that the author had access to).
[159] South West local officer - 29.
[160] South West local officer - 27.
[161] South West local officer - 25.
[162] Regional official - 42.
[163] For example, Cotswold had agreed to support deliveries in two Cheltenham wards and Cheltenham had agreed to give active campaign support to a local Tewkesbury ward (Cheltenham executive council minutes 21 February 2007).
[164] South West local officer - 22.
[165] South West local officer - 19.
[166] Campaigning Department memorandum 30 January 2006.
[167] Regional officer - 40.

[168] Area officer - 36.
[169] Area officer - 37.
[170] South West local official - 34.
[171] Regional official - 42.

Chapter Five

The Local Conservative Party Parliamentary Candidate Selection Process

Local parties have always enjoyed a significant role in parliamentary candidate selection. As noted in chapter one, Schattschneider argued that 'the nature of the nominating procedure determines the nature of the party; he who can make nominations is the owner of the party' (1942: 64). Gallagher though, countered that no one group can achieve ownership or total control; candidate selection instead 'signifies how power is distributed rather than deciding it ... the nature of the nominating procedure reflects the nature of the party more than it determines it' (1988: 277). The Conservative Party reflected this. Local associations have been perennially jealous of their autonomy over candidate selection, rebuffing all attempts at interference (Ranney 1965: 271). Innovation in candidate selection came primarily from Labour, with initiatives such as mandatory reselection and all-women shortlists; the Conservative Party by contrast had merely tinkered with existing rules (Bradbury et al 2000; Criddle 2002, 2005). However, the reforms introduced by Conservative leader, David Cameron, in January 2006 directly challenged the local tradition. He recognised that the party's recovery required voters to perceive that the party had changed. For candidate selection this meant a substantial increase in the number of women and ethnic minority candidates in winnable seats. Local autonomy was a potential impediment to this. This chapter will examine the impact of change. It will commence with an outline of the selection process. Section two will address the reform programme. Evidence from the constituencies will be presented in section three. Section four will add further relevant aspects concerning the persistence of local autonomy. The conclusion will then provide an overall assessment. This found that the strategic role of local parties, and hence their autonomy has been diluted. It has been replaced by a more formal, but at the same time looser, approach in which outside expertise has been engaged.

The Conservative Candidate Selection Process

The Conservative Party candidate selection process can be distinguished by the 'professional' personnel management practices at the national level and the more visible

'democratic' procedures locally: visible with respect to the media and the public. The national process was evolutionary in line with changing political circumstances. *Fresh Future* standardised the procedure to reflect ability and achievement, and to ensure equal opportunity (Conservative Party 1998a: 19). Individuals were interviewed by a regional director, who assessed their background, aptitude, suitability and future plans. This would lead either to an invitation to apply or to a recommendation for further training and time to acquire more political experience in a local setting. Applicants submitted personal data, occupational experience, party history and a statement of why they would make a good MP. Three references were required, including the local association chairman; an MP, councillor or peer; and an occupational referee. The candidates department at CCHQ then performed the necessary checks.[1]

Confirmation of suitability led to an invitation to a half-day Parliamentary Assessment Board. Its introduction had 'legitimised the authority of Central Office in controlling the pool of eligible applicants' (Maor 1997: 127-8). It enabled the centre to increase 'quality control' over candidates (Rush 1994: 5). The format was the 2002 Dykes and Silvester competency model for a Conservative MP.[2] This included psychometric profiling, a group exercise, role-play, an in-tray exercise, a one-to-one meeting and a public speaking exercise. Prospects attended in groups of eight, each being assessed against seven criteria: communication skills, intellect, relating to people, campaigning skills, leading and motivating, resilience and drive, and political conviction; scores were noted for each. The in-tray exercise for example, addressed different scenarios such as an MP's case work, and the public speaking test required consideration of a current issue. Political knowledge was at the level of core beliefs and values, and an understanding of national and international current affairs. A person's views on Europe for example, were not solicited, although there was intent to weed out those with extreme views. The approach was more to demonstrate political competence and acceptance of collective responsibility. Feedback was given on competency gaps and training needs. Successful candidates were admitted to the Approved List eligible to apply for constituency vacancies, though some were placed on regional lists and others allocated to specific seats only. The five assessors included two MPs and senior voluntary members; CCHQ staff could attend, but

it was the assessors who made the final decision.[3] The system aimed to find people who could add value to the House of Commons, but who were also capable of leading the local campaign, as stressed in chapter four.

At the local level, associations were expected to conform to the process prescribed by the centre, but the fundamentals had not changed in decades. Candidates were evaluated by a selection committee appointed by the executive council. This comprised officers, representatives from the branches and specialist committees, and co-opted members. Around 20 would be interviewed, from which about six would form the shortlist to go before the executive council. This was the critical stage; under-represented minorities tended to fail here (Criddle 1994: 159). The shortlist interview involved a short speech and question session. Earlier reform had brought a requirement for at least two candidates to advance to the special general meeting of the full constituency membership (Kelly 1999: 223). A speech and questions from the floor was again the format, with a secret ballot to decide the outcome.

Candidate Reform

Candidate inclusiveness was a key issue focused upon by Cameron to convince voters that the party had changed. *Fresh Future* provided the authority and a priority list of candidates combined with local procedural change were the mechanisms to achieve it.

1. Inclusiveness

The traditional local selection concept of meritocracy had left the party looking stale. The Commission on Candidate Selection stressed that party procedures, linked to the decline in member numbers and their socio-economic background, were responsible for producing a constricted base of candidates (Riddell 2003: 5). Paxman thus observed that selection committees were 'atypical', so that 'in an increasingly diverse country, the Conservative Party was saddled with a bunch of people in parliament who looked and sounded much the same' (2002: 76). Inclusiveness became politically sensitive. An apparent unwillingness to select women, black and ethnic minority candidates for winnable seats, a trend highlighted by the media, presented the centre with a rationale to

acquire more strategic control over the local candidate process. In 2005, just 19% of candidates and 9% of MPs were women; the figures for black and ethnic minorities were 7% and zero respectively (Criddle 2005). For women, the seat distribution was 14 incumbent MPs, 11 contesting marginals and 93 in unwinnable seats where the majority was 10% or more (Campbell and Lovenduski 2005: 844). Lovenduski asserted that a change of party culture was needed to address the lack of ethos for women (1997: 712). For Sagger, the black and ethnic minority problem was part of a wider concern about the party's willingness to promote a more inclusive brand of Conservatism (2001: 196). Layton-Henry had noted an intra-party tacit consensus on the kind of person who would make a suitable MP, but if this became strained, formal procedures would probably be introduced to reassert central control (1976: 401-2). Reform reflected his view, being designed to align local priorities with national strategic interests.

The inclusiveness problem had both supply and demand dimensions. For the supply of women, Norris and Lovenduski highlighted the time and money needed to acquire political experience and build contacts, and a need to assist those not employed in brokerage-related jobs (1993: 396-402). Conservative Home added support, claiming that those employed in the public and voluntary sectors would be deterred.[4] In 2005, 60% of MPs and 152 other candidates attended public school. Occupationally, 38% of MPs came from professional or armed services, 38% business and 17% graduated from politics or journalism (Criddle 2005: 164-5): sectors where women were deficient. Demand reflected the notion that in first-past-the-post electoral systems, parties tended to look for the perceived best single candidate rather than a more 'balanced ticket' achievable under proportional ones; women suffered accordingly (Curtice and Steed 2000: 194). This was underscored by a Fawcett Society report (Shepherd-Robinson and Lovenduski 2002). Britain's political parties were 'institutionally sexist'; they did not want women. The lack of high-quality women reflected low demand because few would try. It conceived three strategies: rhetoric by senior politicians towards members; positive action including training, voluntary targets, shortlist guarantees and encouragement to come forward; and positive discrimination, making selection mandatory. The latter was enshrined in the Sex Discrimination (Election Candidates) Act 2002, which permitted positive discrimination

measures in favour of women, but without compulsion. Labour reintroduced all-women shortlists for the 2005 election; under Blair, officials were willing to use the party machine to achieve the 'right type of candidates' (Shaw 2001: 50). However, a notable defeat at Blaenau Gwent, where a former party official prevailed showed the potential for a backlash.[5] This selection also illustrated the use of positive discrimination to try to block local 'heirs-apparent', usually men (Criddle 2005: 152). Conservative attitudes to women remained mixed, caught between the traditional family role and the need to attract women voters and party activists (Campbell et al 2006: 19). Change though, was driven by the electoral imperative. Women were reportedly 'less satisfied with government, less likely to support the Conservatives and more disaffected by politics' (Campbell and Lovenduski 2005: 839).

2. The Cameron Response

On becoming leader, Cameron immediately articulated his aim: 'we need to change in order to win ... we need to change the scandalous under-representation of women in the Conservative Party and we will do that'.[6] He later added: 'I now have a clear mandate ... I plan to change the face of the Conservative Party by changing the faces of the Conservative Party ... it's about political effectiveness ... to create effective policy, we must involve those who are affected by it ... my plan for positive action is based on clear principles: "guaranteeing" more women and ethnic minorities are selected in winnable seats, ensuring that someone's potential to be a good MP is the only factor that counts in being selected a parliamentary candidate, and preserving the autonomy that constituencies have to select the candidate that is best for them'.[7] Candidate equality was integral to moving the party back to the centre ground of British politics, but local autonomy would be conceived in different terms.

