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Home Affairs

cc M. Pakison

cc W. S. O.

FAMILY POLICY GROUP

Memorandum by the Central Policy Review Staff

1. The objective of the Family Policy Group is to identify, and to seek ways of counteracting, those factors which tend to undermine, or even prohibit, the exercise of personal responsibility and the sense of individual self-respect.
2. Taken together, the papers circulated to the Group give a fairly comprehensive picture of what has been achieved. They also outline a number of specific further developments which are already in hand. For the next stage, each Minister will wish to pursue these initiatives which have been identified within his own area of responsibility.

Interdepartmental Issues

3. In addition, the papers identify a number of issues which appear to offer scope for further thought and possibly further Government action. Of these, some have no obvious departmental home, either because they fall between Departments or because they touch on matters which are of equal concern to several Departments. We believe that four such issues are most important:
 - how to encourage more effective care in families and the community, for the elderly;
 - influences on children's behaviour and attitudes;
 - the extent to which the excessive influence of professionals results in producer-led services and saps individual initiative;
 - the dependence of individuals on State bureaucracies and the effect this has on their responsibility and self-respect.

These subjects, which are discussed in more detail at Annex A, are broad and wide-ranging and it is not clear at this stage what scope there is for Government action. We suggest, therefore, that as a first step the CPRS be invited to review what is known about each and to present the Group with further proposals.

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Departmental Issues

4. The papers highlight also a number of specific matters which might usefully be pursued by individual Departments or by Ministerial or Official Groups already in existence. At Annex B we review briefly the six issues which we believe deserve priority treatment:

- the role of housing (Department of the Environment)
- responsibility at work (Department of Employment)
- unemployment and the family (Department of Employment/Department of Health and Social Security)
- preparation for parenthood (Department of Education and Science/
Department of Health and Social Security)
- the tax system and the care of children (HM Treasury)
- crime and policing (Home Office)

Summary

5. The Group is invited to decide that:

- (a) the CPRS should prepare reviews of the four subjects listed in paragraph 3 and discussed at Annex A; and
- (b) the subjects listed in paragraph 4 and discussed at Annex B should be examined by the Departments directly concerned.

Cabinet Office

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INTERDEPARTMENTAL ISSUES PROPOSED FOR REVIEW BY THE CPRS

1. Care of the Elderly

There are few incentives, and many disincentives facing people who might wish to look after their elderly relatives. The main areas are: housing - scope for encouraging conversion/extension/adaptation of private housing, and more flexible allocation policies and use of stock in the public sector; fiscal position - scope for changes in tax allowances and/or benefit systems to encourage family care; material help - ways in which social services (voluntary, private or public) might help families to cope. Many elderly do not have younger relatives to whom they can turn; ways might be sought of encouraging 'artificial' families (e.g. making it easier for the elderly to become resident landlords, encourage schools to develop 'adopt-a-granny' schemes, young employees to help ex-employees of the same company now elderly). This is a wide field embracing a number of departmental interests.

2. Influences on children's behaviour and attitudes

There is a very large volume of research literature on the influences on children. It has not been brought together in the context of what it might imply for policy. We think it would be useful to examine the literature with a view to establishing the facts about the various influences. These are likely to include parent(s), peer groups, school, television, pop groups and football. Once the influences, and their relative importance, are known, the Group could consider which, if any, might be amenable to Government action.

3. The power of the professional

The role of the professional has been growing, and not only within the welfare state. In many areas, people's lives are dominated by decisions taken for them by 'professionals' whose job it is to do so. This has two effects: the individual makes little input and does not feel any responsibility for the outcome, and the service provision is driven by the producers' views of what ought to be provided rather than consumers' views of what they want. This drift needs to be reversed. Within the

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personal welfare services, the main professionals involved are teachers, the medical professions and social workers. But the issue extends beyond the personal services: professional engineers and architects set standards which are often unnecessarily high (and expensive) and not what people want. There has been a good deal of work outside Government on the changing role of the professional, although it has often not been focussed on examining how the professionals' involvement detracts from the individual's own responsibility.

