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Why Parties and Policies Matter and Networks Don't

A Case Study of the Children's Services Policy Process

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Introduction

This paper seeks to highlight the role played by the political parties in the children's services policy process. This is neglected by the network governance and asymmetric power models which provide the two dominant perspectives on policy making in Britain (Laffin, 2013).

Both highlight the influence of non-governmental interest groups over central government policy makers. The children's services policy process is an appropriate case study because of the existence of a large number of such interest groups including the local government and professional associations alongside a number of well-established charity sector organisations which have seemingly had good access to central government policy makers in recent years.

The focal point for the research was Labour's *Every Child Matters* (ECM) programme (HM Government, 2003; 2004). This programme had a strong 'governance narrative' running through it. It sought to establish local Children's Trusts to govern multi-agency networks of services across the public and charity sectors. The research examined the origins of the programme, the development of the ECM Green Paper (HM Government, 2003) and the subsequent reform programme. The development of the Conservative-led Coalition's children's services policy programme was then considered alongside this. Under the Labour Government the dominant influence of the Treasury over ECM was revealed. ECM was rooted in an ideological commitment to tackle economic disadvantage through the welfare state articulated in the Treasury's child poverty strategy (Treasury, 2001). This challenges existing interpretations of Labour's social policy record highlighting the influence of Gordon Brown and his commitment to redistribution. In contrast the Conservative-led Coalition's programme is traced back to an alternative analysis of poverty which shifts the focus of policy on to a smaller population of "dysfunctional families" consistent with a commitment to smaller welfare state. The influence of policy network actors over policy priorities and resourcing decisions has been minimal, challenging the network governance perspective.

Access has tended to be via invitation and limited to technical aspects of policy notably in the aftermath of high profile system ‘failures’ such as the deaths of Victoria Climbié and Peter Connelly¹. However, departmental² interests were also managed by the Treasury, challenging the alternative asymmetric power perspective.

Policy Network Models and Political Parties

The network governance model is closely associated with the work of Rhodes (1997) and his account of a shift from ‘government’ to ‘governance’. Marsh (2008, p255) highlights four components of this model which he contrasts with the alternative asymmetric power model (Marsh et al, 2001; 2003; 2008). (1) The state has been ‘hollowed out’ following the public management reforms of the 1980s. Horizontal networks of non-governmental charity and private sector organisations have replaced government hierarchies as the main mode of governance. (2) The relationship between government and the “self-steering interorganisational networks” is relatively open and interdependent. Central government policy makers are no longer able to direct previously dependent policy network actors, but instead rely on more indirect ways to steer the policy process. (3) Reflecting the plurality of civil society the boundaries of policy networks are relatively open and fluid. New policy actors from the private and charity sectors can influence policy. (4) The ‘core executive’ of government is fragmented. With their power base eroded, government departments are “no longer the fulcrum” of a policy network (Rhodes 2007, p1245). In contrast the asymmetric power model is based on the following assumptions. (1) Strong government, whilst increasingly challenged, has not been replaced. Hierarchy rather than networks remain the main mode of governance. (2) Government does engage with actors in the policy networks,

¹ Referred to at the time as ‘Baby P’

² The Department which was the focus of this research started off in 1997 as the Department for Education and Employment (DfEE). In 2001 it became the Department for Education and Skills (DfES), before becoming the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) in 2007. Following the 2010 election it became simply the Department for Education (DfE).

but this is not based on a relationship of mutual exchange. Government's command of superior resources makes this an asymmetric relationship. (3) The boundaries of policy networks reflect broader inequality in society. As such policy networks resemble relatively closed and stable 'policy communities' as opposed to open and fluid networks. (4) The core executive of government continues to be driven by the established political tradition of "government knows best" (Marsh, 2008, p263). Having established these differences it is important to understand that both models emphasise the role of policy networks in the public policy process. Whilst the boundaries of these networks are relatively fixed and tightly drawn under the asymmetric model it nevertheless directs us to focus on the interaction between government departments and non-governmental interest groups.

Laffin (2013) argues that the UK empirical research supports the asymmetric model. A number of studies have highlighted the way in which government has installed new 'governance arrangements' to actually strengthen control over the policy process (Bache, 2003; Ball, 2008; Davies, 2002; Entwistle and Laffin, 2005; Goodwin and Grix, 2011; Grix and Phillpots, 2011). Here the establishment of carefully regulated local service delivery partnerships were used to neuter local government interests. In response to this criticism Rhodes has more recently advocated a new 'decentred approach' (Bevir and Rhodes, 2006; Rhodes, 2007). This methodological defence deflects empirically based criticism by shifting the focus of research on to the ideas and beliefs held by individual agents. From this perspective policy change must be related to the actions of individuals drawing upon a range of political traditions. This contrasts with the single dominant Whitehall tradition which underpins the seemingly deterministic asymmetric model. Marsh (2008) rejects this critique emphasising the dialectical approach which underpins the model. "Structures provide the context within which agents act and, as such, constrain or facilitate actions" (p253). This research follows this dialectical approach by seeking to examine the actions of individual