Cameron's ability to succeed could be traced to *Fresh Future*. Responsibility for candidates was assumed by a sub-committee of the board, whose remit was to identify a broad spectrum of suitable, high quality, candidates. A partnership with the localities was envisaged in which, on the surface, their autonomy was reaffirmed. However, this was immediately weakened by a requirement to select solely from the nationally approved

list; the right to choose an unapproved local person was removed (Conservative Party 1998a: 19). Two further provisions had hidden implications for candidate selection. An Ethics and Integrity Committee was empowered to censure and remove any recalcitrant MP or candidate; local obstinacy over incumbent MPs, such as Neil Hamilton in 1997, was thus compromised.[8] Its potential to be used against perceived rebels was not immediately understood locally (Kelly 1999: 223). Secondly, there was the threat of supported status, manifested in the critical wording "other exceptional circumstances" (Conservative Party 1998b: 11). Initially, the area executive, but now the regional level would intervene and, with the association officers, draw up a shortlist for the selection of the PPC.[9] Overall, *Fresh Future* was sufficiently imprecise to permit the leadership to make changes to the rules as it deemed appropriate.

3. The Priority List of Candidates

Cameron accepted the demand thesis regarding local selection, as it fitted his political aims. His strategy afforded little attention to broader socio-economic supply, but control of it was essential to his guarantee. Campbell et al (2006) articulated an intra-party struggle to achieve greater equality, orchestrated by the Women2Win pressure group. This reaped success. Of the eight people who comprised the new candidate sub-committee, four were women and included former party chairman, Theresa May MP, and the influential Shireen Ritchie and Lady Fiona Hodgson, chairs of Women2Win and Conservative Women's Organisation respectively. Just two had links to the voluntary party.[10] This committee chose the new 'priority list' of candidates, which imitated Andrew Lansley's paper, *Do the Right Thing* (2002). This had recommended an 'A-list' of 100 talented candidates containing equal numbers of men and women and some ethnic minorities; associations in winnable seats would be encouraged to select them.[11] The difference with Cameron was that these constituencies would be expected to select from it, although exceptionally, local candidates could be considered. This initiative was augmented by a headhunting and mentoring programme. Cameron appealed to women and ethnic minority people, who shared Conservative values and his passion to change Britain to apply, promising a welcome and the necessary support.[12] However, previous

experience indicated that success could not be promised, as the ultimate decision continued to rest with the constituencies (Richardson 2006: 62).

At the launch of the priority list, the 50% women and 10% ethnic minority was all that CCHQ promoted; other forms of candidate diversity were dismissed and financial exclusion ignored.[13] Research by *The Times* found just six of the priority list employed in the public services, most having chosen traditional careers for becoming a Conservative MP: business, law and political research. The implication was that obtaining the votes of public sector workers would be rendered more difficult.[14] To ConservativeHome, the party was not moving beyond 'face deep diversity'. Representativeness would not be increased 'if we swap southern male barristers for southern female bankers; real diversity will depend upon active recruitment of candidates from the north and those who have been homemakers or have worked in the public and poverty-fighting sectors'.[15] The strategy inferred that the electorate viewed inclusiveness, as being more important than elitism; the former was visual, the latter less so. Moreover, Cameron's tackling of local demand suggested that exercising his authority over the perceived reactionary activists was integral to his leadership approach.

This was reflected in the local response. Activists concurred with Cameron's aim, but not universally with the method. The desperation to win was set against the need to preserve meritocracy: 'it's part of Cameron's message that he's trying to get out to the electorate that the party has genuinely changed ... it doesn't help members and enthusiasts in the party, but it might help our image with people who stopped voting or to show that we are a more inclusive party, so politically it's fair'.[16] In addition: 'the biggest benefit the priority list has done is generate interest and highlight the fact that the party is looking for good people'.[17] Cameron's determination was recognised, as politically: 'you've got to be tough to do that, but it was necessary ... he had to move on, to appeal to a wider cross-section of people'.[18] Tradition however, remained powerful: 'I'm happy for David Cameron and Central Office to say we're going to use a list basis ... you can't get on this unless you've been through a national selection process, so you have the right calibre of people coming forward ... but you can't tell people on that list "you can't apply for that

seat because of X reasons," you should be able to apply for any seat and we have to treat them on merit'.[19] Qualified criticism was also offered: 'if you create an A-list of candidates, particularly from a group of people none of whom have loyally supported the party for a long time, it might be divisive ... some candidates are more high flyers than others ... some I know on the A-list are not totally convinced when they appear before a selection panel it's a plus because it may have the opposite effect ... if you are good enough and you are perceived well, whether you are on the list or not, it will show through ... they've tried to present associations with a high calibre of candidate which is perfectly reasonable ... but fundamentally I'm not worried about that as long as the decision still rests with the association'.[20] This latter point would emerge as a key face saver locally.

The manner of implementation caused particular upset. It reflected Cameron's leadership strategy for creating a positive image with the electorate. However, imposition without consultation also indicated the centre's patronising style: 'it's the way it has been done that is creating resentment, it is really counter-productive ... it was the arrogant way they said you will do it this way ... you should take people along with you'.[21] Moreover: 'I am happy with Cameron's approach, but I would have liked to have seen more care in implementation, more encouragement ... people will do something if they understand the benefits and they can see purpose, if they can't they resist it'.[22] Similarly: 'it's a good idea if it highlights people with necessary skills for today's society ... we have to move away from middle-aged, middle-class, white, male definitely ... if you bring in someone in his 30s, a director of this, head of a committee towards green development, we would like to highlight him, fine ... if you bring that person forward and say you will vote for him, no ... what's the point of having an association if you're going to do that ... don't dictate because associations are associations, they will probably reject'.[23] The centre clearly believed traditional persuasion would fail.

The filling of quotas brought further irritation, as this would undermine the localities' ability to select the right candidate for them: 'the perception is that people are forced into selecting people to tick the box ... the right thing is to encourage people to get involved

and then naturally it will filter through that more people have been selected from all these different backgrounds'.[24] However, evidence in chapter two suggested this was unlikely to happen. A politically acute view was: 'it was wrong to set quotas for women and minority groups ... John Taylor, a black man, stood here and people were saying why doesn't he stand in Gloucester where there's more of his own kind and my answer was that he isn't here to represent any particular section of society, he's here to represent the people of Cheltenham ... now we have an argument used that we want more people representative of different sections of society, that was an argument used by racists in the past, I object to that ... we want more women in, but how we get them is another matter ... Central Office should be focusing on how to encourage associations to attract members from a wider range of backgrounds so that they would be more representative, not to impose candidates on us that they've decided are alright ... we want somebody that the local members want ... otherwise, what's the point of being a member ... one of the major decisions you'll ever have to make is choosing your candidate to fight an election ... there has been resistance, I'm probably one of the most vociferous, but probably 50% object to it'.[25] The problem was linked to localism, conceived in broader terms reflecting local people and characteristics: 'it raised a lot of hackles ... last time, we had a completely female short list for the final based upon merit ... I can see why David Cameron wants to do it ... but this is where CCHQ thinks it can impose and dictate, when they can't because all they do is annoy local people ... you get a candidate who suits lots of ticked boxes up at CCHQ, who doesn't suit the local conditions ... candidates imposed from CCHQ by one way or another are not going to win locally ... they stick out like sore thumbs'.[26] This perspective was strengthened by: 'the A-list was not a roaring success ... there should be more women, and in the right locality there should be more ethnic candidates, but not just across the board, because hopefully each constituency knows what is suitable to them ... there were a lot of good candidates by-passed'.[32]

Localism was also associated with candidate origin: 'when candidates are wheeled up from London to a rural constituency, they're not necessarily on the same wavelength ... in that context, locality is important'.[27] Similarly: 'I don't object to the A-list in principle ... however, the requirement to only have candidates from the A-list on association

shortlists is wrong ... it excludes the ability for local people to represent their local area ... when you are fighting the Liberal Democrats, it really is the key that there is this local bias'.[28] It was clear that a number of officers were not aware of the option to include local candidates. Moreover, an area officer asserted: 'there's a constituency where a local candidate is doing far better than the ones off the so-called A-list ... certain members of the A-list came to the selection committee that I wouldn't even consider as council candidates, never mind as parliamentary candidates ... I've seen it in two or three areas ... appearance, policy knowledge, presentation ... some are not capable of answering questions on the doorstep'.[29]

A further dimension to localism was the leadership's apparent disinclination to seek candidates with experience in local politics: 'the A-list conjures up the wrong impression ... there needs to be a premier league of candidates, but from the general public, and a lot of members too, there is a perception that A-list candidates jump the queue ... you have very hard-working people that may have proved themselves over many years that would feel aggrieved that somebody perceived as a celebrity or well-known for other than political reasons could walk in and suddenly become an MP'.[30] Outsider entry caused particular upset. Notably, the imposition of Tony Lit for the Ealing Southall by-election adversely affected local morale. Shortly before, he attended a Labour Party fundraising dinner where his company donated £4,800.[31] However, a professional argued: 'there's been controversy because he's not even a member of the party, but the lesson was that sometimes speed is of the essence and therefore the ability to react pragmatically to situations is important ... but it is still essentially a pretty democratic process'.[32] Most members believed there should be a minimum period of membership before being permitted candidature;[33] the party constitution stipulated a three-months qualification period for member voting in candidate selection (Conservative Party 1998b: 27). Nevertheless, Maude was critical of those who claimed that such people were not true Conservatives and should not get preferential treatment. Position on the priority list did not depend on service, but on the best candidates.[34] Hence, it reflected the centre's immediate political strategy. The localities were unable to influence the composition of

the list. Overall, it brought mixed emotions. Those opposed were resigned to central imposition of change, but feared the consequences.

