
Working with children, young people and families – the policy context

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The aims of this chapter are to:

- Consider what we mean by ‘policy’ in the context of children, young people and families and how this is shaped by government
- Consider how policy has evolved in recent years
- Explore the implications of current policy for those working with children, young people and families.

Anyone working with children young people and families cannot escape the significance of policy – any workplace will have policies on a wide range of issues, for example on health and safety, safeguarding children and young people or equal opportunities. Policies exist at the local level as described here, but also at a national level, for example the broad sweep of policy ideas and issues which comprise Every Child Matters or Youth Matters. The local policies which govern day-to-day practice are a reflection of the concerns and priorities of national policy.

Policy around children, young people and families is therefore an area of social policy which can be described as the study of the way in which governments seek to influence social life. In this sense anyone working in this area can be said to be working in a political arena. It is therefore one of the central arguments of both this chapter and the book more generally that to understand the role of a practitioner working with children, young people and families, we need to understand the political context in which it takes place. In order to understand the way in which policy is created we need to look briefly at how government operates in the United Kingdom but with specific reference to England.

The structure of government in the United Kingdom

One of the key features of the UK government, particularly in England, is that it is very centralised, even allowing for the recent impact of devolution (see later

section in this chapter). This means that the government in general and the Prime Minister in particular has considerable power and the ability to exert considerable influence on policy. There are a number of overlapping reasons for this. In part this stems from the way in which the government is elected. The 'first past the post' system in which Members of Parliament (MPs) are elected on the basis of who gets the greatest number of votes in a geographical constituency means that effectively government will almost always come from one of two parties; Labour or Conservative. This gives the leaders of these two parties considerable power within the party, as, effectively, political careers are dependent upon being successful within party hierarchies. This is reinforced especially in government by the fact that the Leader/Prime Minister (with close colleagues/advisers) has considerable power of patronage, that is the ability to appoint people to positions both within government and in government agencies (see below).

Governments of all political persuasions have been accused of appointing people to significant roles in 'agencies' whose views support theirs, though in the last few years there has been a move to a more open selection process, through advertising for suitable applicants.

Activity

This is a term used to refer to a range of organisations that are linked to government (often by funding) but are not technically part of government. Perhaps the most important for those working with children, young people and families is Ofsted which despite officially being called the Office for Standards in Education actually regulates not just education but also social care and related services for children and young people.

Whilst you may already have a basic understanding, find out more about the role of Ofsted, for example:

- How does it regulate settings working with children and young people?
- Who does it employ to carry out its inspections?

The use of agencies to implement policy is not without its critics, who highlight the fact that they are not directly accountable to either local or national electorates in the way that governments or local authorities are.

The structure of government in England

There are three main elements to central government: the Executive, the Legislature and the Judiciary. The Executive consists of those who have decision-making power; that is the Prime Minister, Cabinet Ministers and those who

advise them. In policy terms this is where policy tends to be initiated, that is, where, 'ideas' about new policy tend to come from.

The Legislature consists of the two Houses of Parliament, the Commons and the Lords. This is where policy – especially that which requires changes in the law – is discussed or 'debated' and sometimes amended. All potential legislation has to go through a series of readings in the two Houses and also through a series of committee stages where it is scrutinised in more detail by committees of MPs. Whilst this process does lead to some changes, it is important to note that the government can still exert considerable influence as it chooses the timetable for the readings and the composition of the committees which scrutinise the legislation.

The Judiciary is comprised of the senior Judges who play a role in terms of defining the way in which legislation 'works' in practice, by the creation of 'case law' which is the process by which judgements, made in test cases, create a framework for later judgements. The Fraser Guidelines (sometimes called Gillick Competence) referred to later in the chapter provide an example of this.

It is important to note that to a very considerable extent a government's ability to initiate and push through legislation is dependent upon the size of its majority in Parliament. The larger the majority, the easier it is to maintain control of the process outlined above. Over the past 30 years or so, governments have for most of the time enjoyed sizeable majorities and have therefore been able to push through radical change if they have wished to. We now move on to consider the way in which governments actually develop policy.

