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ABSTRACT
MANAGING FRAGMENTATION: A CASE STUDY OF AN AREA CHILD PROTECTION COMMITTEE IN A TIME OF CHANGE.

By
Adrian Barton

One of the outstanding features of capitalist society is its fluidity. What is the orthodoxy today stands a very good chance of being supplanted by a new orthodoxy tomorrow. Similarly, today’s problems have every chance of being tomorrow’s solutions. Accordingly, individuals and organisations are often faced with situations, contexts and environments which are new and challenging and contain the potential to disrupt existing control structures.

Essentially, this contention is at the heart of this piece of work. The following pages will describe and discuss the impact that a ‘new orthodoxy’ has had on an existing organisational arrangement. Specifically, the work focuses on the child protection system of England and Wales to examine the effect that New Public Management, and its accompanying tendency to fragment organisations into managerialised purchaser or provider units, has had on the established organisational discourse of partnership working. It argues that the central features of managerialism – core tasks, ownership, audit and ideology – run counter to those features required to facilitate partnerships – co-operation, sharing and resources exchange. Moreover, it suggests that the inherent mis-match between these two prominent organisational discourses is acting as a barrier to the effective implementation of either.
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AUTHOR’S DECLARATION

This dissertation and the research which informs it is the sole work of the author, it has not been presented in whole or part in any other publication or forum.
Chapter One

An introduction to the research

Certain social groups and certain types of social problems have long been the focus of welfare delivery. However, whilst some target groups remain constant, the process by which welfare has been delivered has altered and developed in line with the changing nature of organisational discourses. Whilst some forms of welfare delivery, such as education, can be identified as being the responsibility of a single agency, some forms of welfare require an approach which involves a number of different agencies working together. Unfortunately, although this need for diffuse agencies to work together has been recognised since at least the 1860s by organisations such as the Charity Organisation Society (Thane 1982), and government reports such as the Seebhomm Report (1969), the agencies charged with delivering welfare within partnership forums have often found this approach to work problematic.

The reasons for this are varied. The problems emerge partly because agencies have been jealous guardians of their domain of expertise, especially since the professionalisation process inherent in the formation of the Keynesian-Beveridge inspired welfare state. Other reasons can be seen as more technical in nature and revolve around such concepts as differing sets of standard operating procedures, organisational and work place culture and world views. Yet more pressures emerge because it is often unclear to the recipients of welfare where exactly they need to turn to receive their desired input. The result is often that partnership forums, where a
number of different welfare agencies come together to address a social problem, become sites of conflict, creating problems for organisation, worker and client alike.

Despite this, the calls for, and faith in, partnership working has remained constant for a number of years. Indeed, partnership working is so much in the ascendancy at present that it is difficult for professionals to instigate new projects without building into them some element of partnership, and government ministers from almost all departments sing the praises of ‘joined-up’ working. Moreover, such is the strength of the partnership discourse that it has managed to remain a dominant discourse throughout a fundamental period of change for welfare organisations.

Specifically, this change to state welfare agencies revolves around the adoption of a new organisational discourse. Politically, a situation has emerged where welfare agencies have been forced into abandoning the bureau-professional organisational model, which can be seen as their ‘traditional’ method of organisational structure and control, for a model known as New Public Management (NPM) (Clarke and Newman 1997). Essentially, NPM asks welfare agencies to adopt a more ‘business like’ attitude to work tasks and client relationships. It also places accountability on a more contractual and calculative footing, as opposed to the explanatory accountability inherent within the bureau-professional model (Reiner and Spencer 1993).

The result of the move to NPM has been to create a situation which has been described as a period of ‘constant revolution (Clarke and Langan 1997). Agencies have been asked to re-assess their role, identify and work toward core tasks, and work toward an audit based approach to evaluating their work in terms of ‘success’ and
economy. In turn, this has seen all the major providers of (broadly defined) welfare suffer periods of upheaval and re-structuring. This has had implications intra-agency, but it also does not take a great leap of logic to see that the introduction of NPM will effect inter-agency relationships.

Essentially, this contention is at the heart of this research project. As the work unfolds it will argue that the demands of the discourse of NPM have altered the manner in which agencies view themselves, their partners and their work. Accordingly, these altered perceptions have filtered into partnership forums and have been at least partially responsible for disrupting the status quo, thus disrupting the structure and formation of partnerships as well as undermining existing control mechanisms within partnership forums. Further, the periods of intra-agency instability evident in most welfare providers following the introduction of NPM will have an accompanying affect on the stability of joint working.

For the researcher, the confused medium that is partnership working offers a number of exciting opportunities. For example, it is possible to examine the problems clients have in negotiating areas where more than one agency is involved. Similarly, exploration of the problems encountered by front-line workers when confronted by their counterparts in other agencies could be selected as a site of research. Equally, the research focus could be placed upon a higher level of partnership and work could centre on the problems managers have in formulating strategic policy within a partnership setting. This research chose to focus on the latter, mainly for pragmatic reasons - access to a managerial level partnership forum had been agreed prior to the research beginning.
The setting for the research, as made explicit in the sub-title, is an Area Child Protection Committee (ACPC). Given the central concern of the work is an exploration of the interface between intra-organisational change and inter-organisation working relationships it was vital to ensure that the site of the research provided access to an area where a variety of welfare agencies came together. Child protection is, perhaps, the optimum example of this. The primary reason child protection draws together so many different welfare agencies can be located in major structural changes which took place in child protection during the mid-1970s. As detailed below, partnerships in child protection assumed such great importance that they became mandated, forcing agencies to become partners, however reluctant they may have been to share work and responsibility with others.

Therefore, from a researcher’s viewpoint, child protection becomes an ideal site within which to work, especially where, as in the case of this project, the research seeks to explore the impact of changing environmental contexts across a number of agencies. Put simply, all major welfare agencies must take part in child protection forums such as the ACPC. This level of ‘across the board’ representation will enable the research to view the impact of NPM on partnership working in a true multi-agency situation, as opposed to, for example, a partnership between health and social services where only bi-lateral working is explored.

The centrality of both partnership working and NPM has given rise to a plethora of research work. In turn, these have spawned a number of truisms surrounding both discourses. For example, research shows that in all agencies which have been
subjected to the discourse of NPM there has been some element of resistance by workers, the introduction of performance targets and the fragmentation of agencies into business units. Similarly, there is a wealth of literature which shows partnership working as problematic. Despite the large volume of research in both areas there is surprising little work which explores the impact of NPM on partnership working, which creates a gap in our knowledge base as well as demonstrating that there is still a need for further exploration of this fascinating area.

This work seeks to go some way in filling this existing vacuum in our understanding. As in so much organisational research (Bryman 1989) it adopts a case study approach and employs qualitative methods in its data collection techniques. The aims of the thesis are straightforward - it is concerned with the impact externally imposed managerialist changes within welfare organisations have had on the ability of the same organisations to work together. Whilst the aims may be relatively simple, the route by which those aims are fulfilled is a complex one, in many respects mirroring the subject area of the research.

From this point, the research begins by introducing the location of the research - the child protection system in England and Wales. Although the protection of children has a long history, the chapter begins from the event many see as the genesis of our current system; the murder in 1973 of Maria Colwell. The chapter charts the rise in the importance of the partnership discourse and details the formation of the organisational framework designed to ensure that each element of the newly formed system worked as closely as possible. From there it moves on and identifies another watershed period in child protection; the death of Jasmine Beckford in 1985 and the
publication of the Cleveland Report in 1987. The significance of these events, and the accompanying Act of Parliament, are discussed, with particular reference to the alterations in the organisational framework of the system.

Chapter three is concerned with the problems that partnership working poses for welfare organisations. It begins by remarking that these concerns are not new and, as a problem, they have taxed policy makers for some time. It then moves on to review some of the existing literature, concentrating on the problems of mandated partnership. At this point the main analytical framework of the thesis is introduced and its elements discussed. The chapter concludes that most of the literature on partnership working notes that it is a 'good idea' but putting the idea into practice becomes difficult for a number of well-rehearsed reasons.

Chapter four moves the discussion toward the latest cure for these long-standing problems of co-ordination - New Public Management. It begins by charting the genesis of NPM. It then explores the impact NPM has had upon individuals and organisations. It then moves to outline the elements of NPM, noting that as well as being a technical exercise NPM has become an ideology and inherited the mantle of the orthodoxy from the discredited bureau-professional discourse. Finally, the chapter offers a brief summary of how NPM has affected the key welfare agencies of health, education, the police and social services.

Chapter five begins the task of linking the theoretical aspects of the thesis with its empirical focus. Its concern is to demonstrate that there is an inherent tension between the discourse of NPM and the discourse of partnership working. In order to
achieve this the chapter reviews the key aspects of NPM in light of the requirements of ‘successful’ partnership working, noting along the way a number of inconsistencies and tensions.

Chapter six reviews the methodological approach adopted by the thesis. In so doing, the chapter describes and justifies the chosen methods, noting in particular the efficacy of case studies. It also discusses the need for reflexivity in research and the importance of the research making their background assumptions explicit.

Chapters seven, eight, nine and ten provide the results of the empirical research. Chapter seven serves as an introduction to the research setting, the participating agencies and the key actors. Chapters eight, nine and ten provide details of the research findings. Each chapter relates to one specific element of the analytical framework selected for the research. Broadly speaking, each chapter provides details of the partnership forum viewed from the macro, mezzo and micro levels of working.

Chapter eleven draws together all the previous chapters and offers some thoughts by way of conclusion. As well as reviewing the work the chapter offers some thoughts concerning the implications of the research for the policy community. It also discusses alternative research approaches and highlights areas for future research into partnership working.

At this stage most theses end. However, there is a slight twist in the tail of this work in as much as it contains an epilogue. To understand the need for this additional chapter, the reader must know that a prerequisite of access to the research site was the
compilation and presentation of a report. The epilogue details a chain of unexpected but fascinating events which followed in the wake of the presentation of the report. In many respects, the epilogue is a difficult chapter to quantify as it includes elements of research findings, methodological and ethical musings and reflexivity. It is however a vital part of the thesis as it demonstrates both the validity of the results and consolidates the theoretical assumptions.
Chapter Two

A review of changes to the structure of the child protection system of England and Wales since 1974

It is important to note from the outset that this research is not concerned with child protection per se. Its focus lies in the responses of those charged with managing child protection policy to the pressures and strains of working in an organisational milieu that places equal emphasis on the two concepts of managerialism and partnership working. Whilst not being concerned with the actual mechanics of how to ‘do’ child protection, in the same way as a study of front-line practitioners may be, it is nevertheless important that this work begins by outlining the structural development of the modern child protection system in order to contextualise the changes which are at the heart of the research.

Thus, what follows will not be a definitive history of child protection, rather it will be a review of the key changes to the structural frameworks within which the protection of children takes place. Arguably, the key structural changes which have created the contemporary child protection system have been constructed around two watershed events: (a) the Colwell Report 1974 and (b) the Cleveland inquiry 1987, which gave rise to the Working Together Documents of 1988 and 1991, and the Children Act 1989.

1 There are numerous histories of child protection. Burke (1996) and Hendrick (1994) provide two accounts which attempt to take different and slightly more critical perspectives than most.
Accordingly, this chapter takes as its starting point the events generated by the unfortunate death of Maria Colwell in 1973. From there, it moves along a continuum of tragedies to the Cleveland inquiry of 1987, highlighting along the way the findings of successive inquiries and the manner in which these findings helped to shape the contemporary system. For the sake of clarity this period will be referred to as the Colwell to Cleveland period. The chapter then examines the post-1987 reforms, which are referred to as the Working Together era, illustrating the nature of the changes generated by the Working Together documents, and noting how they built on the existing, Colwell inspired, framework.

Maria Colwell and her effect on child protection

The death of Maria Colwell in January 1973 appears to be a logical starting point for the examination of the recent history of child protection, not least because the structural framework which emerged in response to Maria’s death is still visible twenty five years later.

The Colwell Report (1974) alerted participating organisations (as well as an increasingly concerned public) that the various welfare agencies charged with protecting children were not fully able to recognise the signs of serious abuse and neither were they able to work together in preventing tragedy. As was expected, the Colwell Report led to a plethora of Department of Health and Social Security (DHSS) circulars, all with the express intention of 'establish[ing] the framework of the administrative system for detecting, investigating, and processing child abuse cases' (Colwell Report 1974).

The contents of the DHSS circulars emphasised the view that the inter-agency approach was the optimum way to ensure the protection of children. The faith exhibited in inter-agency working during this period was not restricted to child
protection. For example, there was a parallel and contemporaneous development with the administrative structure of Joint Consultative Committees designed to implement plans for community care between health and social services.

The work of the newly reformed child protection system was to be constructed around measures designed to ensure the speedy and effective recognition of a variety of types of abuse. Once this had been achieved, the aim of the new system was to provide effective management of cases, with particular weight given to ensuring good inter-agency communication amongst, in particular, front-line professionals. The reforms were focused on four key areas: the setting up of Area Review Committees (ARCs) whose membership was to be comprised of senior members of the various welfare agencies involved in child protection; case review conferences for front line professionals involved with cases; abuse registers for those at risk; and multi-disciplinary child protection manuals.

The practical manifestation of the Colwell reform period

Although there had been formal and *ad hoc* attempts to promote joint working in child protection before the Colwell Report, the Colwell inquiry illuminated the inability of agencies to work together in preventing tragedy. Burke (1996: 24) suggests that the DHSS circular LASSL(74) provided 'the stimulus for establish[ing] management systems to deal with child abuse'. As noted above, there were the four elements to this new structural framework and each will now be considered in more detail.

*The Area Review Committee*

The Tunbridge Wells Group, who were instrumental in orchestrating demands for a new system following Maria's death, commented in 1974 on the lack of a country
wide system in child protection and called for co-ordinating bodies to be formed (Franklin 1975: appendix one). This was addressed in the post-Colwell recommendations. Key amongst the proposals was the creation of Area Review Committees.

Hallett and Stevenson (1980: 4) outline the roles of these new bodies. They inform that the main function of the ARCs was to devise, and subsequently advise on, procedures for dealing with cases, reviewing case conferences, and to act as providers of education and training. This is expanded by Franklin (1975 appendix one) who provides a list of the mandatory roles of the ARC:

1. To act as a forum where the widest possible consultation can be held between all professions who play any part in managing the problem;
2. To take responsibility for formulating policy and procedures;
3. To review the work of the case conferences in the area;
4. To ensure long term plans, whether with the child at home or in care, are being satisfactorily carried out;
5. To promote the spread of knowledge
6. To encourage research
7. To co-operate with epidemiological studies;
8. To be in touch with review committees in other areas
9. To submit an annual report to the DHSS and the Home Office

This remit can be compared with Murphy's (1995: 42) more recent contention that good inter-agency working is about 'effective communication...mutual planning, coordinated action and constructive review'. Quite clearly, the role of the ARC was meant to be as a facilitator and to create conditions whereby the administrative framework of the newly reformed child protection system was able to promote inter-agency work. There was also the intention to ensure that each participating agency
remained in touch with current developments and maintained its involvement. This was the message emanating from the inquiries during the 1970s and 1980s, and one which clearly demarcated the role of management as providers of the structural framework. The Beckford Report (1985: 12) provides an indication of this:

...social workers can, in fact, be defined only in terms of the functions required of its practitioners by their employing agency working within a statutory framework

In terms of effectiveness, Hallett and Stevenson (1980: 6) found that 'area review committees have performed valuable functions particularly in the guidance for the management of cases, establishing register systems, organising training days...and increasing inter professional understanding at senior levels'. Not all comments were as positive. The Select Committee on Violence in the Family recommended that 'the elaborate structure of the ARC should be kept under constant review with the aim of simplifying it..." (HC 329 - I, 1977: xxxi).

Factors linked to intra-agency organisation were also noted as being potentially problematic to the ARC. For example, Hallett and Stevenson (1980) note that GPs' position as 'free-floaing' contractors to the Family Practitioner Committees had created a situation where the GP representative on the ARC was unable to commit colleagues, and thus needed to be seen as a voice, as opposed to a delegate or true representative.

**The Case Conference**

The second change brought about in the post-Colwell reforms was the requirement to call a case conference in every instance of suspected non-accidental injury to a child. Murphy (1995: 32) defines case conferences as 'the vehicle through which the
decision about the registration or de-registration of a child is taken, and it is the setting where the direction and emphasis of work...is discussed and formulated'. Hallett and Stevenson (1980: 57) recognise the fact that case conferences were not invented by the post-Colwell changes, but rather have a long history in welfare work. However, the post-Colwell reforms placed great faith in the use of the case conference as a tool to aid inter-agency communication.