4. Local Reform

To complement the priority list, radical alterations to local procedures were announced in April 2006; Cameron was no respecter of tradition. The selection committee would involve a 10-minute presentation, followed by 15-20 minutes of questions, some of which would be set in advance. At least three, but ideally four-six candidates would be interviewed by the executive. Associations were additionally obliged to conduct a community consultation process and/or hold a primary. Community representatives would interview and score candidates on a range of skills, giving an overall impression of suitability. This would feed into the executive, helping them to produce a shortlist of two-four for the final special general meeting of members, or in the case of a primary, party supporters also. Here, the set speech was abolished; each candidate being interviewed separately by an independent moderator, preferably a journalist, community leader or professional. This would be followed by questions from the floor, permitting an exploration of the previous answers given by candidates. Voting would finally take place by secret ballot.[35]

In the promised review after three months, 22 selections had resulted in seven women and two black and ethnic minority men.[36] Cameron's response in August 2006, probably pre-planned and backed by the threat of further action, was: 'we need to go further and we need to go faster ... no one inside or outside the party should have the slightest doubt about how seriously I take this issue'. The priority list was expanded to 150, including nearly 60% women. Target constituencies with less than 300 members would be expected to employ an open primary. Others could do likewise, but where this was not used, the full membership would select a shortlist of four through a 'big event'; at least two must be women. The final selection would then be made by the executive council after rigorous and professional job interviews. Finally, any association opting for an all-women short-list could use the existing arrangements.[37] This was now the sole method whereby ordinary members retained the final decision; a clear challenge to local party democracy,

and ultimately to autonomy. Statistically, these guidelines came closest to delivering Cameron's objective. The proportion of women peaked at 38.1% in mid-December and they were doing well in marginal seats; it was 'A-list' men who were doing badly.[38] Given that it was still possible for all candidates selected to be white and male, the view from the top of the party was positive.[39]

It was surprising therefore, that Cameron's January 2007 review brought a retraction. Conservative-held and target seats could now choose from the full approved list, but at each stage of the process at least 50% of candidates should be women. Associations were still obliged to use either a primary or big event.[40] The rules on women were tightened, as associations using a primary had not been obliged to have a gender balance, or indeed any women. Primaries were also believed to favour local white men, often councillors.[41] The equality shortlist was designed to assist local people, Cameron being anxious to enhance the party's electoral prospects in the North; the priority list was deemed too London-centric.[42] Key northern marginal seats were receiving few applications from the priority list.[43] The change was described by White as 'necessarily a face-saving compromise for both sides,' noting Women2Win's acceptance; it had dismayed those activists who were uncomfortable with multiculturalism and who valued their independence.[44] Locally, an area officer asserted: 'there was a lot of disagreement over who was on the A-list and whether they were really up to it and ill-feeling about so many women ... it's quietened down, but then they've done a U-turn really'.[45] The problem of satisfying a quota was again stressed, but there was some local disappointment, one officer noting: 'it's essential that the leader continues trying to redress the imbalance of gender and ethnic origin ... it may halt the progress that's been made actually in trying to broaden the Conservative Party'.[46] Subsequent statistics suggested his fears were justified. By March 2007, the proportion of women had fallen to 33.6%; at one point there were 17 male selections in a row.[47] The centre would point to demand problems for this retrenchment. However, it would be natural for able men previously held back to be selected. Cameron had achieved his objective of getting more women, black and ethnic minority candidates into winnable seats, but local autonomy had ensured that progress

was slower than desired. The next section will provide evidence from the four constituencies in the study.

Constituency Progress

Each association's selection process contained interesting nuances, which illustrated the centre's determination to achieve progress on its terms; there was also external political manoeuvring. Primaries will be examined separately, as they elicited specific issues. Finally, the extent of local resistance will be discussed.

1. High Peak

Before Cameron's accession to the leadership, some constituencies managed to fast-track their previous losing candidates; High Peak was one such, the beneficiary being local councillor Andrew Bingham.[48] His reselection was the Conservative equivalent of Labour heirs-apparent, but with a nepotism dimension.[49] Thus, it provided good evidence of why Cameron was keen for change: 'a panel was formed ... officers, councillors, the people heading the main groups in the constituency ... the chairman headed the selection and the panel was formed by invitation from him ... he did it by speaking to the branches ... it wasn't formalised in any way'.[50] There was involvement by the ACD and several prominent people in the community. The process was expedited. The then chairman argued: 'I can understand wanting to get more ladies and ethnic people into candidature, but they've gone overboard in restricting it so heavily that people are being put off, the Andrew type of person that's just got no chance ... I am very much in favour of a local being a candidate ... there was resistance inevitably from those who didn't think Andrew was going to be capable of doing the job and a number were wary of the speed with which he was reselected ... there was a very big feeling within that we wanted him straight back and in talking to Central Office, it was agreed ... Theresa May tried to stop it at one stage and I got very annoyed with her ... we were able to deflect that through our area agent (ACD) ... he and I put pressure on her, so she let it through ... this business of having people from the general public in, primaries, we managed to avoid it ... I'm glad we did'.[51] ACD involvement was important. Another officer was cautious: 'when Andrew was selected, there was a determination within the association to select a

local candidate and quite a lot of pressure was put on people to do that ... it wasn't so prudent ... one or two friends of ... Andrew was not involved directly ... but one or two people were sort of ... it's a good thing to have a local candidate, but the calibre of the candidate is important as well'.[52] Nevertheless, the association could not have proceeded without central agreement.

2. Derby

Derby North had not completed its process at the time of the study. Hence, the evidence came from the new constituency of Mid-Derbyshire. It was an early selection under the first procedures. It opted for final selection by special general meeting, attended by about 100 members. Local councillor and priority list candidate, Pauline Latham, prevailed in a seemingly smooth process, which followed Cameron's instructions. Essentially: 'we had 30-40 apply because it seemed a safe Conservative seat and we had a lot of good candidates ... we try and involve a couple of people from each branch ... certainly, there wasn't any direction about who they should and shouldn't pick ... it was all done fairly'.[53] Moreover: 'they liked the change, they took on board the message ... they liked the input from the community people, though I question how they got them ... the big speech is brilliant providing you are a brilliant tub thumping campaigner, but if you don't do that and most women don't, which is why they've changed it ... Matthew Parris (moderator) was quite a hard political interview ... he was structured, hard but fair, there were no hobby horse questions ... intricate planning applications, how can any candidate answer that even if you live in the area ... it's a much fairer, much better process ... the people who participated as candidates mostly liked it ... the members enjoyed it because it was different and it shows more skills because being interviewed on radio or television is what MPs do'.[54] Topics were both national and local, but Parris's assessment was that members were looking for a solid track record of local political work; all three final candidates were from the region.[55] Localism, conceived as both origin and an understanding of local issues, was the key success factor: 'the experience here is that whilst people are mindful of what goes on nationally, they are more conscious of what grasp they have of local issues and whether they live here or not ... they resent candidates being parachuted in from outside the area and the evidence is that where you've got local

candidates that know the area, they do better'.[56] The centre's conception of localism as its trained candidate was therefore contrary to the local interpretation.

The controversial aspect occurred prior to the Parris interviews. A CCHQ video was shown that 'virtually instructed selection meetings to choose a woman.' He believed this irritated the audience and disadvantaged the women.[57] One activist agreed: 'if it hadn't been for the fact that they knew the winning candidate, some would have voted against her on principle because they didn't like the film'.[58] Others saw it differently: 'I was very surprised to see the video, I hadn't been warned ... it was saying basically that you've got to pick a woman ... that was the subliminal message coming out ... it immediately put the man at a disadvantage ... it's important to encourage more women, ethnic minorities and people with disabilities to come forward, but it should not be rammed down your throat ... most people felt the same way ... there were two women and a man, the man went out on the first ballot ... it just makes you wonder ... it's not David Cameron's place to dictate'.[59] Another agreed: 'the questions favoured the women and then there was the playing of certain music and the video about selecting women ... I don't approve of that at all'.[60] Neither Cheltenham nor Somerton and Frome later employed the video, implying that CCHQ had learned that its patronising approach, at least in this, had backfired.

3. Somerton and Frome

Both Somerton and Frome, and Cheltenham selected their candidates under the second set of guidelines. Both held primaries for the final selection and both selected priority list candidates, Annunziata Rees-Mogg and Mark Coote respectively. Somerton and Frome was important politically because, like High Peak, there were moves to fast-track its previous candidate; here though, the centre stealthily ensured there would be no repeat outcome, happily exploiting local division. Consultation was lacking: 'we had an excellent candidate in Clive Allen ... if you don't win Frome, you can forget it, but Central Office rung up nobody in this part of the county to ask if he performed well ... they rung people in south Somerset who were unhappy with Clive because he didn't spend so much time down there ... they didn't ring our chairman, they didn't ring any of us who worked with him'.[61] The then chairman added: 'I was very upset ... they claimed

to have consulted widely, but my successor was the only person who had a call from the centre and nobody else, neither of my deputy chairmen ... they made the decision without reference to us ... yet they allowed one or two other associations to fast-track their losing candidates ... I imagine the chairman of the candidates' committee made the decision ... I made strong representations to party chairman Liam Fox and eventually received a phone call from someone who was very apologetic, but it didn't help'.[62]

The decision aroused further intrigue. In the new process, Clive Allen was invited for interview, but his presence split the association: 'there was a movement afoot to make sure he didn't get beyond the first hurdle ... the "keep Clive out campaign" was a local one ... I'm sure there was some collusion beforehand because the feeling was that if he got in front of the membership, they liked him so much he probably would have been re-selected'.[63] Conflict ensued over the selection committee: 'the people who weren't on the selection committee accused the officers of a fix and said so publicly ... it caused dissent'.[64] The new chairman stressed: 'I always said if Clive was not fast-tracked, then he should be given an opportunity to be interviewed ... he was amongst the 12 candidates that we selected prior to the executive, but he didn't get through ... I then get lobbied by "the old and the bold" because who selected those who were on the interviewing panel ... I put that through the executive who didn't agree the whole number ... I was then allowed to go back and seek the views of the branches, they nominated people for the selection committee, who then selected the selection committee'.[65] However, this was contested: 'the selection committee was too south Somerset biased and it took a lot of work to keep people in line up here ... the selection committee was appointed by the chairman and he comes from south Somerset ... I've been told by a pro-Clive person that he had a bad one ... but Annunziata is a very good replacement and she's more Eurosceptic than Clive and that might be what we need at this stage'.[66] Another officer added: 'there was a lot of "is Clive on the list", because there was quite a big following ... what killed him off was that they asked him what he had being doing since the last election to help the constituency and he said "nothing" ... if he was intending to re-apply, he should have been participating'.[67] The dispute was clearly allowed to fester, resulting in potential damage to local campaigning capability. The centre's lack of consultation and abrupt decision-

making indicated it was solely concerned with its strategic candidate priority; it exploited local divisions accordingly. It would be a local leadership responsibility to conciliate activists. There was no explicit evidence that the refusal to sell the Wincanton property influenced the centre's stance, but it was inferred; locally, candidate selection, joint working and the future of the Wincanton office were all linked politically. Unlike High Peak, there was no supporting input from a regional professional.