policy actors within their institutional context. However, it departs from the asymmetric power model in so far as it seeks to look beyond the context of Whitehall departments. The focus on policy networks organised in relation to departments obscures the question of party political influence over policy. In their detailed study of four government departments, which informs the asymmetric power model, Marsh et al (2001) declared at the outset that departments “are the source of most policy and they hold overall responsibility for delivering policies. As such, the activities of the core executive occur within the departmental framework. The majority of ministers operate within, and draw most of their resources from, departments” (p1). This research follows Laffin (2013) in seeking to understand the way in which political parties rather than Whitehall departments provide the institutional structure which constrains and facilitates action. His research suggests that it was party electoral considerations which drove the housing policy process and that the policy network resembled nothing more than an ‘issue network’ (Heclo, 1974). Looking across the Labour and Conservative-led Coalition periods this research was able to compare the policy programmes adopted by the two parties. The research questions were: (1) Has the children’s services policy process been shaped by party politics? (2) How much influence did the policy network exert? In response to the first question the research looked for evidence of party ideological influence and inter and intra-party competition in shaping the children’s services policy process either through shaping of the agenda or control of the policy development process. Responding to the second the research looked for evidence of policy network actors driving the process by either pushing ideas on to the agenda or by blocking initiatives they opposed.

Children’s Services Case Study

Children’s services policy provides an interesting case study given the number and range of non-governmental groups seemingly engaged in the policy process. The ECM programme developed under Labour is particularly pertinent given its explicit focus on establishing new

network governance arrangements, Children's Trusts, to lead delivery of the programme. Children's services is defined broadly, in line with the ECM programme itself, so as to incorporate the public and charity sector providers of a range of services to children and young people. In local government services were brought together into new children's services departments following the Children Act 2004. The main services brought together were education and children's social services. Departments also incorporated a range of other services, including early years services, youth services and youth offending teams as well as a range of initiatives funded through government grants. Outside of local government Children's Trusts included statutory health agencies and local charities. Furthermore, policy making in this area is also seemingly driven periodically by response to moral panics played out in the media, usually following the death of a child. During the period considered for this research the deaths of Victoria Climbié and Peter Connelly, both in the North London Borough of Haringey, appear to have had an important impact on the policy process. Children's services can be considered as good example of a 'wicked issue' and therefore a good candidate for network governance.

Evidence for the research was taken from official documents, press coverage and 28 interviews with prominent policy network actors including government ministers, special advisers, senior civil servants (Department and Treasury), local authority directors, charity leaders and social work academics involved in policy making. Whilst the main purpose of the research was to contribute to the debate around policy network models, the research also builds upon existing research on the ECM programme. A number of studies have used Levitas' (2005) three competing social exclusion policy discourses to analyse Labour's ECM programme (Churchill, 2011; Frost and Parton, 2009; Garrett, 2009; Simon and Ward, 2010).

1. Redistribution (RED) – Here poverty is identified as the prime cause of social exclusion. Tackling social exclusion therefore requires a redistribution of resources.

2. Moral underclass (MUD) – This perspective highlights the behaviour of the poor as the primary cause of exclusion from mainstream society. Tackling behavioural problems and welfare dependency are the main solutions.
3. Social integration (SID) – Social exclusion is defined in relation to paid work. Paid work is identified as the best route out of poverty. Policy focuses on education and training.

This research also uses this framework to analyse the dominant ideological themes underpinning the ECM programme. The existing studies suggest that the ideological underpinnings of ECM are best thought of as a SID/MUD mix. However, these studies have relied upon official policy documents as the main source of evidence and have tended to rely, as Levitas herself does, on policy documents published by policy units reporting to No.10 such as the Social Exclusion Unit and the Cabinet Office. In contrast this research made extensive use of new interview data which highlighted the prominence of the Treasury in relation to children's services policy. This required a reassessment of the origins of the ECM programme and the Treasury's involvement in it.

Accepting the SID/MUD interpretation Churchill (2011) considers the prospects for the ECM programme under the Conservative-led Coalition. Based on the early record of the new government she argues that there are significant continuities in the Conservative-led Coalition's programme compared to Labour's. Utilising Stratham and Smith's (2010) analysis of the concept of 'early intervention' in Labour policy discourse, she argues that the second definition could continue to underpin children's services policy.

1. Early years interventions – investment in services for pre-school children.
2. 'Earlier' intervention as the early identification of problems and additional needs leading to earlier delivery of services for specific children and families

3. 'Earlier' intervention aimed at reducing exposure to known 'risk factors' thought to cause poor outcomes in later life

As well as reassessing the ideological underpinnings of ECM, this research also looked at the use of the concept of early intervention in Labour and Conservative policy statements, testing Churchill's early conclusion. Three years into the Conservative-led Coalition more evidence is available on which to base a conclusion.

Presentation of the research findings makes up the bulk of this paper. The first section sets out how under Labour the Treasury established its influence over children's services policy through the spending review process. Challenging existing interpretations of the ECM programme, the Treasury's control over the development of the ECM programme is then considered in the second section. Across these two sections the changing structure and influence of the policy networks over policy in the Labour period is discussed. The third section then looks at the ideological underpinnings of the Treasury's involvement in children's services policy. This is compared with the ideology present in the Conservative's new social policy statements developed after David Cameron's election in December 2005. In the final section the development of the Conservatives children's services policy programme in opposition and then in office is described. This section also considers the relationship between the Conservatives and the policy networks.

