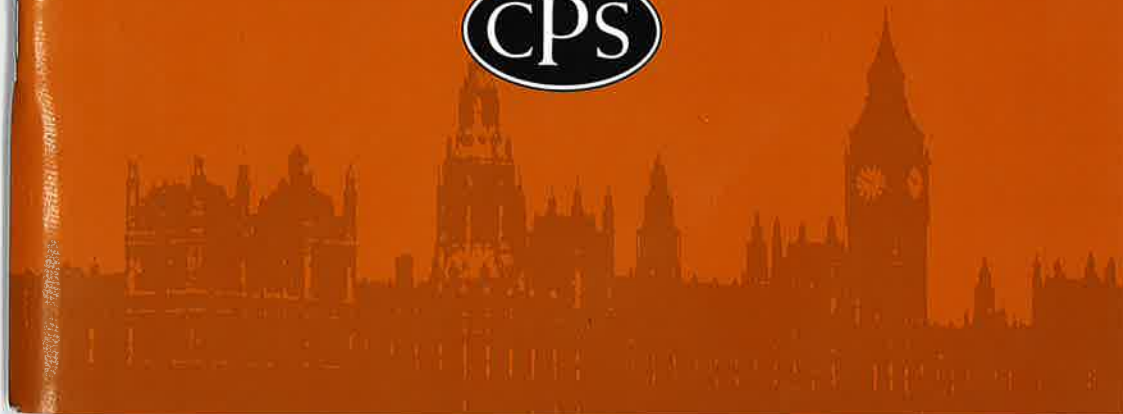


CENTRE FOR POLICY STUDIES

The Nationalisation of Childhood

JILL KIRBY





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CENTRE FOR POLICY STUDIES
57 Tufton Street London SW1P 3QL
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THE AUTHOR

JILL KIRBY is a policy analyst who writes and broadcasts on family issues. A graduate of Bristol University, she qualified as a solicitor and practised in a leading City law firm until the birth of the first of her three sons. She chairs the CPS/Civitas Family Policy Project and is the author of *Broken Hearts: family decline and the consequences for society* (Centre for Policy Studies, 2002); *Choosing to be different: women, work and the family* (CPS, 2003); and *The Price of Parenthood* (CPS, 2005).

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CONTENTS

Summary

1. Introduction	1
2. Every Child Matters	5
3. Sure Start	24
4. Childcare for All	35
5. Conclusions and Recommendations	46

Appendix 1: the Government's Five Point Plan

SUMMARY

- In a bid to reduce “inequality of outcomes”, the Government has devised a national strategy setting out its objectives for every child “from conception to age 19.” These objectives are laid down by statute, subject to Public Service Agreement targets and measured by OFSTED. Parents are expected to support these objectives.
- To accomplish its strategy, the Government is merging child protection services with the education system and putting every child’s ID into a national computer database in order to monitor their use of services.
- All services to children and families are to be centred in the education system, using a network of Children’s Centres for birth to five year olds and Extended Schools for five to 14 year olds. In what the Prime Minister describes as “a new frontier for the Welfare State”, universal childcare will be available through this network on a “dawn to dusk” basis.
- The Government believes that this strategy, labelled “Every Child Matters” will ensure that vulnerable children are protected from harm and all children will fulfil their potential. In fact, as the recent evidence from Sure Start demonstrates, this “universal, non-stigmatising” approach is dangerously likely to put more children at risk and leave the most needy even further behind.

SUMMARY

- Because it refuses to identify the real-life causes of the worst outcomes for children, such as young lone motherhood and family disruption, the Government is failing the most vulnerable. At the same time, it is undermining the most reliable source of security and wellbeing for every child: the presence and commitment of both parents.
- The Government's agenda for children and families directly contradicts its claims to deliver more "personalised" services; it is a centralising, controlling and regulating agenda that fails to respond to individual needs. It builds on the Chancellor's doctrine of "progressive universalism", rooted in the belief that the state must intervene in the lives of all, for their own good.
- In the guise of a caring, child-centred administration, this Government is effecting a radical change in the balance of authority between parents, children and the state. It is nationalising the upbringing of children.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

DURING THE BLAIR YEARS, New Labour has given the appearance of abandoning old-fashioned socialism. Embracing the language of the free market, acknowledging the importance of choice and talking of the need to "personalise" public services, it has put on a good show of being a modern, post-Thatcher government of the centre ground. Yet under the skin, this Government's socialist heart beats strong. Nowhere is this more apparent than in its programme for raising children, a programme which displays a remarkable confidence in the ability of the state to regulate the lives of its citizens and to control their destinies.

This Government has a five-point plan for the welfare of every child in England.¹ The plan concerns the health, education and economic status of children as well as their behaviour, sexual health, relationships, personal skills and more. In order to forestall possible criticism, the Government asserts that this plan has been drawn up in response to the desires of the nation's children, through a process of consultation with them. This is not merely a wish-list or statement of pious hopes, but a purposeful and universal agenda. The Department for Education and Skills (DfES) has broken it down into a sub-set of 25 detailed objectives, which will have the force of statute, be subject to OFSTED inspection and measured against Public Service Agreements and government targets.²

¹ *Every Child Matters*, Green Paper, 2003, Cm 5860, p6.

² *Every Child Matters: Change for Children*, Department for Education and Skills 2004. For a full list, see the Appendix of this pamphlet.

THE NATIONALISATION OF CHILDHOOD

To assist in the fulfilment of its plan, provisions in the 2004 Children Act enable the Government to set up a database which will allocate an identity number to every child in England and Wales and will carry personal data for cross-referencing children's records between health, education and child protection services.³

New duties are to be imposed on every local authority to ensure that childcare is universally available.⁴ The Government proposes that by 2010 every school will be able to offer "wrap-around" childcare for every child up to the age of 14, from 8am to 6pm throughout the year, school holidays included.⁵ As the Prime Minister explained, as he commended the Childcare Bill to the House of Commons in November 2005, this

...effectively means a new frontier for the Welfare State.

This "new frontier" bears a remarkable similarity to the Marxist concept in which the collectivisation of childcare was considered essential to achieve an equal society with full productivity. Marx recognised that "you cannot abolish the family; you have to replace it".⁶ As Leon Trotsky later explained, "the functions of the family" were to be absorbed by the "institutions of the socialist society."

The Marxist doctrine was brought up to date by Anthony Giddens, one of the architects of New Labour, in 1998. In *The Third Way*,⁷ Giddens explained how the "democratisation" of the family demands that responsibility for childcare be shared not only between men and women but also between parents and non-parents. Giddens also proposed that in the democratic family, parents would have to "negotiate" for authority over their children.

The Blair Government signalled its commitment to shared responsibility for childcare soon after the 1997 election, and the expansion and subsidy of non-family care has been a key

³ Children Act 2004, section 12; also see DfES announcement, 8 December 2004.

⁴ Childcare Bill 2005, Part 1.

⁵ HM Treasury & DfES, *Supporting Parents – the best start for children*, December 2005.

⁶ Leon Trotsky, "Thermidor in the family", from *Revolution Betrayed*, 1936.

⁷ A Giddens, *The Third Way – The Renewal of Social Democracy*, 1998, Chapter 3.

INTRODUCTION

component of the Chancellor's welfare agenda. Only in 2002, however, did the Government make clear the full extent of its proposed intervention in "the functions of the family", by announcing the development of:

...an overarching strategy for all children and young people from conception to age 19.⁸

Intended to "cover all aspects of children's and young people's lives" this strategy would:

...articulate the outcomes Government wishes to see for children and young people.

As this language demonstrates, the strategy is intended to create a direct relationship between child and state, with objectives determined by Government, not by parents. The role of parents would, in effect, be subsidiary to the state.

By the time Labour was elected for a third term in 2005, this "overarching strategy" was gaining real momentum. Its statutory provisions were largely enacted by the 2004 Children Act (to be supplemented by the forthcoming Childcare Bill). Details of the scope and implementation of the strategy have been laid out in an ambitious DfES agenda, under the incontrovertible title *Every Child Matters*. In accordance with the doctrine of "progressive universalism", modelled by Gordon Brown and his Treasury advisers, the strategy requires that the Government shall intervene in the lives of every child, but with the intention of providing extra help to those children who need it most.

Opposition to the Government's strategy for children has been tentative and fragmented. Some Conservatives have expressed unease at the direction in which the Government is travelling, and Shadow Children's Minister Tim Loughton has made a thoughtful case against some of the most intrusive and prescriptive aspects of the legislation. Concerns have been raised by the Liberal Democrats

⁸ DWP, *Delivering for Children and Families*, 1998, p12.

about the child database and its potential to become a system of ID cards by stealth, and newspapers of both Left and Right have expressed scepticism about the merger of children's services and the effectiveness of the Sure Start initiative. But these concerns have not been consolidated, and there has been no attempt to question the full scope of the Government's programme and its impact on family life.

The Government justifies its programme of universal intervention on the grounds that it wants to see every child fulfil his or her potential. It sounds compassionate. But the Government's agenda is both dangerous and misguided. Not only does it enable the state to become involved in the upbringing of every child, displacing the primacy of parents, but it also puts at risk the welfare of the most vulnerable. Because it refuses to identify the real-life causes of the poorest outcomes for children, such as young lone motherhood and family disruption, the Government is incapable of helping those children. Through its determination not to "stigmatise", the Government is turning its back on the most needy. At the same time, it is undermining the most reliable source of security and well-being for every child: the presence and commitment of both parents.

In the guise of a caring, child-centred administration, constantly proclaiming its desire to support parents and reduce inequality, this Government is effecting a radical change in the balance of authority between parents, children and the state. The nationalisation of childhood is no longer a Marxist dream; it is becoming a British reality.