There were a number of official procedural guidelines which urged the use of case conferences to improve communication (DHSS 1974; 1976). These were supplemented by the findings of the Reports. The Brewer inquiry (1977: 30) was particularly enthusiastic:

We see as the advantage of case conferences the pooling of information relevant to the care and safety of a child. The total information yielded is likely to be a great deal more than the sum of the individual parts. Many professionals are inclined - erroneously - to assume they know what another's contribution will be. An opportunity exists for each participant to offer his interpretation of particular aspects of the situation and to contribute to the decision finally reached.

This official optimism was not shared by contemporary authors. Hallett and Stevenson (1980: 57) provided a warning in regard to over-enthusiastic championing of this reform:

Given the complexities and uncertainties which Kane describes concerning inter-professional communication...it is salutary to remind ourselves of the high, perhaps unrealistic, expectations which have arisen in relation to such communication, especially in relation to case conferences...The practitioner may be forgiven for some irritation with the exhortary tone of much of the official literature on this theme.

Despite the urging of the post-Colwell reforms, case conferences were still beset with problems. Hallett and Stevenson note that status and roles became an issue in
conferences they observed, with the inter-professional differences being accentuated. They particularly point to deference to the medical profession in case conferences, despite the fact that social workers shouldered the burden of case management.

What is also interesting is that through case conferences we can see the emerging power of the ARCs within the new system. Lambeth ARC issued these guidelines in 1975: 'A case conference will be held at the earliest possible moment...The conference shall take place without delay...' (emphasis added). As Hallett and Stevenson (1980: 60) remark, 'The prescriptive verbs like 'will be held' and 'shall take place' leave no doubt the [ARC] is directing". This emphasis on the case conference can be said to have a duality of outcome. On the one hand central, local government can be seen to be actively addressing the key area of concern, on the other hand it can be seen as further deflecting criticism and attention from any structural problems the new system was encountering.

The Child Protection Register

Child Protection Registers, or as they are known informally 'at risk' registers, were another feature of the post-Colwell reforms. The registers themselves constitute the National Society for the Protection and Care of Children's (NSPCC) primary role in child protection. The registers themselves became important because, as Lyon and deCruz (1993: 2) note, 'there is still no universally agreed, all encompassing definition of child abuse'. As such, the child protection register instituted categories of abuse under which children could be registered. The result being an enabling of various agencies' definitions and concerns to be acknowledged by others. In line with the diverse nature of abuse there were ten categories of registration.

There were, of course, other reasons for the setting up of the register. The DHSS (1974) urged local authorities and ARCs to 'set up a central record of
information...[which will be] essential to good communication between the many disciplines involved'. Thus, the registers were seen to be yet another vehicle to promote effective inter-agency communication (Gibbons et al 1995). Hallett and Stevenson (1980) note that the post-Colwell reforms envisaged four main purposes for the registers.

Firstly, diagnosis of cases can be aided by recording previous professional concern; secondly, the register can be a source of epidemiological data for statistical, measurement and research purposes; thirdly, the register enables case managers to conduct periodic reviews of registered cases and, finally, the registration of a case can lead to allocation of resources toward particular families.

Gibbons et al (1995: 1) inform us that the child protection registers were not a particularly successful reform. They remark upon the fact that registers were not much used by front-line professionals, that professionals were aware of civil liberty infringements of families included as 'suspect' cases. They also note that the registers were large, difficult and expensive to administer, leading to the conclusion that 'they were probably inaccurate'. Moreover, there were often covert structural reasons for entering a child on the register which had more to do with resource procurement than child protection. Indeed, Corby (1987) felt that child protection registers served no useful purpose and should be abolished.

Child protection registers during the period 1974 to 1989 can be characterised as mainly bureaucratic exercises carried out to serve the needs of the system and not necessarily those of the child. The structure and format of the registers varied from area to area, a fact noted by the Peacock Report (1978: 17). The Report states that the decision to place 'Simon' in the 'suspected' category was a contributory factor in the non-recognition of risk when the family moved to another area. The extent of variation between not only the localities but also the agencies involved, led to the
growth of the fourth vehicle through which to promote partnership - the local inter-agency joint training manual.

**Joint Training Manuals**

Leathard (1994: 226), in a review of inter-professional working, advocates 'an emphasis on increased inter-professional education and training which is focused on the needs of practice'. This builds on the approach championed by Ducanis and Golin (1979) who stress the importance of joint training and shared manuals. The importance of the latter can be seen in the fact that multi-discipline manuals were part of the framework established after the Colwell inquiry.

These manuals were usually issued at the behest of the local ARC, again signalling a growing management influence within the new system. The manuals were based on an attempt to overcome the negative effects of stereotyping and occupational culture, as well as defining responsibilities and roles. Hallett and Stevenson (1980: 107) point out that this indicates an implied assumption that 'some form of shared education would facilitate better working relationships', and seemingly ignores deeper, more structural inter-agency differences.

Unhappily, despite these reforms, Table One demonstrates that the period from Maria’s murder in 1973 to the Cleveland inquiry of 1989 was marked by a continuous stream of reports on the deaths or serious injury of a number of children. Worryingly for those involved in the child protection system was the fact that the principal reason for the numerous ‘failures’ appeared to be the continued inability of agencies to work together effectively, specifically in the area of communication.
### Table One

**Significant enquiries into the death or serious injury of children 1974-1987**

(adapted from Reder et al 1993: 30)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Enquiry</th>
<th>Authors</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1974</td>
<td>Maria Colwell</td>
<td>David Naseby, Max Piazzani</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1975</td>
<td>Richard Clark</td>
<td>Susan Aukland, Lisa Godfrey, Steven Meurs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1976</td>
<td>Neil Howlett</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1977</td>
<td>Wayne Brewer</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1978</td>
<td>Karen Spencer</td>
<td>Simon Peacock, Stephen Menheniott</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1979</td>
<td>Darryn Clarke</td>
<td>Lester Chapman, Paul Brown</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1980</td>
<td>Claire Haddon</td>
<td>Carly Taylor, Malcolm Page, Maria Mehemadagi, Christopher Pinder/Daniel Frankland</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1981</td>
<td>Malcolm Page</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1982</td>
<td>Jason Caesar</td>
<td>Anonymous, Richard Fraser, Lucie Gates</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1983</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1984</td>
<td>Shirley Woodcock</td>
<td>Reuben Carthy, Gemma Hartwell</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1985</td>
<td>Jasmine Beckford</td>
<td>Charlene Salt, Tyra Henry</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1986</td>
<td>Heidi Kosed</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1987</td>
<td>Kimberley Carlile</td>
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Warnings as to the problematic nature of inter-agency communication were available to all during this period. For example, Oppe (1975: 161) informed that 'outcome [in child protection cases] depends upon the communicating and co-ordinating skills of the workers...' (1975: 161). This theme was taken up by Hallett and Stevenson (1980: 57), who pointed out that 'it is salutary to remind ourselves of the high, perhaps unrealistic expectations which have arisen in relation to...communication...'.

The Reports themselves also singled out poor communication as a primary reason for system failure:

Maria, despite an elaborate system of "welfare provisions", fell through the net primarily because of communication failures  
(Colwell Report 1974: 16)

The Committee concluded that there was an unfortunate combination of weaknesses in communication.  
(Peacock Report 1978: 19)

This enquiry, like others...came across numerous instances of information which was known to one agency and not being known to another.
there does appear to have been some failure of communication...

The Brewer Report (1977) noted with disapproval that magistrates had returned 'Wayne' to his home under a Supervision Order which was contrary to the social work advice which suggested a Care Order. One year later, the Peacock Report exposed the problems of communicating across local authority boundaries and focused on the number of lost or misinterpreted messages. The Clarke Report (1979) again laid open the failures of communication between principal agencies in dealing with 'Darryn' and his mother.

However, whilst the reason for system failure was seemingly clear enough, the burden of responsibility was not equally distributed throughout the newly created system. The majority of the blame, post-Colwell, fell heavily on those charged with the day to day practice of child protection - the front-line workers.

At a common sense level it is clear why the front-line came under scrutiny during this period. Those on the front-line have the capacity to make errors, and for organisations, especially, there is a tendency to individualise and pathologise blame in order to shift or deflect questions of accountability. Murphy (1995: 43) suggests that it is all too easy to conceive of 'failure' as one or two individuals being unable to fulfil their role in the system. He expands this, arguing that:

there is a temptation to track down 'difficult' individuals in child protection systems, blame them for poor multi-disciplinary relationships and speculate that, when they move on, multi-disciplinary relationships and practice will improve.
By noting that the problem can be solved by individuals ‘moving on’, Murphy also identifies one of the attractions of pathologising blame: the remedy is simple and requires only a minimum of effort at a strategic level.

These sentiments are echoed by Reder et al (1993). They suggest that the child protection system is considered to be derived from the relationships of the parts. Hence, the solution to a system problem lies in replacing or repairing the part which is faulty, and not in replacing the entire system. Murphy (1995: 43) contests this view, stating categorically that the ‘very idea that one individual within a system can be blamed...denies the whole concept of collective multi-disciplinary decision making and responsibility’.

Child protection during the Colwell to Cleveland period can be summarised as being based on a recognition of the inter-related nature of the causes and effects of child abuse. Leading from this came a recognition of the need for the many agencies involved to co-ordinate their responses and embark on planned and structured partnership working, especially at the front-line level. The reality was, however, that there was still much room for improvement to the system.

**The 'Working Together' era**

Pound (1991) suggests that by the end of the 1980s there was a consensus that there was a need to reformulate the approach to the management of child protection. If there is an acceptance that the Colwell case was central to the creation of the child protection system from 1974 to 1987, then numerous authors claim that the catalyst for the present configuration can be found in the Beckford case (1985) and the Cleveland Report (1987) (Burke 1996; Otway 1996). This is best illustrated by the Department of Health (DoH) (1995: 17) which argues that 'Occasionally, the
movement of the threshold and the pressure for change become evident... The
Cleveland Inquiry of 1987 caused much soul searching...

It also caused much change within the system, most of which took place around the
introduction and promotion of the concept of prevention over that of therapeutic
intervention (Otway 1996). This point is expanded by Lyon and de Cruz (1993: 86)
who refer to the 1989 Children Act noting that 'The principle of prevention has been
elevated by the 1989 Act to a position of central importance'. Further evidence to
support this can be found in the concerted efforts by central government to control
and direct the re-vamped system via publications such as Working Together (1988;
1991) and Messages from the Research (1995), as well as the 1989 Children Act. The
transition from therapeutic intervention toward management is a key development in
the re-shaping of the system.

Again, just as the move to joint working promoted by the Colwell Report reflected the
trends of the time, the concentration on risk management and prevention in 1989 was
not the sole preserve of child protection. Both periods of reform can be seen to be
products of their time.

This major change in direction, as Butcher (1995) notes, coincides with a
paradigmatic shift in social policy with the onus being placed on managing social
problems. The reasons behind these shifts and their implications for inter-agency
working in child protection will be detailed in Chapter Four. Here, it can be suggested
that greater emphasis was placed on the role of the manager; budgetary concerns
became key considerations; the locus of power shifted away from the professional and
toward managers; and there was a tendency to create semi-autonomous 'business
units' within welfare agencies (Clarke and Cochrane 1997).
Working Together saw a measure of reform to the four component parts of the child protection system the Colwell Report created. To this end, the developments in the ARC, the case conference, the child protection register and joint training manuals will now be examined.

Area Review Committees to Area Child Protection Committees

Like all other aspects of the child protection system, the ARC has undergone changes. In 1988 ARCs were re-named Area Child Protection Committees (ACPCs). Lyon and deCruz (1993: 144) locate this re-naming within a number of immediate responses to the Cleveland Inquiry, which highlighted that inter-agency working remained problematic. The ACPC is the focus of this piece of empirical research and accordingly will be explored in greater depth than the other areas.

The contemporary role of ACPC is made explicit in Working Together:

In every local authority area there is a need for close working relationships between [those]...who share a common aim to protect the child at risk. Cooperation at the individual case level needs to be supported by joint agency and management policies for child protection, consistent with their polices and plans for related service provision. There needs to be a recognised joint forum for developing, monitoring and reviewing child protection policies. This forum is the Area Child Protection Committee (ACPC).

(DoH 1991: 2.4)

Over time, and reflecting the original role of their predecessors outlined above, the mandatory role of the ACPC has developed becoming:

- to establish, maintain and review local inter-agency guidelines and procedures to be followed in individual cases;
- to monitor the implementation of legal procedures;
- to identify significant issues arising from the handling of cases and reports from inquiries;
- to scrutinise arrangements to provide treatment, expert advice and inter-agency liaisons and make recommendations to the responsible agencies;
• to scrutinise work related to inter-agency training and make recommendations to responsible agencies;
• to conduct reviews;
• to publish an annual report about local child protection matters.

(DoH. 1991: 2.12)

If a comparison is made of the current role of the ACPC with the remit of the ARCs a number of points emerge. It will be noted that the number of tasks have fallen from nine to seven, and that the nature of the role of the ACPC is somewhat different. The ACPC has more of a management and evaluative role today whereas the ARCs can be seen to be concerned with the creation of a child protection system and the formulation of a system. This shift of emphasis can be seen to be as a result of the stabilisation of the child protection system, post-1988, when compared to the 1974 concerns which were dominated by the need to provide a shape and direction for the new system.

In terms of structure, each ACPC should comprise representatives of a number of agencies involved in child protection. In practice, the four major social intervention agencies, social services, health, education and the police should be represented in force (DoH 1991: 2.4). Other statutory and voluntary sector agencies should be represented, including probation and the NSPCC. The ACPC, due to a recognition of the inter-relatedness of the cause and effect of child protection issues, has the additional power to co-opt any agency which it feels makes, or could make, a contribution to child protection within its catchment area.

In a move clearly designed to strengthen the bonds between participating agencies it was further recommended that the ACPC should develop a clear relationship with each of its constituent agencies and that each agency should endorse the policies and procedures and actions of their ACPC. Also, to ensure inter-agency work is given appropriate seriousness, each agency has to accept responsibility for monitoring the representative it sends to ACPC (Thomas 1994: 58).
An important point to note is that members of the organisations represented at ACPCs must be drawn from the managerial echelons. However, research shows that most bring with them an original background of practice, although members tend to be removed from their practice background by a number of years (Murphy 1995). According to the following guideline, one characteristic trait the variety of members ought to possess is their position and status within their own agencies, which is that:

...appointees should have sufficient authority to allow them to speak on their agencies' behalf and to make decisions at an agreed level without referral to the appointees' agencies.

(DoH 1991: 2.8)

There is a marked tendency for the chair to come from social services or health, and these two organisations are often seen as lead agencies. ACPCs do not consist solely of those two agencies: given the wide ranging nature of the effect of child abuse, it is unremarkable that Murphy (1995) informs that ACPCs have developed into comparatively large bodies which meet infrequently and employ sub-groups as 'reporting back' mechanisms. Indeed, Working Together discusses and promotes the use of sub-groups (1991: 2.13).

Despite the mandated nature of the ACPC, they often lack both power and resources. Resources for the ACPCs do not come from any central government funding. Instead, ACPCs are forced to rely on voluntary contributions from the composite agencies to resource projects. DoH advice is for each agency to make available enough funds for the ACPC to resource projects (1991: 2.16). In a similar vein, the members of any ACPC lack accountability to the joint working forum, their locus of accountability lying within their individual organisations. Murphy (1995: 19) posits that this renders the ACPCs' effectiveness limited, hinging on the traditional readiness for agencies involved in child protection to work together.
At the heart of this is the role of the ACPC: in short what is it that they are supposed to do? Ideally, the role of the ACPC should be clearly stated in the DoH guidelines. That is not the case: Armstrong (1994) notes that the guidelines issued by the DoH are sufficiently ambiguous to allow a wide degree of local interpretation.

ACPCs therefore occupy somewhat anomalous ground. They have enough scope for local diversity to become, within reason, the type of committee the locality desires in order that particular needs are addressed. At the very least, the ACPC has the ability to (i) shape local response to national guidelines, (ii) be the point where the 'buck stops' in terms of accountability, and, (iii) fulfil what is arguably its primary rationale, to become the vehicle to ensure that the lack of inter-agency communication and shared information, at the heart of so many tragedies in the past, becomes at least avoidable. Essentially, each ACPC can interpret the official document in any way it wishes, the net result of which means that it is impossible to point to a 'model' ACPC.