The Labour Treasury and Children's Services Policy Pre-ECM

Treasury Control of Departmental Policy

Arguably the most important product of the early Labour years, certainly in relation to state support for children, was the Sure Start programme. The programme was born out of the 1998 Comprehensive Spending Review (CSR) process. Through this process and the subsequent two yearly reviews the Treasury extended its remit beyond economic and

financial management. It became actively engaged in determining departmental policy priorities (Treasury, 1998). The Sure Start Review was a cross-departmental review of services for pre-school children led by the Treasury. Following the review Gordon Brown announced an initial investment of £450m over three years for 60 trail blazers in areas of high deprivation. The cross departmental Sure Start Unit (SSU) was established to manage the programme. Local Sure Start programmes were to be planned and run by partnerships of local agencies including the charity sector, parents, the NHS and local government. There was a strong emphasis in official guidance on the need to ensure joined-up planning and integrated service delivery (Sure Start, 2002). Following the 2000 Spending Review (SR) funding for the programme was to increase substantially to £500m per year by 2004. In 2003 local programmes were rebranded as Children's Centres with a target of 3,500 (one in every community) achieved before Labour left office in 2010. A senior official recalled Margaret Hodge declaring that "we have created a new frontier in the welfare state".

Alongside the expansion of the Sure Start programme, the 2000 SR also committed £450m over three years to improve services for 5-13 year olds. Whereas it could be argued that the Sure Start programme provided a range of new welfare services for the children and families of young children, the aim of the Children's Fund was to fill a perceived gap between existing universal and specialist services. Here the third of Stratham and Smith's (2010) three versions of early intervention began to take shape. The concept was used to draw attention to a sub set of the general population of children and young people who may need additional support for a variety of reasons, but who do not meet the threshold for more specialist interventions. Local programmes were required to work towards addressing locally identified 'risk factors' associated with poor school attendance, poor school achievement, involvement in crime, and poor health, all associated with poor outcomes in later life. These factors had been identified in the report of the Social Exclusion Policy Action Team 12 (Social Exclusion

Unit, 2000). More generally new local services were required to be accessible to those historically reluctant to engage with welfare agencies, also an indicator of social exclusion (Edwards et al, 2006). Importantly social exclusion and the associated risk factors were seen to correlate with economic disadvantage and funding was distributed accordingly. In line with the principles of Sure Start, it also directed local agencies to establish formal partnerships across the charity and public sectors. The aim was to try and get local agencies to work more closely together to do more to help children overcome the disadvantages associated with poverty.

The Children's Fund was managed by the Children and Young People's Unit (CYPU). However, the CYPU's remit was much wider than the management of the Children's Fund. Its primary role was to lead the co-ordination of policy making for children and young people aged 0-19 across all government departments. The unit reported to the new Children and Young People's Cabinet Committee, nominally chaired by Gordon Brown, although in reality it was chaired by the newly appointed Minister for Young People based in the Home Office, Paul Boateng (Interview). Althea Efunshile, previously Director of Education at the London Borough of Lewisham, was appointed by a Treasury official (Interview) to the position of Head of the CYPU starting in January 2001. Alongside the advocacy and co-ordination of children's policy across Whitehall, the CYPU turned its attention to what was being delivered at the local level. In keeping with the ambitions of the Children's Fund programme it set out to extend the remit of universal welfare services. This vision is clearly laid out in the document *Building a Strategy for Children and Young People* (CYPU, 2001) published in November 2001. This document also included the first version of a cross departmental 'outcomes framework' which later became the pivotal ECM five outcomes (HM Government, 2004). Alongside the development of this strategy the Treasury had been working on *Tackling Child Poverty* (HM Treasury, 2001) which was published a month later.

In addition to increasing family income through tax and benefit reforms, the strategy clearly identifies the improvement of universal public services as a key objective in alleviating the effects of poverty. Significantly, it also lays the groundwork for the ECM structural reforms which were to follow in the years ahead declaring that “there is insufficient joining-up at ground level” (Treasury, 2001, p40). In the *Children at Risk Review* (HM Treasury, 2002), part of the 2002 SR, the Government’s determination to extend the remit of universal services is restated. It clearly articulates the need to intervene earlier to prevent poor outcomes in terms of educational achievement, employment, health and anti-social behaviour. These outcomes make up four of the five that form the basis of the ECM five outcomes, the missing one relating to safeguarding. This review also states that insufficient progress has been made locally in terms of joining-up local services across the charity and public sectors and that the Government believes there is a case for structural reform. This is eventually achieved over two years later following the Children Act 2004.

The Children’s Charities Pre-ECM

The Sure Start review was led by the Treasury civil servant, Norman Glass, but is notable for looking to external experts for evidence of ‘what works’ in relation to welfare services to support young children and their parents. Alongside the research evidence from the United States, the review team seemed particularly open to the influence of the children’s charity sector at home. However, the robustness of the evidence available can be questioned. As one charity leader involved in the review explains:

“They called for evidence from all these outside groups like the charity I was working for and it was quite funny because we all wrote in stuff that we believed and that the Treasury thought was evidence. There was no scientific basis, it was what we believed. But for some reason they took more credence against what we wrote in than

from what the Departments were telling them... Was any of this tested against really rigorous evaluation? No.”

This willingness to trust the children’s charities in the early years was born in part out of a mistrust of departmental interests. Although based in the Department, the SSU and the CYPU were established as cross-departmental units with protected budgets. Furthermore the Treasury recruited staff from outside the civil service. The chief executive of the Family Services Unit, Naomi Eisenstadt, one of the *Friends of Sure Start* was recruited to head up the SSU. Althea Efunshile was later recruited from Lewisham Council to head up the CYPU. However, despite Efunshile’s background, mistrust of local government is also evident. Not only was local government excluded from policy formulation in these early Labour years, it was also not seen to be trusted to deliver the Sure Start and Children’s Fund programmes, at least not on its own. Government actively sought to establish children’s charities as the lead organisations within local delivery partnerships. A senior official working on the Children’s Fund explained that that this was necessary as it was the charity sector that had experience in relation to early intervention and supporting poor families, not local government. They were seen as being closer to local communities and more capable of innovation.