EVERY CHILD MATTERS

"EVERY CHILD MATTERS" first appeared as the title of a Green Paper published in September 2003. Promising "radical reform" across the provision of all services to children, the Green Paper envisaged:

...a framework of universal services which aims to prevent negative outcomes and support every child to develop their full potential.⁹

Although it was about much more than the issue of child protection, the Green Paper made frequent reference to the well-publicised horrific death of eight year old Victoria Climbié. It was the Laming Report of January 2003 (following Lord Laming's inquiry into Victoria's death) that prepared the ground for Every Child Matters.¹⁰

Two techniques deployed in the Green Paper recur through the Government's approach to children's services, evidenced in ministerial speeches and in government reports. First, the invocation of a particularly disturbing and recent case where a child has suffered abuse;¹¹ and, secondly, the declaration by ministers that they really care about children and have their well-

⁹ *Every Child Matters*, Green Paper, 2003, p13.

¹⁰ *The Victoria Climbié Inquiry, Report of an Inquiry by Lord Laming*, CM5730, 2003.

¹¹ For example: "the fact that a child like Victoria Climbié can still suffer almost unimaginable cruelty to the point of eventually losing her young life shows that things are still very far from right. More can and must be done." Tony Blair, Foreword to *Every Child Matters*, Green Paper, 2003.

being at heart.¹² These techniques can be very effective in suppressing dissent, as the implication is that those who object to the Government's proposals are heartless and uncaring.

The Laming Report

The death of Victoria Climbié in 2000 at the hands of her great-aunt and boyfriend, after persistent and horrifying abuse, had been notable not only for the manner of her death but because all the authorities with whom Victoria had come into contact had so plainly failed her. Lord Laming's inquiry into the circumstances of Victoria's death heard that there were 12 occasions when relevant services could have intervened to prevent her slow torture. In her short period of residence in London leading up to her death, Victoria was known to four social services departments, three housing authorities, two child protection teams from the Metropolitan Police, two hospitals and one NSPCC child protection centre. All had failed to act on their concerns about her treatment or, through contact with each other, to piece together the pattern of her abuse.

Lord Laming was highly critical of what he called the "sloppy and unprofessional performance" of those agencies, who had failed to implement basic child protection procedures; "hapless" front line staff and bad management. He also blamed "widespread organisational malaise",¹³ lack of accountability and poor information sharing. In his Report, Laming concluded that structural problems in the local organisation of child protection contributed to these problems. He cited the fact that while local authorities (and their social services departments) had been reorganised to cover smaller geographical areas, local health

¹² "Children are precious. The world they must learn to inhabit is one in which they will face hazards and obstacles alongside real and growing opportunities. They are entitled not just to the sentiment of adults but a strategy that safeguards them as children and realises their potential to the very best of our ability." Paul Boateng, then Chief Secretary to the Treasury, *Every Child Matters*, Green Paper, 2003.

¹³ *The Laming Inquiry*, p4.

authorities had moved in the opposite direction, making interaction between the two unwieldy. Area Child Protection Committees, intended to take responsibility for such interaction, had become bureaucratic and inefficient, and there appeared to be wide variations in the size and standard of these Committees, leading to inconsistency, inefficiency and lack of accountability.

Having identified the specific failings in the Climbié case, and having considered the extent to which these failings might be symptomatic of wider problems in child protection, the Laming Report concluded with a list of 108 recommendations for reform. The majority of these were specific, detailed proposals to improve efficiency and accountability in the front line, where the most palpable negligence had occurred in Victoria's case. There were also a number of more general recommendations for structural reform, including the replacement of Area Protection Committees with new Management Boards for Services to Children and Families, which would include representatives from all the relevant agencies.¹⁴

But included in the general recommendations were a series of proposals that went far beyond the child protection system. Abruptly asserting that:

...it is not possible to separate the protection of children from wider support to families¹⁵

...the Report recommended fundamental changes in the provision of services by the state to children and their parents. Anticipating the support of the Government for these changes, the Report advised that "with the support of the Prime Minister" a new Children and Families Board, chaired by a senior minister, should be created "at the heart of Government".¹⁶ A National Agency for Children and Families should be set up, led by a Children's Commissioner. This agency should, amongst other things:

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p372.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p6.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p371.

THE NATIONALISATION OF CHILDHOOD

*...advise on setting nationally agreed outcomes for children and how they might best be achieved and monitored.*¹⁷

At local level, child protection should be merged with family services, each local authority creating a Committee for Children and Families, with members drawn from social services, the NHS, education, housing and the police. Each Committee would in turn oversee the work of the Management Board, which would appoint a Director of Children and Family Services. Finally, the Report recommended that the Government should “explore the benefit to children of setting up and operating a national children’s database on all children under 16.”¹⁸

An inquiry which had set out to rationalise child protection and increase co-operation between agencies ended up by laying the ground for the Government to merge all its services to children and families, and to track every child in the country.

Universal outcomes

Taking up the assertion made in the Laming Report, the Green Paper reiterated that child protection:

*...cannot be separated from policies to improve children’s lives as a whole.*¹⁹

This statement of belief provides the foundation for the Government’s entire agenda for children. To question its validity amounts almost to heresy. Yet it deserves questioning. The implication of the Government’s approach is that a vulnerable child will be best protected by the development of a universal programme “aimed” at 11 million children. Can this really make sense?

Of those 11 million children, there are at present around 26,000 officially recorded as being “at risk” of abuse and harm, entered on local child protection registers.²⁰ Analysis of the

EVERY CHILD MATTERS

backgrounds of those children has shown that there is a strong link between the likelihood of harm and certain parental characteristics, such as teenage lone motherhood, the presence of a father substitute, and parents with a criminal record or a history of mental illness.²¹ Surely the priority of any child protection service should be children who are registered and those whose backgrounds indicate high risk factors?

But the Government says it will:

*...focus both on the universal services which every child uses, and on more targeted services for those with additional needs.*²²

This is a contradiction in terms. To ‘focus’ is to concentrate attention upon an objective. It implies a desire to prioritise that objective. What the Government appears in fact to have decided is that it will concentrate its attention on a programme designed to scrutinise the lives of every child in Britain, and hopes that this will reduce the likelihood of abuse of the most vulnerable.

Thus the Government has embarked on a complete reorganisation of children’s services, moving child protection out of public health and into the education service and giving the Department for Education and Skills overall responsibility for protecting children at risk. At local level, this responsibility is devolved to 150 local authorities, acting through local Children’s Trusts, each supervised by a Director of Children’s Services. In order to carry out its child protection duties at the same time as improving outcomes for every child, each local authority will be measured by the DfES, who will assess all of its services for children against five outcomes.

It was in the 2003 Green Paper that these “outcomes” made their first appearance; they can now be found in each and every piece of government consultation or legislation referring to children or families. They are described as:

¹⁷ Ibid., p371.

¹⁸ Ibid., p373.

¹⁹ *Every Child Matters*, Green Paper, 2003, p5.

²⁰ Office of National Statistics, *Social Trends 2003*.

²¹ S J Creighton, *Child Abuse Trends in England and Wales 1988-90*, NSPCC, 1992.

²² *Every Child Matters*, Green Paper, 2003, p5.

THE NATIONALISATION OF CHILDHOOD

- *enjoying and achieving*
- *staying safe*
- *being healthy*
- *making a positive contribution*
- *economic well-being*

These are the five broad objectives for all children and young people that the Government has put in place. Given statutory force in the Children Act 2004,²³ they have been developed into a more detailed programme of 25 targets.²⁴ These include, for example, being “sexually healthy”, being “safe from bullying and discrimination”, achieving “personal and social development”, and developing “enterprising behaviour.”

In your dreams

So how exactly will the Government ensure that its five aims and 25 targets for children are reached? The 2004 DfES publication *Every Child Matters: Change for children* explains that there will be a “national framework for change” which will measure outcomes against Public Service Agreement targets (PSAs) and local performance indicators.

Every local authority must draw up a Children and Young People’s Plan, based on an “integrated needs analysis” to be in place by April 2006.²⁵ Inspections will be carried out by OFSTED, using national datasets, to measure local performance against national criteria; the results of these inspections will be fed into Local Authorities’ Comprehensive Performance Assessments.

Local Authorities will be permitted some discretion in reaching the national criteria, provided they remain within the Outcomes

²³ Children Act 2004 Part 2 Section 10.

²⁴ *Every Child Matters: Change for children*, DfES, 2004. See the Appendix of this pamphlet for the full list.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p21.

EVERY CHILD MATTERS

Framework. *Change for children* cites with approval the example of Portsmouth, which has already formulated the so-called “Portsmouth Eight.” This divides and embellishes the five national outcomes with the addition of two further aims for the children of Portsmouth: “the right to an active say in their development” and “the opportunity to succeed in achieving their dreams.”

How OFSTED will succeed in measuring dream-achievement in the Portsmouth area is not entirely clear. But for the Government’s 25 specified aims, performance indicators have been laid down in some detail, with 26 PSA targets and 13 other “key indicators.”²⁶ Being healthy, for example, will be measured against PSA targets for the reduction in the percentage of obese children, suicide rates and child smoking. OFSTED must determine whether “healthy lifestyles” are being promoted to children and young people, and whether enough of them are eating five portions of fruit and vegetables every day. Is breast-feeding being increased, and are children being discouraged from drug abuse?

Targets, targets

“Staying safe” demands a reduction in the percentage of children who say they are being bullied, as well as fewer children being killed on the roads. OFSTED must also consider whether children and their “carers” are being informed about “key risks and how to deal with them.” “Enjoying and achieving” requires evidence of an increased take-up of “recreational and cultural opportunities” and a narrowing of the attainment gap for children in the 20% most deprived areas, through children being “enabled and encouraged to attend and enjoy school.”

“Making a positive contribution” entails an increase in the percentage of 18 year olds who are self-employed or thinking of starting their own business. It also requires a reduction in the percentage of teenagers who admit to attacking, threatening or being rude to someone due to race, religion or skin colour. The

²⁶ *Ibid.*, pE4.

extent to which children may be considered to be “achieving economic well-being” will be determined by such measures as the take-up of childcare and of further education. Steps must be taken to ensure that young people are financially literate, and the use of temporary accommodation for families is to be minimised.

