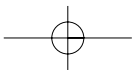
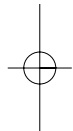
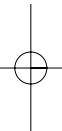
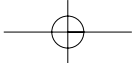


Part I

From Children's Departments to Departments of Children's Services



1

Local Authority Children's Services in the Post-war Period

The purpose of this introductory chapter is to outline the changing role and nature of what is now called children's social care, in the post-war period. While it might appear that the current changes, which have seen the establishment of departments of children's services, give the impression that we may be witnessing a 'return to the future', nothing could be further from the truth. Rather than simply be concerned with children who are in the care of the local authority, as was originally the case with children's departments, the new arrangements aim to prevent poor outcomes for *all* children and young people and to ensure they fulfil their potential. *Every Child Matters: Change for Children*

sets out the national framework for local change programmes to build services around the needs of children and young people so that we maximise opportunity and minimise risk. The services that reach every child and young person have a crucial role to play in shifting the focus from dealing with the consequences of difficulties in children's lives to preventing things from going wrong in the first place. The transformation that we need can only be delivered through local leaders working together in strong partnership with local communities on a programme of change. (DfES, 2004b: 2)

The vision is of integrated services meeting the needs of all children and being available as soon as problems and/or extra needs are identified. It aims to transform the way universal, selective and targeted services work together and it is the 'well-being' of all children which is the focus. However, this has not always been the case. In this chapter we outline how the focus and responsibilities of local authority children's services developed in the post-war period prior to the election of New Labour in 1997.

The Children Act 1948 and Post-War Changes

The blueprint for the Children Act 1948 was provided by the report of the Curtis Committee, which was established at the end of the Second World War. In particular it attempted to provide a simplified and unified administrative framework

8 Understanding children's social care

at both central and local government levels for all children who, for whatever reason, were deprived of a 'normal' home life. The focus was very specific – those who were living in care, often in large institutions, and where the dominating philosophy continued to be the Poor Law. While the children came into care via a number of routes and for different reasons, the largest group was those in the care of local authority public assistance committees as 'poor persons in need of relief', and were either orphans or had been deserted by their parents, or had mentally or physically ill parents who were unable or unwilling to care for them. The total number of children and young people in care at the time was 124,900 (Curtis Report, 1946: 8).

The main purposes of the Children Act 1948 were: the establishment of local authority children's departments which would take over responsibilities from other local departments for children in care, while, at central government level, the Home Office would take overall national responsibility; a new emphasis on boarding out (fostering) in preference to residential homes; the restoration of children in care to their natural parents whenever possible; and a greater emphasis on adoption.

Beyond this, however, the new departments tried to lay to rest the Poor Law and embodied the revolutionary principle that they should seek the *best* development of the children they were responsible for. Under Section 15 of the Poor Law Act 1930 it was the duty of the local authority to: 'set to work and put out as apprentices all children whose parents are not, in the opinion of the council, able to keep and maintain their children'. Until 1948 the influence of the 1601 and 1834 Poor Law Acts was explicit and there was no reference to any duties to educate, compensate or care for the children involved. However, the responsibilities in Section 12 of the Children Act 1948 were much more generous and stated that:

- (1) Where a child is in the care of the local authority, it shall be the duty of that authority to exercise their powers with respect to him so as to further his best interests and to afford him opportunity for the proper development of his character and abilities.
- (2) In providing for a child in care, a local authority shall make such use of facilities and services available for children in the care of their own parents, as appears to the local authority reasonable in his care.

As Jean Packman (1981) has argued, children in care were in future to be treated as individuals and not as an undifferentiated category of youngsters, and should have access to the same range of facilities as other children. The new departments were to be staffed by a new kind of personnel who were professionally trained in the psycho-social sciences and who had a thorough understanding of human relationships and the importance of the family and parental attachments, particularly in relation to mothers, for a child's development.

However, while the changes were significant, the focus of children's departments was circumscribed and specific to children in care. The new service played a residual and particular role in the overall context of welfare services.

