CABINET

REPORT OF THE INTERDEPARTMENTAL COMMITTEE ON LOCAL AUTHORITY AND ALLIED PERSONAL SOCIAL SERVICES

Joint Memorandum by the Secretary of State for the Home Department, the Secretary of State for Education and Science, the Minister of Housing and Local Government and the Minister of Health

The Report of the Interdepartmental Committee on Local Authority and Allied Personal Social Services (the Seebohm Committee) will be published on 23rd July. The Committee's own Summary of their Report is attached at Annex I.

2. No decision need be taken on the substance of the Report until all concerned have had an opportunity to consider it. All we need to decide now is what should be said on the day of publication. We propose that publication should be announced in a Written Reply to an inspired Question in the terms of the draft at Annex II.

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16th July, 1968
1. We were appointed on 20th December 1965 "to review the organisation and responsibilities of the local authority personal social services in England and Wales, and to consider what changes are desirable to secure an effective family service".

2. We now have the honour to submit our Report. We recommend a new local authority department, providing a community based and family oriented service, which will be available to all. This new department will, we believe, reach far beyond the discovery and rescue of social casualties; it will enable the greatest possible number of individuals to act reciprocally, giving and receiving service for the well-being of the whole community.

3. The new department will have responsibilities going beyond those of existing local authority departments, but they will include the present services provided by children's departments, the welfare services provided under the National Assistance Act 1948, educational welfare and child guidance services, the home help service, mental health social work services, other social work services provided by health departments, day nurseries, and certain social welfare work currently undertaken by some housing departments.

4. In our opinion, local authorities should immediately review needs and services in their own areas in order to determine current priorities. As a committee we have not attempted this task, for it can be performed only in relation to the needs and circumstances of specific areas, including their previous investment in particular services.

5. However, we foresee that most local authorities are likely to feel that today children under five and very old people call for special attention and
some local authorities will have clear "priority areas" within their boundaries. For the nation as a whole we consider that the community approach indicated in chapter XVI and the training of staff for the social service department, including the field staff of the area teams and the staff for residential accommodation, will be crucial to the success of the new service.

Brief summary of the report

Part 1 - Introduction and the present situation

6. In chapter II we discuss briefly the terms of reference and the background to the enquiry. Chapter III describes the procedure we adopted. Chapter IV summarises briefly the history of the services with which we are concerned, and their present structure, which is described in greater detail in appendix F.

Part 2 - The need for change and the form it should take

7. In chapter V, we examine criticisms of the effectiveness of the present services, and reach the conclusion that substantial improvements could be made in them, and that organisational change and changes in the distribution of responsibilities between local authority committees and departments would be important means to this end.

8. In chapter VI, we examine the main proposals which we received for the reorganisation of the services. We conclude that there are overriding objections to all of them, apart from the proposal for a social service department.

9. In chapter VII, we consider the case for and against the proposed social service department, stating our belief that it will provide better services for those in need because it will ensure a more co-ordinated and comprehensive approach to the problems of individuals, families and communities, should be more effective in detecting need and encouraging people to seek help, should be able to attract resources and use them more effectively, and should make it possible to plan more systematically for the future.

Part 3 - Meeting needs in a comprehensive service

10. We go on to discuss particular groups of services and how they would be affected by the creation of a social service department. In chapter VIII we deal with services for children and their families, emphasising in particular the need for development of the social care services for children under five. We recommend that the social service department should be responsible for social care services for schools and suggest ways in which these services should be organised.
and developed. We explain that, owing to lack of time and the need for an early report, we have not been able to give adequate consideration to the youth service and other services for young people but we recommend a comprehensive enquiry into all these services. As regards services for children in trouble with the law, we give a general welcome to the recently published White Paper, Children in Trouble, subject to reservations on a few points, notably on the age at which criminal prosecution should be possible, and the division of responsibility between the probation service and the social service department in supervising young offenders. Finally in this chapter, we suggest how the child guidance service should be related to the functions of the social service department and developed into a family guidance service.

11. There follows a chapter on services for old people (chapter IX), which stresses the need for the social service department to concern itself particularly with the development of a more coherent pattern of provision for old people, including more effective measures for identifying those in need and meeting their needs early. Chapter X deals with the services for the physically handicapped, including in particular the need for the social service department to concern itself with the provision of adequate housing and to help some particularly vulnerable groups of handicapped people - for example, school leavers, those who are partially incapacitated in late middle life - to cope with their problems.