Many of these are worthy goals. But their conflation in an all-embracing strategy, with results to be inspected and measured by the state, demonstrates a totalitarian attitude to the raising of children that denies common sense and individual discretion. How are these targets to be reconciled with the Government’s desire to provide more personalised public services? How are head teachers to make their own decisions about the relative importance of teaching entrepreneurship and responding to bullying? Does the Government’s decision to liberalise licensing hours and downgrade the classification of cannabis sit well with the duty to discourage alcohol and drug use by young people?

Most important of all, what discretion is left to parents to identify their own priorities and the values which will determine their children’s welfare? In the list of more than 50 inspection criteria set out by the DfES, parents are mentioned just twice: they should be “helped to ensure their children are healthy” and “supported in helping young people to enjoy and achieve.”²⁷

Integration of services

In order to achieve the desired outcomes, and to protect all children while helping them fulfil their dreams, all front-line services to children are being integrated through the introduction of Children’s Trusts. Every local authority is required to set up a Children’s Trust, described by the Government as a “set of arrangements for partnership working... to deliver children’s services across the five outcomes.” The arrangements should cover “inter-agency governance, integrated strategy, integrated processes and integrated front-line delivery.”²⁸

²⁷ Ibid., pE4.

²⁸ DfES, *Children’s Trust Governance and Accountability – Questions and Answers*, 2005.

The Trusts will embrace all education and childcare facilities, child protection and social services and child mental health, and will share information about children with all child health providers. According to the DfES guidance for the establishment of the Trusts:

*People will work in effective multi-disciplinary teams, be trained jointly to tackle cultural and professional divides, use a lead professional model where many disciplines are involved, and be co-located, often in extended schools or children’s centres.*²⁹

The legal status of Children’s Trusts is unclear: the Government says that they do not have to be legal entities, but will be expected to operate as “partnerships” led by local authority representatives, using “consensual decision-making.” It will be up to local authorities to determine the exact structure and working methods of each Trust. The DfES envisages the possibility of multiple layers of bureaucracy, suggesting that each Trust may comprise “high level groups” for strategic decisions, supported by “second tier groups” of senior managers and “third tier groups” of professionals.³⁰

Children’s Trusts will enable budgets to be pooled to provide both health and education services, and professionals may be re-trained to enable them to become children’s service providers with a mix of medical, educational and social service expertise. Described as a “model of whole-system change”, the Children’s Trust is illustrated by the following diagram:³¹

²⁹ Children’s Trusts www.everychildmatters.gov.uk

³⁰ DfES, *Children’s Trust Governance and Accountability – Questions and Answers*, 2005.

³¹ Reproduced from DfES, *Every Child Matters: Change for Children*, 2004.



Transformation on a shoestring

The Government believes that the introduction of Children's Trusts will lead to a transformation in children's services:

This re-shaping will require personalised and high quality, integrated universal services, which give easy access to effective and targeted specialist services. These will be delivered by a skilled and effective workforce.³²

But it is not easy to see how this level of quality, "personalisation" and easy access to specialist services is to be achieved simply through the merger of services. The Government intends most of it to be funded out of existing budgets, topped up by a one-off payment of just £100,000 to each local authority. Described as a "Change Fund Grant," this modest payment can be spent by local authorities on:

...any aspect of children's trust arrangements, including multi-agency and multi-disciplinary working, common assessment,

³² DfES, *Every Child Matters: Change for children*, 2004, p13.

information sharing, joint commissioning or setting up Local Safeguarding Children Boards.³³

Clearly it will have to be spread very thinly. As the DfES Select Committee gently pointed out in March 2005:

Every Child Matters is an extremely ambitious and expensive programme... The evidence we have seen has not convinced us that the financial implications of the Every Child Matters programme of reform have been properly assessed or comprehensively modelled, and it is therefore not clear on what basis the Government is able to assume that Every Child Matters will be largely self-financing.

The Government appears to believe both that the transformation can be effected and that it can be paid for by the savings which will result from a new-found co-operation between doctors, teachers and social workers. In a triumph of hope over experience, it also seems confident that social services, health and education budgets will have fewer demands placed upon them, due to the improved wellbeing of the nation's children which will result from these initiatives.

On the other hand, it seems more probable that the new structure will be so weighed down with inter-professional guidelines, multi-agency protocols and information-sharing procedures that it will generate more of the "bureaucratic activity" which, in Lord Laming's view, was so damaging in the Climbié case.

Tracking every child

On 8 December 2005, the Government announced that it would use the enabling provisions of the 2004 Children Act to set up a central index to cover all children in England, its data to be divided into 150 parts to correspond with the 150 English local authorities. This database is to be in place by 2008, and is

³³ "While this small grant will allow local areas to kick-start change in various ways, the increased efficiency of more joined-up working and less duplication gives every incentive to reconfigure baseline budgets in order to support new ways of working." DfES, *Every Child Matters: Change for children*, 2004, p27.

estimated to cost £224m to set up, with ongoing operating costs of £41m per year. According to Children's Minister Beverley Hughes, this index will enable practitioners to "share relevant information about children who need services, or about whose welfare they are concerned."³⁴

The national database had its genesis in the Climbié Inquiry. It did not flow directly from the desire to share information across professional boundaries, however, but from an Inquiry hearing which (in the words of the Laming Report):

*...focused on the means by which we can be sure that every child is included in the general provision of services to which they are entitled.*³⁵

Greater population mobility, homelessness and family breakdown were all considered to make it more likely that a child could remain unknown to children's service providers. Lord Laming suggested that a national index could overcome this, with every child registered soon after birth (or on arrival in England) and then tracked throughout childhood.³⁶

Lord Laming did enter a number of caveats, acknowledging that there would be concerns about the intrusive nature of such an index and the risk of it falling into unauthorised hands. Nevertheless, the Green Paper took up and amplified the proposal for a universal database, recommending that every child should be given a unique identity number and that all local authorities should keep a list of children in their area, the services the child has had contact with, and details of the relevant professionals.³⁷

These recommendations were carried through to the 2004 Children Act, which gave the Government wide powers to set up a

database to carry all this information and more.³⁸ During the passage of the Act through the House of Commons, Shadow Children's Minister Tim Loughton objected to the use of a universal index, pointing out that creating a universal database does not necessarily make children safer, and indeed could lead to a 'tick-box' mentality; he also suggested that to focus instead on vulnerable children would be more likely to provide them with practical protection.

But the then Children's Minister, Margaret Hodge, was implacable, insisting that every child must be put on the list. Mrs Hodge claimed that this was necessary to ensure that all children have access to "all the universal services to which they are entitled."³⁹

Needle in a haystack

In her evidence to the Education and Skills Select Committee examining Every Child Matters, Mrs Hodge remained equally adamant. She said that a universal index was essential for early intervention; that a third of all children had "additional needs" of some kind, so they would be more easily tracked through this index, and finally that:

³⁸ Children Act 2004 s12(4) The information referred to in subsection (3) is information of the following descriptions in relation to a person—(a) his name, address, gender and date of birth; (b) a number identifying him; (c) the name and contact details of any person with parental responsibility for him (within the meaning of section 3 of the Children Act 1989 (c. 41)) or who has care of him at any time; (d) details of any education being received by him (including the name and contact details of any educational institution attended by him); (e) the name and contact details of any person providing primary medical services in relation to him under Part 1 of the National Health Service Act 1977 (c. 49); (f) the name and contact details of any person providing to him services of such description as the Secretary of State may by regulations specify; (g) information as to the existence of any cause for concern in relation to him; (h) information of such other description, not including medical records or other personal records, as the Secretary of State may by regulations specify.

³⁹ Hansard, 13 September 2004.

³⁴ DfES announcement, 8 December 2005 (see www.everychildmatters.gov.uk).

³⁵ Climbié Inquiry, p368.

³⁶ Climbié Inquiry, p368.

³⁷ *Every Child Matters* Green Paper, 2003, p8.

THE NATIONALISATION OF CHILDHOOD

...a universal database is much less stigmatising, and therefore much easier to operate than one that is simply focused on children who are on the at-risk register.⁴⁰

Other witnesses to the Select Committee did not share this view. The Information Commissioner, Richard Thomas, thought it would be extremely difficult to spot at-risk children in a database of 11 million:

If you are looking for a needle in a haystack I am not sure it is wise to make the haystack even bigger.

His concerns were echoed by Dr Eileen Munro of the London School of Economics, who felt that developing a huge, intrusive and complex database would distract from front-line services.

Significantly, Dr Munro pointed out that the decision to set up a database betrayed a fundamental misunderstanding about the mistakes made in the Climbié case, where:

...there was no shortage of information but there was a shortage of wisdom of how to understand that information.

In the words of Select Committee chairman, Labour MP Barry Sheerman:

You are going to have a register of every child in the country to find out if there are problems in a very small number.

The Select Committee concluded:

We are not convinced that sufficient evidence currently exists to justify the commissioning of the proposed IT-based child indexes. We have significant reservations about whether this will represent the best use of resources and very significant concerns about critical issues such as security, confidentiality and access arrangements. We are concerned in particular that the current research evidence does

EVERY CHILD MATTERS

not conclusively demonstrate that expenditure in this area is the best way of improving outcomes for children.⁴¹

Security risks

Notwithstanding all these concerns, the Government is pressing ahead, deploying all the powers granted to it by the 2004 Act. The Policy Statement⁴² that accompanied the December 2005 announcement explained that data on every child in England will be included in the index because it is not possible to predict which children might need “additional services”; and, as the index will show whether or not children are receiving education and health care, action can be taken to ensure they are getting these services. Each local authority will track each child up to the age of 18.