The policy process

The 'traditional' view of the policy process is that governments start the process by putting out a consultation document in the form of a Green Paper which organisations are then able to respond to. Green Papers often include a range of options that are then either proceeded with or dropped on the basis of the response from interested parties. This is followed by a White Paper that tends to set out more definite proposals. After the consultation on the White Paper the government will produce draft legislation, a 'bill' that then enters the process described previously. At the end of this process the bill becomes a new piece of legislation or Act. To give one recent example of this process which applies in the context of working with children, young people and families, in 2003 the government issued a Green Paper on the future of services for children in the light of the Laming report into the death of Victoria Climbié (discussed more fully in Chapter 7). This was Every Child Matters. After going through the process described above this became the basis for the Children Act 2004.

Activity

Current consultation documents can be found on the relevant government departments' websites (Department of Health, Department for Children, Schools and Families, Scottish Executive, Welsh Assembly). Have a look at any relevant consultation documents.

If there are any that are particularly relevant to your area of interest, think about whether and how you might want to respond, either individually, as a student group or as a group of work colleagues.

It is important to highlight that not all new policy follows this route, as some changes do not require changes in the law and are brought about by government changing the advice or 'instructions' it gives to local authorities in the form of policy guidance. A change in the way funding is provided or targeted can also be used to change the direction of policy. There is a good summary of how the process of introducing legislation works, as well as useful information on many other aspects of government at <http://www.parliament.uk/works/works.cfm>

Whilst the role of local authorities in direct service provision is declining, they remain significant as commissioners of services. This process of utilising the mixed economy as a basis for policy and using non-governmental agencies as a key element of policy implementation has been described as a shift away from government to a broader framework of governance.

The mixed economy of welfare

One of the key changes in the way in which the services provided for children, young people and families have changed over the past 20 years or so has been a move away from the state (through the NHS or local authorities) as the main provider of services to a situation where services are provided by a range of private and non-profit organisations (charities, voluntary organisations, etc.) who are contracted by the state to provide specific services through a process of 'commissioning'.

Devolution

One of the key changes of the last few years has been the introduction of devolution, which has led to the creation of a Scottish Parliament and Welsh Assembly and the transfer of powers to this 'new' tier of government. In the case of the Scottish Parliament this includes full responsibility for children's services issues.

In the case of the Welsh Assembly there is a greater overlap with the UK Parliament but policy in Wales is clearly diverging in some areas.

From a policy point of view, one of the most interesting implications of devolution is the emergence of different emphases and approaches to children's services policy within the different parts of the United Kingdom.

At present, in the area of policy around children and young people for example, this is most pronounced in the differing roles of the Children's Commissioners in England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. There are also a range of other issues relating to, for example, testing and the structure of the curriculum especially in the early years.

Activity

Explore the four Children's Commissioners' websites which can be easily found through any search engine. Look at the differences in roles and emphases between the different Commissioners. What might explain the differences in emphasis between the roles in each country?

Local government

In Scotland and Wales, the structure of local authorities is quite straightforward with a system of 'unitary' authorities: a single layer of local government in which all authorities have the same roles and responsibilities. In the case of England, the system (largely for historical reasons as reform has been incremental) is more complex; some areas of England (mainly the large urban areas) have unitary authorities, whereas other areas have a two-tier system of district and county councils. In this case responsibility for children's services lies with the county authority. The role of local authorities in the provision of services for children, young people and families has changed significantly in a number of ways.

Firstly there has been a move to Children's Trusts in which there is integrated management of education, social care and other children and young peoples' services. Secondly, in many services, for example early years provision, family support or children's social care, there has been a move away from direct provision towards a purchasing and co-ordination role (the mixed economy as described earlier), with services provided by voluntary and private organisations, though there are still considerable variations in the amount of direct provision between local authorities. Thirdly, in education, there has been a move towards academy schools in which private or charitable organisations take a much greater role in the running of state education.