At one level, albeit superficially, it is the main forum through which the local supervision of inter-agency working is conducted, and through which the localities can be held accountable for their actions. Within a paradigm where notions of 'co-ordination and communication', 'system' and 'inter-agency' have assumed enormous importance this ought to mean that the ACPC is given a concomitant range of powers and resources. Armstrong's work indicates that the reality is that, despite the recognition that effective child protection needs to be based on a multi-agency approach requiring managerial level supervision and co-ordination, many ACPCs lack the ability to ensure this happens.
The Case Conference

*Working Together* allows an examination the case conference in the new era. The authors of *Working Together* view the child protection conference as the site of inter-agency working, maintaining strong links with the approach taken from 1974 to 1987. For instance, the DoH (1991: 6.1) informs that:

The conference symbolises the inter-agency nature of assessment, treatment and management of child protection. Throughout the child protection process work is conducted on an inter-agency basis and the conference is the prime forum for sharing information and concerns, analysing risk and recommending responsibility or action. It draws together staff from all the agencies with specific responsibility in the child protection process (health, social services, police, schools and probation) and other staff who can offer relevant specialist advice, for example psychologists, psychiatrists, lawyers, and provides them with the forum for conducting and agreeing their joint approach to work with the child and the family.

Lyon and deCruz (1993: 125 - 141) outline some of the possible consequences of child protection conferences: (a) the provision of service to the child/family; (b) informal social work involvement; (c) further investigation; (d) placement on the Child Protection Register; (e) application for a child assessment order; (f) application for an emergency protection order; (g) issue of a care or supervision order; (h) no further action.

There has been one major change to the case conference in the *Working Together* era, and that is there is now an emphasis on ensuring the fullest possible involvement of the parents or carers of the child. The Children Act 1989 is concerned primarily with creating a situation whereby a 'multi-disciplinary team [can] successfully monitor a child living at home with its parents' (Burke 1996: 37). As such, much of Section V of the 1989 Act is directed at the roles and responsibilities of 'the designated officer' or the 'applicant'. Recognition is given here to the fact that local authorities are also
mentioned, but it would appear that most of the onus of including the family into case conferences falls on the front-line worker.

*Working Together* is explicit concerning this matter and urges all concerned to keep parental 'exclusion to a minimum' (DoH 1991 6.15). It goes on to note that, as far as possible, parents who do not attend should find ways to air their views in the conference. Farmer and Owen (1995: 317) comment on parental involvement, remarking that 'the balance of power has been heavily weighted against parents...and they have been excluded from crucial parts of the process'.

This is interesting; because of the 1989 Children Act (Part V), the inclusion of parents and children into the child protection system as active participants, rather than passive receivers, dominates the introduction to *Working Together*. This point is picked up by Otway (1996: 166) who cautions on the need to be aware of all the factors affecting the reforms in child protection. She notes that the post-1988 changes have been fuelled by the move into 'service provision', to which could be added the equally strong shift toward consumerism in social policy provision (Butcher 1995).

Despite the centrality of the conference to inter-agency working it remains a problem area. Gibbons et. al (1995) found that the gap between the first enquiry and the case conference convening was on average 34 days instead of the recommended 8. Farmer and Owen (1995) noted that the discussions in the conferences focused on risk assessment and registration decisions, and relegated planning and co-ordination of approach to the 'final nine or ten minutes'. It may be that Farmer and Owen (1995: 89 original emphasis) have uncovered the main rationale for the conference when they suggest that: 'the initial conference had a part to play in spreading responsibility for the decisions made'.
Child Protection Registers

Above, it was noted that although a good idea in principle, in practice the registers were not entirely successful or popular. The *Working Together* era has seen one fundamental change to the process of registration: the removal of what was seen as the catch-all category 'grave concern'. This removal is a facet of the 1989 Children Act and was cemented in the 1991 version of *Working Together*. The category was amalgamated with the more specific categories of neglect and physical and sexual abuse. The removal of 'grave concern' can also be seen as an attempt to 'tidy up' the national picture. ‘Grave concern’ was being used as a catch-all for children where there was suspected but as yet unproved abuse. The use of ‘grave’ concern in some areas led to figures over three times the national average (Lyon and deCruz 1993: 3).

Arguably, *Working Together* has produced a more business-like approach to the register. *Messages from the Research* notes that *Working Together* suggests only four main categories should be used: neglect; physical injury; sexual abuse and emotional abuse (1995: 30-1). However, Gibbons et al (1995) found that concerned professionals, robbed of the catch-all 'grave concern', still employed vague, non-specific categories such as 'non-organic failure' or 'child in same household as a person previously involved in abuse' as precautionary registration devices.

Moreover, attempts to harmonise the use of the register have also encountered problems. Gibbons (1995: 107) informs of continuing geographical variations in the use of the register, identifying two sets of explanatory factors. Firstly, she examines socio-demographic factors such as poverty. Secondly, she comments on the operational factors in the use of the register. Here she claims that inefficiency and organisational problems contribute to high levels of registration.
Interestingly, Gibbons notes an overall improvement in the manner in which the child protection register is viewed. This optimism can be contrasted with Corby's (1987) claims that child protection registers served no useful purpose and should be abolished. In stark contrast Gibbons (1995: 107) concludes that 'most respondents believed that central registers were an essential part of the child protection system...provid[ing] management information, maintaining inter-agency co-ordination and support practice’.

**Joint Training Manuals**

Since 1989 there has been a plethora of joint training 'how to do it' type publications, all aimed at promoting inter-agency working. Indeed, in many respects Working Together can be seen as a training manual. It is difficult not to be critical of many of these manuals, especially their simplistic approach to the difficulties of joint working. For example, Evans and Miller (1995: 21) offer these words of advice for overcoming definitional differences:

>'Using a flip chart, the group compares individual results and discusses any major differences that are apparent. The words on the chart may mean different things to different people, and you should take time to explore them'

Despite this type of publication, joint training is recognised as an important way forward. Working Together (1991: 7.7) states that 'Education and training are not luxuries'. Joint manuals are clearly important. This importance is enshrined in Appendix 6 of Working Together with the recommendation of a standard content and format of local procedures.

Included should be sections such as law and definitions; who is involved; referral and recognition; immediate protection and planning the investigation; investigation and initial assessment; child protection decision making about the need for registration;
comprehensive child protection planning; implementation review and registration. In short, the local guidelines should include all that is necessary for members of the system to know. The maintenance of these manuals falls to the local ACPC (Lyon and de Cruz 1993: 152). The importance of these handbooks becomes clear, especially when viewed in the manner Working Together intends:

These handbooks should be concerned mainly with inter-agency procedure... ACPC should regularly re-examine and ...revise these handbooks so they represent a comprehensive and up-to-date statement of local policy. (DoH 1991: 2.8).

In many respects the local joint training manuals have the potential to become the mouthpiece of the ACPC

The implications for empirical research

The reforms instigated in the Colwell to Cleveland era and reviewed in the Working Together period have created conditions in which the agencies working in child protection have seemingly become more adept, though not faultlessly so, at partnership working. However, it is disingenuous to neglect the changes which have occurred in the broad policy environment of child protection, especially in the more recent post-1988 era. In particular, it is essential to consider the impact of New Public Management on the business and processes of child protection and, this being the case, the focus of this piece of empirical research - the ACPC - is particularly appropriate. Armstrong (1994) provides some extra justification.

In a review of ACPC reports, she notes that 'Almost all reports begin with a reference to the changing agency context within which the ACPC works' (1994: 2.1), which is a direct reference to the on set of NPM and fragmentation. These changes have been instrumental in altering the internal construction of almost every ACPC. However, despite this, Armstrong believes that the commitment to 'partnership' by the ACPCs
remains as strong as ever, noting that often this commitment takes the form of 'public statements'. What Armstrong does not make clear is whether these public statements relate only to public relations, an integral part of management, or whether they go deeper and relate to clear, locally based guidelines and active resource driven participation.

Armstrong (1994: 3.1) informs that 'hard information about the nature and extent of the roles played by member agencies is unavailable in most reports'. This reflects the findings of Gilling (1994) who in looking at inter-agency working in crime prevention found that participation in partnerships by some agencies may be public relations exercises and little else. Moreover, Armstrong (1994: 4 2.2) reinforces the main theoretical argument of this thesis by stating that ACPCs throughout the country are struggling with issues of representation. The formation of Trusts and the reorganisation of Health raise formidable questions...[another ...key anxiety is about the representation of education.

It is very difficult to define what ACPCs are supposed to do outside of the albeit ambiguous tasks which are listed above. This ambiguity means that each ACPC appears to be able to construct itself as it sees fit. It would seem that there is no 'standard ACPC' against which the others can be measured. This point is put into perspective by Armstrong (1994: 3.1) who argues that 'each ACPC regards the pattern of its partnerships the norm'.

Evidence suggests that across the ACPCs there are a number of ad hoc organisational structures operating at a variety of levels of competence with no fixed membership, lacking budgets of their own in most cases, and likely to be confused if confronted with a counterpart's structure or system. Thus, it can be suggested that ACPCs are, in theory, the vehicle which 'organises feedback' and co-ordinates the 'relationships of
the parts' highlighted by Reder et al (1993) as the cornerstones of any system. However, in practice, ACPCs appear to find this task problematic - a point often overlooked by official responses.

Whilst Working Together gives clear guidance on a number of aspects of the ACPC (1991: Part 2), the tone of the section repeats the message emanating from the Colwell to Cleveland era. Making the forum work is assumed to be relatively unproblematic and the co-operation of all relevant agencies is assumed to be assured, seemingly based on the simplistic assumption of what Murphy (1995: 19) terms 'the traditional voluntary cooperation between member agencies [being] sufficient to allow the committee to do its work'. This demonstrates a faith in the ability of managers to create structure and a reluctance to ask questions about the practice of management. This is an important distinction and one which concerns this research.

Summary

This chapter has attempted to contextualise the remainder of the thesis via a review of the structural changes to the child protection system organised around two recent historical periods - the Colwell to Cleveland period (1974 - 1988) and the Working Together period (1988 - present). It has suggested that the Colwell case illustrated the need for inter-agency work, as well as highlighting many shortcomings in the pre-1974 system. As understanding and definitions of child abuse grew in the following twenty years a number of public inquires took place into the deaths of children at the hands of their carers.

The Cleveland to Colwell inquires and the accompanying academic literature were reviewed, concluding that whilst some academic literature concentrated on structural factors, the bulk of the official response located problems and solutions at the frontline. Managerial input to the post-Colwell system was seen largely in terms of
provision of administrative frameworks. These themes have been continued in the *Working Together* period, reinforced by central government's attempt to direct the system via numerous publications and legislation.

It is the contention of this work that there are two competing discourses evident in child protection: the discourse of partnership working and the discourse of managerialism. Moreover, during the course of the remaining chapters it will be argued that the general principles behind these two approaches to the provision of child protection are such that satisfying the aims of both within the same system further complicates an already complex and fragile organisational milieu. Bearing this in mind, the next two chapters review the literature surrounding inter-agency working and the growth, development and current status of managerialism within the agencies comprising the child protection system.
Chapter Three

The contested nature of partnership working in welfare settings

In the previous chapter it was suggested that there are two competing discourses operating within the child protection system and, moreover, each of these two discourses may act as barriers, thus limiting the effective implementation of the other. The task of this and the following chapter therefore becomes one of identifying, defining and discussing each discourse in turn, with an eye to establishing the manner in which each affects the other. This chapter focuses on the contested nature of partnership working, particularly in welfare settings.

From the outset, it is important to note that partnership working in social welfare has generated a plethora of literature, to the extent that we now have a number of lenses through which to view collaborative activity. Not every research site or case study will necessarily have elements which require each and every lens to be applied. For example, Litwak and Hylton (1962) identified three modes of organisational co-operation ranging from independence, through interdependence, to conflict. For this work, the first lens may not be of primary concern, as a reading of the literature implies an element of choice on the part of organisations: joint working in child protection is mandated and not undertaken through organisational choice rendering independence an impossible option.

On the other hand, Crawford and Jones's (1996) contention (which will be reviewed in detail below) that partnerships run along a continuum from multi-agency relations
to inter-agency relations clearly has resonance here because, whilst partnerships in child protection may be mandated, the degree to which collaboration takes place may be decided more by the participating organisations than by the central government mandate. With that caveat in mind no attempt will be made to review all the literature relating to inter-organisational partnerships, rather a selection of literature with direct relevance to the peculiarities of joint working in child protection will be examined.

A brief note on the background and context to the search for improved co-ordination across welfare agencies

Over a decade ago Hudson (1987: 175) noted that 'inter-agency working was in vogue', which implies that it is something of a relatively new phenomenon. This, in child protection at least, was palpably not the case. It has long been recognised that 'a major characteristic of the structure of both central and local government in Britain is the fragmentation of the agencies responsible for welfare delivery and planning' (Butcher 1995: 58). Accordingly, it is possible to suggest that within British social administration there is a history of a search for effective co-ordination of fragmented service delivery and the promotion of joint planning, placing the co-ordination of fragmented provision at the forefront of concern.

The genesis of the problem of fragmented delivery and planning in welfare stems from the British tendency to organise central and local government departments around the services performed as opposed to the client group served, (the search for a solution to this on-going tendency can be traced as far back as the formation of the Charity Organisation Society in 1869 (Thane 1996) ). This form of organisation is
known as the ‘functional principle’ and as an organising principle was confirmed by the Haldane Report in 1918. Even then, Haldane recognised that structuring departments in terms of service provision could lead to overlaps between departments and cause co-ordination problems (1918 para. 19). Fragmentation is evident across all aspects of British administration at both central and local levels.

Evidence of the fragmented nature of local service delivery is clear for all to see. Most local authorities have separate departments for housing, social services and education (Stoker 1988). To complicate matters further, health and police services have different forms of control and are not incorporated into the local authority organisational structure (Reiner 1992; Midwinter 1994), a situation which has created a series of calls for the merging of some or all of these departments in a bid to ensure seamless service and planning and a co-ordinated service delivery system.

This was certainly the conclusion of two key reports which appeared at the end of the 1960s. The Seebohm Committee (1968 paras 676-681) was particularly concerned as to the ability of the local authorities to provide an effective family service given the fragmented nature of delivery. It called for the merging of education, housing and personal social services in order to create a ‘family service’. Equally concerned was the Redcliffe-Maude Commission reporting a year later (1969). That too noted the interdependence of all three services and endorsed Seebohm’s call for their merger. However, such a merger has never materialised, leading to the search for better co-ordinating frameworks which incorporated existing organisational and departmental differences.
Much of the work, as will be demonstrated later in this chapter, revolves around breaking down the problems of departments attempting to preserve organisational independence and autonomy and competition amongst organisations for scarce resources. Stoker (1991: 102) makes this rivalry abundantly clear and has identified three main sources of conflict in partnership working: 'bureaucratic rivalry' which emerges from the perceived need to protect and extend departmental empires; 'professional jealousies' which revolve around rival departments; and 'value clashes' between departments focused around ideological clashes.

Thus, around the time of the death of Maria Colwell, there was a recognition that inherent within welfare delivery agencies was the promotion and defence of sectoral goals and aims and that the large state social service departments were unable fully to meet the needs of their clients due to 'gaps in coverage, conflicts of aim and failures of communication' (Challis et al 1988). Acknowledgement of this state of affairs led to making joint working in child protection mandatory for some organisations (Hallett and Birchall 1992). In turn, this creates a highly specific lens through which to view this particular form of partnerships between organisations and it is to this body of literature this chapter now turns.

**Mandated partnerships in the child protection arena**

As the previous chapter described, mandated partnerships in child protection became a central fact of life for a number of welfare agencies from as long ago as 1974. This poses some important questions for those interested in exploring the effect and impact of partnerships upon organisations. In many respects, circumstances in which
partnerships between organisations are imposed rather than sought voluntarily, over-
ride some of the more established literature, which has a tendency to assume
partnerships are voluntary in response to some form of rational decision making
process (Colebatch 1998). In order to explore this difference between mandated and
voluntary partnerships it is necessary to begin this section with a review of two
explanations of why organisations volunteer to form partnerships.

**Exchange perspective**

Levine and White (1961) based this approach on the belief that welfare organisations
require three elements to complete their goals; clients, personnel and non-human
resources, the latter consisting of funds, knowledge and equipment. These are often
in short supply and during times of scarcity, organisations exchange these goods in
order to secure their organisational goals. Organisational exchange becomes 'any
voluntary activity between two organisations which has consequences, actual or
anticipated, for the realisation of their goals or objectives' (1961: 583).

In the exchange perspective, inter-agency working takes place when mutual benefits
are likely to accrue from working together, and need not be limited to material goods,
but can also be linked to concepts such as legitimacy and status. The theory relies
heavily on the goal directed nature of organisations and the somewhat questionable
influence of the 'rational person'. Nevertheless, it is possible to identify all the aspects
of Levine and White's propositions in many aspects of partnership working in child
protection. There are a myriad of agencies working within child protection and, in
effect, they all 'own' the same clients. Similarly, the inter-agency nature of the work
and the concentration on the front-line, demonstrate that there is need to exchange
personnel. Finally, all inter-agency working has an element of exchange of non-
human resources, even if this amounts only to agreeing to having a meeting on certain premises.