While the index will not record clinical observations or reports on attendance or academic performance, it will show whether practitioners (including social workers and youth offending teams) are taking action in relation to a child. Access to the index will be given to other practitioners across all children’s services. The Policy Statement claims that access will be secure against unauthorised users and that users will be subject to checks with the Criminal Records Bureau and “any additional checks introduced following the Bichard recommendations.”⁴³

The Policy Statement seeks to make a “business case” for the potential effectiveness of a national database, claiming that it will improve efficiency and save practitioners’ time and wasted referrals, asserting that these efficiency savings will amount to £88m a year. Only time will tell whether these optimistic claims are justified, but the wider concerns of the Government’s critics remain. Should every local authority (and consequently the state) be in possession of such a record on every child? And will it really help child protection agencies to identify children most at risk? As

⁴⁰ Evidence to Education and Skills Select Committee Enquiry on Every Child Matters, Wednesday 9 February 2005.

⁴¹ House of Commons Education and Skills Committee, Every Child Matters Ninth Report of Session 2004-05, para 113, p37.

⁴² DfES, *The Information Sharing Index*, 2005. www.everychildmatters.gov.uk

⁴³ Ibid.

Information Commissioner Richard Thomas told the DFES Select Committee, keeping a universal index fully up to date is a huge administrative task, yet there are potentially serious risks to children and their families if inaccurate or outdated information is stored.⁴⁴ And will reliance on the database become a substitute for face to face enquiries between professionals, so that children become more, rather than less, likely to slip through the net?

In view of the Government's delay in implementing the recommendations of the 2004 Bichard Report (as witnessed by the recent controversy over sex offenders in schools), can the public really have confidence that access to the index will be tightly controlled? After the IT debacle at the Child Support Agency, is it likely that the complex IT arrangements essential to the effective and safe working of the child index can be carried through?

Parents may also be concerned at the insistence that the database is necessary to ensure universal use of children's services. It is quite possible to envisage a situation where local authorities, keen to establish that a 'full service' is being provided to every child in their area, will use the index to apply pressure on parents. Those parents who decide to look after their pre-school children at home, to opt out of 'extended schools' or to avoid local childcare provision, may find themselves called to account for their decision on a regular basis. These are not just abstract questions of personal liberty, but go to the root of the relationship between families and the state.

The Children's Commissioner

A recurring theme in the Government's agenda for children is the desire to involve children directly in the policy process. The *Every Child Matters* Green Paper stated the Government's commitment to involving children in the "planning, delivery and evaluation of

⁴⁴ House of Commons Education and Skills Committee, *Every Child Matters*, Ninth Report of Session 2004-05, para 108, p36.

policies and services relevant to them."⁴⁵ Referring to children and young people as a "client group", the Green Paper proudly cites the representation of young people on local scrutiny committees and staff interview panels. The culmination of this process was the Government's decision to appoint a Children's Commissioner, who would "test the success of policies in terms of what children think and experience."

Children's Commissioners were appointed in the devolved administrations of Wales, Scotland, and Northern Ireland, from 2001 onwards. Initially resistant to the creation of such a post in England, the Government gave way following pressure from children's charities such as the NSPCC⁴⁶ and from the Joint Commission on Human Rights.⁴⁷ Part One of the Children Act 2004 thus provided for the establishment of a Commissioner to "promote awareness of the views and interests of children in England".⁴⁸ The appointment of Professor Al Ainsley-Green, formerly National Clinical Director for Children at the Department of Health, was announced in March 2005. With a salary in excess of £100,000 and an annual budget of £3m, the Commissioner will be supported by a Chief Operating Officer (salary £80,000) a Head of Policy and Research (£70,000) and Head of Communications and Participation (£70,000).⁴⁹ An interim staff team of nine will be expanded as the work of the Commissioner develops, developing corporate and business plans, with the task of reaching out to children across the country and soliciting their views.

It is hard to know whether the Government is taking this seriously. The jaunty website is decorated in the manner of a small child's schoolbook, yet it is filled with management-speak and

⁴⁵ *Every Child Matters* Green Paper, 2003, p78.

⁴⁶ See www.nspcc.org.uk

⁴⁷ *The Case for a Children's Commissioner for England*, Ninth Report from the Joint Committee on Human Rights, HL Paper 96/HC 666 May 2003.

⁴⁸ Children Act 2004, Part 1.

⁴⁹ www.childrenscommissioner.org

THE NATIONALISATION OF CHILDHOOD

technical terms likely to be impenetrable to most children: “effective collaboration”, “the UN Convention”, “transparency” and “embedding.” The Commissioner has very limited power to act independently of Government, and cannot initiate an inquiry into a particular child’s case, even where he considers the case has wider implications, unless the Government consents. The emphasis is on giving children a voice and “raising the profile of children and young people”, suggesting that the establishment of a Children’s Commissioner is little more than an expensive PR exercise.

Power to the state, not to parents

Yet the powers granted to the Commissioner by the 2004 Act are not negligible. While the Commissioner’s actions are to be constrained by ministerial discretion, no such discretion is reserved to parents. It is noticeable that there is not a single reference to parents, or to families, in Part One of the Act (being the Part dealing with the establishment of the Commissioner). The Commissioner is required to consult organisations working with children, but not to consult parents. Section 2(8) empowers the Commissioner, or anyone authorised by him, to conduct interviews with a child in private, subject only to the child’s consent; there is no proviso that parental consent should be sought or obtained, whatever the age of the child. This is not confined to matters of child protection. The power is a wide one, to enable the Commissioner to exercise his general function of drawing attention to the views and interests of children.

Conversations with children can of course lead to unforeseen consequences. In 1990 in Rochdale, a seven-year-old boy told his teachers he had been dreaming of ghosts. As a result of the social services investigations that ensued, allegations of “satanic abuse” were made and 20 children were taken from their parents. Some remained in care for months, others for years, despite the fact that the allegations were found to be unsubstantiated.⁵⁰

EVERY CHILD MATTERS

There is every reason to assume that the present Commissioner, and any staff he may appoint, will be motivated by genuine concern for children’s interests. But the prospect of young children being approached in schools, day care centres, playgrounds and elsewhere, and being privately interviewed without the knowledge or consent of parents, surely represents an unwelcome change in the relationship between parents, children and the state.

⁵⁰ “Our stolen childhood”, *The Times*, 10 January 2006.

SURE START

SURE START WAS LAUNCHED by the Government in 1998 as a cross-departmental initiative targeted at children under four and their families in 250 of Britain's poorest communities. Described as:

...key to the Government's drive to prevent social exclusion, raise educational standards, reduce health inequalities and promote opportunity...⁵¹

the Sure Start scheme was intended to have a beneficial impact on society beyond its target communities. The Government, reasonably enough, took the view that children who were poorly cared for in infancy were most at risk of adverse outcomes in later life; and that early behavioural problems were at the root of subsequent delinquency. Early intervention would not only be compassionate but would also pay off later in terms of crime reduction and social responsibility. The beneficiaries of Sure Start would, therefore, be children, families and communities in Sure Start areas as well as the wider society and taxpayers generally.⁵²

In an early sign of the Government's commitment to the integration of children's services, each local Sure Start programme brought together health, education and childcare professionals to work with parents and the voluntary sector. The Government was keen to ensure that parents and communities would 'own' their local programmes. In what was claimed as a "significant break

with past professional practices that were more hierarchical, formal and with an expert base", Sure Start was designed to be "inclusive" and, above all, "non-stigmatising."⁵³ Each area was to have a degree of flexibility in devising the way in which it would co-ordinate services and the mix between public and voluntary sector provision. But all were charged with four key objectives:

- Improving social and emotional development
- Improving health
- Improving children's ability to learn and
- Strengthening families and communities

To carry out these objectives, each local programme must offer certain core services, including early learning, childcare, parenting information and home visiting, health advice for children and parents, and advice on special needs.

Cost-benefit analysis

Sure Start was allocated a generous budget of £452m over the first three years (1999 to 2002) to develop programmes in 250 deprived areas covering an estimated total of 187,000 children – the equivalent of just under £2,500 per child over the three years.⁵⁴ By 2004 the number of programmes had doubled to 500, with a budget of £499m a year – nearly £1m per local programme (around £1,300 per child per year).

This represented a substantial budget for a brand new and untested initiative. To offset potential criticism of such expenditure, the Government proposed that Sure Start should be subject to ongoing evaluation, both locally and nationally. This was intended not only to establish whether the money was being spent to good effect, but also to enable lessons to be drawn from

⁵¹ DfEE, Sure Start prospectus, 1999.

⁵² National Evaluation of Sure Start (NESS), *National Evaluation of Sure Start – Methodology Report Executive Summary*.

⁵³ Sure Start, *Variations in Sure Start Local Programmes' Effectiveness, Early Preliminary Findings*, Report 14, November 2005.

⁵⁴ DfEE, Sure Start prospectus, 1999.

the earliest local projects to inform the design of those to come later, as the programme was rolled out nationally. The Institute for the Study of Children, Families and Social Issues at Birkbeck College was commissioned to design and conduct the national evaluation. Two distinguished academics in the field of child development, Professor Jay Belsky and Professor Edward Melhuish, are leading a team of academics and practitioners, supported by regionally based researchers to carry out the fieldwork, interviewing thousands of families. The budget allocated to the national evaluation is £20.3m.⁵⁵

The evaluation is an ongoing process, reporting at regular intervals. It is required to compare methods of implementation of Sure Start projects, ascertain the impact of the programmes on children, families and communities, and to seek to establish cost effectiveness.

The first significant report published by the evaluation team was in June 2004,⁵⁶ reporting on the results of home visits to 8,000 families in Sure Start areas and 3,000 families in comparison areas. Analyses on a wide range of child development, parenting and family measures revealed only one significant effect attributable to Sure Start: mothers in Sure Start areas were observed to treat their children in a “warmer and more accepting manner than in comparison areas.” The evaluation team considered this effect to be consistent with the “broad goals” of Sure Start. This first report stressed that it was too early to have much hope of clear results, since Sure Start projects had been under way for only a few years.

Nor did there appear to be any firm evidence of the characteristics of various local projects that might make them more successful. In the words of Phil Collins of the Social Market Foundation, giving evidence to the Education and Skills Select Committee:

⁵⁵ DfES Written Reply, 36325, 12 December 2005.