Implementing policy

In actually implementing policy, governments have a number of powerful levers in seeking to ensure that policy 'works' in the way that was intended. The first is finance. Central government provides the bulk of the money (which is raised through national taxes; income tax, Value Added Tax and National Insurance and then redistributed locally) which local authorities use to provide services, and often this is given in ways which mean that it has to be used in particular ways through targeted funding, which can only be used for specific purposes. A second way in which central government is able to control policy is through using legislation to create 'statutory duties', which are duties that local authorities must do, for example providing a child protection service.

A third option open to central government is to give local authorities powers to undertake particular functions. Much of the Community Care legislation works in this way and it gives local authorities greater discretion. However, in many cases the use of 'powers' is clarified by the production of guidance or standards, which may in itself create a fairly tight framework within which agencies have to operate (see, for example the Every Child Matters outcomes framework). This links to the final major 'tool' available to government which is the use of inspectorates such as Ofsted to scrutinise services, and this is discussed in more detail in a later section.

The development of services for children, young people and families

The nineteenth century can be seen as the point at which there emerged a recognisable pattern or system of services for children, young people and families. Key elements of this came from within the charitable movement through organisations like Barnardos which grew very rapidly in the second half of the nineteenth century, providing residential childcare in orphanages (though only a relatively small proportion of the children in them were technically 'orphans'). From 1906 onwards the emphasis switches to increased state intervention as the new Liberal government introduced a series of measures which are still recognisable as key elements of our existing system; school meals, legislation against child neglect, the introduction of school nurses and health visitors and education reform to try to ensure universal primary education. In particular, for the purposes of this chapter, the 1908 Children Act was passed which, for the first time, can be seen as trying to define in a general sense the role of parents in bringing up children.

During the Second World War the government commissioned a senior civil servant, William Beveridge, to look at the technical workings of the benefit system. Beveridge's report somewhat exceeded his brief and called for wholesale reform of the welfare system, arguing that the interconnected nature of the problems

associated with poverty and unemployment, for example, required an interconnected response. The Beveridge report *Social Insurance and Allied Services* published in 1942 was effectively a blueprint for a welfare state and formed the basis for the general election at the end of the Second World War with the Labour party promising to implement Beveridge's recommendations in full but with the Conservatives largely opposed. The only aspect of the Beveridge report which was implemented before the election was its proposals for education which formed the basis for the 1944 Education Act with its introduction of a unified system of grammar and secondary modern schools that have shaped all subsequent education policy.

The post-war election resulted in a landslide victory for Labour, the first time the party had enjoyed an overall majority in Parliament, and the Beveridge proposals now became the basis of far reaching social reform in health, benefits and personal social services, thereby creating the framework of services which, it can be argued, still largely pertains today. In part, the National Health Service (NHS) had already come into existence as the Wartime Health Service, a co-ordinated system set up to meet the demands of war. When the NHS was formally set up in 1948 it marked a decisive shift, giving women and children full access to healthcare for the first time, setting up a proper primary care system through the general practitioner system and integrating the various strands of hospital provision.

In terms of social care, the government set up both the Welfare Department for Adults and the Children's Department, marking the first time that the state had become significantly involved in social care provision. Many of the services which now form the mainstream of social care provision such as residential care and child protection were introduced at this time. The Children Act of 1948 was introduced, as many of its successors, in direct response to a tragedy. In this case it was the death of 13-year-old Dennis O'Neill killed by his foster parents. The 1948 Children Act led to each local authority being required to appoint a Children's Officer and also led to the development of children's services in each local authority. The Children's and Welfare Departments were merged into generic Social Services Departments in 1970, but almost immediately were criticised by the report into the death of Maria Colwell (discussed more fully in Chapter 7).