Despite this ambition local government became the dominant partner in many areas. It became clear that most local children’s charities did not have the bureaucratic capacity to act as the financially accountable body. In practice local authorities assumed this role with a local charity chairing the partnership board, giving the impression that the charities were leading. The exceptions to this were in local areas where one of the major children’s charities, either Barnardo’s or NCH, had a strong presence in the locality (Interview). Importantly these large children’s charities, along with the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children (NSPCC), the Children’s Society and the National Children’s Bureau (NCB), also had good access to Department policy makers. They

provided an alternative space for policy development work outside of the civil service and the local government associations. However, it was the NCB, a specialist policy organisation, which became particularly influential. It had been promoting service integration in children's services for a number of years (see Pugh, 1988) and was closely involved in the drafting of the Sure Start proposals (interview with Treasury official). Recruited in 1998, its new Chief Executive Paul Ennals had regular contact with senior Labour Party figures in the Department and the Treasury, including Gordon Brown (interviews). However, this must not be taken to imply that the major charities, NCB in particular, were driving the policy process. A senior official recruited into government from one of the major children's charities explained that: "the truth is that lots of people working in the children's sector at that time were Labour party members, Labour party activists and were just very at home, it was very easy to work together, very much shared values". The Party was seeking out the views of those it felt it could agree with. There is no evidence to suggest that the Department's or the Treasury's agenda was being driven by the major children's charities.

Treasury Control of the ECM Programme

The Victoria Climbié Inquiry and ECM

Following on from the *ECM* Green Paper (HM Government, 2003) the Children Act 2004 and *ECM: Change for Children* (HM Government, 2004) led to significant structural reform of local government and extended its functions to incorporate the policy agenda outlined above. Local authority education and children's social services departments were merged under the new statutory post of Director of Children's Services (DCS). DCSs were required to establish multi-agency Children's Trusts to co-ordinate service planning and commissioning across all local agencies working with children and young people. Furthermore they were subject to statutory planning, performance management and

inspection arrangements. Alongside the DCS local authorities were also required to appoint a lead member for children's services. Within central government a new position of Minister for Children and Young People was established within the DfES. Under the Minister a new Directorate for Children and Young People was established which incorporated existing DfES units including the SSU and the CYPU along with functions previously in the Home Office and the children's social care function which had resided in the Department of Health (DoH). The crucial point that needs to be made here is that whilst these reforms were framed as a direct response to the *Victoria Climbié Inquiry* (Laming, 2003) they appear to have been informed more clearly by the policy framework the CYPU had begun to articulate. Perhaps tellingly the ECM Green Paper was led Paul Boateng, by now Chief Secretary to the Treasury. The Green Paper seeks to incorporate concern for extreme cases of child abuse within this policy framework.

“The most tragic manifestation of these problems is when we fail to protect children at risk of harm or neglect. But the problem of children falling through the cracks between different services goes much further. Too often children experience difficulties at home or at school, but receive too little help too late, once problems have reached crisis point. As Lord Laming's recommendations made clear, child protection cannot be separated from policies to improve children's lives as a whole... *We need to ensure we properly protect children at risk within a framework of universal services.*” (HM Government, 2003, p5). Emphasis added.

As Frost and Parton (2009) have clearly illustrated, the concept of 'safeguarding' was initially developed in relation to the broader remit of children's social work under Section 17 of the Children Act 1989, in contrast to the narrow focus on child abuse under Section 47. However, the concept was stretched under the ECM programme to highlight the duties of universal services to promote the safety of children and young people (Ch 4). In the Green

Paper 'Staying Safe' had been added to the four outcomes articulated in the *Children at Risk Review* (Treasury, 2002). The five outcomes (be healthy, stay safe, enjoy and achieve, make a positive contribution and achieve-economic well-being) became the cornerstone of the planning, performance management and inspection system which later emerged. The Green Paper does also include some specific measures relating to child protection in response to Lord Laming's inquiry, most notably the promise of an information sharing database. However, despite the presentation it is hard to see the ECM programme as a direct response. The evidence presented here suggests that the primary motivation behind the reforms was to extend the role of public services to better meet the needs of economically disadvantaged children. This was neither a response to a crisis nor a hollowing out of government.

The Children's Inter-Agency Group (CIAG) and the Association of Directors of Children's Services (ADCS)

The CIAG brought together a range of key associations across local government and health together with the children's charity sector. It was initially formed in 2002 as a defensive coalition ahead of the publication of the Victoria Climbié Inquiry. The objective at this point was to stop all the different organisations implicated in the Inquiry from blaming each other (Interview with CIAG member). However, the group became involved in the drafting of the ECM Green Paper, as it provided a convenient way for the Government to consult representatives from across the children's sector. According to one prominent member of the group, it was successful in taming some of the more radical ideas contained in early drafts. Furthermore, the group broadly welcomed the overarching policy framework based on integration of universal services and an increased focus on early intervention. Indeed the group's own publication *Serving Children Well: A New Vision for Children's Services* (LGA, ADSS and NHS Confederation, 2002) sets out many of the principles of integration which the Government appears to have accepted. However, the group was clearly opposed to

structural reform of local government, arguing that integration could be achieved without it. The argument was lost, and structural reform went on to form the basis of the Children Act 2004. The drive for structural reform came from within government. It clearly did not come from the policy network.