The post-war welfare state was based on a particular model of the economy and the family. Not only did it assume full male employment, it also assumed a traditional role for the patriarchal nuclear family (Pascall, 1986; Williams, 1989). The idea of the 'family wage' was central, linking the labour market to the distribution of social roles and dependency by age and gender within the family. Within the family, women were to trade housework, childbirth, child rearing and physical and emotional caring in return for economic support from a male 'breadwinner' (Finch and Groves, 1983). It was assumed that most 'welfare work' was carried out within the family, either by using the family wage to buy goods and services or by women caring for children. The provision of state welfare was intended to support, not replace, this arrangement. Such an approach was key to the work of the newly established children's departments which were explicitly designed to provide a residual service for children deprived of a 'normal family life'.

Clearly, however, the work and rationale of the departments would be subject to a whole series of tensions and difficulties if any of the underlying assumptions were to be seriously questioned or if there were to be significant changes in the key institutions that provided the key pillars for its work – particularly the labour market, the patriarchal nuclear family or the other universal state welfare services – health, education, and social security. Beyond this, further stresses and challenges would be created if the political consensus which underpinned the post-war welfare changes was itself to be put under strain. These were to become important issues from the mid-1980s onwards; however, between 1948 and the early 1970s, the focus and rationale of the work was to broaden and develop in significant ways.

The Establishment of 'the Family Service'

During the 1950s children's departments were increasingly finding their role far too narrow and restrictive and they began to expand their operations and reframe their responses (Packman, 1981; 1993). Increasingly it was felt that waiting until children came into care was doing too little too late. There was a need to intervene with families earlier in their own homes and thereby prevent children coming into care. Such thinking was given a major boost when influential members of the Fabian Society, prominent academics and senior civil servants, made explicit the links between child neglect, deprivation and delinquency such that providing help to families earlier would not only help prevent admissions into care but would also prevent future delinquency. The statutory power to provide services to families in the community in order to prevent children being received

10 Understanding children's social care

into care was provided in Section 1 of the Children and Young Persons Act 1963. It provided the legislative backing for what a number of children's departments were already doing in practice.

Moves to expand the remit and rationale of the work developed further in the 1960s. There was an increasing conviction that better services could be provided by means of reorganizing all local authority children's and welfare services and bringing them together in an enlarged *family service*. This led to the establishment of local authority social services departments in 1971 following the Seebohm Report of 1968 and the Local Authority Social Services Act of 1970 (Hall, 1976; Clarke, 1980; Cooper, 1983). The new department would be generic in nature with a focus upon the family and the community, and the new profession of social work would lie at its core. While the emphasis on genericism reflected a number of issues and was interpreted in a variety of ways, crucially it was premised on the view that the work drew on certain common values, knowledge and skills and was embodied most clearly in the role of the professional social worker. There were key similarities in, for example, assessment, support and counselling tasks regardless of whether the client was a child, an adult or an older person.

The role of the new social services departments was not just to provide a range of services and professional help but to coordinate aspects of other state services, such as health, education, housing and social security, and thereby make them more responsive to need, particularly with regard to the functioning of a small number of families who were seen as causing a disproportionate number of problems and were often referred to as 'problem families' (Philp and Timms, 1962). Social service departments, while clearly residual and small scale compared to the other state welfare services, were established as the 'fifth social service' (Townsend, 1970). They would provide the personalized, humanistic dimension of the welfare state, the primary tool being the professional worker's personality and understanding of human relationships. The early 1970s marked the high point of optimism and confidence in social work, which had been fostered by the approaches developed in the children's departments and its key political and academic advocates. However, during the 1970s not only were the assumptions on which it operated found wanting, but the social, political and economic contexts began to change significantly.

The Growing Crisis in Child Protection

The consensus that had been established in the post-war period, based on the family as the primary mechanism for ensuring the welfare of children, with social workers entrusted with the key responsibility for state child welfare, began to collapse during the 1970s. What became evident from the mid-1980s onwards was that the problems had become considerably more complex and high profile

Local authority children's services in the post-war period 11

and were not amenable to easy resolution. Up until this point social work was seen as having the key role to play in mediating and resolving the difficult and sometimes ambiguous relationship between the *privacy* of the family and the *public* responsibilities of the state, so that children could be protected and the privacy of the family was not undermined. However, the tragic death of Maria Colwell and the subsequent public inquiry (Secretary of State for Social Services, 1974) were to change all that (Parton, 1985; Butler and Drakeford, 2005, Chapter 5).

Maria had been in the care of the local authority in Brighton, East Sussex, and at the time of her death at the hands of her stepfather was subject to a supervision order. Although the authorities received numerous calls expressing concerns about her treatment and the home was visited by a number of professionals, she died a tragic and brutal death. The case received considerable media, political and public attention.