Another significant aspect of the Beveridge proposals was his plans for the restructuring of the benefit system, which have proved to have ramifications and influence over subsequent policy development. Beveridge proposed a contributory system based on National Insurance which workers would pay whilst in work and receive whilst not working (providing that they had paid sufficient contributions). Women would pay contributions whilst working, but as women left the workforce upon marriage they would then receive access to benefits through their husband. Beveridge anticipated that as there was a return to near full employment after the war, the system would become largely self-funding.

For those who were unable to access the contributory scheme, a safety net scheme called National Assistance was introduced. This was intended to be a

minor part of the system, but for a complex variety of reasons, for example the fact that there was no return to full employment and later that this was the only benefit women not living with their husbands could claim, this soon became the larger element of the benefit system. Efforts to control National Assistance and its successors, Supplementary Benefit and Income Support have been a major feature of social policy right through to New Labour and the 'welfare to work' initiative. There has been a debate for many years about the links between the operation of the benefit system and its impact on poverty and social exclusion in general, and on child poverty in particular. Recent research (for example that funded by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation in 2008) highlights that this is an issue of ongoing importance and it is discussed more fully in Chapter 4.

It is also worth highlighting that a central element of the Beveridge plan in the years immediately after the war was housing provision. In the decade immediately after the war, two-thirds of all house building was undertaken by local authorities and social housing became a significant part of provision. Whilst there were some attempts at reform and reorganisation over the next 20 years, the basis of the Beveridge system remained in place until the late 1970s, though after the recession of the early 1970s, spending on house building fell sharply. However, as outlined in the next section, the availability of social housing has fallen markedly since then as a direct result of government policy. The impact of this is important for a variety of reasons. Firstly, there is a shortage of good quality social housing. Shelter (2006) suggest that at the end of 2006 around 1 million children in the UK were living in bad housing and around 130,000 were homeless or in temporary accommodation. Secondly, where social housing does exist, there tends to be an increased concentration of families who are experiencing difficulty, causing a process sometimes referred to as 'ghettoisation' where there is a concentration of disadvantaged groups in disadvantaged areas. This point is developed later in this chapter.

The New Right reforms

The period after 1979 saw a process of radical reform in a number of areas. In housing there was the end of local authority house building and the introduction of the opportunity for local authority tenants to buy the house they lived in.

In terms of benefits, there was the introduction of the Income Support System based around fixed levels of payment for people who fall into specific categories, which still exists in amended form. For children's services, the significant changes were in the implementation of the Children Act 1989 and to a lesser, but not insignificant extent, the National Health Service and Community Care Act 1990. In order to explore these changes fully it is important to place them in the context of the debate about the ideological context of children's services.

The ideological context of children's services

Children's services, as with other areas of welfare, take place in an ideological context: they are heavily influenced by the political views of the government of the day. The expansion of 'Welfare' between 1945 and 1951 took place in the context of a government committed to social democracy whereas the reforms of the 1980s and early 1990s took place in the context of a New Right approach (sometimes referred to as 'Thatcherite' after the Prime Minister for most of this period).

The basis of social democracy is that the state has a positive role to play in the provision of services. This is because in a 'market' context (see below), services (in this case health and education, etc.) will be allocated on the basis of ability to pay rather than need. This is what social democrats refer to as 'market failure'. In order to ensure fairness, the state needs to get involved to ensure all citizens receive adequate support. This is sometimes called 'positive freedom': the idea that people need positive support from the state in order to be able to take advantage of the opportunities that might be available to them. The money needed to provide for these services is raised through taxation. Taxation is also related to income and the ability to pay, so higher earners pay tax at a higher rate. This is referred to as progressive taxation and is linked to a belief that the system should be redistributive, giving on the basis of need.