Theoretically, the impetus to exchange comes from mutual benefits. Motivation to participate is said to be internal to each organisation - in short, partners are working with each other and want to be in a reciprocal arrangement. According to Levine and White (1961) this leads to a high degree of co-operation and a willingness amongst those participating to solve problems of co-ordination. Axiomatically, the reverse is true: if agencies see joint working as non-beneficial or threatening then joint working will not take place as no mutual benefits will be accrued.

**Resource dependency**

This next perspective is related to the latter point and can be located around the concept of power. The perspective itself owes much to the work of Aldrich (1972) and Benson (1975). The perspective assumes that organisations seek to retain control over their environments. For welfare agencies, this environment can often be unstable and unpredictable. Control over an uncertain environment, such as child protection, can be exercised by entering into inter-agency relationships. It also assumes, in common with the exchange perspective, that resources are scarce due to competition between agencies. Scarce resources can only be acquired at the expense of other agencies.

The dominant assumption being made here is that organisations act rationally, that they are goal driven and that resource dependency is central to controlling organisational behaviour. Aldrich summarises this in the following passage:

> Other organisations are key elements in most organisations' environments, as they control the flow of resources...The interorganisational division of labour...ensures that most organisations must seek out others with specialist
resources...If an organisation seeking resources from another, controls strategic resources, has access to alternative sources, can use coercive power, or can modify its goals...to do without the resource it can avoid becoming dependent on the supplier. If these conditions are not met, or the supplying organisation makes counter-moves to blunt attempts at interdependence, an organisation may find itself in a dependent relationship.

(1979: 290)

Power assumes great importance in this model, and has become a theme which has been carried forward in many studies. For example, Crawford and Jones (1995: 19), in a review of Pearson and colleagues (1992), suggest that 'Pearson et al. correctly identify power as the central aspect of inter-agency relations... our own research confirms the primacy of power relations'.

Indeed, according to Hallett and Birchall (1992: 29) inter-agency relationships occur when one or more agencies have the power to force or induce other parties to interact. Those who are forced are not therefore acting entirely voluntarily and in organisational self-interest. This can lead to elements of resentfulness as well as bargaining for position and conflict, in contrast to the mutually beneficial world of the exchange perspective model. In order to counteract these problems agencies devise 'coping strategies' designed to reinforce and consolidate their own power bases. Benson (1975) paints a scenario where agencies operating in this type of arena are keen to protect their own sphere of influence and to establish and expand their domains, emphasising areas of expertise and ownership, opening up the potential for large degrees of cross organisational conflict.

And yet, mandated partnerships create exactly this type of situation. In child protection, agencies have no choice but to participate. In effect, the power relations noted above can be expressed in terms of a pyramid, with central government - the issuer of the dicta to work together - at the top and the various organisations competing for the remaining positions within the pecking order. The impact of
having to work together has spawned its own body of literature which will now be reviewed.

**Mandated partnerships**

Weiss (1981: 29) sets the scene when he argues that ‘organisations are unlikely to take up co-operation...simply because someone says it would be a good idea’. It may be therefore that some organisations, required by public policy demands to form partnerships, exhibit a tendency to attempt to limit the degree to which mandated working impacts on their organisational independence. This idea has been explored by Crawford and Jones (1996) and revolves around the consensus that one of the key problems for partnership working is the fact that all organisations strive to retain organisational autonomy (Hudson 1987; Hallett and Birchall 1992; Crawford and Jones 1996). Thus, any merger or sharing of work with other organisations has at least the potential to threaten this organisational independence making joint working a latent danger. In turn, such a threat explains why some organisations are reluctant and cautious about entering into collaborative forums. Arguably, this reluctance is intensified in conditions where partnerships are forced.

This theme was further developed by Challis et al (1988). They suggest that when looking at local interaction between agencies the term *collaboration arena* should be employed. This, they argue, is the correct term for local level partnerships, mandated or otherwise. They base this contention on the premise that although central government may view partnerships as essential at the local level due to the independence and autonomy welfare organisations hold, any plan of action takes on a
different degree of authority and importance within each participating agency. Challis concludes that central government writs are imperfect at local level creating local policy arenas where different organisations bring different needs, goals, power and enthusiasm for partnership working to the table.

Crawford and Jones (1996) acknowledge this and suggest that organisations develop what can be seen as ‘coping strategies’, developing varying degrees of partnership working along a continuum ranging from a point which offers little threat to organisational independence to its opposite point which compromises organisational identity.

In detail, Crawford and Jones (1996) employ two ideal types in order to make a conceptual distinction between the two ends of their continuum. They suggest that the least threatening form of partnership working is that of multi-agency working. Here, agencies will come together in order to address a problem but any joint working which takes place does not significantly affect or transforms the work each partner agency does. Essentially, Crawford and Jones suggest that the roles of the partner agencies remain distinct, with each partner retaining control and autonomy over their core organisational task. In such a scenario key officers join together to share their collective expertise and multi-agency work is grafted onto existing practices.

The opposite end of the continuum harbours the concept of inter-agency working. It is here where the danger to organisational independence and identity becomes most acute. Here, organisations enter into a form of inter-penetration which affects the internal working relations of the participating organisations, often melding working
practices to create a distinct pattern of work, which fails to resemble that of the host organisations. In turn, new structures, working conditions and allegiances are formed between partner organisations and their agents. These threaten a number of important organisational factors including standard operating procedures and organisational loyalty (Hill 1997).

Crawford and Jones (1996) point to the fact that, in reality, partnerships lie somewhere between these two polar extremes. Importantly, they note that the closer partnership forums move toward inter-agency working the greater the rewards in collaborative activity, yet, at the same time inter-agency working presents increased opportunities for conflict between agencies. On the other hand, multi-agency working, which some have seen as mere public relations exercises (Gilling 1994), allows partners to appear to be working together and at the same time reduce the potential for conflict and the threat to organisational independence. Thus, for any partnership forum, one key area is the decision where on the continuum to place their particular form of joint working. In this respect, Halpert's (1982: 55) insight pre-empts Crawford and Jones's thesis, claiming as he does that:

agencies have been found to deal with this problem [of a threat to organisational independence] by interpreting the command to co-ordinate in such a manner that the parameters of the constraints are as broad as possible enabling them to maintain a certain level of organisational autonomy within a minimum amount of internal disorganisation.

According to Whetten (1981), the question of where on the continuum to locate partnerships is answered by referring to two key factors: assessment of the compatibility of linkages and the capacity to sustain co-ordination. Often, these
decisions are reflective of how the organisation and its staff view their partners. For example, Whetten (1981: 14) suggests that staff within organisations assess their partners in terms of the extent to which partnerships are desirable and will enhance their own organisation. He continues by arguing that if staff within one organisation view their partner(s) as having the potential to tax their organisation and drain valuable resources, they will attempt to undermine the mandate or to reduce the partnership to the bare minimum. Equally, the converse is true: if entering into a partnership forum appears to be benefit the organisation staff within the organisation will maximise the extent to which they collaborate.

Much of this relates to the growing body of literature on the problems of the 'top down' approach to public policy (Pressman and Wildavsky 1973; Lipsky 1980; Hill 1997). Mandated partnerships in the child protection arena stem from a central government decision to 'force' a number of agencies to become partners in the prevention of abuse. Pressman and Wildavsky, writing in a North American context note the extent to which local policy implementors have the capacity to undermine the edicts issued from central government, or to subvert those orders to fit local conditions or organisational needs. In effect, local agents and organisations become policy makers in their own right especially in areas of work where local agents and organisations hold high levels of discretion (Lipsky 1980).

One of the key questions for those who analyse the impact and effectiveness of partnership working is to ascertain where on the continuum a particular partnership forum is located. In many respects the answer to the question (as well as the direction of many of the above accounts into joint working) leads to the work of Hudson (1987)
who offered a framework of analysis relating to partnership working specifically designed to examine the British social welfare context. Although not exclusively concerned with mandated partnerships, much of Hudson’s work becomes an important explanatory tool in helping to understand the complexities of forced partnerships.

Hudson’s framework of analysis

Hudson (1987) begins from the premise that collaborative activity is either feasible or already exists, as in the case of child protection. He then moves to claim that once the feasibility of collaboration is established the next task is to search for explanations of any specific linkages between agencies and organisations. Hudson (1987: 176) posits that a ‘threefold focus is available...the environmental context;...the comparative properties of an organisational network; and...collaborative linkages themselves’. Each will now be reviewed.

Environmental context

Hudson (1987) refers to the work of Emery and Trist (1965) who note that environmental contexts may create conditions where agencies need to form partnerships. Specifically, Emery and Trist point to what they call ‘turbulent fields’ as precursors of partnerships. A turbulent field will contain some or all of the following: ‘a relatively large number of organisations; inability of agencies to satisfy the demand for services; an unstable social situation; a new programme or piece of legislation; a re-trenching economy’ (Hudson 1987: 176). In many respects this view
echoes the work of Warren (1973) who points to the fact that welfare agencies exhibit the tendency to forge partnerships in times of crises or when their work is under attack. Nevertheless, all four authors note that even if the environmental context is conducive to partnerships, or the environment forces agencies to work together, the tendency to resist these pressures still remains.

**The comparative properties of the organisational network**

Whilst environmental pressures may cause organisations to come together, clearly these are not the only factors. As noted many times above child protection brings together a number of disparate agencies and the degree to which collaboration takes place depends upon the degree and nature of the similarities and differences between agencies. So important are these for Hudson (1987) that he suggests that they are best viewed as independent variables and any subsequent partnerships as dependent variables. Hudson (1987) identifies five points for comparison when assessing similarities and differences between organisations.

Firstly, he suggest that analysts should search for the extent to which agencies are homogenous, especially in terms of ‘functional and structural similarity’ (Hudson 1987: 177). Here, drawing on the work of Reid (1969), Hudson suggests that a sharing of goals facilitates partnerships and ensures more stable and deeper levels of exchange. However, because of the functional principle discussed above, Hudson notes that achieving this in the British context is often problematic. He cites the work of Hasenfeld (1972) who claims that the value systems and goals of welfare
organisations are often at odds, which undermines the extent to which partnerships between welfare organisations are able to form and gel.

Secondly, Hudson identifies the importance of domain consensus which overlaps with inter-organisational homogeneity. Thompson (1967 in Hudson 1987: 177) supplies a definition of domain and domain consensus:

>a set of expectations, both for members of an organisation and for others with whom they interact, about what the other organisation will do and not do...it provides an image of the organisation’s role in a larger system, which in turn, serves as a guide for the ordering of action in certain directions and not others.

Establishing domain consensus can produce conflictual situations. Hudson remarks that in order to install and retain domain consensus amongst partner agencies three issues need to be resolved: (a) an agreement on specific organisational goals; (b) a compatibility of organisational goals; and (c) an agreement amongst participating professionals on their respective positions within a hierarchy of professions. It is important to note that these positions are not fixed for all time: they are flexible and can be undermined or strengthened by shifts in opinion or by changes in organisational behaviour. For instances, lapses in performance or changes of role by one organisation can lead to a rejection of their claim to domain by their partners and end that particular organisation’s claims of legitimisation.

In turn this has two implications for partnership working. Firstly, as Hudson (1987: 178) notes the most obvious is the securing of legitimised domains, which allows an organisation to ‘operate within an agreed sphere, claim support for its activities and
define proper practices within its realm’. The second implication impacts upon partnership working. If within the forum two agencies share or have similar domains there exists the potential for increased collaboration. However, the converse is also true in as much that shared domains increase the likelihood of competition and territorial disputes.

The third area Hudson (1987) outlines is network awareness. Somewhat axiomatically this refers to the degree to which partner agencies are aware of each other, a point made elsewhere by Nocon (1989) who linked the need for inter-agency awareness to the concept of ‘organisational ignorance’, where unawareness between partners affects the ability to work together. Partners need to be aware, in the first instance, of each other’s existence followed quickly by knowledge of goals and the degree to which organisations achieve those goals. Hudson notes that seeming to fail to achieve stated goals by one agency can act to undermine their partner’s willingness to collaborate.

Network awareness can be disturbed by a number of factors including differences in training, separate patterns of accountability, organisational management structures and isolated professional socialisation (Thomas 1986; Holdaway 1986). Equally, inter-professional mistrust or suspicion can lead to poor network awareness.

Hudson’s fourth area is that of organisational exchange and is closely allied to the work of Levine and White (1962, reviewed above). It is important because, as Levine and Cook (1977) both point out, exchange needs to be reciprocal. They argue that unilateral exchanges, or exchanges where one side clearly gains at the expense of
another are unpopular, are almost always avoided and can be dangerous from an organisational perspective. This is because exchange may be desirable from a system viewpoint but can expose gaps in power differential between organisations. In turn, acceptance of these differentials formalises the dominance of one organisation over another, threatening the balance of domain consensus.

Hudson's (1987) final area for consideration in the comparative properties of organisational networks is that of alternative resource sources. Agencies which have access to alternative sources of resources are less likely to need to become involved in formalised partnerships, or in the case of mandated relationships are likely to be reluctant partners. Hudson notes that organisational networks are flexible and different in each case. They can range along a continuum from intense to hostile. Thus, in many respects, Crawford and Jones's (1996) continuum thesis mirrors Hudson's earlier analysis.

**The focus on collaborative linkages**

Hudson's (1987) third area of analysis is that of collaborative linkages. Here, he asks analysts to concentrate upon the practicalities and dimensions of partnership working. He suggests that four key dimensions are visible in all partnership arenas.

The first dimension is the degree of formalisation between participating agencies. He suggests that here there are two means by which the degree of formalisation within partnerships can be assessed. One revolves around the extent to which official sanction for the partnership exists: the greater the degree of rules, polices and
procedures then the greater the level of official sanction. Referring specifically to mandated partnerships Hudson (1987: 179) notes that often the question of domain consensus is agreed and defined formally as is the extent of resource exchange. However, he continues by citing the work of Aldrich (1976) who suggests that mandated partnerships tended to be associated with lower levels of co-operation.

The second indicator of degrees of formalisation is the existence of an intermediary co-ordinating body. According to Hudson (1987: 179) this type of formalisation offers a degree of structural formalisation. Thus, any body, be it an organisation or a specially constructed forum, which is charged with co-ordinating partnerships becomes tasked with facilitating interdependence. The problem here is that it assumes that organisations are ready and able to form and maintain partnerships. This is clearly not the case in some partnership forums. Hudson (1987: 180) notes that 'a more common and problematic circumstances is when a co-ordinating agency is confronted with either a high degree of independence or conflict among constituent organisations'. Hudson warns against overt use of central power to impose collaborative activity, arguing that partnerships created in this situation may be tenuous and subject to rupture.

The second dimension of collaborative activity is the degree of intensity. Here Hudson (1987: 180) argues for the need to examine the level of investment an organisation has in its relations with other organisations. Referring to the work of Aldrich (1979) Hudson suggest there are two measures of intensity. The first is the amount of resources involved in a relationship. In welfare organisations this can be assessed by examining the degree to which services and personnel are shared with
other agencies. The second is the frequency of interaction between welfare organisations. There is a slight problem here as welfare agencies often ‘share’ clients. It should be noted that both Hudson (1987) and Rogers (1974) caution against placing too much cognisance upon routine interactions.

Rogers (1974) developed a scale of intensity which attempts to measure the degree to which interaction becomes important to organisations. He suggests that *ad hoc* relationships only have a minimal effect on organisation resources. Conversely, formalised interaction where clear demands are placed upon agency resources can be a drain on resources. Rogers suggests that given a choice organisations will always veer toward the less intense more *ad hoc* relationship in an effort to protect organisational resources and independence.

The third dimension of collaborative linkages identified by Hudson (1987) is that of the degree of reciprocity. This returns the discussion to the notion of ‘exchange’ between organisations. Resources, as noted above, can encompass a wide range of factors including staff and money, but also less tangible commodities such as information and prestige. In forums where some organisations are held in low esteem by their partners, Hudson suggests that joint working may be problematic. Looking specifically at mandated partnerships, Hudson (1987: 180) suggests that equal contributions between partners (an important element in securing adherence to partnerships) may be negatively affected by pre-set agreements, which will impact upon the level of support for the partnership forum.
The final dimension of collaborative linkages revolves around the degree of standardisation between participating agencies. These can be divided into two separate areas of concern. Firstly, Hudson (1987: 181) distinguishes unit standardisation. This is taken to mean the extent to which the participating units, especially in the 'dangerous' area of formalised partnerships, are able to determine and set the nature of exchanges. Hudson posits that if these transactions are standardised partnerships will be stronger. On the other hand if there is an inability to standardise these exchanges formal interaction may suffer.