⁵⁶ *The Impact of Sure Start Local Programmes on Child Development and Family Functioning: a report on preliminary findings*, NESS June 2004.

*There had been enormous local discretion on what people did with Sure Start money. People followed a hunch locally and they had done what they thought was needed in their area, which generally speaking I applaud as an approach to things. It turns out that the bulk of them did things that made no difference at all. It was at best a placebo effect in most cases.*⁵⁷

Sure Start was rolled out across more neighbourhoods nationwide, however, and the national evaluation continued. The evaluation team's next reports, based on the second round of data collection, were eagerly awaited. Finally published in November 2005, nearly six months behind schedule, these included a second impact study, as well as reviews of maternity services and early learning and childcare facilities being provided through Sure Start.

An expensive failure?

Early leaks to *The Guardian*⁵⁸ in September 2005 hinted that the evaluation reports would find that children and families in Sure Start areas were showing little or no benefit and, in some cases, were actually doing less well as a result of Sure Start. When the full reports emerged, these hints were confirmed. Despite all the expenditure and the time spent by teams of professionals, parents and volunteers, there were only small overall differences in outcomes for families and children in Sure Start areas when compared to those in similar areas not covered by Sure Start. Some of these outcomes were negative rather than positive, thus leading to the uncomfortable conclusion that, for some of the most deprived children, Sure Start had done more harm than good.

Taking the first Sure Start goal of **social and emotional development**, the impact study⁵⁹ showed that children of teenage

⁵⁷ Education and Skills Select Committee Enquiry on Every Child Matters, 29 November 2004.

⁵⁸ P Toynbee, “Doubts over value of £3bn Sure Start”, *The Guardian*, 13 September 2005.

⁵⁹ NESS, *Early Impacts of Sure Start Local Programmes on Children and Families: report of the cross-sectional study of 9- and 36-month old children and their families*, Report 13, 2005.

mothers in Sure Start areas were *less* socially competent and had *more* behavioural problems than the equivalent children in neighbourhoods where Sure Start is not available. Amongst older mothers, results are slightly more positive, with lower levels of bad behaviour by three year-olds. These older mothers were also reported to have less chaotic households and to be more “accepting” of their toddlers’ behaviour and thus less likely to slap or scold. As the report puts it:

*...the relatively less disadvantaged section of the studied communities appear to be benefiting somewhat.*⁶⁰

But so far as the second goal of **educational outcomes** is concerned, the adverse effects of Sure Start are not, it seems, confined to teenage mothers. Children in workless households and those with single parents, whether teenage or older, all have *less* verbal ability if there is a Sure Start project in their neighbourhood. Hence the most deprived children seem most likely to have been further disadvantaged by the presence of Sure Start in their communities.

Turning to the **health** goals, the evaluation found that Sure Start was having no impact on child health or development. Nor was there any evidence of a reduction in mothers’ smoking in pregnancy – one of the “Key PSA Targets” for Sure Start identified by the Treasury.⁶¹ Nor does there seem to have been any increase in breastfeeding – indeed, some of the results suggest that mothers in Sure Start areas are *less* likely to breastfeed.⁶²

While the evaluators found that maternity staff involved in Sure Start were generally positive about the programme, it has also created additional demands on hard-pressed health visitors and midwives, both of whom are in short supply nationwide. In any event, as the report acknowledges:

⁶⁰ Ibid., p31.

⁶¹ HM Treasury, *Spending Review*, 2004.

⁶² See for example, NESS Report 13, p33: workless mothers less likely to breast feed through six weeks in Sure Start areas.

*The evidence of improvements in outcomes for mothers and babies which would persuade all mainstream maternity services to use the Sure Start approach remains elusive.*⁶³

Lastly, is Sure Start achieving its intended goal of ‘**strengthening families and communities**’? According to the report’s authors, the ‘theory of change’ prompted the expectation that as community services were enhanced in Sure Start areas, families and communities would function better. But this expectation has so far been disappointed. Most families in Sure Start areas do not perceive their services or communities to be any better than do those in comparison areas, and mothers of three year-olds actually rated their communities *less* favourably if there was a Sure Start locally. This is all the more surprising when it is noted that the ‘non Sure Start’ comparison areas were, in general, the more deprived.

Making matters worse

The adverse effects on the most disadvantaged families in Sure Start neighbourhoods should give cause for concern. As the authors of the evaluation admit:

*...a disproportionate amount of the current and future costs to society of failures in early development (eg school failure, drug abuse, crime, unemployment) derive from the most disadvantaged children growing up in the most disadvantaged families.*⁶⁴

As the report makes clear, the “most disadvantaged” are the workless (who represent 40% of all households assessed), the lone parents (33%) and the teenage mothers (14%). These are the households who were surely intended to benefit most from the Sure Start project. Instead, as the report’s authors surmise, it seems that:

⁶³ Sure Start, *Maternity Services Provision in Sure Start Local Programmes*, Report 12, November 2005.

⁶⁴ NESS, Report 13, p35.

...the utilisation of services by those with greater human capital left others with less access to services than would have been the case had they not lived in SSLP [Sure Start] areas⁶⁵

Two other possible explanations are advanced by the authors to explain why the mothers and children most at risk came off worst. First, that these mothers have been more defensive and less willing to participate in programmes which they could find threatening. Secondly, the theory of 'easy cases': Sure Start staff find it easier to work with the less challenging families and therefore opt to spend time with them, rather than the 'hard to reach.'

If it is true that Sure Start workers are indeed avoiding the more entrenched parenting problems on their patch, they are not alone. For it seems that Government Ministers, in setting the terms of reference for the Sure Start project, are equally guilty of averting their gaze from the real sources of neglect and disadvantage for young children – teenage parenting and father-absent homes.

Sure Start is an intervention unlike "almost any other in the Western world"⁶⁶ because it is area-based and does not follow a prescriptive model. The expectation was that the provision of more day care centres and increased parent-child services within certain deprived areas would have such a beneficial impact on family functioning in those areas that it would be unnecessary to identify and target individual families.

Head Start

The closest model is the Head Start project, which has been running in the United States since 1965 and which provides pre-school programmes for three to five year olds in deprived areas. Remarkably, for more than 30 years Head Start was never subject to a large-scale controlled evaluation. In 1998, reflecting widespread concern about the large sums being spent on Head Start, Congress

⁶⁵ Ibid., p34.

⁶⁶ Ibid., p36.

insisted that funding become conditional on such an evaluation. As results from the early stages of the evaluation began to filter through, it became apparent that the impact of Head Start was very limited. The best sign seemed to be a small to moderate improvement in pre-reading and literacy skills among participating children.⁶⁷

With these results in mind, the Bush administration embarked on a number of reforms to Head Start, intended to ensure that resources are better spent. The programme's educational component was increased with the Early Childhood Literacy Initiative; and the Head Start Management Initiative has been introduced to tighten up local enrolments, in order to ensure that the children intended to benefit from the programme were all attending. A new National Reporting System is intended to monitor children's progress and assess their school-readiness. By focusing more specifically on learning goals, Head Start may survive – if the Reporting System can demonstrate to the satisfaction of Congress that real progress is being made.

Personal services

It is not clear how much the Government is prepared to learn from the disappointing results of recent Sure Start evaluations. They did not prevent Education Secretary Ruth Kelly from claiming that Sure Start is "one of the Government's biggest successes."⁶⁸ As she announced the release of the evaluations, Ms Kelly also announced the introduction of "best practice guidance." This guidance purports to ensure that local Sure Start programmes will learn the lessons of the evaluation results and focus more in future on outreach and home visiting, in order to try to reach the most disadvantaged families.⁶⁹ The guidance also requires local programmes to improve "personalisation of the delivery of services."

⁶⁷ US Department of Health and Human Services, *Head Start Impact Study: First Year Findings*, June 2005.

⁶⁸ DfES Press Notice, 30 November 2005.

⁶⁹ Sure Start Children's Centres Practice Guidance. See www.surestart.gov.uk/practiceguidance

But Ms Kelly's claims do not square with reality. On present showing, Sure Start can hardly be described as a success. More significantly, the Government's plans for the next phase of Sure Start cannot be reconciled with the guidance to which Ms Kelly referred. Having originated as a joint venture between the Department of Health, the Treasury and the DfES, Sure Start is now entirely controlled by the DfES, in what is described as the Extended Schools and Families Group. This Group is supervising the rolling out of Sure Start across another 3,000 neighbourhoods by 2010.⁷⁰ Such expansion can hardly be reconciled with the goal of increased personalisation, as Sure Start is now set to operate entirely through Children's Centres and on a much smaller budget.

Funding is to be distributed through local authorities, who are to receive £947m over two years (i.e. £473m per annum) from 2006 to 2008 to develop and run a total of 2,500 Children's Centres.⁷¹ This means each Centre will receive an average of £190,000 a year. This represents a massive reduction from the £1m per programme, per annum, in the previous phase of Sure Start, and means that average Sure Start expenditure per child each year will be around £250 (compared to £1,300 per child in 2004).

As Norman Glass, former Deputy Director at the Treasury and one of the originators of Sure Start, pointed out last year, the new arrangements mean that Sure Start is effectively abolished. Its brand name will be transferred to a programme of childcare, "a sort of New Deal for Toddlers", chiefly directed at getting mothers into work and their children into day care.⁷²

⁷⁰ "The next phase of Sure Start will see local programmes being extended into a national network of 3,500 Children's Centres. Children's Centres will build on the best of SSLPs and the lessons from the NESS to make a real difference in the lives of children, particularly those growing up in disadvantage." From DfES and HM Treasury, *Support for parents: the best start for children*, December 2005.

⁷¹ DfES Written Reply 18994, 18 October 2005.

⁷² "Surely some mistake?", *The Guardian*, 5 January 2005.