12. In chapter XI we tackle the particularly difficult problems presented by the social services for the mentally ill and the mentally subnormal. On the organisational issues, we conclude that junior training centres should be the responsibility of the education department, but that other social services for the mentally ill and mentally subnormal, including the provision of hostels for all ages and training centres for adults, should be the responsibility of the social service department. This chapter, like the chapter on services for the physically handicapped, stresses the need for teamwork between the social service department and the other services and organisations concerned with services for the mentally ill and the mentally subnormal, and draws attention to the acute shortage of trained social workers. We recommend that the social service department should have expert medical advice in planning and running the services for the mentally ill and mentally subnormal, perhaps a consultant psychiatrist seconded from a hospital board on a part-time basis. We stress also the
importance of better systems of research and intelligence through which better methods of meeting need can be evolved.

Chapter XII deals with some of the other services provided by health departments. We recommend that the social service department should have the responsibility for providing the home help service, partly because the grounds on which home helps are provided are largely social, and partly because providing a home help may be one way of preventing a child or old person being taken into residential care, which would be the responsibility of the social service department. Social workers, apart from mental health social workers, at present in health departments would also be transferred to the new social service department. Health visitors should remain within health departments. The concluding section of this chapter discusses the vitally important question of the future of local health departments in relation to the proposed social service department and to the possibility of a much wider recasting (which is outside our terms of reference) of the administrative structure of the National Health Service.

Part 4 - Foundations of an effective service

We do not recommend any radical change in the pattern of responsibility for local authority housing, but in chapter XIII we emphasise the fundamental importance of adequate housing for the provision of an effective family service and, in particular, the need to pay special attention to the housing problems of elderly and physically handicapped people, large families, and one-parent families. We urge that housing departments should take a wider view of their responsibilities and be specifically and directly concerned, not only with building houses and managing those they own, but also with the whole range of housing problems of the area in question. We are against any division of the responsibility for housing - by, for example, giving the social service department responsibility for letting and managing specific groups of houses for groups of people in special need. In particular, we recommend that the responsibility for accommodating homeless families, as distinct from providing limited overnight accommodation, should be placed squarely on housing departments. We suggest that social workers from the social service department might be attached for all or part of their time to housing departments in order to help deal with the more difficult social problems among council tenants or people in need of housing.
15. Throughout the report, we are at pains to make clear that we do not regard our proposals as merely putting together existing local authority departments and parts of departments. The new structure we propose should have much wider implications, which are discussed in chapters XIV to XVIII. In chapter XIV, we explain how we see the social service department and other related services working in the task of developing more effective preventive measures. 

16. We have been particularly concerned about the lack of adequate systems of collecting and disseminating information about the working of the personal social services and the needs they ought to be meeting, and about the small amount of research going on in these fields. In chapter XV we make proposals for remedying these defects.

17. In chapter XVI, we set out our ideas on community development and the use of voluntary effort, emphasising that an effective family service cannot be provided without exploring new ways of using resources outside the local government structure.

Part 5 - Specialisation and training

18. Chapters XVII and XVIII deal with the inter-related issues of specialisation in social work, and with training for staff in the social service department - which will, of course, include many other kinds of staff apart from social workers. In chapter XVII, we recommend a new approach to the issue of specialisation in social work, suggesting that at the basic field work level social workers should move towards taking responsibility for the whole range of individual and family social problems, drawing on support in this from consultants within the social service department. In chapter XVIII, we urge a considerable expansion in training for all groups of staff, and in particular for residential staff, and a unification of the present separate arrangements for training social workers.

Part 6 - Structure and implementation

19. In chapter XIX we discuss the structure and working of the proposed social service department. The basis of the department, in our view, should in most parts of the country be teams of upwards of a dozen social workers, each team serving populations of between 50,000 and 100,000, and with the maximum amount of responsibility delegated to them from the headquarters of the social service department. For the time being, the social service department should be run by
separate committee of the local authority, with a separate principal officer reporting directly to the council. We envisage that in course of time most of the principal officers at the heads of the new departments would be professionally qualified social workers with training in management and administration or administrators with qualifications in social work. We emphasise the importance of close links between the social service department and other departments, notably the health, education and housing departments; indeed this point crops up throughout the report. We discuss the respective roles of members and officers in running the personal social services, drawing attention to the delicate balance of the relationship between members and officers.