The second form of formalisation revolves around the degree to which procedures are formalised. Hudson (1987) notes that the more intense the partnerships the more standardised joint working procedures become as organisations strive to protect their investments.

As a conclusion to his work Hudson cites Marrett (1971). Marrett begins his work by identifying two forms of inter-organisational activity which ranges from a low degree of formalisation, standardisation and intensity to a highly formalised, standardised and intense form of partnership. Marrett argues that because of the tendency toward maintenance of organisational independence, the former is much more common than the latter.

Finally, and serving as a useful pointer toward the direction of the empirical part of this thesis, Hudson notes that his framework of analysis has been little tested. However, he appears to imply that subsequent tests which employ his analytical framework to analyse inter-organisational forums will yield results which indicate
partnership working in welfare settings are difficult and not always successful. In particular, he draws upon the work of two authors, Warren (1974) and Davidson (1976), both of whom comment on the difficulty partnership working presents for all those involved, yet, as a concept, continues to be promoted. Davidson (1976 in Hudson 1987: 182) in particular makes the very succinct point that:

commentators on the effects of co-ordination are almost uniformly pessimistic, yet co-ordination continues to be promoted as a means of providing greater rationality in the delivery of services.

Summary

This chapter began by highlighting the fact that the search for a more co-ordinated approach to service delivery in welfare settings is not new and has challenged policy makers for a considerable time. The fragmented nature of service delivery stems from the British adoption of the ‘functional principle’ which has created welfare delivery organisations which are fiercely defensive of their respective territories. Yet, somewhat paradoxically as the last quote illustrates, the promotion of joint working continues unabated.

A number of attempts to overcome this paradox have been promoted, ranging from joint consultative committees to the calls for a merger of some local government departments none of which has sufficiently bridged the implementation gap. The other alternative to ensure that reluctant participants embrace the need to co-ordinate services is to make partnership working mandatory, as in the case of child protection.
However, most of the literature at least highlights some of the inherent dangers working with other welfare organisations pose for welfare agencies. In particular, many authors note the tendency of organisations to seek to maximise their autonomy and retain their independence as key barriers to effective and lasting partnerships. Accordingly, a number of commentators have pointed to the fact that organisations seek out coping strategies designed to enable them to adhere to the call for closer co-ordination yet at the same time allow them to retain their independence.

In turn, this has lead to a number of similar conclusions concerning partnership working. These revolve around the fact that most partnerships can be conceived of as being on a form of continuum such as that devised by Crawford and Jones (1996) with, in that example, the polar extremes of multi-agency and inter-agency working. All of these types of analysis point to a number of factors which inhibit or promote the degree to which organisations choose to work together.

The work of Hudson (1987) can be seen as one which offers an insight into partnership working in the British welfare context. Hudson identifies three areas of focus which can act as explanatory tools when examining sites of partnership working. By implication, shifts in each one of those areas of focus will have the effect of moving the level and degree of the partnership along the continuum. By way of signposting following chapters, it is here that the key empirical focus of this research lies.

Clearly, the discourse of joint working is strong and influential in central government policy and almost all would agree that joint working to provide an effective service
provision is a ‘good thing’. To that end, many agencies readily undertake partnerships and in some areas of grave importance, such as child protection, volunteerism is rejected in favour of mandated partnership working.

However, despite the strength of the discourse there can be little doubt from the literature that achieving effective partnerships is fraught with problems and the often fragile relationships between welfare agencies can be compromised in a number of ways. Importantly for this research it appears that some commentators see mandated partnerships as the most difficult form of partnerships to establish and the most fragile once in operation. Moreover, there is an implication that mandated partnerships exist at the end of the continuum which represents the least commitment by the participating agencies. In sum, it could be argued that any change to the environmental context, the comparative properties of an organisational network or the collaborative linkages between agencies working in mandated partnerships has at least the potential to shift such forums along the continuum of collaboration.

Arguably, such a shift in these three areas has occurred in the shape of the discourse of new public management (NPM). It is this area which will be the focus of the next chapter. Following that, the final chapter in this section will outline the manner in which NPM could affect the fragile relationships in child protection and the way Hudson’s framework will be employed to gauge the level of change, if any, in a specific child protection setting.
Chapter Four

A review of the development, growth and current status of managerialism within the agencies comprising the child protection system

As the previous chapter has identified, partnership working has become a central tenet of the delivery of child protection and the co-ordination of a diversity of agencies has been an area of concern for those tasked to oversee the development of child protection services. However, the move toward a more co-operative culture has not been the only major change in the child protection arena. Alongside concerns over co-ordination there has emerged equally pressing concerns over the nature and control of welfare delivery agencies. Over the past two decades there has been a move away from the old Beveridge inspired style of bureaucratic control of welfare agencies and a shift toward a more business like managerial control system. Accompanying this shift, there has been a denial of Keynesian economics in favour of a more supply-side, monetarist approach to public finance (Fuller 1990). Applied in tandem, these two changes have had far-reaching implications for the structure of many of the agencies engaged in child protection.

This chapter begins by reviewing the conditions which created these changes. It then defines and examines the growth in managerialism and the consequences for welfare organisations. The chapter concludes by assessing the current status of the manager within agencies involved in child protection.
The genesis of managerialism

From the early 1980s managers were presented by some as virtually the saviours of the nation:

efficient management is the key to the [national] revival...and the management ethos must run right through our national life - private and public companies, nationalised industries, local government, the National Health Service.

(Heseltine, 1980, quoted in Clarke and Newman 1997: 34)

This view had a number of sources of origin, many of which were located in a growing dissatisfaction with the traditional running of the British post-war welfare state, namely the heavily bureaucratised process of social administration (Clarke et al 1994; Clarke and Newman 1997). Another key determinant in questioning the control and delivery of welfare was the fiscal crisis of the early 1970s, which gave rise to a search for the commitment to lower taxation and the need of 'sound stewardship' of scarce public funds. Concomitant with this disaffection with bureau-professionals, and the fiscal crisis of the 1970s, was a search for alternative forms of implementing welfare. These two points will now be explored in detail, starting with the impact the fiscal crisis of the 1970s.

The fiscal crisis and its impact on the management of the public sector

In economic terms, the period between 1945 and the early-1970s has been identified by some economic theorists as one of cyclical shifts in the capitalist regimes, whereby the periodic readjustments in social and economic organisation are made as a consequence of the 'normal' tension between capital and labour, with concessions being made by both parties in terms of, for example, reductions in profitability to compensate for increased wage demands and vice-versa (Hoggett 1991). During this period organisational and social changes were minor and reflected a relatively
consensual period (Coxall and Robins 1989), with capital, labour and politicians in agreement about the nature and structure of society.

However, post-1973, the nature of the shifts in capitalism became more fundamental heralding a period of conflict and upheaval with wide gaps appearing in the previously consensual relationships between labour, capital and the state. Fuller (1990) argues that since the mid-1970s the changes in the nature of capitalism have been *structural*, made necessary by the capitalistic prerogative of increasing profitability, against a backdrop of stagflation plus high and (arguably) unrealistic demands over wages and working conditions. In turn, these structural changes created conditions where the nature of all aspects of economic production and social organisation were placed under close scrutiny.

Boyer (1988: 76) enlarges upon this argument by suggesting that *structural* shifts occur when 'the very functioning...[of capitalist societies] comes into contradiction with the existing institutional forms', implying that much of the post-war settlement between capital and labour (Mishra 1984) had become outmoded and counter to the needs of capital. Thus, in the context of Britain, the Beveridge-Keynsian axis, with its emphasis on demand economics, full employment and a benevolent welfare regime, was seen as a blocking agent to the necessary economic restructuring required if Britain was to compete in the emerging ‘global economy’.

What was it, then, about the Beveridge-Keynsian axis which made it a ‘blocking agent’? It is possible to view the Beveridge-Keynsian approach to welfare as a product of its time. James and Raine (1998), looking at the growth of managerialism in criminal justice agencies, note that the post-war welfare state was created in the mould of existing models of production and control and was centred around the need to re-construct British society in the aftermath of war. They suggest that the blueprint for the new welfare state was the Fordist model of production with its emphasis on
uniformity and bulk production. Control of this 'welfare production line' was handed over to administrators who were charged to deliver reliable and consistent services. This was achieved by employing bureaucrats - the welfare state's equivalent of production line operatives - who 'produced' welfare services via task specification, hierarchical command, co-ordination of information and segmented structures.

The result was the creation of a post-war welfare state which was 'standardised and consistent' (James and Raine 1998: 32) but without flexibility and certainly not able to respond to the needs of the user. Indeed, as discussed below, by the mid-1970s the welfare bureaucracies were being criticised for being too self-obsessed, too profligate with public moneys and failing to meet the needs of the service users (Clarke et al. 1994).

In practice, the criticisms of the early to mid-1970s had to wait until the post-1979 critical focus on the profligacy and inefficiency of welfare organisations before theoretical critique could be translated into practical action. Allied to the monetarist economic polices of the first Thatcher government it drove the much documented attack on the power bases of bureau-professionals², drawing on such tactics as fiscal constraint, compulsory competitive tendering, internal fragmentation of organisations into separate agencies, and the move from explanatory and co-operative accountability toward calculative and contractual accountability (Reiner and Spencer 1993; Clarke and Langan 1994). Other shifts included the introduction of performance targets, indicators and measurement. In short, the new regime, informed by and driven on by the structural shifts in capitalism, was aimed at eliminating wasteful duplication by streamlining welfare delivery, and introducing market discipline. This point is expanded by Hopwood who viewed the changes as being part

² For example, see The Rayner scrutinies of the then DHSS which claimed to have uncovered areas of waste and duplication in the payment of social security benefit. The National Audit Office (1986: 16) noted that the Rayner scrutinies would have saved the DHSS £53 million per annum.
of a 'new way of examining and managing the state...[C]ost and efficiency rather than effectiveness are being highlighted and debated' (1984: 169).

Essentially, therefore, central in the changes to the nature of the welfare state and its constituent agencies was a greater emphasis on fiscal probity and economic control of hitherto profligate organisations. What Hopwood seems to be referring to above is the concept of the three 'Es': economy, efficiency and effectiveness. The Audit Commission (1983: para. 36) defined these concepts as:

*Economy* may be defined as the terms under which the authority acquires human and material resources. An economical operation acquires those resources in the appropriate quality and quantity at the lowest cost.

*Efficiency* may be defined as the relationship between goods and services produced and the resources used to produce them. An efficient operation produces the maximum output for a given set of resource outputs; or, it has minimum inputs for any given quantity and quality of service provided.

*Effectiveness* may be defined as how well a programme or activity is achieving its established goals or other intended benefits.

Jacob (1991: 267), commenting on the effect of the concentration on matters fiscal, noted that 'Continued economic restraint [gave] a new urgency to demands to improve the efficiency of management in the public sector'. Furthermore he emphasised in particular that organisations tend to increase their investment in economic calculation in times of fiscal restraint. Moreover, he suggested that until the economic and efficiency questions have been answered, concepts such as effectiveness tend to be relegated to the sidelines, a point echoed by Butcher (1995: 122) who notes that whilst economy and efficiency are easily measured, effectiveness tends to be assessed in more political terms and is thus more contentious.

It is here that the second aspect of change can be examined for it revolves around the contentious (and ideological) area of which system of control is more 'effective' in
the delivery and running of welfare agencies - bureau-professional control or managerial control?

The dissatisfaction with the bureau-professional control of welfare agencies

It is not necessary here to enter into a prolonged debate concerning the problems with bureaucratic control of welfare. It is, however, necessary to point out that accompanying the drive toward greater fiscal probity was the perspective that the bureau-professionals who were running the post-war welfare state from its inception until 1979 were not the best group of people to be entrusted with ensuring the required economic rigour. Challis et al. (1988) highlighted the tendency for professionals to be 'seduced' by professional rewards and thus 'lose sight' of how their consumers actually experience a service. This propelled the suspicion that welfare provision was for the benefit of its deliverer and not its receiver. Likewise, as identified by Jacob (1991: 255), the shift toward managerialism, cost and economy created, 'fertile ground for lawyers: they and their allies, particularly in accountancy, are likely to become significant players in administration...'. This was achieved by 'import[ing] into the public sector management practices developed in the private sector' (Hopwood 1984: 171).

Essentially, what was being argued was that the old-style control and accountability practices of the Beveridge-Keynsian welfare state, including the practices of departmentalism discussed in Chapters two and three, was, in varying degrees, unable or unwilling to make the necessary adjustments to their standard operating procedures (Hill 1997) needed to facilitate the change into a flexible and 'consumer friendly' form of welfare delivery which could actively promote and foster a climate that embraced the concepts of economy, efficiency and effectiveness. Clarke et al (1994: 3) posit that in order to ensure fiscal probity and flexibility emerged, and was sustained, in welfare delivery, a new approach to the control of welfare agencies was
required. What was needed was an approach which unlocked the old post-war welfare settlements and transformed the 'relationships of power, culture, control and accountability'.

The discourse of 'New Public Management'

Enter the discourse of new public management. Clarke et al (1994: 3) note that the discourse of new public management has two dimensions regarding the reform of welfare. Firstly, it is concerned with providing a strategic leadership and direction for organisations. In many ways this vision of management mirrors that of Heseltine, cited above. Managers are seen as 'heroic' or 'bold' and are able to inspire their workforce to 'commitment to the organisational missions' (Clarke et al 1994: 3). Secondly, it allows for the devolution of responsibility and an increased importance for local managers who are 'close' to their 'customers'. This allows devolution of responsibility to local level, but importantly it enables local managers to feed into the strategic thinking because they are 'in tune' with the needs of the client group.

Underpinning all of the above is a belief in what Pollitt (1993: 3) has termed the 'right to manage'. Much of the demand to be allowed to manage stemmed, according to Moody (1987), from the private sector which saw excess taxation, too tight regulatory conditions and over use of union power as undermining the ability of managers to manage, leading to failing investments and poor performances. Hence, there was a growing demand by businesses to remove these restrictive practices in order that managers were free to maximise the potential of their individual units. In practice therefore the right to manage translates into issues concerning the use of organisational resources to achieve aims and goals. Whilst these demands emerged within the private sector the introduction of NPM into welfare agencies meant that the 'right to manage' became a clarion call in the public sector as well.
By its very nature such a 'right to manage' introduces conflicts of power over resources, decision making and labour relations. It also introduces two connected and important elements into NPM. Firstly, NPM can be conceived of as an ideology and secondly NPM becomes a practical way of dealing with problematic sections of society. Both of these points will be explored more fully below.

The 'right to manage' was introduced incrementally and addressed both areas of change: fiscal restraint and dissatisfaction with bureau-professional control. Clarke and Newman (1997: 58), building on the work of Pollitt (1993), argue that new public management first emerged in response to the need to introduce and maintain sound financial management: 'management was identified as the organisational force through which the predominant objectives of tighter financial control and increased productivity could be obtained'. However, over time, and increasingly in the late 1990s, wider changes to welfare created conditions where organisations charged with delivering welfare were being encouraged to perceive themselves as semi-autonomous businesses. These changes included an expansion of mixed economies of welfare, marketisation, the separation of purchaser and provider units and the creation of agencies (Colebatch 1998). Central in the instigation of these changes were the new breed of 'public service managers'.

By way of summary it is possible to suggest that, as Clarke and Newman argue (1997: ix), the genesis of NPM pre-dates the Thatcher period and therefore it would be remiss to view the changes discussed and outlined above as simply 'Thatcherite'. Clearly, the Thatcher administrations provided the political vehicle through which to promote change but the genesis for change has its roots in deeper, more structural changes to the nature of capitalism. In many respects, as Mishra (1990) points out, each nation state addressed the structural shifts in the global economy in different ways. In terms of the British welfare state, which is the concern of this work, it is possible to suggest that organisational restructuring occurred on two inter-connected
levels: one which addressed financial issues and one which addressed the nature of organisational control.

In turn, those shifts had two areas of impact. Firstly, welfare delivery organisations needed to alter their own world views and standard operating procedures in order to accommodate the move toward a 'managerial state' (Clarke and Newman 1997). Secondly, those individuals who shifted from bureau-professionals to being new public managers had to change the way they conceived of their work. It is to the impact of those two areas of change this chapter now focuses its attention.