In 2007 the ADSS split and the ADCS was formed as an association to represent the newly established DCSs in local government. In an interview for this research Beverley Hughes indicated that she worked closely with the new association and the CIAG, which by now met with government on a regular and formal basis. However, indicating the degree of influence these representative bodies had she stated: “That was not so much about new policy, but about delivery, what’s working, what’s not working, and problems that arise along the way”. A further indication of the limited influence these external groups had came in the wake of the financial crisis beginning in 2008. A prominent charity sector leader explained how Ed Balls, then Secretary of State, forbid any official work on planning for savings. However, perhaps the most significant feature of this policy network was the absence of a voice for the children’s social work profession. Social work did not feature prominently in policy discourse led by the DfES or the Treasury prior to the Victoria Climbié Inquiry (at this time it was part of the DoH remit). The Treasury’s *Children at Risk Review* (HM Treasury, 2002) includes only four of the five ECM outcomes, with ‘Stay Safe’ being added in the ECM Green Paper. Furthermore, it was argued earlier that children’s social work was seen as just one component of the new safeguarding (stay safe) priority which sought to extend the duties of universal services in relation to child safety (Frost and Parton, 2009). Social work professional interests were not well represented by the ADSS or on the CIAG more generally. A member of the ADSS at this time stated in an interview it was hard to stick up for social work. Following the Victoria Climbié Inquiry the reputation of the profession was in tatters. Added to this it was difficult to argue with the focus on service integration and early

intervention given how well this had been received. Arguably professional representation was weakened further when local authorities recruited the first generation of DCSs. Only 25% of new DCSs had a background in social work (Frost and Parton, 2009, p163). Interestingly the Shadow Children's Minister Tim Loughton seems to have picked up on this issue before the Peter Connelly case shook Ed Balls into action. This had important implications for the development of children's services policy under the Conservatives.

Competing Party Ideologies: From Poor Children to Dysfunctional Families

Having set out how the Treasury controlled Departmental policy and the development of the ECM programme, this section examines the ideological underpinnings of the programme. Firstly, the Treasury's commitment to a redistributive social policy under Gordon Brown, articulated in the child poverty strategy, is shown to provide the key underlying assumptions of the ECM programme. Attempts to shift the focus of children's policy by No.10 policy units under Tony Blair did have an impact, but did not dislodge the Treasury framework. In contrast, the Conservative policy position developed in opposition under David Cameron is shown to have shifted the focus of children's policy since the 2010 election. However, Conservative intra party competition has also shifted the focus of children's policy since the election.

The Labour Treasury and Child Poverty

Although it was Tony Blair that stated Labour's commitment to end child poverty in 1999 (Blair, 1999), it was Gordon Brown's sustained commitment to tackling child poverty which provided a consistent thread within Labour's children's services policy throughout the Party's entire period in office. Indeed the 2010 Child Poverty Act was one of the last pieces of legislation passed by the Labour Government. Going back to 1997, it was the Treasury under Brown that initiated the Sure Start review in 1997, as part of the 1998 CSR. Whilst this

review considered a wide range of evidence relating to ‘what works’ in the United States and learned from the experience of the children’s charities at home, there was clear commitment from the Treasury to provide resources at the outset. As a Treasury official involved in the review explained:

“We were told by the top of the office that we ought to think big on this. By which they meant, don’t just come up with a proposal for 10 pilots that cost 10k each. So we ended up with a proposition which I think was £250m for three years³. They were really interested in how to do better for poor families and poor children, that was very much a feature of their government. That created a space within which officials could be quite radical and say right we will go out and talk to the voluntary sector and listen to what they are saying which felt quite radical at the time, and the political emphasis on the importance of child poverty definitely helped make the space for that.”

Evidence of the Treasury’s influence over the development of the ECM reforms was considered in the last section. Although this was often justified in SID terms there appears to have been a deep ideological commitment to tackling economic inequality beneath the surface. Asked about the development of Sure Start in an interview for this research Margaret Hodge stated:

“Certainly we recognised the economic argument and that is very much evident from the stuff from the States, they reckon there is a one in seven return on investment in children and young people, but the reason this was a policy priority was to do with our commitment to reducing inequality in society.”