Children's Centres

This "rolling out" of Sure Start on a much reduced budget through Children's Centres fits conveniently into the Government's integration of children and family services described in Chapter Two. Sure Start Children's Centres are to provide "co-located" services in every neighbourhood. Each centre is expected to serve about 800 children from birth to five years old. They are to be set up by local authorities, using where possible existing nursery schools; their aim is to:

...enable all families with children to have access to an affordable, flexible, high quality childcare place for their child.⁷³

This means that the Centres are expected to offer early learning combined with full day care provision (for a minimum of ten hours a day, five days a week, 48 weeks a year), health services (including ante-natal services) parental outreach, family support services, a base for a childminder network, support for children and parents with special needs, and links with Jobcentre Plus to support parents who wish to consider training or employment.⁷⁴ As the DfES puts it:

The Sure Start Children's Centre programme is based on the concept that providing integrated education, care, family support and health services are key factors in determining good outcomes for children and their parents.

Children's Centres are to be the focus of all parenting activities involving the under-fives. Through these Centres, the state will take responsibility not only for educating pre-school children, but also for providing them with care throughout the day. A 'minimum' of ten hours care per day indicates that, for some children, nearly all their waking hours will be spent in day care, with all meals taken there.

⁷³ www.surestart.gov.uk *Children's Centres*

⁷⁴ www.surestart.gov.uk *What's on offer?*

To minimise their cost and to establish their “learning” credentials, many of the Centres are to be created out of existing nursery schools. Explaining the proposals for Children’s Centres to the DfES Select Committee in February 2005, Margaret Hodge said that in policy terms she wanted every nursery school to become a Children’s Centre, providing “multi-agency support” for children and going down the age range “to birth”. Not every nursery school will want to become a Children’s Centre, preferring to concentrate on providing pre-school education for a limited period each day. But it seems unlikely they will be able to survive in the state sector if they are not prepared to go along with the plan. In Mrs Hodge’s words, if they do not become Children’s Centres:

*...they will die.*⁷⁵

The Government seems unwilling to accept that young children’s educational and developmental needs may be better served by a half-day session in a nursery school than in “wrap-around” care. Such needs do not fit with the Government’s vision for early childhood. As Mrs Hodge promised on behalf of the Government in 2004:

*We will legislate to create a distinct new phase in children’s lives from birth to 5 bringing together in a coherent way education and childcare as we have all wanted.*⁷⁶

The new Childcare Bill is intended to fulfil this promise.

⁷⁵ In answer to questions put by Select Committee, Education and Skills. See Hansard 9 February 2005.

⁷⁶ Speech by Margaret Hodge to the Sure Start National Conference, 8 December 2004.

CHILDCARE FOR ALL

SINCE FIRST COMING TO POWER, this Government has held that the state must have a role in providing, subsidising and regulating childcare. Launching its National Childcare Strategy in 1998, the Government insisted that childcare could not be left to the market or to the voluntary sector.⁷⁷ Promising to create 50,000 new childcare places in the first year alone, it embarked on a programme of direct and indirect subsidies that would combine with schemes for registration and OFSTED inspection of childcare settings to ensure that the state became closely involved in both early years and after-school care. By 2003, according to the National Audit Office (NAO), government subsidies (including Childcare Tax Credits) accounted for 53% of all childcare expenditure, or £3.5bn a year.⁷⁸

“Universal childcare – towards a progressive consensus”⁷⁹

In making the case for state intervention and subsidy, the Government has deployed a number of arguments to appeal to different sectors of its audience. The dominant theme has been the drive to get more mothers of young children into full time paid employment; alongside this is the assertion that businesses suffer when women take time out to care for children.⁸⁰

⁷⁷ DfEE, *Meeting the Childcare Challenge* Cm 3959, 1998.

⁷⁸ National Audit Office, *Early Years Progress in developing high quality childcare and early education accessible to all*, February 2004.

⁷⁹ Title of a lecture to the Daycare Trust by Treasury Adviser (now MP for Normanton) Ed Balls, January 2005.

⁸⁰ *Meeting the Childcare Challenge*, p2.

But another theme has begun to occupy a more central role in recent years: the role of childcare in reducing inequality of outcomes for children. This argument does not rest simply on increasing levels of parental work and income, but also claims that young children benefit from time spent in pre-school care.⁸¹

This change of emphasis may reflect the increasing perception that the Government's strategy has run out of steam. There is little evidence that women's participation in employment is limited by a lack of childcare; rather, it appears to be a matter of personal choice.⁸² Maternal employment in the UK is, at 68%,⁸³ among the highest in Europe, and a thriving market in part-time work means that many mothers are enabled to fulfil their declared preferences for work-life balance by limiting their hours, rather than using formal day care. Nor is it necessarily a question of cost: the NAO progress report on childcare in 2004 found that the most common reasons given by parents for not using childcare were that the child was too young or that they preferred to look after them at home.⁸⁴

The NAO report also demonstrated the drawbacks to state intervention in the childcare market, finding that for every two childcare places created since 1998, another had closed.⁸⁵ Private childcare providers have complained that the expansion of local authority care has put them out of business and that high levels of vacancies in private nurseries will lead to more closures.⁸⁶

Evidence also shows that the majority of working mothers have a preference for informal or family-based care, currently used by

⁸¹ For example: "good quality early years childcare can help redress the effects of disadvantage, and the evidence suggests that there are positive benefits for children as young as two". From HM Treasury, *Choice for parents, the best start for children: a ten year strategy for childcare*, December 2004, p10.

⁸² For a fuller examination of women's preferences and their work-life decisions see the author's *Choosing to be different*, CPS, 2003.

⁸³ Office for National Statistics, *Labour Force Survey 2003*.

⁸⁴ NAO, op. cit, p8.

⁸⁵ 626,000 new childcare places were created in England 1998-2003, but 301,000 places have closed. NAO, op. cit.

⁸⁶ "Childcare choice under threat", *The Times*, 17 October 2005, reporting a survey of 5,000 childcare providers.

57% of families with pre-school children and 73% of those with school age children.⁸⁷ Early years expert Professor Shirley Dex of the Institute of Education at London University believes that the predominance of family based care, especially by grandparents, is due to a preference for keeping childcare in the family.⁸⁸

All this suggests that the Government's 2004 PSA target to increase the take-up of formal childcare by low-income working families by 50% in four years⁸⁹ is over-ambitious.

The Ten Year Strategy for Childcare

But the Government, and in particular the Treasury, continues to put faith in state-sponsored childcare as a tool for social mobility. In December 2004, it published its new Ten Year Strategy for Childcare along with its Pre-Budget Report.

Entitled *Choice for Parents: the best start for children*, this document argues that childcare is important in tackling disadvantage and poverty and supporting social mobility and equality of opportunity.⁹⁰ Promising legislation to oblige local authorities to provide universal access to childcare, the Ten Year Strategy committed the Government to a goal of 20 hours free childcare a week, 38 weeks a year, for all three- and four-year-olds. It also promised an out-of-school childcare place for every child aged from three to 14 from 8am to 6pm every weekday, all year round, by 2008. The accompanying Pre-Budget Report 2004 pledged an increase in the payments to parents using formal childcare, through

⁸⁷ S Vegeris, *Childcare for child development or childcare for mothers' work? Some evidence from the Families and Children Study (FACS)*, Policy Studies Institute, 2004.

⁸⁸ Shirley Dex commenting on The Millennium Cohort Study in "Why 45% of working mums rely on granny", *The Daily Mail*, 12 October 2005.

⁸⁹ HM Treasury Spending Review 2004 PSA Target 2: As a contribution to reducing the proportion of children living in households where no one is working, by 2008:

- increase the stock of Ofsted-registered childcare by 10%;
- increase the take-up of formal childcare by low income working families by 50%; and
- introduce by April 2005, a successful light-touch childcare approval scheme."

⁹⁰ HM Treasury, *Choice for parents, the best start for children: a ten year strategy for childcare*, December 2004, p4.

the Childcare Tax Credit, to £300 a week, and declared that its long-term goal was to increase these payments further.

The Ten Year Strategy admits that day care may not be best for babies, alluding to research from both US and English sources showing increased levels of aggression in children who spent long hours in day care before the age of two.⁹¹ But it plays down these worries, maintaining that improvements in the quality of childcare will offset these adverse effects. Yet the most comprehensive and long-term studies from the US indicate that it is the *quantity* of time spent in care rather than the *quality* which is significant.⁹²

Is it good for children?

A recent English study also underlines the drawbacks of institutional care for the very young: the Families Children and Childcare Study led by child psychologists Kathy Sylva and Penelope Leach cautioned against the use of group care for under-threes.⁹³ A separate piece of research found that young children going into nurseries were experiencing high levels of stress (measured through increased production of cortisol in the brain) compared with toddlers cared for at home, and that they were put in a state of “hyper-arousal” by a day at nursery.⁹⁴

These findings do not bode well for the expansion of non-family and “wrap-around” care. The Ten Year Strategy seeks to mitigate concerns about such findings by relying on a government-sponsored study on the impact of early education. The Effective Provision of Pre-School Education (EPPE) Project⁹⁵ found that children with experience of pre-school education fared

⁹¹ Ibid., p8.

⁹² Professor J Belsky, “Developmental Risks (Still) Associated with Early Child Care”, *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry*, 2001, based on findings from the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development Child Care Study.

⁹³ “Free nursery scheme could be bad for young children, says study”, *The Guardian*, 4 October 2005.

⁹⁴ “Hidden stress of the nursery age”, *The Guardian*, 19 September 2005, referring to report by Michael Lamb of Cambridge University.

⁹⁵ Institute of Education, *The Effective Provision of Pre-school Education Project*, 2004.

better when they started school than those without. But the Ten Year Strategy omits to point out that the same study confirmed that children who experienced high levels of day care (either in a nursery or by a childminder) before the age of three were more likely to have behavioural problems than those cared for within their families. Significantly, the EPPE project also concluded that the most important determinant of child outcomes is not whether children have been to nursery school or not, but the extent to which parents engage in constructive activity with the child, regardless of social background, and that the best pre-school experiences are those with a high level of parental involvement.