The impact of the discourse of managerialism on individual managers

There are, arguably, subtle but clear differences in the images conjured up by the words 'manager' and 'bureaucrat', with the former suggesting dynamic control and the latter implying some form of dogged, unimaginative 'jobs-worth'. In turn, the images of 'manager' will have some form of impact upon those asked to perform the task. Jaques (1994: 112-113) supplies an informative definition of a manager. He suggest that the managerial role has 'three critical features', the most critical of which is that the 'manager must be held accountable not only for the work of subordinates but also adding value to their work'. The second role Jaques identifies as 'manager[s being] held accountable for sustaining a team of subordinates capable of doing this work'. Thirdly, Jaques posits that 'every manager must be held accountable for setting direction and getting subordinates to follow willingly, indeed enthusiastically'. In brief every manager is accountable for work and leadership within their host organisation and each manager becomes responsible for ensuring that their 'team' is both fully conversant with, and enthusiastically supports the aims of their host organisation.
However, the manager’s job does not stop there. The task of managers is to ensure that they have enough authority to make sure subordinates can do the work assigned to them. Such authority is based on four elements: '(1) the right to veto any applicant who, in the manager’s opinion, falls below the minimum standard of that ability; (2) the power to make work assignments; (3) the power to carry out performance appraisals...; and (4) the authority to initiate removal - at least from the manager’s own team - of anyone who seems incapable of doing the work' (Jaques 1994: 113).

For Jaques, it is clear that individual managers exert control over subordinates and employ that control via a mixture of exhortation, team building, veto and discipline. His outline of what managers ‘do’ emphasises the dynamic nature of management and the manner in which this is used to control subordinates in order to achieve corporate aims. Jaques’ analysis is only partial as it relates solely to the impact being a ‘manager’ has on individuals charged with ‘managing’, in this case, welfare delivery units. There is, however, another and equally important area of impact which needs to be considered: that of the effect of managerialism on the organisations which purchase or provide welfare services.

The impact of managerialism on welfare delivery units

In order to review the manner in which NPM affects organisations, it is necessary to turn to the work of Clarke and Newman (1997: 77) who discuss the impact of managerialism on state organisations. Central in their argument is the belief that organisations which embrace NPM change the way in which they conduct their business by virtue of a shift in the organisation’s ‘world view’. This occurs by:

...creating a dispersed managerial consciousness...throughout the organisation. By this, we mean to refer to the process that all employees come to find their decisions, actions and possibilities framed by the imperatives of managerial co-ordination...
Concurring with the work of Jaques (1994) and Meek (1988), the individual managers may pursue their own version of what management does, as outlined above, usually constructed around notions of dynamic control, but, when viewed collectively the action of a 'managerial consciousness' will have an impact on how the managerialised unit views its own work and also any work undertaken with other providers of welfare. Clarke and Newman (1997) posit that there are three main aspects of managerial business in this area: core business; ownership; and audit, all of which are particularly pertinent to this discussion.

**Core business**

This is defined as 'the effect of processes of service fragmentation (between providers) and forms of quasi-market competitiveness' (1997: 78). Thus, public sector organisations imitate the tendency for businesses to become 'focused'. This translates into the rejection of activities which divert attention and resources away from the primary corporate goal. Clarke and Newman imply that, in the public sector, the concentration on core business alters the ethos of public sector work. For example, they argue that the identification of core business legitimates a:

> shift away from the idea of complex organisations serving multiple constituencies, responding to a diversity of needs, and attempting to find a balance between potentially conflicting interests and goals.  
(1997: 78)

This assertion can be reinforced with some actual examples, such as the withdrawal of schools from extra-curricular activities or the gradual replacement of the scarecrow function of police foot patrols by private or local authority employed security officers. Equally, in the case of social work, anecdotal evidence suggests that 'purchasers' may disassociate with their 'provider' colleagues when problems arise.
This is an important corollary of managerialism. Core business orders and prioritises the response of the fragmented managerialised units. It also maps the external world of the managerial units into 'strategic plans, bifurcated into threats and opportunities and peopled by cut-throat competitors' (Clarke and Newman 1997: 79). In essence, the managerial concept of core business relegates all that cannot be measured in quantitative terms to the sidelines, and potential obscurity. What it also does is to create a sense of ownership of certain tasks, which will now be reviewed.

Ownership

Clarke and Newman (1993) suggest that the concept of ownership has:

been one of the most sought after effects of the managerial revolution, constructing commitment and motivation among staff in pursuit of corporate objectives.

Whilst this can be seen as a positive, there is a darker, more negative aspect to ownership. Owners become territorial and precious about their property and are unlikely to be tolerant of 'outsiders' or 'interlopers'. In terms of welfare delivery, this has resulted in territorial disputes which have seen a debate in areas as diverse as where social care ends and medical care begins, which school should take difficult pupils, and so forth. In child protection in particular, social services' ownership of child protection can be threatened by the police, in terms of who makes the crucial decision concerning either the removal of the victim or perpetrator or maintain and support the family unit.

Ownership therefore has implications for both inter- and intra-organisational working. Intra-organisationally there have been tensions in the internal market between purchasers and providers especially in the area of re-charging (Midwinter 1996). In inter-organisational terms the effect of ownership, when allied to core business, has
been to intensify the rivalry between the different agencies, especially in areas where there are budgetary concerns. As Clarke and Newman (1997) point out, managerialism is about 'earning not spending'. This is especially true if one agency's expenditure provides kudos for another agency which has committed less in the way of resources: in managerial terms this is aiding the 'competition' and can be seen as 'bad' strategic planning.

The legacy of the move into managerialism becomes clear; for individual managers and for the organisations they represent, the external world has become full of competitors. In turn, it is the job of the manager to ensure that the core business of the organisation remains within the domain of that particular organisation. Moreover, sharing and partnership become potentially dangerous ground and one which could easily de-stabilise all that the manager has worked toward in terms of core business and ownership.

Up to this point the discussion has perhaps provided the impression that new public management has been over-endowed with autonomy. The third main aspect places notions of autonomy in perspective and demonstrates how the apparent autonomy of managers is curbed and controlled.

*Audit*

Power (1994) identifies an 'audit explosion', which has become the central method by which the autonomy inherent in the 'right to manage' is controlled. Initially, audit related to concerns of economy and efficiency, but latterly it has also become synonymous with performance, such as in the case of league tables for schools. Positions in such tables are often dependent upon performance based around centrally prescribed key performance indicators. Managers are judged on their ability to perform efficiently and economically and also on their ability to adhere to centrally
dictated performance criteria, which differ from sector to sector. This means that managers from different areas of welfare delivery will have differing and variable end-goals dependent on their respective key performance indicators.

Clarke and Newman’s analysis ends there. However, as noted above, NPM can also have an ideological element to it which transcends the practical application of managerialism and becomes an organisational world view. With that in mind, the next section adds a fourth element to Clarke and Newman’s original typology and examines NPM as an ideology.

**Ideology**

Meek (1988) suggests that managerialism has been conceived of as a sort of ‘collective consciousness’, or, as preferred here, an ideology. Abercrombie (1988: 118) provides a definition of ideology, which states that '[ideology] is defined as a tightly knit body of beliefs organised around a few central values'. Abercrombie notes that ideologies are controlling, in as much that people behave according to an ideology in everyday life, in a mainly unreflective manner.

The ideology of management assumes that managers and their charges will accept and embrace the importance of the main aspects of management outlined by Jaques (1994) and Clarke and Newman (1997), and will, in a largely unreflective manner, transplant those aspects on to their everyday lives and the lives of those around them. The acceptance of a managerialist ideology becomes a controlling element, and one which can be manipulated from the centre, reflecting the Marxist sense of the term in generating a functionally useful sense of false consciousness.

Alvesson and Wilmott (1996) enlarge upon this point, citing what they call a process of *micro-emancipation*. They suggest that upon appointment to a managerial position
a person may not always perceive their self-identity as one of a 'manager': there will be other competing identities such as parent, partner, union member. From the managerialist perspective, it is vital that 'manager' should become a key self-identity. Constant appeals to 'managers' in terms of a managerial discourse serve to re-enforce certain ideals concerning the job, such as cost efficiency, results, and performance. Galbraith (1983) has commented that managers are often more controlled than employees, being constantly urged to be more thoughtful about their actions and what they think and say. In summarising their argument Alvesson and Wilmott suggest that 'it is important for top management to constitute people who take 'managership' very seriously and give priority to...being a manager' (1996: 173).

Thus, writers such as Alvesson and Wilmott (1996) and Clarke and Newman (1997) are implying that NPM has become much more than a technical exercise. It has become an ideology which has been accepted by some in an almost unreflective manner - in short NPM has become the new orthodoxy in the way its predecessor, bureau-professionalism, was throughout the 1950s 1960s and 1970s.

On the one hand managers are being bombarded with an ideology which preaches dynamism, autonomy, and control over subordinates. On the other, those aspects of 'managerialism' are being controlled and tempered from the centre via audit and performance indicators. Such control is not problematic, audit being an integral part of the ideology of management. What is problematic, and is central to this thesis, is the point where managers are instructed to deviate from the ideology of management, and forced into a partnership approach predicated on sharing and co-operation.

**The status of NPM within agencies of the child protection system**

This chapter has thus far explored the genesis and theory behind the rise of NPM. The final section of the chapter moves to examine the impact of NPM within four key
sections of the child protection system: social services, education, the police, and the health service. It should be noted that each sector will be examined in brief, outlining the main points of change and key areas of impact. Space precludes a detailed account but many publications have dealt, in detail, with the subject area (see amongst many others, Thompson et al 1991; Clarke et al 1994; Butcher 1995; Ham 1992; Clarke and Newman 1997; Reiner and Morgan 1997)

Social services

Langan and Clarke (1994: 73) provide an indication of the extent to which the scenarios discussed above have affected social service departments across England and Wales, stating that in social service departments the changes since 1989 have acted to:

...break-up the last of the local state’s ‘bureau-professional’ welfare empires...to fragment the service, subject it (albeit unevenly) to the disciplines of the mixed economy of welfare...The objective was not merely to change the role of local authority social service department from that of provider of services to that of ‘enabler’, ‘commissioner’ or ‘purchaser’ of services from a mix of public, private and voluntary sources. There was also a broader concern to transform the character of social services from a welfare agency run by professionals, allegedly too much in their own interests, to a customer centred network of facilities and services run by managers.

The catalyst for change came about in two major pieces of legislation, the 1989 Children Act and the 1990 NHS and Community Care Act. However, the Audit Commission had noted as far back as 1984 that social service managers were slow in developing performance indicators, that social services staff were reluctant to accept hierarchy and formal managerial styles, and that there was little in the way of rational or strategic thinking (Kelly 1991).
Moreover, in line with the need to promote economy and flexibility, the Audit Commission noted in 1986 that local authority social services were both profligate and inflexible. Much of this stemmed from the tendency for social services to concentrate on residential and institutional care for its charges. Accordingly, assessment tended to be based around the clients suitability for existing services and not reflective of actual client need, further cementing claims that service provision was centred around the bureau-profession’s needs and not the client’s. As Langan and Clarke (1994) note the Audit Commission’s findings regarding social services almost amounted to the perfect example of a public sector in need of managerialisation.

It will be recalled that in Chapter Two it was noted that child protection social workers came under a constant stream of criticism during the 1980s and, inevitably, this lead to change: the 1989 Children Act. Arguably, the Act embraced at least two of Clarke and Newman’s (1997) typologies outlined above: core business and ownership. The Act made local authority social service departments key agencies in the child protection system, whereas the 1990 NHS and Community Care Act introduced social service departments to the purchaser/provider split in the search for greater economic rigour. Langan and Clarke (1994: 76) note that whilst the Acts provided for an enhanced role for social service departments they also ‘restructured not just the internal world of social work but also its relationship with other agents and agencies’.

NPM was to be introduced across the whole spectrum of social service departments in order to ‘encourage the emergence of a stronger management culture’ (Kelly 1991). The Audit Commission was firmly behind these sentiments commenting in 1992 that
leadership roles involves formulating clear goals in a mission statement. Moreover, the Commission highlighted the need for NPM to become an entrenched ideology by claiming that managers need to work on ‘winning the hearts and minds of social service members and staff to a different role for social services’ (Audit Commission 1992: 22).

In practice NPM was to embrace the pattern noted above. Senior management were to fulfil a strategic role at council level, concentrating their work on spending and budgetary concerns as well as challenging the vested interest and power structures inherent in the old bureau-professional system. This meant the introduction of a number of performance related contractual obligations for all grades of staff. In short, senior management were to be responsible for strategic planning, defining and measuring local needs, establishing priorities and targets and assessing local resources (Langan and Clarke 1994).

At a lower level, importantly for winning the ‘hearts and minds’ of social workers, power and managerial responsibility was devolved to team leaders and care/case managers. Here responsibility for the budget, planning and assessment of client need in individual cases was the responsibility of the lower tier manager. In addition to the introduction of managers, social service departments have also been asked to embark upon quasi-market relationships become the purchaser for provider agencies (Le-Grand 1990).

Langan and Clarke (1994: 89) note that these changes can be seen in both optimistic and pessimistic lights. Optimistically, the changes allow for diversity in the provision
of services, allows managers to become empowered to become real managers and exercise the right to manage, allows clients real needs to be met and transcends narrow departmentalism.

Pessimistically, they cite the work of Schorr (1992) who compares British developments with the social service provision in the USA. Schorr makes three points. Firstly, he notes the ideological nature of NPM arguing the belief in the mixed economy/managerial approach is only a theory and not grounded in evidence. Secondly, he argues that this approach is not cheaper and contests the belief that it can become self-funding. Finally, he notes that care/case management requires a high degree of training and key skills in budget management which is not evident in the existing managerial echelons of social services and is of such complexity it cannot be easily or quickly acquired.

Clarke and Langan (1994: 90) conclude by suggesting that:

management...has been given [a] transformational role...For those inside [social services] the debate about optimistic or pessimistic prognostications over whether the magic will work is beside the point. They now inhabit a world whose basic elements have been transformed - the structures, cultures, languages and practices are different and the old elements cannot be recovered. The ground has changed under them and the issue is how to manage to survive in the new world.
**Education**

Education was one of the first areas of public policy in which managerialist reforms were instigated. As with social services, the rationale behind this reforming zeal was the by now familiar litany that education provision suffered from all that was wrong with bureau-professional provision and needed to be made more flexible, accountable, financially rigorous and consumer friendly (Fergusson 1994).

The bedrock of the shift toward a more managerial education system was the 1988 Education Act which its originator, Kenneth Baker, styled the ‘great’ (sic) Education Reform Act. Fergusson (1994) identifies the principal concerns of the Act as being:

> to establish the conditions for a competitive market in publicly funded school provision and enable parents to exercise choice in a free market...It gave schools substantially increased control over how they used their budgets...It sought to influence these directions of development...by allocating funding according to numbers on roll...

Responsibility for the core curriculum was to be defined, not by classroom teachers, but by a centrally dictated National Curriculum, thus eroding bureau-professional power and challenging expertise and domain ownership. Adherence to, and efficiency of teaching the new national curriculum was to be audited via a series of pupil tests at key stages. The results of such tests are public knowledge and a school’s performance (and by implication the professional competence of its staff) is recorded and published in a ‘league table’. Parents are thereby encouraged to make a consumer choice based upon the standing of a school in the league tables.
The three subsequent Education Acts of 1992, 1993 and 1994 have all acted to consolidate those changes, building upon the 1988 foundations. The main impact of the reforms have been to create semi-autonomous schools managed by a head teacher who has moved from being a 'senior peer embedded within a professional group...and is becoming a distinctive and key actor in an essentially managerialist system' (Fergusson 1994: 94). Fiscal probity is at the heart of this change and is constructed around the concept of Local Management of Schools (LMS).

Head teachers, acting in an enhanced managerial capacity are empowered and being given the right to manage by being made responsible for their individual school’s budget, allowing them to allocate resources and choose policy directions with very little external consultation. Moreover, as Fergusson (1994) notes, head teachers in large schools are earning salaries which are commensurate with managers in the world of business, providing an incentive to individual heads to embrace the managerialist ideology and to create a situation where head teachers, acting in a managerial capacity are being encouraged to strive to make their school the 'best' in the area in order to attract pupils and funding. This is being done 'in competition with and at the expense of neighbouring schools' (Fergusson 1994: 97).

As with the changes in social services, Fergusson (1994: 113) comments upon the growing entrenchment of the managerialist ethos within education. He notes, with a degree of sadness, that: '[teachers] come gradually to live and be imbued by the logic of new roles, new tasks, new functions and, in the end, to absorb partial redefinitions of their professional selves, first inhabiting them, eventually becoming them'.
The police

In contrast to education's experience of being one of the first sectors to become 'managerialised', the police have been one of the last to be asked to change their standard operating procedures\(^3\) (McLaughin and Munice 1994). James and Raine (1998: 33) concur with this, but in a now familiar pattern identify the onset of Audit Commission driven reforms to the police as being located firmly in the 'pragmatics of cost efficiency and demonstrable effectiveness'.

Change in this sector was a little more complex due largely to the separation of the powers of the judiciary from the executive (Sanders 1994) and the fact that criminal justice agencies tend to be dispersed and devoid of overall control by either central or local states. Equally, the Conservative regimes, especially under Michael Howard during his tenure as Home Secretary, focused on a policy regime which emphasised getting tough on crime. Accordingly, managerialism in this sector translates to meeting performance targets whilst remaining within tight fiscal constraints (James and Raine 1998).