The Public Inquiry into the death of Maria Colwell can be seen as a watershed in the contemporary history of social work, particularly in social service departments. Prior to this, social work practice was seen primarily as a private activity carried out between clients and professionals, the latter optimistically feeling their skills and techniques could tackle, even solve, many social problems. The case of Maria Colwell and the numerous subsequent inquiries into cases of child abuse have quite changed all that. (Parton and Thomas, 1983: 56–7).

Between the publication of the Colwell Inquiry report in 1974 and 1985 there were 29 further inquiries into the deaths of children as a result of abuse (Corby et al., 1998). There was considerable similarity between the findings (DHSS, 1982). Most identified: a lack of interdisciplinary communication; a lack of properly trained and experienced front-line workers; inadequate supervision; and too little focus on the needs of the child as distinct from those of the parents. The overriding concern was the lack of coordination between the different agencies. The intensity of political and media concern increased further in the mid-1980s with the public inquiries into three other child deaths in different London boroughs – Jasmine Beckford (London Borough of Brent, 1985), Tyra Henry (London Borough of Lambeth, 1987) and Kimberley Carlile (London Borough of Greenwich, 1987). Until this point, all the public inquiries had been concerned with the deaths of children at the hands of their parents or carers. The child welfare professionals were seen as having failed to protect the children and did too little, too late.

However, the Cleveland 'affair' which broke in the summer of 1987 was very different. This time over 100 children were kept in hospital against the wishes of their parents, on 'place of safety orders', on suspicions of sexual abuse (Secretary of State for Social Services, 1988; Parton, 1991). Not only was it the

12 Understanding children's social care

first scandal and public inquiry into possible over-reaction by professionals, it was also the first when the actions of paediatricians and other doctors, as well as social workers, were put under the microscope and subjected to criticism.

The issues that were articulated through the inquiries into child deaths and the Cleveland 'affair' resonated with a number of developments in the wider political environment, and contributed to the increasing questioning of the welfare consensus around the family. From the 1960s onwards, with the growth of the women's movement and the increasing recognition of violence in the family, it was argued that the family may not be the 'haven in a heartless world' (Lasch, 1977) it had previously been assumed to be. While campaigning was initially concerned with improving the position of women, from the mid-1970s, particularly with the growing attention to sexual abuse, energy was also directed at the position of children (Rush, 1980; Nelson, 1987). Such critiques helped disaggregate the interests of individual family members and supported the sometimes contradictory development during the period of the emerging children's rights movement (Freeman, 1983; Franklin, 1986, 1995).

The period also witnessed the emergence of a more obviously civil liberties critique which concentrated on the apparent growth of intervention into people's lives in the name of welfare (Morris et al., 1980; Taylor et al., 1980; Geach and Szwed, 1983). Increasingly, lawyers drew attention to the way the administration of justice was unjustly applied to various areas of child welfare and the need for a greater emphasis on individual rights. During the mid-1980s, the parents' lobby gained its most coherent voice with the establishment of Parents Against INjustice (PAIN). Thus, while quite different in their social location and focus of concern, there was a growing range of constituencies that were critical of the post-war consensus in child welfare. These were most forcefully articulated in and through the various child abuse inquiries.

These developments need to be located in the context of the more wide-ranging changes that had been taking place in the political environment. From the mid-1970s there was an increasing disillusionment about the ability of the post-war welfare state to both manage the economy effectively in the context of rising unemployment and inflation, and overcome a range of social problems, such as the growth in violence and crime more generally, via the use of wide-ranging welfare programmes. The growth of the New Right (Levitas, 1986) and the election of the Conservative government under Margaret Thatcher in 1979 proved particularly significant in shifting the political discourse in the 1980s. For the New Right, the problems in the economic and social spheres were closely interrelated and the approach stressed the importance of individual responsibility, choice and freedom and supported the disciplines of the market against the interference of the state. It had its roots in an individualized concept of social relations whereby the market was seen as the key institution for the economic sphere, while the family was the key institution for the social sphere.