4. The impact of Government

There is a wider issue about the extent to which individuals are dependent on services provided by State bureaucracies and the effect which this has on the individual's sense of personal responsibility and self-respect. Central and local government provide a wide range of services so that the scope for potential topics for enquiry is correspondingly wide. One specific issue is that the contact point between the State and the individual often belies the term 'civil servant' (for either of the words!). Individuals are not encouraged to behave responsibly if their treatment by bureaucracy appears to them to be arbitrary, rigid and insensitive. The relevant issues are the amount of discretion allowed to Government employees in dealing with the public, the training of staff, and the degree of centralisation under which they operate.

ISSUES PROPOSED FOR FURTHER WORK BY DEPARTMENTS1. Housing [Department of the Environment]

The paper by the Secretary of State for the Environment identifies a number of ways of extending the right-to-buy. But over 6 million households are likely to continue as Council tenants. In what ways can they be given more responsibility for their own housing even if they do not want, or can not afford, ownership? Delegation of power and responsibility to tenants committees or co-operatives works well in some areas, and the Secretary of State's paper outlines some further experiments. What more could be done? In particular, in what ways might Government encourage or even force Local Authorities to devolve power? The 'tenant's charter' embodied in the 1980 Housing Act was a start; how might tenants' rights be extended further into the management of housing? We suggest that the Secretary of State ask his officials to examine further options in this area, and report back to the Group.

2. Responsibility at work [Department of Employment]

There have been various moves to seek to involve employees more in the affairs of their employer (though usually via the unions). What more might be done with a view to obtaining more responsible behaviour by employees? Should there be more pressure - even legislation - on managers to provide more information to their workforce? Might more profit sharing (or perhaps equity stakes) help, so that employees' fortunes were more tied in with those of their firms? Employee involvement is already being examined by an interdepartmental ('Waddington') group, we suggest that it should include in their work this and other possibilities like it.

In addition to action on small and family firms, how might the lines of responsibility be clarified within large organisations to enable individuals to know where they stand, and to prevent various levels of management from ducking responsibility? How might more management responsibility be delegated down the line? Might the public sector set an example (eg more power to head teachers or heads of DHSS offices)? We suggest that the Department of Employment and other interested departments should be asked to examine such options and report back.

3. Unemployment and the Family [Department of Employment]

Unemployment has a damaging effect on family values particularly in the case of unemployed fathers, of whom there are about 600,000. There may be scope for flexible and hence comparatively inexpensive ways of helping them. These could include providing intermittent spells of work, or the financial incentive to take part-time work, and encouraging them to use their time constructively (eg voluntary work and adult education). Many unemployed people in their twenties increasingly face the problem of how to set up a family home without secure paid work. Could a 'homesteading' scheme be set up within the framework of special employment measures, which would enable some of them to improve properties for their own occupation? We suggest that these ideas be examined by the Ministers concerned.

4. Preparation for Parenthood [Department of Education and Science/
Department of Health and Social Security]

There has been much emphasis on the need for the education system to prepare children for the world of work; little attention has been given to the need to prepare school leavers for the world of parenthood. What more could be done both within schools (the facts about early marriage, the tasks and responsibilities of a family, more contact between older and younger children etc) and post-school (eg might more nursery classes for children be paralleled by classes for the parents)? We suggest that this aspect should be examined firstly by the Secretary of State for Education and Science and the Secretary of State for Social Services.

5. The tax system and the care of children [HM Treasury]

This has two aspects. The first is the well recognised problem of the fiscal bias in the tax system which encourages both parents to work, sometimes against the best interests of the children. But secondly, even with a neutral tax position, there will still be some families in which both parents might be encouraged, through the tax system, to pay for adequate child care. We suggest the Treasury be asked to report on progress and options in this general area.

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Annex B cont'd

6. Crime and policing [Home Office]

The criminal justice system influences personal responsibility and the family in a number of ways. There are improvements which might be made consistent with the concept of personal liberty. Areas worth particular examination would be the extent to which the system of punishment for crimes promotes personal and parental responsibility, and respect for the welfare of others. Those responsible for maintaining law and order should earn the respect which they should be given; both police training and methods of operation should be examined with a view to achieving the highest standards of recruitment, qualities of leadership, and total integrity in their operations.

A Home Office-led interdepartmental committee is already examining the contribution that other departments may make to law and order problems, and we suggest that the Home Office should be invited to examine the scope for further work on the topics indicated above.