So is there really a case for universal non-maternal childcare? The Ten Year Strategy acknowledges that the Treasury has another motive. A key cause of child poverty is the increasing number of households headed by a lone parent, since lone mothers are much more likely than married mothers to be unemployed.⁹⁶ The case is thus made for higher levels of subsidy of childcare for lone parents,⁹⁷ to keep them in work and to ensure their children are in registered care.

But parental preference for family-based care extends to lone parents too. Unless the Government proposes to introduce compulsion, it is far from clear that the “problem” of lone mother unemployment can be solved by more childcare subsidy. The Government is reluctant to target lone parent households and continues to hope that, by drawing all parents into a web of family services, it will transform attitudes to work and childcare amongst the benefit-dependent. The evidence from Sure Start suggests this is a misguided approach, which is more likely to increase dependency on the state than to reduce it.

⁹⁶ In 2004, 54% of lone mothers were economically active, compared with 71% of married or cohabiting women with dependent children. See Office for National Statistics *Analysis of Labour Force Survey 2004*. This is a reversal of the situation in the 1970s, when lone mothers were more likely to be in paid work than their married counterparts.

⁹⁷ HM Treasury, *Choice for parents, the best start for children: a ten year strategy for childcare*, December 2004, p10.

“A new frontier for the welfare state”

In order to give statutory force to the Government's commitment to childcare for all, the Childcare Bill was introduced in November 2005. In response to a question in the House of Commons in November 2005, Tony Blair described the Bill as:

*...a new frontier for the welfare state, where wraparound child care will be available from eight in the morning until six at night.*⁹⁸

Introducing the Bill on 28 November, Ruth Kelly used similar language, confirming the new legislation would extend the welfare state's frontiers. If passed, the Act will impose a new duty on all local authorities to secure sufficient provision to meet local childcare needs.⁹⁹ They must carry out an assessment of the childcare needs in their area and repeat such assessments at least every three years.¹⁰⁰

The duties on local authorities will go even wider, imposing a requirement that all English authorities must improve the well-being of young children in their area and must also “reduce inequalities” between those children. Tying these duties in with the Every Child Matters agenda, the Bill recites the litany of five goals for every child: health, safety, educational achievement, contributing to society, social and economic well-being.¹⁰¹

Furthermore, local authorities must not just ensure that childhood services are provided in an integrated manner, they must ensure that all families are making use of those services.¹⁰² Putting every child's details into a database will enable authorities to ensure that every family is drawn into the system; the process will also be facilitated by bringing families together in “one-stop” Children's Centres.

⁹⁸ Hansard, 9 November 2005.

⁹⁹ Childcare Bill 2005, s6.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., s11.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., s1 and 2.

¹⁰² Ibid., s3.

A curriculum for toddlers

There is already tangible evidence of the prescriptive nature of the Government's vision. In the 2005 Budget the Chancellor announced funds for the Bookstart scheme, which will:

*...provide a pack of books to all parents in England at the birth of a child, at 18 months and at three years.*¹⁰³

The DfES is thus selecting appropriate reading material for all babies and pre-school children, an extraordinary proposal from a Government which claims to seek a more “personalised” approach to the provision of children's services.

The Childcare Bill's proposals for a “toddler curriculum” have already aroused opposition from parent's organisations and child welfare experts. The Bill introduces a new phase for the National Curriculum, to be known as the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS), which merges the existing “Birth to Three Framework” with the “Foundation Stage” for three to five year olds, so that it will cover “children's development and learning experiences” from birth to the start of full-time school.¹⁰⁴ Maintaining that “care and learning are indistinguishable”, the EYFS is to be compulsory for all registered childcare providers, pre-school settings and nursery schools.¹⁰⁵

Margaret Morrissey of the National Confederation of Parent Teacher Associations said:

*We are now in danger of taking away children's childhood when they leave the maternity ward. From the minute you are born and your parents go back to work, as the government has encouraged them to do, you are going to be ruled by the Department for Education.*¹⁰⁶

¹⁰³ HM Treasury and DfES, *Support for parents: the best start for children*, 5 December 2005, p27.

¹⁰⁴ DfES, *EYFS Direction of Travel Paper*, December 2005.

¹⁰⁵ Childcare Bill 2005, s40.

¹⁰⁶ BBC News, 9 November 2005.

The aim of the proposals is to ensure that all babies and young children have a consistent experience “regardless of which setting they attend.” The EYFS certainly seems likely to ensure homogeneity of early childhood experiences, as it prescribes six “learning areas”, more than a dozen detailed principles, set within the familiar five childhood goals and delineated by the “Outcomes Framework”, to achieve a “truly integrated and coherent day”, which will be measured by OFSTED inspection.¹⁰⁷

Not surprisingly this is described by Professor Peter Moss, an early years expert at the Institute of Education as an “industrial model” to be “applied by technicians.”¹⁰⁸ Moss believes it will ensure conformity at the expense of creativity and spontaneity, and is far more prescriptive than other European childcare models.

During the First Reading of the Bill, Shadow Children’s Minister Tim Loughton objected to the “six learning areas” prescribed by the EYFS, which he said would “educationalise” the crucial early years of a child’s development, and failed to take account of the different needs of the under twos. For the under twos, neurological development is dependent on consistent care from “an attentive and loving care-giver”.¹⁰⁹ Such caregivers may not, however, take kindly to a regime of OFSTED inspections, and their attentiveness will presumably count for little if they are failing to provide a “truly integrated and coherent day.”

Extended schools for all

In the Government’s view, the best way of providing children with an “integrated day” is by keeping them at school for as much of it as possible. The Ten Year Strategy for childcare promised “wrap-around” care for children from 8am to 6pm throughout the year. The way in which this promise is to be fulfilled for school-age children is laid out in yet another strategy paper, *the Five Year Strategy*

¹⁰⁷ DfES, *EYFS Direction of Travel Paper*, December 2005.

¹⁰⁸ “Toddler curriculum criticised by European education expert”, *The Guardian*, 15 November 2005.

¹⁰⁹ Hansard, 28 November 2005.

for Children and Learners, published by the DfES in July 2004. This sets out the concept of Extended Schools as:

*...dawn-to-dusk schools, with breakfast childcare and after-school clubs to help parents juggle their busy lives.*¹¹⁰

Charles Clarke, then Education Secretary, explained in the Foreword that the result of this strategy would be a nation where “all schools are extended schools.” Over time, every school would be expected to offer 8am to 6pm care or to be part of a network of schools which provide the service between them, using the power to provide community facilities enacted in the 2002 Education Act.

More details have been provided by the *Extended Schools Prospectus* published by the DfES in 2005, which explains how “extended services” can include:

...childcare, adult education, parenting support programmes, community-based health and social care services, multi-agency behaviour support teams and after-school activities.

While the Prospectus commits the Government to providing local authorities with £680m to “kick-start” Extended Schools over the next three years, it also makes clear that authorities will thereafter be expected to find their own financing to keep their “extended services” going, using resources from other local budgets such as health and leisure services. The intention is to ensure more “co-location” of community services in schools; the result will inevitably be fewer activities and services being available to children and families in settings other than school.

The best interests of children?

The offer of a ten-hour school day might seem superficially attractive, enabling both parents to work a full 9am to 5pm day plus travelling time without any anxieties about child care. But is it really in the best interests of children? There is no doubt that the extended school day is a further step towards the

¹¹⁰ DfES, *The Five-Year Strategy for Children and Learners*, July 2004.

institutionalisation of childhood, and will reduce the likelihood of children taking family meals, or interacting with other members of their family. Educational psychologist Dr Christopher Arnold, speaking at a child psychology conference in January this year, cautioned that the care of children in large numbers by a small number of adults was “not emotionally healthy,” and gave children no time to relax in a home environment.¹¹¹ Dr Arnold was reporting on a study of children in after-school clubs in the West Midlands. Commenting on his findings, Anne Longfield of the charity 4Children said:

None of us would want to sit in a workplace two to three hours longer a day and children shouldn't have to either.

Other studies have confirmed Dr Arnold's findings, noting that children perceived after-school clubs as an extension of the school day, where activities are controlled and children are given little scope for imagination or initiative.¹¹²

While the Government resists suggestions that children will find themselves in dawn-to-dusk care on a daily basis, it is clear that if its plans for extended schools are to be effectively carried through, parents will have to commit their children to regular attendance. If they don't, it will be impossible for schools to finance programmes, provide meals and recruit staff.

Family intervention

In fact it appears that the Government is not only keen to keep children in after school, but would like the “Full Service Extended School” to become the “hub” of every community, where parents also will receive education. This was spelt out by the Chancellor in the 2005 Pre-Budget Report, where he pledged that “for the first time” schools will be responsible for delivering much more than

¹¹¹ “After-school clubs may pose threat to emotional growth”, *The Times*, 6 January 2006.

¹¹² F Smith & J Barker, “Contested spaces: Children's experiences of out of school care in England and Wales”, *Childhood*, 7(3), 2000, p315-333.

just education services.¹¹³

Included in these services will be a new kind of family intervention designed to sort out problem children and their parents. Parent School Advisers, described as “school-based outreach,” will operate out of Extended Schools and will decide what intervention is needed to put parents on the right track. Examples offered include attendance on parenting programmes and the appointment of mentors for parents.

The Government also wants to see widespread mentoring for children, beginning with the creation of “3,600 matched mentor and mentee pairs in two years.”¹¹⁴ It is not yet clear how much say parents will have in the choice of a mentor for their child, but the introduction of such a programme is a further indication of the Government's determination to shape child development through state-led schemes, based in schools but extending well beyond the classroom.

Through the use of Children's Centres for the under fives, and Extended Schools for five year olds to 14 year olds, the Government's plan for “co-location” of children and family services will place school, rather than home, at the centre of family life. In the guise of support for struggling families, and the “joining-up” of services, the ability of the state to oversee, influence and (ultimately) control the upbringing of children is steadily advanced.