The Somerton and Frome selection revealed several levers to achieve the centre's aims. Firstly, it could compel constituencies to amend their procedures during their process, in line with Cameron's alterations to the guidelines. This brought operational difficulties: 'we were a target seat and wanted to select within the earlier tranches because that's when the best candidates come forward ... because it was a change in the process, "the old and the bold" again were critical ... it changed midway ... we had long discussions with the agent because I didn't want another executive to go through this new process, because we would then destabilise it and it would undermine everything ... so, we stuck to the timetable and as closely as we could to the originally agreed process ... the open primary was the only sticky bit because we had said the membership would have the final say ... which we did because the members at the primary had different coloured voting cards, as opposed to the 40 who originally were not members, but had registered as being supporters of the Conservative Party ... only 12 turned up ... so it worked very well, but I could understand others' frustration ... it caused us grief ... we only started this joint-working in May and then to have the whole process trying to be changed ... I could just see our membership revolting to the hilt'.[68] The original process had rejected the primary in favour of a community panel of four non-party members, consistent with the April 2006 guidelines.[69]

Other mechanisms were geared specifically to enhancing professionalism locally. There was a subtle change in the extent of involvement by local personnel. The 'paper sift' where applications were reviewed to produce the initial shortlist was now conducted solely by the three senior association officers, rather than the selection committee; it only appeared for the second stage of interviewing the 12 candidates selected. The paper sift

meeting was attended by the agent and regional director, although only in an advisory capacity. Officers were only permitted access to the curriculum vitae to make their choices; photographs and other details were retained by the agent until afterwards. Moreover, there were amendments to the selection committee: 'it was considered important that the selection committee should be representative of the electorate and the process called for wider community involvement in this and at the executive ... there were various imperatives in the instructions from Central Office about representation of those people on the selection committee, with the agent being very specific that the criteria were being adhered to ... it included officers, but with the aim that around 50% of the committee should be women ... the final decision as to the membership of the selection committee would be left with the chairman'.[70] Previously, it was an executive council decision. It was reported that most members were happy with the process, though the open primary caused concern.[71] However, "the old and the bold" observed that the executive council was largely sidelined in the selection process through a central board directive that the association had no option but to accept. The candidate selection rules had been changed by diktat from London, thereby ignoring the governing body of the association.[72] Whilst local autonomy was preserved through the local party being allowed to make the final decision, it was clearly diluted by reduced involvement of local activists. The centre was modernising local procedures on its terms.

4. Cheltenham

In the Cheltenham process, activists revealed another departure from previous practice, notably the local application procedure. For an advertised seat, candidates now applied to CCHQ, who forwarded the curriculum vitae to the regional director. He brought them to the initial paper sift. CCHQ was hence provided with an opportunity to perform its own sift and ensure certain candidates were given preference. Officials closely associated with candidates vehemently denied this occurred, maintaining that all applications were forwarded.[73] Nevertheless suspicions were aroused locally: 'we had about 20 candidates whose papers were passed through ... I signed the stand letter for somebody who had to apply not to the association, but to Central Office, who vetted them and only sent to us, the association, those CVs that met their own criteria ... was that the right thing to do ...

I don't know who was excluded by that ... but if they didn't come up to set criteria, they probably wouldn't write ... they did have that influence'.[74] In addition: 'applications are sent to CCHQ and it sends them down here ... the idea of local candidates, there was some objection from the centre about that, they much preferred their own candidates to be chosen ... I've no proof that (they sifted them), but yes ... there should be a list vetted by Central Office, but whether they are all notified ... they notify, or allegedly, everybody on the list that Cheltenham is now looking for a candidate, that's how they control it'.[75] That Somerton and Frome received very few applications from men, substantiated this concern; indeed they were largely the local candidates encouraged to apply by the association.[76] Local candidates were also believed to lack central support: 'it was evident that local candidates had a fairly blinkered look, didn't have a good knowledge of national events, had not had access to some of the advisers at Central Office ... whether they had the ability to ask for it, I don't know'.[77] It was thought that the centre was coaching its preferred candidates.

Cheltenham demonstrated that the centre allowed some leeway in local procedures. A ballot was used to choose eight members to join the three principal officers on the selection committee and a further ballot was used to choose four members of the community panel.[78] In addition, the constituency showed a capacity for innovation by canvass testing the survivors of the initial sift: 'to see how they would perform on the doorstep ... we made this decision locally, we were allowed to do so within the rules ... we found enough people to do one per candidate ... we were allowed about two hours'.[79] Such modifications though, were not strategic. Along with the other constituencies, most Cheltenham members judged the process a success, but mirroring concern in Somerton and Frome: 'some people felt disenfranchised in the selection process, those who might have been on the executive or management committee ... we structured it according to Cameron's diktats, but there were people who thought they would be involved earlier on'.[80] The centre could impose strict control over local procedures.

5. Political Tactics

In addition to the local operational changes, the centre employed some covert ruses in order to achieve its political aims. There were reports of CCHQ telephoning local associations to encourage the selection of women, backed up by promises of regular visits from members of the shadow cabinet.[81] Illustratively: 'the final decision must never go to Central Office ... this is what we get annoyed about ... someone rang and said they wanted a woman on the shortlist ... I said I'm not interested, I'm interested in the best person to win the seat and put the phone down ... I wouldn't tolerate it'.[82] There were also subtler mechanisms. Through its control of the selection timetable, the centre could manipulate applications. Candidates were given just two or three weeks to apply for advertised constituencies. Consequently, local candidates did not always find out about target seats, as those on the priority list only were informed officially. Local candidates were a constituency responsibility: 'people on the other list are not circulated, you've got to contact them individually and say "are you interested", or they find out and say "can we apply" ... you can't have class A and class B, they're either fit to be parliamentary candidates or they are not, if you don't want them, don't have them on the list'.[83] Potential local candidates for the safe seat of Cambridgeshire North East reportedly discovered the vacancy through ConservativeHome, even though the full approved list was in operation.[84] This strategy was apparently premeditated: at the 2006 candidate conference, a question on this issue brought widespread applause. Both party deputy chairman (candidates) John Maples and chairman of the candidates committee Shireen Ritchie were also supposedly unaware of a practice whereby local candidates were being effectively vetoed by CCHQ after being invited to apply by local chairmen.[85] That local candidates were sometimes encumbered by unpublicised CCHQ deadlines just for them,[86] added to its scheming.

6. The Local Primary

The introduction of the open primary, whilst largely enjoyed, caused the most local angst. Professionals were euphoric to the point that it would likely be employed universally in future general elections. An agent commented: 'no-one can argue about the primary ... the opposition haven't a leg to stand on, it's a wonderful idea, we've opened it up so much that Liberal Democrats come in and vote at our count ... we were open to it and we had

excellent candidates'.[87] Some local officers were equally content: 'the vast majority of people when Annunziata was selected ... I've never experienced anything like it ... the room was electric ... it was overflowing'.[88] Furthermore: 'we had two Liberal Democrats attend ... you have to register, you can't just turn up ... it was taken in good spirit ... it went well ... Mark Coote got over 50% of the vote and it gave him a good launch pad'.[89]

However, in Cheltenham there was evidence that Cameron's message was not fully embraced. Local people had not grasped his strategic priority: 'on the final night, Tariq was fantastic but should have been in London, Jesse fluffed it and Mark stole the floor ... it was a fantastic way of doing it ... open, transparent, none of this backroom stuff'.[90] Moreover: 'each would have been a very good candidate ... Tariq was the most intelligent and the best, but we have to have one which is electable in Cheltenham ... Jesse performed less well and Mark, the sort of man who on the doorstep comes across well because he doesn't immediately put people off, a man of the people who has the tremendously important cache of having been to the local primary and grammar school, and then went off into education, a teacher, a director of Cancer Research ... it was important to have a local dimension'.[91] The spectacle surrounding the black candidate, John Taylor, in 1992 had not been fully exorcised.

Most antagonism was directed towards the introduction of outside people: 'I'm not happy that you do not have to be a Conservative member to vote at your prospective candidacy ... I recognise he's trying to say we're an open party, but if you really want 50 Liberal Democrats registered, they could vote a dummy in and you lose a good candidate ... how would we know that non-members had the interests of the party at heart'.[92] A more positive view was: 'South Derbyshire, about 70-80% of people were members ... you only put four forward, you are perfectly happy with any of them, so it's not as if the Labour Party could come in and vote in a most unsuitable candidate, you've got fairly good control over it ... but perhaps it should have been explained better in the party'.[93] Furthermore: 'we were anticipating that the Liberal Democrats would flood the meeting, but there was a small envelope of time ... only two who were identifiable applied and neither turned up ... some said that the candidate we selected had flooded the meeting ...

there were three members of her family and friends who were not members present ... people said the most outrageous things and it's just not based on facts'.[94] However an area officer related that at Bolton North East: 'there were about 150, more than anticipated ... an A-list lady from nearby won ... generally, when I've been to a selection meeting the winning candidate had got a standing ovation, but a few stood up, which isn't a good omen ... it was clear that some didn't like what had happened'.[95] Overall, an official concluded: 'they are quite keen on primaries ... it's been good for associations ... they are not always keen on being told that they have to include women candidates ... until they'd worked out that they could say yes or no to the candidate that the open primary had selected, they were against it because they were worried that it would invite opposition supporters to swell the ranks ... there is a Special General Meeting immediately afterwards where the membership vote on whether to adopt that candidate'.[96] It would though, be difficult politically for any association to overturn the result of a primary attended by local voters; the media fallout would be significant.[97] However, many officers were alarmed about the membership impact. The point of being a member was questioned; members might not leave, but new ones would be more difficult to attract.