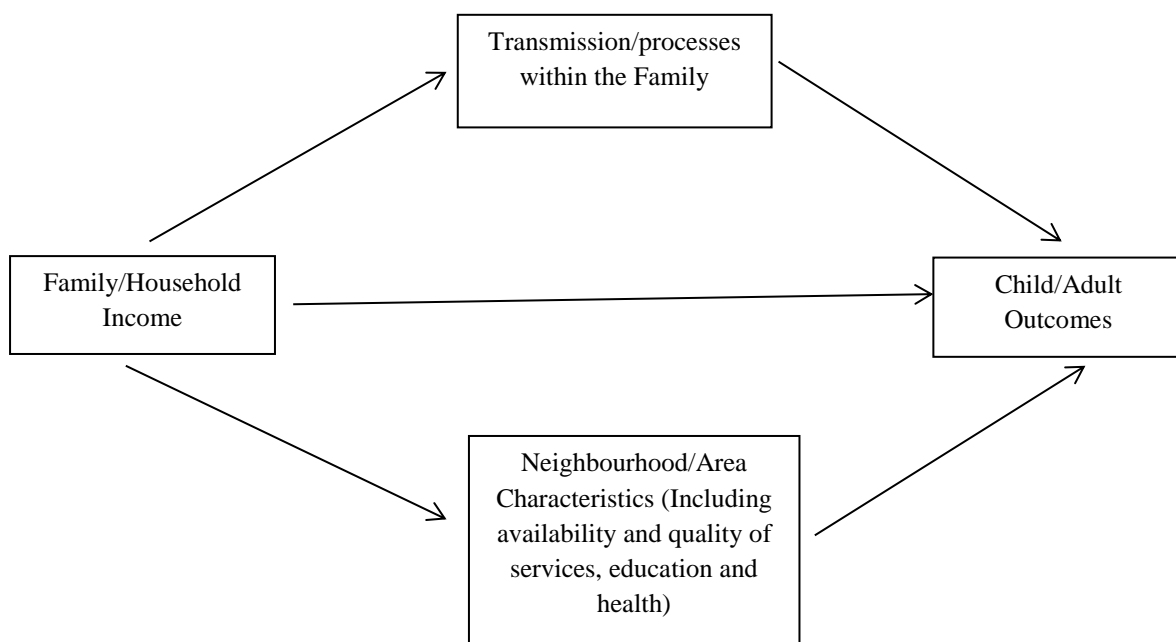
³ The final figure agreed in the 1998 CSR was £450m over three years.

Beverley Hughes, the longest standing children’s minister, took over from Margaret Hodge as children’s minister in 2005, stepping down in 2009. In an interview she also revealed the ideological underpinning of Labour policy.

“In the context of universal services, underneath that universal umbrella we wanted and expected the public services, the agencies, to identify, target and deliver more to disadvantaged children, because closing the gap, reducing child poverty and closing all kinds of gaps between disadvantaged children and the rest was a really top priority. It’s what we were about, it’s what we stand for, it’s wired into our [Labour Party] DNA.”

The causal importance of economic inequality in the Treasury’s analysis can be seen in the diagram below taken from *Tackling Child Poverty* (HM Treasury, 2001, p3). It depicts three ways in which poor outcomes in childhood or later life are driven by economic disadvantage.

Figure 1



This provides, not only the rationale for income transfers to the poor, but also the logic underpinning reform of children's services. This clearly indicates a commitment to a RED social policy, challenging existing interpretations which have drawn more heavily on the policy statements published by No.10 policy units under Blair. To strengthen this argument further we need to briefly consider a couple of examples of how the Treasury responded to challenges from No.10.

One senior official working under Labour commented, "I could never figure out if this department was about all children, poor children or fucked up families". The development of Sure Start is an interesting case in this regard. In her account of the development of the programme, Naomi Eisenstadt (2011) the Head of the SSU between 1998 and 2007, describes how the original focus of the programme on the nurturing of young babies gave way to a greater emphasis on childcare, education, and the employability of parents in line with the DWP's policy agenda. Electoral considerations were also a factor. Originally targeted at the poorest neighbourhoods the programme was rolled out nationally from 2003 onwards. Buy in from the middle classes was needed given the massive increases in expenditure (interview with Margaret Hodge). Here we can see the tension between a focus on all children versus one on poor children. In response to this tension the Treasury concept of 'progressive universalism' was honed. In the 2005 document *Support for Parents: The Best Start for Children* (Treasury and DfES, 2005), published ahead of the 2007 CSR, this is defined as "support for all, with more support for those who need it most" (p1).

At the other end of the spectrum, No. 10 was also concerned with crime and anti-social behaviour. The target population here was the "fucked-up families". In January 2003 Louise Casey was appointed to head up the Anti-Social Behaviour Unit within the Home Office. In the summer of 2003 Children's Fund guidance was adjusted to stipulate that 25% of funding be spent on crime and anti-social behaviour initiatives. Casey was later appointed head of the

Respect Task Force. Tony Blair launched the Respect Action Plan (Home Office, 2006) in January 2006. However, this does not seem to have dislodged the Treasury's ECM policy programme. Beverley Hughes (interview) admitted that the *Youth Matters* (HM Government, 2005; DfES 2006) programme which she helped to develop tried to strike a balance between the Respect agenda and meeting the needs of the wider population of young people not involved in crime and anti-social behaviour. Whilst *Support for Parents: The Best Start for Children* (Treasury and DfES, 2005) includes Blair's "rights and responsibilities" as one of its underpinning principles there is also a commitment to continue to focus on supporting children and young people from disadvantaged economic backgrounds (p1). Furthermore, the ECM programme is very much alive in the *Children's Plan* (DCSF, 2007) which followed after the 2007 CSR and after Ed Balls had become Secretary of State. It was the Conservatives that followed the MUD focus No.10 had been pushing for.