New Right thinking emerged as a reaction to this. It argued that the inevitable consequence of social democracy was bureaucracy and inefficiency and that the welfare system had a tendency to trap people in dependency on the state. The solution was to reduce the role of the state by reducing its role as a service provider through the privatisation of services. This would also introduce competition between service providers leading to greater choice and efficiency, and free up money which could be used to reduce taxes giving people the opportunity to take greater responsibility for themselves. Of particular significance to the 'New Right' critique has been the way in which public services, it is argued, tend to be inflexible and unresponsive and to deliver a 'one size fits all' service, rather than one tailored to the specific needs of children, young people and families. Whilst in practice even most New Right governments have retained some element of progressive taxation, most are critical of the principle, arguing for a move towards a 'flatter' tax system in which everyone pays the same rate on all income.

Central to New Right thinking is a belief in a 'free market' system, which in this context is a belief that market principles of supply and demand apply even to welfare services, that is that if someone 'supplies' a good or service at an appropriate price there will be demand for it. The better the price and quality, the greater the demand. If goods or services are of poor quality or priced too high for their market, demand will fall and the supplier will need to adjust price, quality or both in order to become competitive. This leads to the best goods or services being available at the most competitive prices, so called 'market discipline'. It also leads to flexibility and choice, as there

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are likely to be a range of providers competing to provide appropriate services. In this model the NHS and social care services could and should be provided in the same way as any other good or service.

There are however two key problems in the area of welfare. One was how to introduce market forces into an area where the state was the only or most dominant provider of services. The second is the problem of free services, as, in a market model, providing a service for free is likely to lead to an excess of demand – of which more later.

New Labour emerged in the 1990s as an attempt to reconcile a commitment to social justice with a belief in markets. Its adherents claimed that it encompassed key features of both social democracy and the New Right, hence the claim to be a new approach – the ‘third way’. New Labour in government have retained, in a modified way, most of the market reforms of the 1980s and 1990s but have also developed some distinctively new elements which are explored in the next section.

The Children Act 1989

It can be argued that the Children Act 1989 remains the most important piece of legislation around children, young people and families as it covers both the broad framework of child protection (though some of the structures which surround this and the associated guidance have changed, and this is discussed more fully in Chapter 7) and the framework for state intervention into family life in the context of relationship breakdown. It is a large and complex piece of legislation and a full description is beyond the scope of this book. Suggestions for reading, giving a fuller picture, are at the end of the chapter.

Whether the 1989 Children Act can be described as a ‘New Right’ piece of legislation is contentious. It certainly enjoyed all-party support during its passage through Parliament and like so many other pieces of legislation in this area it arose from perceived failings in practice. At this point though, there were countervailing pressures, firstly from a series of high-profile child protection ‘failures’ of which the most notorious were the deaths of Jasmine Beckford in 1985 and Kimberley Carlile in 1987, and secondly as a result of perceived overreaction by social workers in the context of the ‘Cleveland’ case (which is discussed more fully in Chapter 7). In the light of this tension, the legislation is built around a number of key principles:

- 1 The child’s interests are paramount – all decisions should focus on what is in the best interests of the child.
- 2 Minimum intervention – that is, that any intervention into a child or young person’s life should take place at the lowest level possible to secure the child or young person’s safety or well-being. In court cases the test is that the court has to decide whether making an order is likely to lead to a better outcome than not making an order.

- 3 Speedy decision making – where decisions about whether, and how, to intervene need to be made, these should be taken as quickly as possible to secure the child’s best interests. In many cases there are specific timescales built into the legislation.
- 4 The welfare checklist – in court cases, the court shall have regard in particular to a number of matters set out in the welfare checklist, and in particular:
 - the ascertainable wishes and feelings of the child concerned
 - the child’s physical, emotional and educational needs
 - the likely effect on the child of any change in circumstances
 - the child’s age, sex, background and any relevant characteristics
 - any harm which the child has suffered or is at risk of suffering
 - how capable each of his parents and any other relevant person are in meeting the child’s needs
 - the range of powers available to the court.
- 5 Partnership with parents – where possible it is better for children to live with their natural family, and parents should continue to be involved in terms of both decision making and contact as long as this is in the child’s best interests.