7. Resistance to the Cameron Reforms

Despite annoyance over the introduction of primaries, overt resistance was confined to the rhetoric of relatively few activists. Most either accepted the modernising agenda and/or recognised the practical reality. For example: 'there was some resistance, but on the whole people accepted that we couldn't carry on in exactly the same vein and the changes just had to be made'.[98] Moreover: 'there has been resistance, but that's just something to do with being Conservative with a small c ... it was always very minor amongst a certain hard core of activists, who feel they are more important than they really are ... people will spout on about local autonomy, but equally spout on about the need to have a Conservative government'.[99] Practical politics underpinned acquiescence: 'our members know they have to move with the times ... people now recognise that we are in a different world ... I'm not sure the job's been completed yet ... if he delivers success, he will be forgiven ... it was exactly the same with Margaret Thatcher'.[100] In Cheltenham particularly: 'what was the point of fighting against the changes ... politically damaging

... it would be very difficult to do that and pointless at a time when we are up in the polls ... which association puts its head above the parapet and starts shouting about what the leadership is doing, when actually what we want is to get a good candidate, get working and get an MP ... what we don't want is headlines about "local association riots against" ... you have to understand the sensitivities in Cheltenham around the selection of John Taylor in 1992 ... one of the main reasons why we lost that election is that the Liberals were putting out reasonably torrid bits of paper across the town in working class CDE areas and it turned people ... so, the sensitivity of being high profile'.[101] An alternative explanation was: 'I wouldn't have said for political reasons ... more out of trust because Cameron was elected with a fairly large percentage of the membership ... in his honeymoon period, that would be a powerful influence with people, effectively saying they trust the guy'.[102] Poor communication reflecting a patronising approach, was however apparent: 'it wasn't the best handled announcement, it did cause some resentment ... all too often, we have found a knee-jerk reaction because of a lack of clarity and understanding as to what it's about and that's a barrier we've got to break down ... when Cameron first became leader, he had huge aspirations, but he's surrounded by an enthusiastic team who didn't always understand the structure and the need for clarity within the party'.[103] Disenchantment was present locally, but most activists recognised they would have to accept change. The communication problem was a continuation of previous practice.

Practical acquiescence with change did not necessarily translate into a change of the collective local mindset. Opinions were equivocal, age of members being a key factor: 'with candidate selection, most people I know thought there was no reason to change it'.[104] Moreover: 'it's so ingrained, that's going to be tough, politics is not vibrant enough ... I cannot see leopards changing their spots and the problem is the demographics of the membership haven't changed significantly'.[105] A wider political explanation was offered for Somerton and Frome: 'there are older members who have an affinity with UKIP ... Cameron's a much younger man than they are used to, with new ideas, and they don't hear in their view a strong enough message for them as core Conservative voters ... some will be concerned that we have selected a woman instead of a male ... there were a lot of

executive members where the mindset was stuck in the past'.[106] Equally though: 'most of us decided one of the ways we could get rid of this Liberal Democrat was having a young woman candidate and we're jolly lucky one came along ... David Cameron's made a step change ... it's a bit prescriptive what he wanted, but they liked Annunziata, she's young and got energy ... only very few resisted, but that's passed, people have moved on ... people love being anti sent candidates from Central Office ... we had to choose a local person here because that's what the Liberal Democrats go for'.[107] Other officers were also positive: 'he's definitely changing the mindset ... he's got a long way to go, but certainly he's done more in 12 months than anybody ever thought he could do, so we're getting there'.[108] Similarly, to a professional: 'where they have made a good choice it has ... it has opened things up ... in a safe seat, the association were absolutely willing and open to consider all sorts of new ideas ... you have a danger, particularly in non-majority seats and some Labour heartlands where our associations are not necessarily as representative of the whole constituency as they used to be, of making decisions that are out-of-date, but by and large they are becoming more open-minded on selection'.[109] This was reinforced by: 'the better quality members, the ones who do the campaigning, work, listen out more and understand more ... whereas there's still a lot of them saying well what's he doing, why is he saying this, I don't like that'.[110]

Supply side improvement provided the crucial face saving factor for neutralising local resistance. Agents concurred that: 'even though they were suspicious of positive discrimination, they've been impressed with the choice of candidates ... it's a sensible move for the party and locally it's been well received'.[111] Moreover: 'the fact we selected a candidate who had overwhelming support helped hugely ... if we'd had a strong body of the association unhappy with the candidate finally selected, then there might have been more trouble over the selection procedures ... the end justified the means'.[112] Candidate quality reflected elitism in terms of occupational 'high-flyers', but this met with both local and professional approval. For a professional: 'the nature of women candidates has massively changed ... 15 years ago, it was "twin set and pearls" and "now the children have left school, I thought I would do politics" ... now, when we selected Annunziata Rees-Mogg, at the executive council stage four out of the five were women purely on

merit and they had a choice between a leader writer for the Daily Telegraph, a managing director of her own communications company, a general practitioner and the wife of a consultant surgeon, but who had been the managing director of a merchant bank herself, so serious career people ... if you had sat at the back of the Somerton and Frome selection process and spoken to some of the 'crustees', retired colonels, they would have quietly said they were a pretty impressive bunch of women ... the calibre and the nature of the candidates made their acceptance of a controversial process that much more simpler and much more straightforward'.[113] This enabled another to conclude: 'they moaned about it and then did exactly what he wanted ... they were forced to consider more widely and in many cases they have chosen candidates who we need more of ... some really good candidates ... people have accepted the need to change ... when I first came into the party, a woman candidate arriving at a selection could be shot down in flames about whether her husband was going to join her, and what was she going to do about the children ... now that couldn't happen'.[114]

This section revealed a number of local nuances designed to enable the centre to achieve its strategic aims. They resulted in a chipping away at local autonomy in candidate selection to the point where it became very questionable whether it remains. The long term impact upon member motivation was not a central consideration. The evidence though, did point to some local acquiescence. An interesting further observation was complicity with elitism. This was embraced locally both in the composition of the candidate shortlist and the selection of community representatives; it was not just a local face saver. However, the failure to select the perceived 'best' ethnic minority candidate in Cheltenham indicated that local interests were not fully aligned with national ones.

<u>Contemporary Local and Central Candidate Selection Positions</u>

The changes to local procedures were significant and questioned the continuance of local autonomy. A number of further issues warrant consideration in this regard. This section will first examine the perceived competitive position of activists. It will then assess the growing role of higher officials and the prospects for central intervention and candidate imposition.

1. The Position of Activists

The developments discussed thus far indicated a weakening of activists' power over candidate selection. However, they were quick to discount this: 'it's still local ... we've got absolute say about who we select and who we don't select ... there's no interference nationally'.[115] Moreover: 'it's got to be local ... I can see areas where that will differ like South Wales where there's only a few members ... but where there's an association that's raising money and has district councillors, that area should select its own, whether it's male, female, it's up to them'.[116] The common view was that people would walk away if they did not retain the right of final selection. This was recognised professionally: 'people think isn't it bizarre that we start off with quite a rigorous and finely honed selection procedure and then right at the end throw it open to the membership in almost a lottery, but if the membership aren't allowed to be involved, then they may not choose to be involved when you need them, it's a really fine balancing act'.[117] A local officer thus concluded: 'it has to be the final decision rests with local members ... it still left us with the autonomy to make our own decision ... we had a slightly restricted list of candidates, but we were happy to accept that they had filtered out what they thought were the best and we did have a reasonable cross section of men and women ... I didn't feel that we were having people foisted upon us unnecessarily ... we all knew that there was a bit of re-engineering going on, but we accept that ... we need a few more women and if we can get a few ethnic minorities, great ... we had a pretty strong group of people that applied, so we thought we hadn't been short changed in any way, but we were conscious that we could have been'.[118] Finally, an agent played down the significance: 'some people have seen parliamentary candidate selection being partly interfered with from the centre, but it hasn't been ... very few are really bothered about it ... there's a lot of fuss about Cameron's change to the list, but the grassroots didn't make a lot of fuss because the association still had the final say'.[119] Nevertheless, the evidence detailed earlier pointed at a dilution of this 'final say'; many activists resignedly accepted the political reality.

Activist acquiescence was a test of Strom's (1990) exchange concept, and indeed Whiteley and Seyd's (2002: 27) assertion, that candidate selection was a reward for the

hard work of campaigning and fundraising. This was vociferously discounted: 'it's a right, it isn't any reward ... if you are running the show, you've got to be able to select your candidate and don't forget that candidates have to present themselves to the members'.[120] Moreover: 'I wouldn't see it as a reward, I would see it as something that is fundamental to being part of a local party, otherwise what is the point?'[121] Another stressed the right, but in essence was closer to Strom: 'not a reward, very much a right ... the party is the members and going to conference and voting for your local parliamentary candidate, your county council candidate is what you pay your subscription for and what you pound the streets for ... you have earned that, so it's certainly not seen as a reward from the centre ... the times where these concerns are raised is when the centre seems to forget that'.[122] An alternative view was: 'I wouldn't regard it as either ... people want to do their best and get the best possible person ... it's not that I pay my £15 and I've got a right to this, it's subtler than that ... it's more the voluntary element ... a willingness to help out'.[123] Nevertheless, others extended the notion of right into local ownership: 'of course, we listen to Central Office, we're aware of what's happening in the wider world, we take all that into account, but we select because he's going to be our member of parliament'.[124] This could extend into local politics: 'once she was selected as PPC, the councillors were all over her with offers of help ... it felt like "remember me when you are an MP" ... people viewing the candidate selection process from the point of their own vested interests ... how much more influence they can have to bring about their own agenda ... it seemingly snowballs'.[125] The link to the MP was commonly stressed; it was a fundamental component of activism. Ultimately, the notion of candidate selection as a basic right was linked to the broader activist view of localism and a sense of ownership of the MP, who was there to look after local interests. This may therefore be in conflict with national interests.