The Conservatives and Broken Britain

Following his election as Conservative Party leader in December 2005 David Cameron initiated a review of the Party's social policy. The Social Justice Policy Group led by Iain Duncan Smith and supported by the think tank Centre for Social Justice published *Breakdown Britain* (Social Justice Policy Group, 2006) a year later. The report examines (1) the extent of social breakdown and poverty in Britain and (2) the causes of poverty. The analysis departs significantly from the Labour Treasury model of the causes of poor "child/adult outcomes" depicted in figure 1 above. Labour is criticised for simply pushing people over the poverty line via changes to the tax and benefit system. Furthermore, its measurement of child poverty is seen as too simplistic in so far as it only exposes the economic dimension of poverty and obscures the complex mix of social issues faced by those in the deepest poverty. Whereas Labour is depicted as having focused on those at the bottom of the ladder, this report shifts the focus to those "tangled up" in the safety net. The review

was organised around what are described five “pathways to poverty”: (1) family breakdown (2) educational failure (3) worklessness and economic dependence (4) addictions (5) indebtedness. A sixth group looked at the role of the charity sector in tackling these issues. The findings of the first and third groups are particularly pertinent for the discussion here. They are explicitly critical of Labour’s approach to child poverty whilst appealing to traditional Conservative concerns about marriage and welfare dependency. In April 2011 the Coalition published *A New Approach to Child Poverty: Tackling the Causes of Disadvantage and Transforming Families’ Lives* (HM Government, 2011), as it was required to under the Child Poverty Act 2010. The strategy is based on the same critique of Labour and the same analysis of the causes of poverty. However, on this occasion the fiscal climate provides a further pretext for reform (see Forewords by Iain Duncan Smith and Sarah Teather).

The critique of Labour’s child poverty strategy outlined above is mainly focused on the financial hand outs. However, a critique of Labour’s public service reforms, including ECM, starts to emerge in *Breakthrough Britain: Ending the Costs of Social Breakdown*. (Social Justice Policy Group, 2007). Firstly, the report argues that the ‘welfare society’ dwarfs the state as the biggest provider of care for children. The ECM programme is criticised for neglecting the role of parents in the upbringing of children, preferring to extend the role of public services. However, the report recognises that the state must continue to support those families experiencing the most complex difficulties (p6-7). Here a narrower focus for children’s services policy starts to emerge which challenges the Treasury’s ECM framework.

The ECM definition of early intervention is challenged in *Early Intervention: Good Parents, Great Kids, Better Citizens* (Centre for Social Justice, 2008) a report which includes a foreword by the Labour MP Graham Allen alongside Iain Duncan Smith. In tune with the Social Justice Policy Group the report focuses on a smaller cohort of the population than ECM does. The main challenge is not to tackle economic disadvantage, but to tackle the

‘dysfunctional base’ of society. This section of society is associated with the pathways to poverty discussed earlier. Here we can detect a focus on the first and second of Stratham and Smith’s three definitions of early intervention, and a shift away from the third. Early intervention targeted at this ‘dysfunctional base’ seemingly provides a solution that unites two politicians from different parties. ‘Evidence based’ specialist interventions in the early years (0-3) of a child’s life are recommended to minimise the impact of dysfunctional parenting on cognitive development. To compliment this parenting programmes should also be carefully commissioned to “prevent the intergenerational transmission of disadvantage”. Details of ‘evidence based’ interventions it approves of are included in the report. This model of early intervention challenges the effectiveness of Labour’s less accurately targeted population wide programmes. For example, it is argued that “too many Sure Start Children’s Centres have, since being set up, drifted into concentrating on child care, providing less and less of the more challenging yet vitally important support and learning for parents to nurture their children in the early years” (p82). The criticism here is that they have failed to successfully engage families with the most complex problems. Shortly after this report, and in the midst of the Peter Connelly media storm, Iain Duncan Smith argued that earlier intervention with dysfunctional families was necessary to avoid future tragedies such as those of Victoria Climbié and Peter Connelly (*Guardian*, 13 November 2008).

The Conservatives’ Children’s Services Programme

The Conservatives and Social Work Professionals

At the same time that *Breakdown Britain* was published, Tim Loughton announced at the 2006 ADSS conference that he was setting up a commission to examine the future of children’s social work. The Conservative commission reported its findings in October 2007 in *No More Blame Game: The Future for Children’s Social Workers* (Conservatives, 2007).

The Commission included a range of experts from academia, the charities and local government and took evidence from an impressive number of organisations across the sector. In his foreword to the report David Cameron situates the commission within the wider social policy context of 'Broken Britain'. He states that "social workers, particularly those dealing with child protection cases, are at the sharp end of these challenges, often dealing with very difficult and damaged families". He goes on to draw attention to the lack of support given to social workers by Labour, especially when compared to teachers and doctors (p3). However, the report itself is not overtly critical of Labour's record and adopts a non-partisan tone. It calls for greater recognition of the contribution of social workers and an improvement to their status and acceptance of their professionalism (see Tim Loughton foreword). The recommendations included a range of measures aimed at improving the training, recruitment and retention of social workers, as well as measures to improve the voice of the profession in policy making including the appointment of a Chief Social Worker. In the midst of media reporting of the Peter Connelly case in November 2008 Ed Balls appears to have accepted that Labour had not done enough to support social workers (interviews with officials). He established the Social Work Taskforce which was then succeeded by the Social Work Reform Board (SWRB). The recommendations of the Taskforce taken forward by the SWRB and now by the newly established College of Social Work are broadly in line with the recommendations of the Conservative Party Commission. However, in response to Laming's review of child protection which he also commissioned (Laming, 2009) Balls defends the legislative and policy framework of ECM (HM Government, 2009, p2). In the run up to the 2010 election Tim Loughton restates the Conservative's plans for reform in *Child Protection: Back to the Frontline* (Conservatives, 2010). This echoes the earlier Commission, but clearly attacks Labour for its record in office. The main line of argument is that Labour has not simply neglected frontline social work, but has inadvertently made the job much harder