An example – Section 8 Orders

Section 8 is the part of the 1989 Children Act which deals with intervention in family life in the context of relationship breakdown. It is important to highlight that Section 8 only applies where families (and in this context mainly parents) have been unable to reach an informal agreement themselves which is what happens in the majority of cases. There are four Section 8 Orders; Residence, Contact, Specific Issue and Prohibited Steps.

- Residence Orders – these orders specify who a child will live with and under what circumstances. They can be unconditional or have specific conditions attached, e.g. the requirement to live in a particular area.
- Contact Orders – cover contact arrangements between the child/young person and named people (usually the other parent but can include extended family or others who have had a significant role in the child’s life). Again these can be general or very specific.
- Specific Issue Orders – allow courts to make an order around a particular issue, e.g. where a child or young person is to be educated.
- Prohibited Steps Orders – allow the courts to prevent something happening, e.g. contact with a named individual.

In any situation the court has to decide which Order/combination of Orders is the most appropriate taking into account all the factors described previously.

Alongside the family Orders and the child protection framework, the 1989 Children Act also gave local authorities considerable discretionary powers to

provide information, advice and support to a range of families and to support young people leaving the care system. As these were discretionary, there were wide variations in the pattern that emerged and especially in relation to the leaving care provision, evidence that the system has not always been successful.

New Labour reforms

Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000

This was the first attempt by New Labour to deal with the issues highlighted in the previous section and focuses on giving young people leaving care ongoing support in terms of accommodation, financial support and access to further education. This legislation is to be superseded by the Children and Young Persons Act 2008.

Every Child Matters and the Children Act 2004

The context of Every Child Matters is usually seen as that of child protection. In many senses this is true and this dimension of Every Child Matters is discussed more fully in Chapter 7. However, it also needs to be seen as a specifically New Labour response which incorporates other New Labour themes around employability, inclusion and joined-up services as well as an emphasis on the use of computer systems to support policy; each of these issues will now be considered.

Central to any understanding of the Every Child Matters agenda is the emphasis on employability on two levels: firstly through provision of services which support parental employment such as early years childcare and extended provision within schools; secondly through the emphasis on early intervention aimed at ensuring that children 'succeed' within education such as Sure Start and the 'personalisation' emphasis within education. Related to this has been the continued emphasis on the inclusion of children with additional needs in 'mainstream' education.

In terms of 'joined-up services' these are most pronounced in the context of child protection, but it is worth highlighting the role of Children's Trusts. According to the DCSF:

Children's Trusts are local partnerships which bring together the organisations responsible for services for children, young people and families in a shared commitment to improving children's lives. It is local authorities – through their Directors of Children's Services and Lead Members for Children's Services – which lead Children's Trusts, but they work closely with the other local agencies with a legal duty to be part of the Trust: strategic health authorities, primary care trusts (PCTs), police authorities, local probation boards, youth offending teams, Connexions partnerships, the Learning and Skills Council for England and district councils. We recommend that Children's Trusts also include other important local partners like schools, colleges and third sector organisations, as well as other local authority services like adult social care and housing. (DCSF, 2008a)

The Children's Trusts represent a key initiative but are as yet relatively new and untested and in particular the extent of full involvement of the organisations identified in the quote above is still variable.

This raises a key issue: the past few years since the Laming Report and subsequent publication of Every Child Matters have seen a period of unprecedented change in a whole range of issues related to policy and practice with children, young people and families which are discussed in the rest of this book. It is, in practice, too early to see whether the changes are 'working' and indeed any judgement is dependent upon the criteria for success given the broad sweep of policy change. For example, do we make judgements on 'improvement' in terms of child protection, or greater parental employment, or indeed on whether overall parenting 'quality' changes? All of these are not only ambitious changes in their own right but raise complex issues of judgement in terms of how they can be measured.