The basic right of candidate selection evoked strong local feeling. Pointedly, recent developments meant that: 'we've got to fight for it, but that's a good thing, you can prove that you are right rather than just having the powers ... you've got to provide a good case'.[126] Similarly: 'it is fightable, particularly if you've got the candidate with the qualities that you wanted ... it's the people in charge who've got the "umph" to say I'm

not accepting that, look at it again ... the strength of people, and then they back off'.[127] This was reinforced by: 'I would have been very unhappy if they had said "we impose a candidate" because when you do that you have the danger that you completely alienate local people, and if you are the candidate the first thing you need to do is to enlist the help of all your volunteers to support you ... if you arrive having been imposed from on high like a sort of dictator type of figure, you're not going to get very far ... you're also up against a sitting MP'.[128] Hence, an agent stressed: 'not quite as strong as a basic right, but they would see it as important ... some people would spend 20 years as an active member of the party and never have an opportunity to select a candidate because they have a long serving MP, but if it was taken away from them, then there would be some resistance ... it's the one big thing that party members see they have to decide on ... I don't think it would involve huge resignations'.[129]

2. The Role of Higher Officials

The right of membership potentially conflicted with the growing responsibility of regional professionals. There was a consensus that their role was to enforce the centrally conceived rules, and for advice. However, their remit has become more strategic, incorporating information provision. Close involvement began at the executive council meeting to agree the selection system. The regional director outlined the new procedures and delineated the aim of achieving greater diversity and correcting the gender imbalance; following discussion, the method of selection was agreed.[130] A professional stated: 'more than before, we conducted significant research in each constituency to brief the selection committee ... for example, the Tory party continues to have a major hang-up over Europe, but if you stopped 100 people and asked which criteria will most influence how they will vote at the next election, wherever you go the answer's pretty much the same, the health service, schools, law and order ... we also touched on localism and the extent to which it mattered, and the answer almost without exception across the country, people told us they didn't care where the person was born or went to school, but they did care whether or not they will live here, use local services, shop locally ... there lies the difference'.[131] The opinion of professionals and the centre that localism meant their trained candidate was thus reinforced; this was again in contrast to the broader

stance taken by activists. Area officers performed a similar role to the professionals, but in a softer manner: 'to counsel, to advise and to ensure the procedures are followed ... I know more about the rules than they do and when things go wrong, I might say "chairman, I really think it might be a good idea if" ... it very rarely happens ... a chairman who misunderstood her briefing from the regional director, I put her right very gently ... you can make a big difference by making the job run smoothly ... I have been at selection processes where there was blood on the carpet ... you don't get good decisions out of those'.[132]

Activists had mixed feelings over the professional role. Positively: 'the regional director said "which of these candidates do you believe is going to be a winner" ... that struck a note with most of us and we looked at the candidates in a very different way after that ... he was very much involved in that he was there at each stage of the selection process, but purely for advice'.[133] In addition: 'with Mid-Derbyshire, the regional director and campaign director were involved ... they were the professional paid people representing the party board ... it's the rules and regulations, if they know something is happening that is not right, they can step in ... there has to be that'.[134] Critically: 'there is a separate document which tells people what to look for when selecting a parliamentary candidate, which is more to do with common sense ... the centre also provided a set of rules for the process, how you did things ... we were obliged to adhere to them because Central Office sent the regional director to be present at the meetings and the agent, who is a servant of the party first and foremost as opposed to the local party who employs him'.[135] Other officers were more dispassionate: 'they're always there to give advice ... they're proactive at the election when we want to select a candidate and then they are too proactive ... that's the problem'.[136]

Activists vehemently discounted professional influence over the final selection: 'I detected no influence whatever by Central Office ... I am willing to accept that the local association did have the opportunity from the 20 to make their own free selection ... as a member of the panel, I would have had some knowledge if I was being manoeuvred ... they co-ordinate the process and rules, that's all ... I would hope not to see more central

involvement in future, but I can't judge on that'.[137] Moreover, professionals were viewed by some officers as a resource: 'who might know something about the candidates from networking with other constituencies'.[138] In Derby North: 'we asked him what he thought of those candidates he knew and he gave his opinion, but he didn't try and force anyone on us or tell us we must consider so and so, there's no element of direction or of us being told who to favour or not favour'.[139] Nevertheless, the professionals were strengthening their position: 'in the past, it was just making sure it was fair ... now, I'm much more likely to be asked advice about candidates because we tend to know them ... for example, some lack commitment because they may do the interview and then fly off somewhere ... I would tell the association about that, whereas in the past we weren't allowed to ... if someone tells an outright lie, I will make that known'.[140] For a regional official: it was 'a multi-faceted role ... from a technical point of view to represent the board which determines the process in conjunction with its candidates' committee ... to ensure fair play, to ensure the guidelines are abided by ... I always tell them I have neither a vote nor an opinion, but if someone sidles up to you over coffee and says what do you think of that one ... I try to provide leadership, clarity, explain the process ... on this controversial last round with the priority list and the desire to increase the number of women, I made the case on David Cameron's behalf ... it was before the commencement of each stage ... those who oppose tend to forget that he never sought to conceal it during his leadership campaign ... so, to advise selection committees and very genuinely we sought to work with them to tow them in the right direction as we perceived it ... some of that comes down to my judgement'.[141] Officially therefore, professional involvement related to the formal process, but in practice it was much broader. It stopped short of influencing the final decision, but professionals were very proactive in setting out Cameron's strategic priorities and hence trying to align local interests to national ones. For progressive officers, this development was not of great concern, but for others it caused alarm.

3. Central Intervention

The professional role in rule enforcement implied a right of intervention, but it was contentious how far this could be applied. There was local support for intervention over legal issues and extremism, but not generally: 'if the basic procedures weren't being

applied properly, if there was evidence that the local party was acting unfairly in terms of equal opportunities or it was discriminating against candidates, then certainly it's got to intervene'.[142] Regarding extremism: 'if you had a totally perverse selection ... you find out afterwards he is a member of the BNP, or he holds extreme views, it is perfectly right, just as Labour did when they had to control Militant, for the centre to come down and say no, this is not allowable'.[143] This was qualified by: 'except if the local association was trying to choose some thoroughly undesirable character, they shouldn't in principle intervene to remove a candidate or MP ... it should be by persuasion ... they shouldn't have a veto over it'.[144] Hence, extremism was interpreted in terms of the far right; there was no suggestion of it applying to positions on Europe, for example.

Activists equated the centre's role with accumulating a bank of suitable candidates. However, it did now possess a veto, which overrode local decisions: 'local autonomy is emphasised by virtue of we selected the candidate ... we had a brace of good quality candidates ... if we hadn't, we had the option to say we aren't selecting, we want some more candidates ... as long as they find the quality, because we can't find the candidates ourselves ... if we could, the centre has a right of veto ... the centre is better to do this because it has an overview of what the party needs'.[145] Moreover: 'subject to the right of veto by Central Office, we are the people doing all the work, we know the area best, we're raising most of the funds ... that gives us the right to conduct our own affairs relatively independently of Central Office ... that doesn't mean it doesn't give them the right to oversee what we do or check up on us ... certainly they have a right to object to a candidate we select'.[146] In principle however, intervention during the candidate process was dismissed: 'if they tried to intervene, I would resent it ... have a conversation with the chairman or the officers, but you get the candidate or MP you deserve and as long as it's not something illegal that the candidate has done, then why should CCHQ try ... it might be an essential seat, but sometimes it works against the centre ... there is past evidence where the party has split because externally someone's intervened or the association itself has split over the candidate for whatever reason ... it never helps to get interference from CCHQ, advice yes, but if you interfere then you immediately get two

sides ... we have the collective strength, "the old and the bold" include three ex-chairmen who are very anti-CCHQ and would come to my support if I considered it appropriate'.[147]

There was however, some local support for central intervention in performance terms: 'I do a three monthly report for Lord Ashcroft on the candidate in North West Leicestershire ... a regional chairman should be given that duty to report on candidates and evaluate their performance on for example, work rate, press coverage'.[148] Moreover: 'I'm very keen on, as I'm instituting locally, if a candidate is selected and trust is placed in them, they'd better work ... if they don't, I want the power to deselect them ... this is where the performance figures and the links with the Area Campaign Director come in much more tightly ... how well are you doing, if you're not doing well you get a "kick up the arse" and if you're still not doing well, pull them out'.[149] Ultimately for the centre: 'they have to have some control, they've got to agree that this person has the calibre and everything they require ... but, it should be exceptional (political) circumstances when centre intervenes'.[150] That some activists are in accord with the centre's approach suggested that professionalism is pervading at least the apex of some localities. The basis for intervention was that now accountability was invested in the candidate, rather than the association (see chapter four). A professional noted: 'if the candidate is under-performing, he can get called into the candidates' department, the party chairman will talk to his local association ... ultimately, the party could say you can't be a candidate because these days, the nomination paper, you have to have another paper signed saying that the party gives permission for so and so to be a parliamentary candidate ... that's what Michael Howard used against Howard Flight ... there is local autonomy, but if they want to stand, they have to have a signature which says you can'.[151] Deselection is beyond the scope of this dissertation, but the centre's advocacy of local performance warrants emphasis, as it is clearly the direction in which it is moving.