Local authority children's services in the post-war period 13

The family was seen as essentially a private domain from which the state should be excluded but which should be encouraged to take on its 'natural' caring responsibilities, particularly for children. The role of the state should be confined to ensuring that the family fulfilled these responsibilities, while making sure that no one suffered at the hands of the violent and abusive. Clearly, however, a fine balance had to be struck between protecting the innocent and weak and protection from state interference. By 1987/8 it seemed that the state was falling down on both counts. For while the state, in the guise of local authority social workers, was failing to protect children in the family (as in the Beckford, Henry and Carlile inquiries), it was, at the same time, invading the privacy of the family as exemplified by events in Cleveland.

The Children Act 1989

It is in this context that we need to understand the significance of the Children Act 1989. As David Mellor, the Minister of State at the Department of Health, said when introducing the Bill for its second reading into the House of Commons:

We hope and believe that it will bring order, integration, relevance and a better balance to the law – a better balance not just between the rights and responsibilities of individuals and agencies, but most vitally, between the need to protect children and the need to enable parents to challenge intervention in the upbringing of their children. (Hansard, vol. 151, no. 94, col. 1107)

While the legislation was an explicit attempt to address the wide-ranging disquiet about the practices of health and welfare professionals in the area of child protection, it was not simply responding to the recommendations of child abuse inquiries. It was also informed by research and a series of respected official reports during the 1980s which aimed to update and rationalize child care legislation, particularly the Short Report (Social Services Committee, 1984) and the *Review of Child Care Law* (DHSS, 1985).

The central principles of the Act encouraged an approach to child welfare based on *negotiation* with families and involving parents and children in agreed plans. The accompanying guidance and regulations encouraged professionals to work *in partnership* with parents and young people. In an attempt to keep the use of care proceedings and emergency interventions to a minimum, the legislation strongly encouraged an approach which emphasized *support* for families with 'children in need'. In the process the concept of prevention was elevated and broadened from simply the duty to prevent children coming into care to a much broader power to provide services to *promote* the care and upbringing of children within their families. The aim was to establish a new balance in policy

14 Understanding children's social care

and practice between 'family support' and 'child protection', with a much greater emphasis on the former.

Section 17 of the Act was key to bringing this change about.

Under s17(1) of the Children Act 1989:

It shall be the general duty of every local authority (in addition to the other duties imposed on them by this Part) –

- (a) to safeguard and promote the welfare of children within their area who are in need; and
- (b) so far as is consistent with that duty, to promote the upbringing of such children by their families, by providing a range and level of services appropriate to those children's needs.

while in s17(10) a child is deemed to be 'in need' if:

- (a) he is unlikely to achieve or maintain, or to have the opportunity of achieving or maintaining, a reasonable standard of health or development without the provision for him of services by a local authority under this Part;
- (b) his health or development is likely to be significantly impaired, or further impaired, without the provision for him of such services; or
- (c) he is disabled.

The definition of a 'child in need' was further expanded by reference to the concepts of health, development and disability in s.17(11). Thus, 'development' meant physical, intellectual, emotional, social or behavioural development; 'health' meant physical or mental health; and a child was described as 'disabled' where she/he was blind, deaf or dumb or suffered from a mental disorder of any kind or was substantially and permanently handicapped by illness, injury or congenital deformity or such other disability as may be described.

The Act also introduced a new threshold criterion which had to be satisfied before compulsory state intervention into the family, via court proceedings, could be warranted. The criterion was: 'that the child concerned is suffering or is likely to suffer significant harm' (s.31(2)(a)) where harm was defined in s.31(9) as 'ill-treatment or the impairment of health or development'. For the first time the criterion for state intervention included a prediction of what 'is likely' to occur *in the future*. The harm should be *significant* and, where this was concerned with issues of health and development, these should be compared with that 'which could be reasonably expected of a similar child' (s.31(10)).

Thus, while it was not intended that minor shortcomings in health or development should give rise to compulsory intervention (unless they were likely to have serious and lasting effects on the child), it was clear that, in theory, the role

Local authority children's services in the post-war period 15

of local authorities was broadened, not only because of the much wider notion of prevention but also because of the need to try and anticipate what might happen to a child in the future. The overall duty for local authorities was to *safeguard and promote the welfare of the children* who were 'in need'.

Section 47(1) laid a specific duty upon local authorities, that where they:

have reasonable cause to suspect that a child who lives, or is found, in their area is suffering or is likely to suffer, significant harm, the authority should make, or cause to be made such enquiries as they consider necessary to enable them to decide whether they should take any action to *safeguard or promote the child's welfare* (emphasis added).