Managerialism and surveillance

One way in which the changes of the past 20 years or so can be explained is through the emergence of managerial approaches to children's services. Managerialism is a set of ideas that emerged from the New Right critique of welfare services more generally and is based on the idea that public services need to be managed in the same way as commercial organisations. It has been at the heart of both the Conservative reforms in the 1980s and 1990s and more recently key aspects of the Every Child Matters reforms. There are tensions in managerialism as an approach in that it has tended to both highlight the need for flexibility in service delivery and also the need for targets to assess performance and service delivery with critics suggesting the latter approach has proved dominant. Linked to managerialism has been a distrust of professional autonomy which has led to increased surveillance through the various inspection bodies such as Ofsted. This has been particularly pronounced in the area of child protection where a number of high-profile cases since the implementation of the Every Child Matters agenda, notably the 'Baby P' case in 2008, have led to an intensification of the inspectorial approach.

Children's services under Labour – changed direction or the New Right continued?

One of the central issues when trying to consider the way in which children's services have developed under New Labour is to what extent is policy a continuation of the New Right reforms of the 1980s and to what extent it represents a new phase. There is, in some senses, evidence for both. There is certainly more private sector involvement in the children and young people's sector, whether in

the form of academy schools, private childcare provision in children's centres or the contracting out of family support services (and a strong commitment from government for this to be extended). Furthermore, the way in which market 'choice' has become the mantra for change across this sector has shades of the New Right critique, for example in the context of parental choice of schools.

However, there has also been a real increase in spending on a number of major initiatives though this highlights two further aspects of Labour reforms which warrant discussion: firstly, the use of targeted services to tackle deep-rooted disadvantage and secondly the central importance of work as an aspect of welfare. In terms of targeted services perhaps the most prominent has been the Sure Start programme where areas of particular disadvantage with a high concentration of families have received additional funding to provide appropriate services, for example childcare or a greater health visitor presence. Other examples are the 'action zone'/'challenge' approach in health and education. Sure Start also provides an example of the emphasis on employment, as one function of the projects has been to provide childcare and training in order to help parents find work.

Linked to this is the other element of the surveillance debate. Some commentators (see, e.g. Anderson et al., 2009) have highlighted the way in which the combination of greater contact with some groups of children and parents, for example through Sure Start, greater emphasis on recording and assessing information through the Common Assessment Framework (described in Chapter 7) and greater reliance on electronic recording of information, has a number of consequences. Firstly it can be argued that more parents and children are likely to be formally assessed; secondly that this information will be more carefully recorded, and thirdly that this information will be shared more widely. This can have both positive consequences in terms of rational allocation of resources to those whose needs are greatest, but also raises the danger of children and families with regular or complex needs becoming inappropriately labelled simply as a result of ongoing contact with services.

What does the future hold?

At the point of writing there appears to be a broad political consensus around the shape of children's services, though it remains uncertain how the changed climate around greater public spending will have an impact over the next few years. Nonetheless the model of a mixed economy of services working in an integrated way appears to be the dominant policy discourse for the foreseeable future.

Further reading

One of the main difficulties with policy is that the rapidly changing context means that books tend to date quickly. Using journals is therefore important in

maintaining a clear view of the current position. The following journals are likely to be particularly helpful:

Journal of Social Policy
Social Policy and Administration
Social Policy and Society

For a historical perspective see:

Fraser, D. (2002) *The Evolution of the British Welfare State*. London: Palgrave Macmillan, is a clear and highly readable account, as is:
Timmins, N. (2001) *The Five Giants: A Biography of the Welfare State*. London: Harper Collins.

For a fuller exploration of ideological perspectives and how they link to policy see:
Lavallette, M. and Pratt, A. (2006) *Social Policy: Theories, Concepts and Issues*. London: Sage.

For a clear overview of policy on a more general level see:

Bochel, C. et al. (2005) *Social Policy: Issues and Developments*. London: Prentice Hall.

Hendrick, H. (2005) *Social Policy and Child Welfare*. Bristol: Policy Press.

Robert Gordon University provide an excellent social policy site with lots of useful content at: <http://www2.rgu.ac.uk/publicpolicy/introduction/contents.htm>