4. Candidate Imposition

Regarding performance, 'exceptional circumstances' highlighted above, could be construed in terms of the selection of women, black and ethnic minority candidates. Contemplating the August 2006 changes, Cameron did not rule out imposing all-women

shortlists.[152] However, this would have caused severe problems. In Somerton and Frome: 'the officers would have resigned en masse ... that is the only thing you could do, but I would hope desperately that it would not come to that ... they would be upset if we did, as we are one of the key marginals they've got to win ... people do feel strongly ... we have a lot of elderly, ex-service people with very strong views ... I am not sure they would be daft enough to do it ... I don't think they dare do it ... I would be astonished if they tried to drive that through because they know there would be blood on the carpet and that's not in anybody's best interests ... they pushed it almost as far as they reasonably could this time around by the whole A-list process and the more recent 50% women ... if they had tried to impose all-women shortlists, there would have been absolute mayhem'.[153] Moreover: 'Somerton and Frome would be strong enough to say no to all-women shortlists... we would not select and he's got to realise that ... you select the person on how good they are, regardless of sex'.[154] A similar outlook was echoed elsewhere. Most were relieved that all-women shortlists could be avoided: 'there would have been a revolt if there was no alternative as the Labour Party did for a while ... we weren't told you could only have that but if you did it the traditional way it had to be one ... if you wanted complete freedom, it had to be an open primary system where anybody can come in'.[155] Politically, an official conceded: 'that would have caused huge problems, which it did for the Labour Party ... it seriously damaged its campaigns in the Forest of Dean, by doing that and doing it twice, it could have been a critical factor in the loss of the seat'.[156] By imposing all-women shortlists, the leadership would have been courting local disaster through a further weakening of the campaign base, but if the party were to lose the next general election, activists feared corrective action.

Although, all-women shortlists were eschewed, there was creeping candidate imposition through the 'City Seats Initiative', which was expected to be extended. This was aimed at reviving the party's fortunes in large cities. Teams of candidates were chosen who campaigned under the direction of regional offices and were then placed in individual seats. In future, members might be allowed a say, but this was not guaranteed: 'we're training up candidates to be potential winners ... two of the Manchester team from the last election are now candidates in target seats ... hopefully this time for the five seats we

might have 10 candidates as a team and then nearer the time have a mini-selection of those associations, so some involvement of the members'.[157] However, an area officer added that in 2005, candidates were: 'chosen by me and the area campaign director, but it didn't work as planned because not many wanted it ... because of the team, members had no say in the selection at all ... I was surprised how quietly that went down, but there was nothing they could have done about it because Central Office had put it to us and we'd decided ... the same thing happened in Liverpool ... they'll widen it out'.[158] The initiative has been confined to seats where there was a weak association. However, the definition of 'weak' could be extended.

Local autonomy in candidate selection was strongly emphasised as a right of membership, and not a reward for effort. This was linked to perceptions of ownership of the candidate in terms of looking after local interests, which contradicted the centre's narrower view of localism as its trained candidate. This dichotomy illustrated the problem of trying to align national and local candidate interests. Hence, the centre has been proactively strengthening its position. The role of the regional professionals has become more strategic, through the provision of information and the enforcement of local procedures. Moreover, the centre now possesses a veto over local choice. It has so far resisted the temptation to impose all-women's shortlists, but the City Seats Initiative suggested creeping change, which might be quickened if the party lost again.

Conclusion

Electoral reversals drove candidate selection reform. Change though, was equally a fundamental component of Cameron's leadership style, reflecting a belief of needing to be seen to be in control of his party in presidential terms. The priority list of candidates and the radical changes to local procedures were underpinned by his enthusiastic acceptance of the demand thesis regarding candidate inclusiveness; it was easy to portray activists as a reactionary force blocking change. In his quest to modify the composition of the parliamentary party, the evidence revealed some progress statistically, though still short of that desired. Importantly, the introduction of local primaries was judged a success both politically and organisationally; these were likely to become a compulsory

feature of future selections. The engagement of external community representatives and supporters was viewed positively. Cameron stated publicly that they make 'this a more, not a less, democratic process than the one it replaces', thereby conceiving local democracy in voter terms.[159] Primaries were a significant component of the centre's aim of professionalising the electorally visible local procedures. This included restricting the initial paper sift to the three senior officers and hence reducing the role of the executive. However, the failure to implement all-women shortlists and moreover, the rolling back of local change to an equality shortlist, chosen from the full approved list, showed the limit of progress, at least in this electoral cycle; essentially, the centre still needed local activists. Face saving, which was implied could also be extended to the quality of candidates, which was enhanced, and to the outward retention of the 'final say' by the localities. Nevertheless, the Cheltenham incident, in which the perceived 'best' ethnic minority candidate was not successful, indicated the cost to the leadership of this middle position. It showed that local parties had not fully grasped the leadership's strategic priorities or recognised national competitive differentiation. The different interpretations of localism were apposite. To the centre, it was its trained candidate; to the localities, it was much broader, reflecting local origin, an empathetic understanding of local issues and looking after local interests. Full alignment of national and local candidate interests was not therefore achieved by the Cameron reforms.

Local autonomy, a core traditional principle of Conservatism, was crucial to this. The leadership deemed it an impediment to improved competitiveness, and hence it required dismantling. The constitution provided the authority to facilitate reform and as a result, the evidence pointed to the localities being undermined on several fronts. In addition to the priority list, the officer sift, the downgrading of the executive council and the introduction of primaries, the centre has control of the selection timetable, and opportunities to perform its own sift and manipulate applicants. It can also impose candidates at by-elections and retains a final veto. The localities were ultimately required to follow selection rules imposed by the centre, without consultation. Their deteriorating position can be interpreted in the twin processes of de-skilling and de-politicisation highlighted in chapter four. Many activists now have reduced candidate responsibilities;

only the three senior officers have a full role. The introduction of community expertise added to this. It is the engagement of outsiders generally that has contributed to the de-politicisation, though few supporters have thus far attended primaries. Nevertheless, it would be politically explosive if the local membership overturned the decision of a primary. All-women shortlists are now the only method where local activists have the exclusive rights over selection, but in such circumstances their strategic role is implicitly lost. Moreover, activists were having to fight to retain their basic right of candidate selection as they saw it. The notion of local ownership of the MP, in the sense of looking after local interests, remained a core value. Candidate reform thus caused much upset and resentment, even if much of it was not audible. Importantly, it questioned the future of the concept of membership party. Solidary incentives were further weakened through the reduced role. That individuals no longer had to be members of the party to vote at the selection also undermined purposive incentives. However, this was consistent with the leadership position of trying to retain a core activist membership and enhance supporter networks. Overall, to keep activists motivated, the centre was trying to maintain the perception of local autonomy to meet their expectations. It was no longer autonomy under the strict definition, but a revised central conception.

The candidate changes thus pointed to a strengthening of oligarchy. Cameron's approach to resolving the inclusiveness problem was a re-affirmation of McKenzie's (1963) conclusion concerning the elite model of democracy, where the chain of responsibility was to the electorate. Moreover, it was the leadership that drove change through the constitution, and the various ruses employed were illustrative of Michels's characteristics of skills in the art of politics and control over the internal means of communication. However, as demonstrated, the leadership did not have full control of the candidate process, so that local parties retained a significant input into the composition of the parliamentary party.

The evidence was further consistent with the models of both Kirchheimer (1966) and Panebianco (1988), who pointed to a strengthening of the leadership and a downgrading of members. However, electoral-professional and the associated political marketing

interpretation implied the need to control all aspects of the product. To improve the Conservative Party's image, greater inclusiveness was necessary. The leadership though, was not able to impose candidates on the localities and hence could not achieve full control of product strategy. In terms of Panebianco's zone of uncertainty, it had enhanced its position regarding both the formal rules and candidate recruitment and advancement, but the local parties still retained a meaningful role. In a similar manner, Carty's (2004) stratarchical bargain, which underpinned his franchise model, was tipped further in favour of the leadership who were able to meticulously determine revised local procedures and personnel involvement. However, the model was undermined structurally by the enforced introduction of outside expertise and supporters. Moreover, his assertion that the franchise contract would strongly incentivise members to build an effective local organisation was refuted by the candidate selection evidence. Nevertheless in this activity, local power remained a constraint on leadership freedom of action, albeit a diluted one.

With regard to the party organisation, the concept of separation, as with the campaign initiatives discussed in chapter four, was apposite. For candidate selection, there was also a separation of formulation and implementation of strategy, with the localities responsible for the latter. Moreover, the centre was separating out the different local stages, so that it could clearly define who should be involved at each one. Hence, like the campaign team, it was able to embrace outside expertise in the form of the community representatives and the primary moderator. Similarly, consonant with building up supporter networks for leafleting and fundraising, so it was engaging them for a greater candidate role. Hence, the party was retrenching into its cadre position locally, but in a different form to previously. The local chairman particularly had an enhanced role, including responsibility for the selection committee, the primary moderator and importantly, for diffusing tension caused by reform. The Somerton and Frome selection revealed the necessary diplomatic, empathetic and motivational skills required for a local leader; a regional professional would not have been able to facilitate local change so successfully. Structurally, the party, again in a similar manner to the campaign teams, is loosening the boundaries of the local organisation and contracting out specific parts of the process, but not strictly in

terms of the models of Heidar and Saglie (2003), and Hopkin and Paolucci (1999). Overall, through reform the centre has diminished Drucker's (1979) exposition of 'accepted practice' and replaced it with a more formalised and institutionalised approach. Local autonomy has been replaced by a looser concept in which outside supporters perform an increasing role. This will be developed further in chapter six.