There is one other point to note concerning the onset of managerialist reforms. As numerous authors have pointed out (Reiner 1992; Reiner and Newburn 1997) the police are a quasi-militaristic organisation, organised around tightly proscribed lines of discipline and hierarchy. Nevertheless, despite these problems, Home Office research in the 1980s (Clarke and Mayhew 1980; Clarke and Hough 1984) had begun
to question police effectiveness. By 1992 the Audit Commission had issued eleven reports on police practice (McLaughlin and Muncie 1994) all of which were critical of police practices. Indeed, as the same authors remark (1994: 119):

Reform is to be achieved within an overall framework of organisational restructuring, fiscal accountability and rationalisation...agencies are increasingly having to justify their existence and reimage themselves in terms of market competitiveness, managerial resource control and certifiable cost effectiveness.

In turn, such changes are supposed to have an effect on the organisations and, importantly the conditions of services and world-views of individuals within the police. As McLaughlin and Muncie (1994) suggest, the beginnings of managerialism within the police acted as a destructive force as far as the quasi-militaristic model of administration is concerned.

Essentially, the Audit Commission focused its concerns upon financing, budget allocation, costing, rank structures and salary scales. The results highlighted the need for a flexible, decentralised and streamlined management structure, transparent organisational priorities and objectives and an output based measurable set of performance indicators which allowed cross force comparisons to take place (Reiner and Newburn 1997).

McLaughlin and Muncie (1994) suggest that senior officers, or as they have been reimagined, senior police managers, welcomed these recommendations after an initial

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Some authors have remarked on the highly political nature of the decisions not to subject the criminal justice system to the scrutinies of the Audit Commission in the way other areas of state provision were. Whilst interesting, this debate is of little consequence here.
period of trepidation. Their enthusiasms for the reforms stemmed from an understanding that senior management had little control over the ‘rank and file’, archaic shift systems and inflexible working practices. McLaughlin and Muncie (1994: 132) imply that senior police managers agitated for the ‘right to manage’ especially where ‘freedom to introduce incentives and the power to remove corrupt and inefficient officers’ was concerned.

Although late-comers to the managerial revolution the changes envisaged and underway are set to have wide-ranging changes to the structure and operational nature of the police. McLaughlin and Munice (1994: 133) predict that ‘...as the government look toward more market based approaches to resolve the problems of policing...it will constitute the most systematic sea change in policing since the formation of the ‘new police’ in the early nineteenth century’.

The health service

If the police’s problems in introducing NPM into their organisation stemmed from the inflexibility of a quasi-militaristic structure and the need to retain operational independence, then, as Walby and Greenwell (1994) note, the health service’s problems originate from the diverse nature of the workforce within the NHS. Much of this revolves around the dichotomy between nurse’s roles and doctor’s role in the treatment and diagnosis of patients and the reluctance of doctors to temper their diagnosis and treatments in the face of financial constraints. Essentially, both the ‘reformers’ and ‘traditionalists’ have been fighting for the moral high ground which is the nebulous concept of the ‘well-being of the patient’.
There are two important strands to the implementation of NPM in health. The first is the actual process of introducing managerialism and the second, related, feature is the introduction of the internal market (Mullen 1991). Looking at managerialism first, Walby and Greenwell (1994) identify two phases. The first stemmed as a result of the 1983 Griffiths Report. Griffiths called for the introduction of general managers who were expected to subordinate health professionals and establish a single chain of command. The idea behind the reforms was to reduce the bureau-professional, somewhat syndicalist nature of health provision and create an holistic (and therefore more efficient and economic) health service.

These changes were contested by both doctors and nurses, both professions seeing the general managers as some form of assault on their respective knowledge and power bases (Strong and Robinson 1990). Nevertheless, demonstrating the power of NPM, high profile campaigns by health service workers failed to prevent the appointment of general managers. Walby and Greenwell (1994) remark that, in practice, general managers were somewhat constrained in their ability to make changes because they were reliant upon health professionals for expertise and to carry out work.

The second set of managerial reforms followed the 1989 White Paper Working for Patients. Here, the imposition of NPM was far more subtle and arguably more effective in creating a managerial ideology amongst health service staff. The reforms in this instance created managers from within the health service instead of imposing managers from without. Doctors, especially senior medical professionals, are encouraged to take a greater measure of responsibility for their budgets. In so doing,
the argument goes, senior staff gain far greater levels of control over their work and enhance their decision making capabilities (Walby and Greenwell 1994).

Nurses have not been immune from managerialist changes either. Nursing contains a managerialist hierarchy within their profession, a fact made clearer by looking at job titles such as Nurse Manager or District Nursing Officer. Walby and Greenwell (1994: 64) are optimistic about the manner in which nurses have seized the opportunity NPM has opened up for them. They suggest that 'perhaps more than any other group of health workers nurses have managed to go with the new times, merging the discourse of new wave management concerns...with their own project of upgrading training and autonomy for their profession'.

Alongside these changes has been the creation of a quasi-market in health (LeGrand 1990). Again, this resulted from the 1989 White Paper and centred around a series of changes which divided the health service into purchasers (District Health Authorities and individual GPs) and providers (hospitals and other health providers such as the Ambulance Service). Each provider unit has been encouraged to apply for trust status which then increases the amount of autonomy each trust possesses.

Within each provider unit tasks have been identified and new directorates have been formed which concentrate upon highly specific aspects of provision, leading to a decentralised, but increasingly fragmented, form of managerial control. Purchasers are encouraged to buy health services from the most competitive provider, which does not necessarily have to come from the same geographical area, but can come from anywhere within the system. Thus, the competition between rival trusts and
directorates leads to an increase in efficiency and effectiveness, at the same time ensuring fiscal rigour via the discipline of the market.

At present the impact of NPM on health is mixed. Walby and Greenwell (1994: 71) provide a neat summary, implying that those individuals who have become managers enjoy the enhanced status and control the right to manage brings, but resent the 'interference' audit, scrutiny and fiscal probity bring to their clinical expertise:

Thus, senior doctors are not averse to controlling the budget for their speciality, but resent the control of general managers over the size of budget and surveillance over their practice. Those nurses who are able to participate in the upskilling of their profession and increased autonomy of primary nursing may be enthusiastic about the changes, but those at the sharp end of budgetary restrictions and increased workloads are subject to greater restrictions...both medicine and nursing have been resistant to managerialism which...[undercuts]...their ability to look after patients, but have been less resistant to the increase of managerial components of their own jobs.

Summary

The purpose of this chapter has been to locate the genesis of NPM, to define its principal components and to assess the current status and overall impact NPM has had upon the four key statutory agencies of the child protection system. What has emerged is the fact that NPM is both a practical innovation designed to 'improve' public services as well as being an ideology aimed at creating long-term cultural shifts to organisations and workers, both collectively and individually. Clearly, all the principal agencies discussed above have embraced the discourse of managerialism in both its guises, some more enthusiastically than others. Equally, those workers tasked
with being 'managers' seem to enjoy the freedoms and increased control exercising the 'right to manage' bestows on them.

The next chapter discusses the impact that the acceptance of the practicalities and ideologies of managerialism has on the equally important acceptance by managers that 'good' child protection depends upon effective partnership working. Principally, the chapter searches both discourses for signs of inconsistencies between these two powerful, contemporary organisational approaches.
Chapter Five

The search for inconsistencies between partnership and NPM

The previous chapters have described the two prevailing discourses in British social administration: managerialism and partnership working. This chapter seeks to locate these discourses in the context of the empirical focus of this thesis - the workings of an Area Child Protection Committee - and thus link the theoretical aspect of this work with the research findings. It has been assumed that these two discourses can compliment each other to fulfil contemporary organisational and political aims. Indeed, both are seen as so important that one, partnerships, is seen as vital at:

...the strategic level, agencies and professionals need to work in partnership with each other and with service users to plan comprehensive and co-ordinated children's services.

(Dept. Health et al 1999: 12)

and the other, managerialism, is claimed to be:

...the key to [national ] revival and the management ethos must run through our national life.

(Heseltine 1980)

Although on its own each discourse has undoubted merits, there is an implied assumption that they are in some way compatible and that partnerships can succeed and be fostered in the prevailing managerialist climate. This chapter questions this assumption. Moreover, it will claim that instead of being mutually supporting each discourse acts as a barrier to the successful application of the other. This will be
demonstrated by focusing on the key areas each discourse identifies as central to its successful implementation.

In terms of managerialism, Clarke and Newman (1997) identify three main aspects of the managerial discourse which are central for its successful implementation and these are the identification of core business, ownership of core business and audit. To these, the previous chapter added the ideology of managerialism, which can affect both individual managers and organisations by making the discourse of managerialism the orthodox and accepted organising framework of day-to-day tasks and standard operating procedures for all (broadly defined) welfare providers.

In terms of partnerships, the literature reviewed above denotes three key areas which are seen as central to the successful implementation of partnerships. These can be broadly said to encompass the macro, mezzo and micro areas of partnership working. Taking Hudson’s (1987) typology as the basis for analysis it is possible to claim that for partnerships to flourish cognisance needs to be taken of the (i) environment and context in which the partnership operates, thus concentrating on the macro, (ii) the comparative properties approach which deals with the mezzo level of analysis and seeks to explore the degree to which agencies are organisationally similar, and (iii) the collaborative linkages approach, located at the micro level and concerned with examining the dimensions of partnerships.

Essentially, the literature suggests that partnerships which ‘work’, (and in this context this is taken to mean partnership forums which, using Crawford and Jones’ (1996) typology, are closer to inter-agency working than multi-agency working), require
agencies to share resources in order to provide a smooth and integrated service, akin to the Department of Health’s (1999) guidelines noted above. The chapter will now employ the four key aspects of managerialism to demonstrate that there is an inherent tension between them and the discourse of partnership working.

**Identification of core business**

To re-cap, Clarke and Newman (1997: 78) argue that as a result of the onset of NPM welfare agencies are encouraged to become ‘focused’ in their everyday working relationships and standard operating procedures (Hill 1997). ‘Focused’, in this context means an identification of a core task (s) and the setting of a corporate goal designed to direct work toward the effective and efficient provision of the core task. Practically, this translates into a need for managerialised units to reject activities which divert resources away from the primary corporate goal. What we have witnessed in all public services has been a search to identify ‘core tasks’ (for example, the Home Office Report (1995) in relation to the core tasks of policing). The key question is how does the concentration on the identification of ‘core tasks’ and ‘corporate goals’ fit with the discourse of partnerships based in theory at least upon a sharing and collaborative culture?

Perhaps one way to explore this is to turn to the Department of Health et al’s (1999: 12) latest guidelines. Under the heading ‘A Shared Responsibility’, they suggest that the task of the agencies participating in child protection partnerships are to:
1.10 Promote[ing] children's well-being and safeguarding them from significant harm, depends crucially upon effective information sharing, collaboration and understanding between agencies and professionals...supported by a strong lead from elected or appointed authority members and the commitment of chief officers.

1.11 At the strategic level, agencies and professionals need to work in partnership with each other and with service users to plan comprehensive and co-ordinated children's services.

1.12 Individual children, especially some of the most vulnerable children and those at the greatest risk from social exclusion, will need co-ordinated help from health, education, social services, and quite possible the voluntary sector and other agencies including the youth justice sector.

Whilst there is a clear and unambiguous exhortation for agencies to work together, these guidelines do not amount to a 'corporate goal' for ACPCs. In contrast, Section 3 of the same document (Dept. of Health et al 1999: 25-45) outlines the corporate goals and core tasks of the participating agencies. It is transparent that, with the exception of social services, child protection is not a core task of any of the participating agencies, although many have child protection as an ancillary task. For example, the document notes that the core task of the police is 'Protecting life and preventing crime' (1999: 36), likewise it defines the core task of health as '...ensuring that children and families receive the care, support and services they need in order to promote children's health and development' (1999: 29).

Arguably, therefore, it should be the case that agencies which have embraced the managerialist discourse and who do not view child protection as their core business will, by extension, view participation in child protection as ancillary to their core task. Accordingly, this perspective may cause those agencies which view child protection as ancillary work to be reluctant partners. However, the converse may be true with social services, the agency which has child protection as its core task and corporate
goal, feeling obliged to pressurise their reluctant partners toward greater levels of participatory action.

Ownership

Linked to the identification of core tasks is the managerialist concept of ownership. This is a central tenet of the managerialist discourse and as noted above is 'one of the most sought after effects of the managerialist revolution' (Clarke and Newman 1993). Its importance is predicated upon the belief that if ownership can be established and staff begin to view their particular core task as their 'own' then mangers can begin to construct commitment to, and motivation to achieve, corporate goals and core tasks.

The attraction of this concept is axiomatic: a committed staff will be easier to manage and strive to provide an effective and efficient service delivery. The problem, in terms of partnership working, is that ownership carries in its wake territorialism. When added to the managerialist concept of competition and protection of scarce resources it can be seen that the discourse of partnership could, potentially, be compromised. Moreover, given that many of the social welfare agencies which participate in child protection have been fragmented into purchaser/provider units, the capacity for ownership *intra-agency* has also increased.

Audit

Audit shares an affinity with the discourse of managerialism. Indeed, many of the changes wrought over the past years have been instigated following work by the Audit
Commission (for example the Audit Commission 1992). Within a partnership forum audit and evaluation can also raise issues surrounding accountability: are the participating agencies accountable to the partnership forum or to their own organisation? Given the managerialist foundation of the ACPC it is not therefore surprising that it too has an audit role:

- to audit and evaluate how well local services work protect children;

(Dept. Health et al 1999: 46)

Audit and evaluation is important for the managerialist discourse because it allows managers to gauge their ability to manage their respective units. Because of the importance given to ‘proving’ sound stewardship, success is often seen in terms of providing an efficient, economic and effective service as well as allowing some form of measurement to be made in regard of achieving corporate goals and adhering to core tasks.

However, audit and evaluation poses two problems for partnership working within ACPC settings. Firstly, based on information supplied above, it can be suggested that ACPC do not have an identifiable corporate goal or core task, beyond a highly generalised ‘banner goal’ of ‘child protection’. This makes evaluation difficult in the sense that there may be little evidence of effective working. The second problem area revolves around the concept of accountability.

The most recent guidelines (Dept. Health et al 1999: 48) note that in terms of accountability ‘ACPCs are accountable for their work to their main constituent
agencies, whose agreement is required for all work...’. Thus, the ACPCs themselves have little in respect of direct control over the participants. This places the ACPC in a sub-ordinate position to its constituent agencies. Clearly, in light of previous discussions this further reinforces the ancillary role of child protection for the majority of ACPC members, shifts the power balance in favour of the agencies not the ACPC, cements accountability within the agencies, makes audit and evaluation difficult and allows the disparate agencies focus on their own, individual corporate aims.

In terms of the managerialist discourse, all of the above points will appear attractive as it allows managers to retain control and influence over their staff and resources, as well as allowing them to concentrate upon core tasks and fulfil corporate goals. Such a scenario also confirms the relegation of child protection to an ancillary task for the majority of ACPC members. Reference to the literature on partnership working outlined in the previous chapters will confirm that all of those points serve to undermine the basic principles of joint working, especially in areas of domain consensus, network awareness and resource dependency.

Ideology

Over-arching all of the technical, day-to-day concerns about making partnerships work alongside managerialised units is the ideology of managerialism. To return to the work of Abercrombie (1988: 118), it will be recalled that an ideology is a ‘tightly knit body of beliefs organised around a few central values’. The previous chapter argued that the managerialist discourse had become more than a technical exercise in
the running and administration of welfare agencies, it had become a 'new orthodoxy' in the delivery of public services. In turn, this new orthodoxy has been embraced in a largely unreflective manner and has influenced almost all those working within the (broadly defined) welfare field.

It is this aspect of the managerialist discourse which may prove to be the biggest barrier to the successful implementation of partnership working. The ethos of the manager is centred on core task, ownership and audit. The political interpretation of managerialising welfare has been to employ fragmentation as a means to devolve power, decentralise decision making and allow managers to manage. This has created a new breed of public sector manager enmeshed in the three key concepts. Equally, the managerialist discourse has sharpened competition between the participating agencies.

It is important to note that managerialism has sharpened not introduced competition. As chapter Four noted, there has always been an element of fragmented and competitive service delivery within British social welfare due in part to the functional principle and the influence of departmentalism. However, managerialism emphasises the competitive nature of service delivery. This is reinforced and perpetuated by reference to the key concepts of core task, ownership and audit. At every turn, managers are expected to perform against measurable objectives. Once this becomes an ideology - a guiding principle - the world becomes full of competitors, resources.