Section 47(3) continued:

the enquiries shall, in particular, be directed towards establishing:

(a) whether the authority should make any application to the court or exercise any of their other powers under this Act, with respect to the child.

The balance that local authorities struck between its new 'preventive' duties under Section 17 and its responsibilities in terms of a narrower focus on investigating cases of child abuse, under Section 47, was to prove an important issue.

Overall, the Children Act 1989 was welcomed on all sides as a progressive piece of legislation, although it was recognized that it was being introduced in a 'hostile climate', out of step with the philosophy and aims of most of the other social and economic policy of the Conservative government at the time, and that its success would be dependent on whether resources were going to be made available for the more extended family support provisions (Frost, 1992).

Developments in the 1990s

By the mid-1990s it was becoming increasingly evident that the approach envisaged by the Children Act 1989 was being only partially implemented. A number of developments and debates took place which not only illustrated the nature of the difficulties but also suggested how things might change in the future. In the process they provided key foundations for the way the New Labour government might take policy and practice forward following its election in May 1997. We will focus on three areas in particular:

- the 'refocusing' of the children's services debate;
- the development of the 'Looking After Children' (LAC) project; and
- the growing emphasis on the importance of early childhood prevention.

The 'refocusing' of the children's services debate

A number of reports demonstrated that local authorities were struggling to implement the key principles and aims of the Children Act 1989. The *Children Act Report 1993* argued that:

A broadly consistent and somewhat worrying picture is emerging. In general, progress towards full implementation of Section 17 of the Children Act has been slow. Further work is still needed to provide across the country a range of family services aimed at preventing families reaching the point of breakdown. Some authorities are still finding it difficult to move from a reactive social policy role to a more proactive partnership role with families (Department of Health, 1994, para. 239).

At the same time, the Audit Commission (1994) argued that the aspirations of the Children Act were not being achieved because local authority and community health services were poorly planned and coordinated, resulting in a large part of the £2 billion expenditure being wasted on families who did not need support. The focus should be on assessing need, with a much greater emphasis being placed on prevention and less on reactive interventions.

However, it was the publication of *Child Protection: Messages from Research* (Department of Health, 1995a), which summarized the key findings from a major government research programme on child protection practices, which was to prove crucial in opening up a major debate about the future shape of child protection policy and practice and children's services more generally (Parton, 1997). It demonstrated that only around one in seven of those referred as children at risk of abuse were ever placed on a child protection register and less than one in 25 was ever removed from home as a result. Thresholds for registration on the child protection register varied between authorities, but in all there was a tendency to concentrate on investigating whether there was any risk of abuse rather than to assess whether the child was 'in need'. Even those children who were registered were provided with little treatment, and many children who were not registered still often had considerable difficulties but received little help.

The report argued that any '*incident* [of abuse] had to be seen in *context* before the extent of its harm can be assessed and appropriate intervention can be agreed' (DH, 1995a: 53, original emphasis). The research demonstrated that 'with the exception of a few severe assaults and some sexual maltreatment' (p. 53) long-term difficulties for children seldom followed from a single abusive incident – rather, they were more likely to be a consequence of living in an unfavourable environment, particularly one which was *low in warmth and high in criticism*. Only in a small proportion of cases in the research was abuse seen as extreme and warranting immediate child protection interventions.

The report argued that 'if we put to one side the severe cases' (p. 19), the most deleterious situations in terms of longer-term outcomes for children were those

Spell out?

of *emotional neglect* and a prime concern should be the *parenting style* that failed to compensate for the inevitable deficiencies that become manifest in the course of the 20 years or so that it takes to bring up a child. Unfortunately, the research suggested that these were just the situations where the child protection system was least successful. Many children and parents felt alienated and angry and there was an overemphasis on forensic concerns, with far too much time and resources being spent on child protection investigations with a failure to develop longer-term coordinated preventive strategies. The significance of the 'refocusing' debate was that it had the effect of relocating concerns about child protection in a much wider context of providing services to children 'in need', particularly where there were concerns about emotional neglect and parenting style, and thereby arguing for the greater integration of children's services more generally.