[1] National level candidate selection process material: Candidate Committee official and Chairman of Parliamentary Assessment Board - 44.
[2] Dykes, C. and Silvester, J. (2005) *Political Leadership: What is it and How Do We Find it?* London: Tory Reform Group. The former was the Conservative Party's director of development and the latter an academic professor.
[3] Candidate Committee official and Chairman of Parliamentary Assessment Board - 44.
[4] Conservative Home estimated the costs of becoming an MP at £41,550 including foregone earnings, and £27,235 for losing candidates. The lower figure reflected a lack of optimism on the part of the unelected. However, the sample was only 16, 8 in each category. Considering direct costs only (fees, travel, accommodation etc), the figures were £22,020 and £16,070 respectively. In a later survey of 72 candidates, 49% expected to exceed the £41,550 amount and 21% expected to indulge in other income producing activities on becoming an MP. ConservativeHome 1 August 2006 and 27 January 2008.
[5] Blaenau Gwent was one of Labour's safest seats with a majority in 2001 of 19,313. Former official Peter Law overturned this, achieving a majority of 9,121.
[6] 'Cameron: A voice for hope, for optimism and for change'. Speech after being announced as the new Conservative Party leader 6 December 2005.
[7] 'Cameron: Until we're represented by men and women in the country, we won't be half the party we could be'. Speech in Leeds on improving candidate selection 12 December 2005.
[8] Neil Hamilton, MP for the safe seat of Tatton was embroiled in the 'cash for questions' scandal which hit the Conservative Party. The association rebuffed central attempts at having him deselected. He was heavily defeated at the subsequent election.
[9] Regional officer - 40.
[10] Jones, G. and Carlin, B. 'Cameron ready to fight diehards over priority list for women MPs'. The Daily Telegraph 13 December 2005.
[11] Baldwin, T. 'May to press for more women.' The Times 7 October 2002. Lansley also suggested postal balloting to generate greater participation of younger members.
[12] 'Cameron: Until we're represented by men and women in the country, we won't be half the party we could be'. Speech in Leeds on improving candidate selection 12 December 2005.
[13] 'The costs of being a candidate'. ConservativeHome 1 August 2006.
[14] Bennett, R. and Maxwell, D. 'Tories change the face of their candidates, but not their jobs'. The Times 12 June 2006.
[15] 'Half women shortlists may not increase gender diversity and do nothing to achieve social diversity'. Conservative Home 20 August 2006.
[16] South West local officer - 26.
[17] South West local officer - 18.
[18] South West local officer - 32.
[19] South West local officer - 23.
[20] South West local officer - 22.
[21] East Midlands local officer - 2.
[22] South West local officer - 18.
[23] East Midlands local officer - 9.
[24] East Midlands local officer - 7.
[25] Area officer - 39.
[26] South West local officer - 23.
[32] East Midlands local officer - 10.
[27] East Midlands local officer - 15.
[28] South West local officer - 19.
[29] Area officer - 38.
[30] East Midlands local officer - 7.
[31] 'Another Fine Mess'. Campaign for Conservative Party Democracy 22 July 2007.
[32] Regional official - 42.
[33] 'Three-quarters of Tory members want people to wait at least a year before becoming eligible to stand as a candidate'. ConservativeHome 6 February 2008. 1600 members took part in the survey. 25% thought there should be no minimum duration. Those for, stipulated various timeframes from six months to five years, with one year and two years having prominence.

[34] 'Challenge the Chairman 3' Tory Radio 9 October 2006. Maude also cited the case of Rehman Chisti who had been his Labour opponent in Horsham at the 2005 general election. His views and those of the modernising Conservative Party had converged, and he was deemed to be a good campaigner.
[35] Maude, F. 'Conservatives announce new candidate selection guidelines'. www.conservtives.com 11 April 2006.
[36] Hurst, G. 'Cameron steps up campaign for more women'. The Times 21 August 2006.
[37] 'David Cameron announcement on priority list review'. www.conservatives.com 21 August 2006.
[38] 'A-list succeeding in increasing number of female candidates'. ConservativeHome 11 December 2006.
[39] 'Challenge the Chairman 4', Tory Radio 29 November 2006.
[40] Press release: www.conservatives.com 29 January 2007.
[41] White, M. 'Tory progress on election candidates may make Labour glee shortlived'. The Guardian 30 January 2007.
[42] Grice, A. 'Cameron to change candidate choice in drive for diversity'. The Independent 23 January 2007.
[43] Carlin, B. and Isaby, J. 'Cameron's A-list fights shy of seats up North'. Daily Telegraph 18 October 2006.
[44] White, M. 'Tory progress on election candidates may make Labour glee shortlived'. The Guardian 30 January 2007.
[45] Area officer - 36.
[46] East Midlands local officer - 13.
[47] 'Proportion of women adopted dips to 33.6%', ConservativeHome 26 March 2007. They later observed that by October 2007, exactly 30% of selections were women.
[48] In 2005, Bingham had lost by 735 votes. The 2001 Labour majority was 4,489.
[49] Bingham was not only a local councillor, but also the son of a prominent local activist and councillor. He did however put a lot of work into the constituency acting as its unofficial agent.
[50] East Midlands local officer - 10.
[51] East Midlands local officer - 14.
[52] East Midlands local officer - 13.
[53] East Midlands local officer - 1.
[54] East Midlands local officer - 6.
[55] Parris, M. 'How three would-be MPs faced the ordeal of my personal Paxo test'. The Times 17 June 2006.
[56] East Midlands local officer - 8.
[57] Parris, M. 'How three would-be MPs faced the ordeal of my personal Paxo test'. The Times 17 June 2006.
[58] East Midlands local officer - 6.
[59] East Midlands local officer - 1.
[60] East Midlands local officer - 4.
[61] South West local officer - 30. Frome is in the far north of the constituency and is the main centre of population. Clive Allen had been defeated by 812 votes in 2005. The 2001 Liberal Democrat majority was 668.
[62] South West local officer - 26.
[63] South West local officer - 26.
[64] South West local officer - 29.
[65] South West local officer - 25. 'The old and the bold' were a group of very active former chairmen and officers of the association, very much steeped in local tradition.
[66] South West local officer - 30. UKIP had polled 1047 votes in 2005, more than the losing margin.
[67] South West local officer - 28.
[68] South West local officer - 25.
[69] Minutes of Somerton and Frome executive council meeting 31 July 2006.
[70] South West local officer - 29. Minutes of Somerton and Frome executive council meeting 31 July 2006.
[71] Minutes of Somerton and Frome Officers meeting - 13 October 2006.
[72] Private Somerton and Frome correspondence which the author had sight of.
[73] Regional and candidate officials - 42, 44.
[74] South West local officer - 20.
[75] Area officer - 39.
[76] South West local officer - 29.
[77] South West local officer - 20.
[78] Minutes of Cheltenham executive council 12 October 2006.

[79] South West local officer - 22.
[80] South West local officer - 21.
[81] 'Is CCHQ renewing efforts to promote A-listers'. ConservativeHome 4 December 2007.
[82] South West local officer - 24.
[83] East Midlands local officer - 2.
[84] 'Is CCHQ renewing efforts to promote A-listers'. ConservativeHome 4 December 2007.
[85] 'Yesterday's candidates' conference'. ConservativeHome 10 December 2006.
[86] 'Is CCHQ renewing efforts to promote A-listers'. ConservativeHome 4 December 2007.
[87] South West local official - 34.
[88] South West local officer - 25.
[89] South West local officer - 22.
[90] South West local officer - 24.
[91] South West local officer - 20.
[92] South West local officer - 30.
[93] East Midlands local officer - 2.
[94] South West local officer - 29.
[95] Area officer - 36.
[96] East Midlands local officer - 16.
[97] The only known member rejection of a primary result was in Plymouth Sutton. Members did not like his manner and believed he had packed the meeting with his supporters. There was adverse publicity in the local media, voters who attended the primary being 'insulted'. ConservativeHome 5 December 2006.
[98] East Midlands local officer - 8.
[99] South West local officer - 29.
[100] South West local officer - 22.
[101] South West local officer - 19.
[102] South West local officer - 31.
[103] Regional officer - 40.
[104] Area officer - 36.
[105] East Midlands local officer - 4.
[106] South West local officer - 25.
[107] South West local officer - 27.
[108] South West local officer -17.
[109] Regional official - 43.
[110] East Midlands local officer - 6.
[111] South West local official - 34.
[112] South West local official - 35.
[113] Regional official - 42.
[114] Regional official - 43.
[115] East Midlands local officer - 8.
[116] South West local officer - 33.
[117] Regional official - 42.
[118] South West local officer - 26.
[119] South West local official - 34.
[120] East Midlands local officer - 15.
[121] East Midlands local officer - 8.
[122] South West local officer - 19.
[123] South West local officer - 31.
[124] East Midlands local officer - 2.
[125] East Midlands local officer - 5.
[126] East Midlands local officer - 10.
[127] East Midlands local officer - 14.
[128] South West local officer - 22.
[129] South West local official - 35.
[130] Minutes of Somerton and Frome executive council meeting 31 July 2006.
[131] Regional official - 42.

[132] Area officer - 37.
[133] South West local officer - 25.
[134] East Midlands local officer - 1.
[135] South West local officer - 29.
[136] East Midlands local officer - 2.
[137] South West local officer - 20.
[138] South West local officer - 21.
[139] East Midlands local officer - 3.
[140] Regional official - 41.
[141] Regional official - 42.
[142] East Midlands local officer - 8.
[143] East Midlands local officer - 9.
[144] Area officer - 39.
[145] South West local officer - 29.
[146] East Midlands local officer - 3.
[147] South West local officer - 25.
[148] Area officer - 38.
[149] South West local officer - 23.
[150] East Midlands local officer - 12.
[151] Regional official - 41. Howard Flight was de-selected just prior to the 2005 general election for inappropriate comments on tax policy, made at a private dinner.
[152] 'Cameron in warning on MP selection'. The Times 22 August 2006.
[153] South West local officer - 26.
[154] South West local officer - 30.
[155] East Midlands local officer - 2.
[156] South West local official - 34.
[157] Regional officer - 40.
[158] Area officer - 36.
[159] 'David Cameron responds to your concerns'. ConservativeHome 21 August 2006.