20. Our terms of reference excluded consideration of the organisation of central government, but nevertheless we thought it right in chapter XIX to point out that reorganisation of services at local level would not be effective unless it was accompanied by reorganisation at central government level, and in the structure of councils and committees advisory to Ministers in this field. In particular, we see an important place for a reorganised and strengthened central government inspectorate, with promotional, consultative and advisory functions, in helping the development of the new department.

21. Finally, in chapter XIX, we make specific suggestions about ways of resolving some difficult problems on the handling of confidential information, and bring together proposals made in other parts of the report for the provision of medical advice to the social service department.

22. Chapter XX contains recommendations on the implementation of our proposals. We deal in particular with the relationship between our recommendations and what may emerge from the recommendations of the Royal Commission on Local Government in England. We urge that our main proposals should be implemented without waiting for legislation on general local government reorganisation, mainly because of the need to improve the services as quickly as possible. In the long-term, however, we recommend strongly that responsibility for the social service department, and for local health, education and housing functions should be discharged by the same tier of local government.

23. Chapter XXI deals with the implications of the Committee's recommendations for services outside their terms of reference - the Supplementary Benefits Commission, the Probation and Aftercare Service, doctors, and medical social work in hospitals.
24. The report is concerned throughout with resources: how the existing resources can best be used; what additional resources are likely to be available; how these additional resources can be attracted. An effective family service cannot be provided without additional resources. It would be naive to think that any massive additional resources will be made available in the near future, not only on account of the present economic situation, but also because of the inevitable time lag in planning, recruitment, training and the construction of buildings. The pace at which our recommendations are implemented must be a matter for political decision. Nevertheless these considerations do not change our opinion that the reorganisation recommended in chapter VII must be started now, as the suggested changes will result in more efficient and economic functioning of the services, and are vital if more resources are to be attracted and used sensibly.

25. It is as well to consider the size of the problem in terms of money and manpower. The national expenditure on the Social Services in 1965 amounted to £5,479 million. The net amount spent from public funds in 1965-66 on the local authority welfare and child care services on capital and revenue account was just under £100 million, only 1.8% of the total (or 0.72% of the G.N.P.).

26. The budget of the social service department will be about 46% higher than the combined expenditure of children’s and welfare services, because it will also be responsible for relatively expensive items such as the home help service and parts of the mental health services. Nevertheless, it will remain small in relation to the total. At appendix J we estimate the annual current expenditure of the social services department at about £113 million on 1965/6 figures which compared with a total local authority expenditure on revenue account of over £2,000 million.

27. In terms of manpower, it is estimated that in 1966 there were about 90,000 people employed in the local authority services which we have proposed for inclusion in the social service department (see appendix L). Among them were about 7,700 child care officers and social workers in health and welfare departments. Even a modest increase in these categories could affect

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significantly the effectiveness of a family service. In particular, more
effective measures to prevent children having to be taken into residential care
could save heavy expenditure in other directions. The cost of keeping a child
in a remand home is now £20 per week or over £1,000 per annum; the cost of
keeping a child in an approved school is nearly as much, and the cost of keeping
a child in a residential home is about £12 a week. A qualified social worker
comes £1,060-£1,435 a year, to which must be added the cost of supporting services.
If an additional social worker can remove the need for even two children coming
into residential care the benefit to the community in terms of money alone is
obvious.

28. Even more striking examples can be given of how the use of home helps
could avoid much heavier expenditure on residential care for children and old
people. The total cost of one whole-time home help is less than £1,000 a year.
If the use of one home help on a full-time basis could avoid the need for a
family of three to be taken into care, public money would be saved.

29. As will be clear from our recommendations, we are not of course saying that
the solution to every social problem must lie in greater use of social workers
and home helps rather than the residential services. What we are saying,
however, is that providing services which lessen the need to take children and
adults into care is often right in itself and may be cheaper.
The Report of the Interdepartmental Committee on Local Authority and Allied Personal Social Services is published today. The Committee have produced a thorough and extremely interesting Report, and I am glad to be able to express to their Chairman, Mr. Frederic Seebohm, and his colleagues the Government's gratitude for the way in which they have discharged their task. The Report calls for careful study and consideration, and the House will not expect the Government to announce any decisions until we have had an opportunity to consult the local authorities and the other interests concerned in this important field. We shall initiate consultation without delay.