Subsequent government research, carried out in the mid-1990s, which reviewed the progress in implementing the Children Act, painted a similar picture. While the overview on the 'messages from research' was not available until 2001 (Department of Health, 2001), most of the projects had been completed and submitted to government some years earlier. Crucially, the research reinforced the message that while there was some progress, local authority social service departments had found it very difficult to 'refocus' their services in the way suggested. Recommendations from the overview called for: improvements in inter-agency work, particularly between social services, health and education; the development of a wide range of accessible and appropriate services; and an improvement in the ability of social workers to work with families to use these resources appropriately. The difficulty of different agencies working together was not helped by the lack of a common language for describing 'need', together with a tendency for agencies to defend themselves against demand and 'pass the buck'. Particular problems were identified with the assessment of children and their families for the purposes of identifying 'need' and thereby allocating appropriate resources.

The essential message was to emphasize the importance of working with families in a way that would keep children in their families and improve their outcomes. These outcomes were conceived widely and included the child's education, emotional and physical well-being, their ties with their family, together with their sense of identity and preparation for the future.

The 'Looking After Children' (LAC) Project

These were all themes that were reflected in the 'Looking After Children' (LAC) project. For running alongside the 'refocusing' debate was the development of the LAC project which aimed to improve the life changes and outcomes for children who were 'looked after' by the local authority, the first stage of which was the publication of the report by the original working party (Parker et al., 1991). The project was prompted by growing political and professional concerns about

18 Understanding children's social care

the poor outcomes achieved by 'looked after' children according to a wide range of criteria and the scandals concerning the treatment and abuse of children in children's homes, which received wide media coverage from the late 1980s onwards (Corby et al., 2001). It was seen as vital that local authorities fulfilled their responsibilities as 'corporate parents' to the children and young people they 'looked after' (Jackson and Kilroe, 1996). Much of the evidence suggested that not only did 'looked after' children not succeed educationally but that their health, mental health, general well-being and integration into mainstream society was poor. Those who had been 'looked after' appeared to make up a disproportionate number of the unemployed, criminals and a variety of other groups later in life. At the heart of the LAC project was an attempt to make explicit what 'good parenting means in practice' (DH, 1995b: 22) so that local authorities could fulfil their corporate parenting responsibilities.

Seven 'developmental dimensions' were identified as being key to achieving long-term well-being in adulthood:

- health
- education
- identity
- family and peer relationships
- emotional and behavioural development
- self-care and competence
- social presentation

The key components of the LAC system were a series of six age-related *Assessment and Action Records* (AARs) and within the seven developmental dimensions the AARs set specific age-related objectives for children's progress. They then posed two types of question: first, how far were children progressing towards recognized developmental objectives; and second, whether they were being given the experiences or services that were necessary for their attainment. The AARs were set within a system for gathering information and reviewing children's cases that would provide baseline information about the specific needs of individual children, the situation of their families and the purpose of providing the service. While the AARs were implemented initially as a practice tool, this was secondary to their original purpose which was to provide local authorities with a systematic means of gathering information that would enable them to assess the outcomes of 'looked after' children away from home. Information on individual children could be aggregated to assess the effectiveness of the service as a whole.

While originally introduced specifically for use with children being 'looked after', increasingly local authorities and researchers began to examine how far the LAC system could be adapted and developed for assessing outcomes in relation to a much wider population of children who came into contact with social

service departments and other health and welfare agencies (Ward, 1998). The system was to provide a crucial foundation for the development of the *Framework for the Assessment of Children in Need and their Families* (Department of Health et al., 2000b), the *Integrated Children's System* (ICS) (Department of Health, 2003; Walker and Scott, 2004), and the *Common Assessment Framework* (CAF) (Department for Education and Skills, 2006e,f), all of which we will discuss in subsequent chapters.

'Early Childhood Prevention'

The third development during this period was located on the margins of debates in mainstream child welfare and protection and was much more associated with growing concerns about youth crime. Increasingly, a powerful case was made in the 1990s from a diverse set of constituencies, which included the Family Policy Studies Centre (Utting et al., 1993), the Joseph Rowntree Foundation (Utting, 1995) and the National Children's Bureau (Sinclair et al., 1997; Utting, 1998), that 'early childhood prevention' strategies should be placed at the centre of policies for children and families, and that the current approaches were unnecessarily restrictive. The case for prevention was pragmatic and rooted in the changing nature of family life but argued for a higher profile for the state:

While believing the relationships and choice of lifestyle within families should normally be a private matter, it accepts that this cannot always be the case. The welfare and safety of children, in particular, are viewed as a collective responsibility which can be met through the public provision of preventive services and intervention where necessary. ... Indeed, the financial and social costs which fall to the community as a result of family malfunction and breakdown are reason in themselves to justify the essential contribution of public policy involvement (Utting, 1995, p. 8).