¹¹³ HM Treasury, *Support for Parents: the best start for children*, Pre-Budget Report, 2005.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The doctrine of “Progressive Universalism”

The Government has made it clear that Every Child Matters will change the basis on which services are provided to children by the state. It represents:

*...a step-change in the quality, accessibility and coherence of services so that every child and young person is able to fulfil their full potential and those facing particular obstacles are supported to overcome them.*¹¹⁵

This approach is consistent with the Chancellor’s doctrine of “progressive universalism,”¹¹⁶ which holds that the state is to provide for everyone, and at the same time to provide extra support for those who need it most. The doctrine was first applied to welfare payments but has also been used by the Chancellor’s colleague and former key adviser Ed Balls to apply to childcare provision.¹¹⁷

“Progressive universalism” applied to child protection means that the Government logs details of every child and their use of services, measured against specific targets, with the intention that additional help and protection will be triggered for those most in

¹¹⁵ DfES, *Every Child Matters – Change for Children*.

¹¹⁶ “The principle of progressive universalism, providing security through support for all and more help for those who need it most, when they need it most.” HM Treasury, *Building a fairer society*, 2004.

¹¹⁷ “We have called this approach Progressive Universalism – and it is this approach to the welfare state reform that we are now applying to childcare.” Ed Balls, Speech to the Daycare Trust, January 2005.

need. But is there a realistic prospect that this method will, in practice, ensure that the most vulnerable and needy children will be protected and provided for? Or will they become even more likely to be lost in the system?

Evidence of the practical effect of “progressive universalism” from another of the Government’s flagship projects for children is not encouraging. The distinctive feature of Sure Start programmes was that the services they provided would be universally available, “thus limiting any stigma that may accrue from individuals being targeted.”¹¹⁸ But the results so far from the National Evaluation of Sure Start demonstrate the penalties of failure to target.¹¹⁹ The children of young, single, unemployed mothers have actually been put at further disadvantage by the presence of Sure Start. The Government’s expectation that a ‘trickle down’ effect might result from the presence in a poor neighbourhood of a Sure Start programme has simply not been realised.

The lesson from Sure Start is that a “non-stigmatising” approach, which does not target the most vulnerable children, is at best a waste of money and at worst harmful to those most in need of help. Applying the same doctrine to child protection services looks positively reckless.

Witnesses both to the Climbié Inquiry and to the Every Child Matters Select Committee reported severe problems in the recruitment and retention of experienced staff in the front line of child social services. Rapid turnover, inexperienced staff, high vacancy rates and reliance on agency workers are problems common to many local authorities and threaten the welfare of vulnerable children.¹²⁰ The Government hopes that reorganising services to embrace all children means that those most likely to be at risk will more easily be noticed. But experience with Sure Start points to the opposite conclusion: that the less needy will absorb

¹¹⁸ NESS, Report 13, Executive Summary.

¹¹⁹ See Chapter 3 above.

¹²⁰ Association of Directors of Social Services, *Tomorrow’s Children*, September 2002.

more resources, staff will be distracted by dealing with “easy cases”, and more staff time will be wasted in multi-disciplinary and inter-professional meetings.

If “progressive universalism” results in vulnerable children receiving less attention and consequently being put at greater risk of neglect and abuse, the Government will need more than compassionate rhetoric to justify its reforms to children’s services.

The expansion of the welfare state

There is another reason to resist the doctrine of “progressive universalism”. By creating a system of universal intervention and support, the Government is expanding the powers and responsibilities of the state. Should it really be the business of government to have an “overarching strategy for all children and young people from conception to age 19”? The clear implication of such a strategy, with its attendant targets and frameworks, is that the primary responsibility for the upbringing of children lies with the state, and not with parents.

As the terminology of the Outcomes Framework makes clear, parents are to act as helpmate to the state, provided they accede to the Government’s objectives. Have parents in modern Britain become so state-reliant that they are content to let the Government take over the responsibilities of parenthood in this way? And can the welfare state be judged such a success that it should be expanded, to allow Children’s Centres and Extended Schools to become the focus of all family activities and to control the supply of childcare?

The Government presumably believes that there is a popular consensus for the state to take on the responsibility for childcare. The Prime Minister sounded enthusiastic enough when he endorsed this “new frontier” for the welfare state. Yet it is hard to see how such enthusiasm can be reconciled with the philosophy behind the Prime Minister’s recent proposals for education reform, which sought to free schools from the grip of state control.

There can be no doubt that the Government’s strategy for children is directly contrary to that philosophy. “Every Child Matters” is based on increasing, not reducing, the scope of state control. It seeks to regulate and nationalise the upbringing of children, taking responsibility for matters which have until now been the prerogative of parents. It is hugely ambitious yet inadequately funded. The assertions that it will deliver a more “personalised” service, attuned to the wishes of parents, seem designed to confuse, for this agenda is impersonal and makes choices on behalf of parents.

The Treasury has been a powerful driving force for state-sponsored childcare. For the Chancellor, this agenda is presumably a logical extension of the principles behind the tax credit system, which has greatly expanded the scope of state benefits and welfare dependency.

One thing should be made clear, however. The more power is accrued to the state, the weaker the family becomes. By taking away parental responsibilities, and introducing a direct relationship between child and state, the Government is inevitably creating greater state dependency. It should not then be surprised if parents become incapable of exerting authority over their own children, and if the consequence of this process is a more dysfunctional and fractured society.

Where now? Some policy recommendations

Having identified the dangers inherent in the Government’s current agenda, it is necessary to give some indication of an alternative approach. The overall objectives of an alternative strategy for children should be to return power to parents, to strengthen the family, and to protect the most vulnerable children. The following recommendations would be possible components of such a strategy:

- abandon Every Child Matters, recognising the “universal” approach is an expensive failure, and instead accept the need

to “target” child interventions on those children most at risk of poor outcomes;

- accept that the integration of child protection within the DfES, including the appointment of Directors of Children’s Services and Local Safeguarding Children Boards, is probably now irreversible, but insist that its key principle should be a direct line of accountability from front-line child protection up to the Secretary of State for Education and Skills;
- close down the Office of Children’s Commissioner, and use the money for front-line child protection services;
- recognise the importance of the family structure in determining outcomes for children, and reform the tax credit and welfare system to incentivise marriage and committed fatherhood;
- abandon the National Childcare Strategy and instead give families financial support to enable them to purchase the childcare of their choice (including tax breaks to enable them to provide parental care);
- give all schools the freedom to decide whether or not to offer pre-school and/or after-school provision.

THE GOVERNMENT’S FIVE POINT PLAN¹²¹

1. Be healthy

Physically healthy

Mentally and emotionally healthy

Sexually healthy

Healthy lifestyles

Choose not to take illegal drugs

PARENTS, CARERS AND FAMILIES PROMOTE HEALTHY CHOICES

2. Stay safe

Safe from maltreatment, neglect, violence and sexual exploitation

Safe from accidental injury and death

Safe from bullying and discrimination

Safe from crime and anti-social behaviour in and out of school

Have security, stability and are cared for

PARENTS, CARERS AND FAMILIES PROVIDE SAFE HOMES AND STABILITY

3. Enjoy and achieve

Ready for school

Attend and enjoy school

Achieve stretching national educational standards at primary school

Achieve personal and social development and enjoy recreation

Achieve stretching national educational standards at secondary school

PARENTS, CARERS AND FAMILIES SUPPORT LEARNING

¹²¹ Reproduced from *Every Child Matters: Change for Children*, DfES, 2004.

4. Make a positive contribution

Engage in decision-making and support the community and environment

Engage in law-abiding and positive behaviour in and out of school

Develop positive relationships and choose not to bully and discriminate

Develop self-confidence and successfully deal with significant life changes and challenges

Develop enterprising behaviour

PARENTS, CARERS AND FAMILIES PROMOTE POSITIVE BEHAVIOUR

5. Achieve economic well-being

Engage in further education, employment or training on leaving school

Ready for employment

Live in decent homes and sustainable communities

Access to transport and material goods

Live in households free from low income

PARENTS, CARERS AND FAMILIES ARE SUPPORTED TO BE

ECONOMICALLY ACTIVE

THE PRICE OF PARENTHOOD

£7.50

Jill Kirby

For many ordinary families – particularly two parent families with only one earner – the price of parenthood is too high. A couple on average income with two children pay over £5,000 a year more in tax than they receive in benefits. If they break up, they can receive nearly £7,000 a year more in benefits than they pay in tax. Why, asks the author, does the state subsidise family breakdown when it is so damaging for all concerned? The US experienced a similar pattern of spiralling welfare costs but took radical steps to reform welfare in the mid-1990s and has since reduced welfare dependency by more than 50%. Jill Kirby concludes that in order to rebuild family life and cut welfare dependency, Britain must learn some of the lessons of US welfare reform – and support rather than penalise two-parent families.

“There are, as always, two faces to this government. One tells us in almost every ministerial speech that new Labour is all about standing up for and guaranteeing the prosperity of hard-working families. The image is of Tony Blair’s version of the American dream, with Mom, Dad and the two kids beaming contentedly as they motor off on holiday, grateful to be living in a paradise created by the government. The reality is different, as an important new report by Jill Kirby for the Centre for Policy Studies points out” – leading article in *The Sunday Times*

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Florence Heath and Richard Smith

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“It comes to something when some of the most practical and insightful recommendations for improving the lot of families with disabled children come not from the political left, but from the right” – leading article in *The Independent*

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The Government is implementing a national strategy for all children
“from conception to age 19”.

This strategy directly contradicts the Government’s stated desire to
deliver more personalised public services. It sets statutory objectives
for the lives of every child, with targets to be measured by OFSTED.
Parents are expected to support these objectives.

To accomplish its strategy, the Government is: merging child
protection services with education; putting every child’s ID into a
national computer database to monitor their use of services; focusing all
services to children and families in Children’s Centres and Extended
Schools; and creating what it describes as “a new frontier for the Welfare
State” by offering universal “dawn to dusk” childcare.

This strategy, labelled “Every Child Matters”, is expected to protect
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evidence demonstrates that this approach is likely to be counter-
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