following successive waves of legislation and accompanying rules and procedures. This “bureaucratic drift” (p 2-3) is a theme picked up after the election in Eileen Munro’s Review of the child protection system (DfE, 2011) commissioned by Tim Loughton. The review supports the recommendations of the Social Work Taskforce and adds a number of specific recommendations aimed at reducing the level of prescription in social work practice and promotes greater use of professional judgement in place of compliance with procedure. Munro promotes a ‘systems’ methodology which takes greater account of context to reveal the complexity of professional decision making. This has important implications for central guidance, inspection and serious case review processes. She is critical of an existing focus, particularly in case reviews, on the actions of individual workers in isolation, seemingly in search of someone to blame (DfE, 2011). Interestingly the review also includes a recommendation to place a statutory duty on local authorities to secure “early help” services for children, young people and families. Having accepted the proposals in full it can be argued that Tim Loughton’s programme, whilst narrowing the scope of children’s services to a clearer focus on families known to social workers, presents some continuity with the ECM policy framework in so far as it recognises the importance of “early help” and therefore the resourcing of services outside of the core child protection system.

Michael Gove and Children’s Services Policy

However, following the sacking of Tim Loughton in September 2012 this programme of reform appears to have been replaced by a more narrowly focused set of policy priorities linked to the most extreme cases of child abuse and neglect, perhaps the best examples of “dysfunctional families”. In an interview for this research carried out in 2013 Tim Loughton stated:

“Various things that I put in place seem to have been put on the back burner, which is a shame, because what we need and what we were doing was a long term structural overhaul of the whole system, and there is a real focus on adoption now which is great, but adoption accounts for about 5% of kids in care at the moment.”

These sentiments were echoed by a number of interviewees. These network actors had been generally supportive of Tim Loughton’s policy priorities but are now alarmed by the direction being taken by Michael Gove. In a speech a couple of months after Tim Loughton was sacked Gove set out his policy priorities (Gove, 2012). By focusing on the most extreme examples of ‘failure’, including the Peter Connelly case, he argues that more children must be taken into care with the possibility of adoption thereafter. He is critical of social work for its “optimism bias” arguing that it clouds professional decision making and puts the interests of parents ahead of children. His intention to reshape the system in order to increase care numbers and adoption rates runs counter to the recommendations of the Munro Review which emphasises the complexity of each case and the importance of professional judgement in decision making. Furthermore, he diverts attention away from early help services which are critical to the prevention of family break up. Gove is being advised by Martin Narey the ex-chief executive of Barnardo’s and a long standing advocate of increasing care numbers. However, he is seemingly not accessible to those who had access under Labour or indeed when Tim Loughton was in office. The sacking of Tim Loughton appears to have drawn a line under a brief period in which it appeared as if the social work profession had access to ministers and was starting to gain a degree of influence over policy priorities.

Conclusion

Returning to the first research question, it has been demonstrated that party ideology and intra and inter-party competition have shaped children’s services policy. Firstly, the Brown

Treasury's commitment to a redistributive social policy, articulated as the child poverty strategy, was shown to have motivated its early involvement in children's policy and which went on to underpin the ECM programme. This commitment to child poverty was sustained by Brown throughout the entire Labour period in office. Furthermore, it survived attempts from No.10 to shift the focus of children's services policy. This reinterpretation of the ECM programme is reinforced when we consider the Conservative response developed initially in opposition, but which has gone on to inform the children's services policy programme of the Conservative-led Coalition. Since coming to power the policy programme tied to Tim Loughton has been dislodged by a more narrowly focused programme led by Michael Gove.

Returning to the second question, control of the policy agenda by the political parties has been reflected in the reshaping of the policy network. Three separate policy networks were identified during the period studied for this research. In the early Labour period, before the publication of the Victoria Climbié Inquiry (Laming, 2003) the Treasury appeared to open up the policy process to the children's charity sector. However, it sought to resist departmental interests and excluded the local government interests all together. Furthermore, the charity sector was approached by government policy makers to help shape initiatives such as Sure Start and the Children's Fund which the Treasury was clearly committed to. These initiatives did not follow successful lobbying by "self-steering interorganisational networks". In the run up to the publication of the Victoria Climbié Inquiry the CIAG was formed initially to coordinate a unified response across the statutory and charity sectors. Once established, the group also sought to influence the development of the ECM Green Paper and the ECM programme which followed. However, it failed to resist the Government's plan to restructure local government. The group along with the newly established professional association, the ADCS, then assumed an advisory role. Its influence was limited to technical aspects of policy.

The third policy network identified in this research was formed by the Shadow Children's Minister Tim Loughton following the establishment of the Conservative Commission on Children's Social Work in 2006. He approached representatives of the social work profession who had been excluded from the policy process under Labour. The recommendations of the commission (Conservatives, 2007) went on to form the basis of the Coalition's programme of reform when in office. However, even before Tim Loughton became a DfE minister after the 2010 election the Peter Connelly case seemingly opened up the DCSF to the social work profession. In the aftermath of the case Labour's neglect of the profession appears to have been accepted. Ed Balls subsequently established the Social Work Taskforce which later handed over to the Social Work Reform Board. The recommendations of the Taskforce to be taken forward by the Board were in line with those of the earlier Conservative Party Commission. After the election the case for reform was underlined further by the review led by the social work academic, Professor Eileen Munro (DfE, 2011). However, the influence of the social work profession under the Conservative-led Coalition appears to have been tied to Tim Loughton. Following his sacking in September 2012 the commitment of the DfE to this reform programme is questionable. The Conservative Secretary of State Michael Gove has set out a more targeted focus on the most extreme examples of "dysfunctional families" which does not appear to be supported by the policy network actors.

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