The way children grow up was seen as key to their future attitudes, behaviour and achievements and this was seen as being crucially 'conditioned by their relationships with parents and other members of their families' (Utting, 1995: 32). In a rapidly changing world, the role of parents was seen as providing the key mediator between the challenges of adult life and the way children develop. The attitudes and behaviour of parents were key to the way children develop from the moment of their conception.

The importance of prevention for pre-empting future crime was underlined. Criminological studies over many years had consistently identified a range of family-based factors linked to an increased risk of offending. David Farrington, perhaps the leading proponent of the theory and practice of youth criminality prevention, identified a number of key 'risk factors' including: poor child rearing; hyperactivity; low intelligence; harsh or erratic parental discipline; divorce; low income and poor housing, which significantly contributed to future criminality

20 Understanding children's social care

(Farrington, 2000). Overlapping personal and environmental risk factors were identified not only in relation to drug abuse, criminal behaviour and violence but also for educational failure, unsafe sexual behaviour and poor mental health (Dryfoos, 1990; Mrazek and Haggerty, 1994; Goldblatt and Lewis, 1998).

However, the role of prevention was not only to combat the negatives or risks involved but to enhance the positives and opportunities for child development by maximizing protective factors and processes. Rutter (1990) conceived of risk and protection as processes rather than fixed states and saw protectors as the basis for opening up opportunities. The timing of interventions was crucial for, if they were to have the most impact, the 'early years' were key and success depended on recruiting parents – usually mothers – into the role of educators. The notion of protection was thus wider than simply protection from harm or abuse. Trying to maximize childhood 'strengths' and 'resilience' was thereby emphasized. Crucially, such an approach was seen as providing a major contribution to policies which aimed to tackle the causes of crime and anti-social behaviour.

Importantly, these developments were taking place shortly after the abduction and murder in February 1993 of two-year old James Bulger by two eight-year old boys, Jon Venables and Robert Thompson. Media and political responses suggested that childhood was in 'crisis' (Scruton, 1997) and was in need of serious attention, and where the relationship between the state, the child and the family was in need of realignment. It coincided with Tony Blair becoming shadow Home Secretary when he coined the phrase 'tough on crime, tough on the causes of crime' (Blair, 1993) which was to lie at the core of the emergence of New Labour in the mid-1990s. No longer could policy be based on the premise of trying to ensure the privacy of a traditional nuclear family, which had been a central assumption of the Conservative government. If crime were to be taken seriously and social disadvantage overcome, the state would have to take a much more active and interventional role in relation to children and their development.

Conclusions

Taken together, the 'refocusing' debate, the development of the LAC project and the growing arguments for the need to emphasize 'early childhood prevention' in order to tackle a number of social problems, particularly in relation to crime and anti-social behaviour, were to provide important foundations for the key developments that were to take place following the election of the New Labour government in May 1997. What is also apparent is that the nature, focus and aspirations of social work in social services departments had changed considerably from the early 1970s. The various research projects carried out in relation to child protection and child welfare more generally clearly demonstrated that social service departments defined their role narrowly and that social workers

Local authority children's services in the post-war period 21

were having to set strict priorities as to what they did and were engaged in various forms of rationing of both their time and, more generally, the allocation of services. They had moved away from the much more generic, community-based vision of social work outlined in the Seebohm Report (1968) and the Barclay Report (1982). This process had been reinforced by organizational changes following the Children Act 1989 and the NHS and Community Care Act 1990, whereby all departments became much more specialist. Not only did departments separate their functions in terms of adults and children, but within each there was much greater specialization. Rather than be organized in terms of localities, teams covered much larger – often authority wide – populations and concentrated on certain specialist tasks, including: intake; long term; looked-after children; fostering; adoption; leaving care; family support; out-of-hours emergencies, etc. In addition, local authority social services had become particularly tarnished by the high profile child abuse inquiries and, as Jordan with Jordan (2000) have argued, were seen as very much associated with the 'Old Labour' approach to welfare – something which New Labour was determined to move beyond. It is the New Labour approach to social policy and welfare we turn to in the next chapter.