

The Contractual Culture and Children's and Family Services

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**Public service reform
Fears of misapplied, squandered
investment opportunities and
corruption.**

**Tools to assuage these fears:
inspection
targets
stringent evaluation
a competitive ethos**

Changing directions

**competition / markets
controls of centralisation
new localism
arms length administration**

**For all the flurry of changing
directions, the common theme
throughout public service
enhancement is a tightening of the
contract with those who deliver
public services on our behalf – the
'contractual culture'**

Reservations / discontents in family and children's services

child protection - managing risk through detailed procedural requirements and control structures is not conducive to constructive working by social workers (Cooper et al., 2003).

funding instability and the constant focus of attention on contract bidding is detracting from stable services and professional collaboration (Price Waterhouse, 2006).

Reservations / discontents in family and children's services

targets have received disproportionate attention at the cost of the totality of provision; figure massaging because of pressure to deliver

elaborate inspection regimes that are onerous (Department for Communities and Local Government, 2006).

This policy review looks at the contractual culture in relation to the governance of family services and assesses ways in which we can tackle the drawbacks that are hampering the delivery of services that are creative and fit for purpose.

Some fundamentals of accountability, probity and efficiency pertain across the board, but a particularly flexible and responsive regime is needed for personal services such as family support.

Family support is a rapidly developing range of provision in the personal service field; it is vital that its systems of governance and operation are re-appraised.

Central to the UK government's activity on the redress of social fragmentation.

Family services include:

- **information;**
- **advice**
- **parent/child leisure and learning activities;**
- **the parental role and schools and parents involvement in their children's education;**

- **befriending;**
- **group-work;**
- **counselling;**
- **therapeutic facilities;**

- **couple relationship support;**
- **help with special needs;**
- **support for families where either the parent or child has a disability or health issue;**

- **the broader monitoring of children's wellbeing.**
- (UK Commission on Families and the Wellbeing of Children, 2005)**

Values

- a highly personal and consumer specific perspective; social and cultural diversity in families and relationships
- shift in power relations from providers as benefactors to consumers as citizens with entitlements and the capacity to pursue these
- an *ethic of care*.

Programme for change 1 unleashing professional initiative

- drawing more effectively on professional expertise
- a place of prominence for professional values
- full professional participation in policy development and planning

- **peer review in the inspection process and rationalising that process**
- **more constructive government guidance with professional input; critical in relation to the management of risk**

Programme for change 2- review of planning and assessment processes

- **whole service planning perspective**
- **separation of evaluation and planning**
 - **reduction in service skews and unresponsiveness that have resulted from an over reliance on targets – particularly nationally determined targets**

Programme for change 3 – rationalising competition

**Not a return to monolithic state
bureaucracies**

- **each element of competition to be considered on its merits minimising disruption and unnecessary reorganisation.**

- **a substantial market of providers may suggest the value of competitive tendering**
 - **a limited market or a need of significant stability are pointers against competition**
- **procurement protocols that facilitate flexibility in the interests of supporting children and their families.**

Programme for change 4 - accountability

- **empowering user input across government, commissioner and provider interactions**
- **citizen enforcement powers in relation to minimum support levels**

- **wider needs led responses with a strong local dimension; institutional representation; research based needs assessments across a wide constituency of interests; individually defined need expressed through the one to one relationship between user and professional.**

**Programme for change 5 – balance
between a rights and welfare approach**

- **UK family service governance predominantly welfare orientated**
- **transition required to provision underwritten by rights and entitlements - a major change in the axis of power in favour of the user**

- **a pincer movement proposed taking the benefits of welfare and rights approaches in a model that spans both.**