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4 This is somewhat of a paradox and needs greater exploration. What was once seen as a major problem in the delivery of welfare - fragmentation of service delivery - has now become one of its central features.
become vital and in need of protection and the promotion of one’s managerialised unit becomes all-important (Clarke and Newman 1997).

This pressure to compete is not restricted to inter-agency arenas. The fragmentation of organisations into purchaser/provider units introduces an element of competition and rivalry intra-agency. This is especially true in health provision which has been heavily fragmented into purchaser and provider units thanks largely to the managerialist inspired introduction of the ‘internal market’; The Department of Health (1999: 29-35) identify nine aspects of health provision with child protection as an ancillary task. Establishing a market and encouraging the adoption of a managerialist ideology introduces the three key concepts of task, ownership and audit into intra-agency forums.

Summary

The opening chapters of this thesis have been designed to define, describe and discuss the two prevalent discourses in British social administration. One, the need for a more streamlined and co-ordinated form of service delivery, has been identified as an on-going concern since at least the 1860s. The other, the introduction of private sector managerial practices into welfare delivery, is a relatively recent attempt to improve service delivery, make welfare more efficient, ensure that resources are employed more effectively, and complete those tasks within a climate of fiscal probity. In order to achieve this welfare delivery agencies have been asked to alter their standard operating procedures and to fragment into core task directed units.
As noted, this can be seen as something of a paradox. The new orthodoxy that is managerialism has actively sought to fragment welfare delivery into managerialised units in order to achieve flexibility and fiscal probity. In order to achieve this end, a 'new wave' of public sector managers has been created. Much of the world view of these new public sector managers is based on the ideology of management which sees management as essentially dynamic, autonomous and competitive. Moreover managerial success is based on fiscal responsibility and performance indicators geared to particular managerial units.

However, some old concerns refuse to go away. Central control over local delivery of welfare remains, whether welfare is delivered by the local state or managerialised units. There also remains the vexed question of what to do where a general need, such as the need of children to be protected from a variety of threats, has been fragmented amongst an increased number of service providers. Enter partnership with its concerns for co-operation and sharing. In turn, the promotion of 'joined-up' working has given rise to a proliferation of 'DIY' texts, which appear to view partnership working as a technical concern and not environmental, and certainly not as the product of deeper social, political and economic shifts. As such, these texts ignore what may be the biggest obstacle of all to partnership forums: the potential for a clash of ideologies between the discourse of managerialism and the discourse of partnership working.

The central argument of this thesis thus becomes clear: the changes in the context and environment in which welfare is delivered will have an effect upon welfare agencies in terms of their readiness and ability to work together. Essentially, if there is an inherent tension between the two discourses then partnership working should have moved backward along the continuum of joint working which has been identified by a number of authors (for example, Crawford and Jones 1996).
Any tensions between those competing discourses should be visible in any sites where managerialised units are expected to work in partnership with others. This work has selected child protection as the arena in which to locate its empirical focus. There are a number of reasons for this. Firstly, as chapter two discussed, there is a long-standing recognition that child protection spans a number of welfare providers and good child protection practice is heavily dependent upon partnership working. This has been officially recognised since 1974 when a number of key welfare agencies were mandated to work together. This has repercussions for the second reason. Child protection, but more specifically the local co-ordinating body the ACPC, brings together a number of welfare agencies, thus enabling the research to go beyond bilateral working relationships and explore a location and series of events where all the major, and a number of peripheral, welfare agencies meet.

This is the background and thought which has informed the empirical aspect of this thesis. From here, the work shifts the focus to the fieldwork and the research findings. The next chapter discusses the methodology and considers some of the problems and issues raised in undertaking research. Following that, the findings of the research are presented and discussed.
Chapter Six

A consideration of the methods employed in the empirical research

The preceding chapters took as their focus the theoretical concerns of this thesis, whereas this chapter examines the practical concerns of data collection. The chapter will describe and justify the methodological approach employed to collect the data, and will be structured in the following way: the first segment of the chapter will offer some thoughts and comments on the methodological approach chosen for this project, in essence answering the question 'why' certain methods and approaches were chosen above others. Secondly, it will provide some thoughts on the importance of reflexivity in research, which is taken to mean an exploration of my background assumptions. It will conclude by supplying the reader with details of the overall aims of the research project and the manner in which the information was obtained, thus dealing with the 'how' element of research.

The thorny question of mechanism and context

Above, it was suggested that the concentration of much research into joint working, including that into child protection, has focused on 'what works' at the expense of examining the context in which joint working takes (Benson 1975). Pawson (1993) argues that this approach forces much research work to take a reductionist stance. Pawson's critique of research which adopts this approach has been instrumental in shaping my methodological considerations. As a consequence, this research has attempted to adopt a realist approach giving greater cognisance to the structural restraints each agency faces prior to attending the inter-agency site, as well as an awareness of the impact exogenous factors, namely new public management, may have on agencies' ability to work together.
The need for context in inter-agency research

Tilley (1993) and Pawson (1993) in the evaluation of multi-agency crime prevention projects, undertake a realist research project. They found their ability to complete this task effectively was hampered by two developments. Firstly, there has been a move toward flexible multi-agency work, leading to a lack of comparability between projects, which has resulted in boundary crossing in terms of inputs and outcomes. Secondly, the focus of crime prevention work has seemingly changed from situational to social. This second point needs some brief clarification.

In simple terms, situational prevention aims to reduce opportunistic offending by concentrating on the target of crimes, making them as 'crime proof' as possible. Tactics here can include high-tech security systems, locks, bolts and patrols. Social prevention focuses more on the motivation of the offender. In this paradigm tactics could include social regeneration programmes, improved education and/or the strengthening of informal social control mechanisms within communities. In a world where all projects need to prove their worth, both types of crime prevention need to be evaluated to see if they 'work'.

Situational prevention is comparatively easy to monitor and measure. 'Crime prevention' in this instance tends to revolve around a single input action, such as the removal of electricity or gas coin meters from houses. The focus of the crime reduction initiative thus becomes defined by the input (in Pawson and Tilley's example burglary reduction via the removal of meters). 'Success' is measured by referring to the definition determined by the single input. The effectiveness, efficiency and economy of the project can be measured by a comparison to a 'control' situation, in which the single input action did not occur. The overall outcome can be
measured using available indicators (for example, police statistics) which can be understood by all interested parties and offer a relatively quick, tangible, set of results. 'Success', determined by the single input nature of the project, can be claimed if, in this case, burglary falls (Tilley 1993). Tilley and Pawson refer to this as the 'O (i) X (ii) O (iii) (OXO) method, where O (i) represents the situation before the advent of the single input initiative, X (ii) represents the input, and O (iii) represents the situation after the installation of the single input initiative.

According to Pawson and Tilley (1997) social crime prevention initiatives become problematic for the evaluator in a variety of ways. Firstly, because motivation to offend is a complex and only partially understood phenomenon, social crime prevention tends to be constructed around multi-input projects. A corollary of this, as well as the contested nature of inter-agency working, is that projects do not lend themselves to cross-agency definitions, making aims and objectives harder to determine: the aim may be to reduce 'crime' but are there agreed multi-lateral objectives? Secondly, the outcomes of social crime prevention are much more subjective than their situational counterparts. Social prevention deals with peoples' perceptions of crime, their motivations and the 'feel' of their community. Measuring subjective outcomes is notoriously difficult, due to the lack of an indicator all interested parties can understand or agree upon. In a similar vein, success may be unknowable. An individual who has yet to offend, but who may do so without the input of the social preventative measure, may be sufficiently affected by the scheme and not commit any offence. How is such an outcome to be measured? At present, social science in general has failed to come up with an answer, although Pawson and Tilley have made an attempt.

They argue that adherence to the tried and tested 'OXO' method of evaluation means that some projects are difficult to evaluate, causing replication to become problematic. They further suggest that the primary reason researchers fail in their
quest to facilitate replication is because they ignore the mechanisms which 'fire' action and the nature of the context in which the work takes place. In order to overcome this failing they advise the introduction of a 'realist synthesis' (Pawson 1993:7). This synthesis is based on the proposition that structure and agency are fused, a point current trends in research fail to take into account. Pawson explains his thesis thus:

The basic task of sociological enquiry is to explain interesting, puzzling, socially significant outcome patterns...between events or social happenings or social properties. Explanation takes the form of positing some underlying mechanisms...which generates these outcomes and thus consists of propositions about how the inter-play between agency and structure has constituted these outcomes. Explanatory closure requires that, within the same investigation, there is also an examination of how the workings of such mechanisms is contingent and conditional, and thus are only fired in particular historical or institutional contexts.

(1993: 8)

Pawson and Tilley (1997) provide a further explanation of this stance in diagrammatic form:

Mechanism and context in realist research

(Figure 1)
It does not take a great leap of imagination to transpose these perspectives on to partnerships in child protection. In neglecting to give adequate consideration to both the context in which working partnership is located and the mechanisms which drive it, key areas and dynamics can be overlooked. Similarly, those academics who concentrate on the 'what works' aspect of partnerships simply describe the research site, only to downplay the impact of the context when evaluating their work (Farmer and Owen 1995). It would be misleading to suggest that this trait is visible in all inter-agency research. Pietroni reminds us that 'the importance of the context...has been emphasised by many researchers' (Pietroni 1994: 84), the work of Benson (1985) who was clearly aware of context was reviewed above in Chapter Two.

Such a-contextual research takes us into the realms of functionalist sociology, as, akin to early functionalists such as Durkheim, the implication is that social relationships are patterned, recurrent and exist outside of those who inhabit them. Therefore, those responsible for evaluation research which concentrates on 'what works' can be charged with employing what Kaplan (1964) identified as 'reconstructed logic' in order to make sense of what they study. If Pawson and Tilley's (1997) approach is correct, much can be derived from examining the mechanisms and contexts behind the linked events of new public management and partnership working.

**Realist research in practice**

Possibly, the case study approach, with its emphasis on theory testing (Yin 1994), is the ideal site in which to undertake realist research. The following section of this chapter examines this claim, beginning by providing a brief outline of the logic and philosophy behind realist research.

The goal of realist research is to establish 'lawful, causal regularities' (Pawson 1993:10). However, according to Bhaskar (1979), realist research gives credence to
experimental production and experimental control. In practical terms, this translates as a generative theory of causation which assumes that a particular mechanism is responsible for a particular outcome pattern. Following this, the realist researcher will provide provisional information on contexts which will, or will not, be conducive to the mechanism. Thus, in realist research, theory is central to the completion of the research task. Consequently, case study research with its emphasis on the theoretical and the formation of analytical generalisations shares an affinity with the realist approach.

This procedure has been applied in natural science where the work of the researcher is geared toward finding contexts which will fire the appropriate mechanism in order to achieve the required outcome. This research project has attempted to invert that action, in the sense that it has sought out contexts which inhibit mechanisms from being fired. This is important, as realist research believes that mechanism and context are two sides of the same coin: a suitable context is central for the desired mechanism to come into operation. Following the same logic, unsuitable contexts will always preclude a mechanism from operating to its full potential, thus diminishing the impact of the desired outcome.

In terms of operationalising this as a methodology, the research was faced with one relatively easy task and one which required a little more thought. Identifying the mechanism to be fired was relatively straightforward: the task was to turn to the ACPC itself to ascertain what its primary aim was (outcome), and how that was to be achieved (mechanism). In the words of one respondent "the ACPC is about ensuring that we all pull in the same direction", which can be seen to mean fostering good partnership working. The ACPC thus becomes the mechanism through which good partnerships were to be achieved.
In terms of context, the task was slightly more difficult. The first responsibility was to find out if the members of the ACPC thought their overall performance was facilitating good partnerships within the ACPC arena. As the result section will show, there was a general air of pessimism over this element of their work. Arguably, therefore, the desired mechanism was being prevented from being fired. The research task was to uncover exactly what shared context(s) each agency operated within prior to, and at, the site of inter-agency working, in order to discover what was preventing the mechanism from operating. At this stage it is possible to suggest that the shared context is working within the milieu of new public management. By adopting this approach, the research is able to introduce context and mechanism into the equation and thereby create a research project where context, mechanism and outcomes are allied to the theoretical slant intrinsic to case study research, thereby undertaking a piece of realist research work.

Reflexivity

This section is included because it is based on the belief that as social scientists 'we should be aware of our values and the way in which these affect not only our everyday actions and judgements, but also our research work' (May 1991: 7). In this respect, May asks researchers to look at their assumptions in order that they become clear prior to undertaking any academic work. Moreover, as readers of research, we should demand to be made aware of the background assumptions of other authors for precisely the same reasons.

Fundamental to this is the question "why undertake research work?" In this instance the answer could be said to be "in order to get a PhD". That apart, there are two main
reasons for undertaking research, namely research as a method of gaining knowledge and research as a critique. For Dixon, Bouma and Atkinson, research is clearly seen as a generator of knowledge:

Research is a disciplined way of coming to know something about ourselves or our world. Research is a process for answering some of the questions we ask, for settling disputes over the correct answers to our questions.

(1987:10)

Undoubtedly this is true. However, it is research as a critique which has driven this particular project.

As May (1991) argues, instead of taking the existing state of affairs as a given, research work should seek to challenge popular conceptions of 'normal' and 'orthodox', as well as attempting to contribute to thought concerning new ways of working and living together. From the outset, the express intention of this project has been to attempt to explore partnership working in both an explanatory and critical fashion. As a caveat, it should be noted that this project was not an attempt to devalue the work of established and respected academics, merely an attempt to provide an alternative perspective, which, in the spirit of the research project, should itself be subject to critique.

Secondly, this project is based on the belief that there needs to be a realisation, not yet grasped by some academics in social policy, that we have a new orthodoxy in place. For example, Williams persists with the nomenclature 'New Right' (Williams 1996:50) presumably ignoring the fact that those entering academia straight from school to study social policy in the year 2000-2001 will have lived in a 'New Right' social policy regime their entire life. Equally, Hughes (1999) has referred to the 'New Labour' project as 'Conservative Labour' emphasising the manner in which 'New' right policies have become the orthodoxy for what purports to be a centre-left government. The task of critical researchers is not to berate the Right for the
The deconstruction of the Keynesian welfare state, but to study the 'new orthodox' systems and frameworks, searching for the flaws, weaknesses and inconsistencies in the same manner that the Right thinkers reviewed the Keynesian welfare state in the mid-1970s. With those two perspectives in mind the reader is invited to undertake a critical examination of this research project.

Aims

The aim of this project was to examine why inter-agency relations within child protection remains problematic despite twenty plus years of mandated co-operation, with direct reference to the effect of new public management. This places the work in the exploratory, descriptive category of research.

The research design

Experience has led to the conclusion that the successful researcher quickly develops a pragmatic streak. This became evident in the early days of the research, as the nature of the project placed some constraints on the approach which could be taken. These constraints are threefold and revolve around location, budget and time. Provisional access to an organisational setting had been agreed in advance of the research funding constraining the location, the research budget was limited to an amount which had the effect of placing a time constraint on the research of two years and also precluded travel to a number of different locations in order to undertake comparative research. The constrained nature of the research project meant that, sensibly, there was only one viable approach open and that was to undertake a case study, described by Yin (1994: 23) as: 'an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context...[using] multiple sources of evidence...'.

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This presented few problems given the subject being researched. Indeed, Bryman (1989) notes that the case study method is one which is commonplace in organisational research. Appropriate components of a case study include in-depth interviews, secondary analysis of documents, observation, both participant and non-participant, and structured surveys, all of which allow triangulation of methods to take place (Bryman 1989). With that in mind, the research design focused on:

a) a series of semi-structured interviews
b) a small number of unstructured interviews
c) non-participant observation of both full ACPC meetings and sub-group meetings
d) an analysis of past minutes from full ACPC meetings

A number of other documents were consulted such as central and local government guidelines as well as a number of in-house publications and reports. The aim being to achieve triangulation of methods in order to gain as full and complete picture as was possible within the aforementioned constraints.

Research Access

There must be thousands of research projects which fail to make it past the drawing board stage because of a failure to gain access to the relevant people or places. Bryman clarifies the fundamental nature of the problems that researchers of organisational life face when attempting to gain entry into a situation, stating:

At this point our...research is likely to encounter the first of a number of problems, which, while not unique to organisational research is none the less a pervasive and intractable one; we need access...

(1989: 2)

Fortunately, this project was spared the agony of negotiating entry into the world of the ACPC, due to the links between a colleague at the University and a Social Services Department. Informal access was agreed prior to the funding of the research,
mainly because the research project was thought to be mutually beneficial to both organisations. Access was formally negotiated through the chair of the ACPC after notification of the funding. Following an initial written contact, the chair suggested that a researcher attended a full ACPC meeting, where a broad outline of the research methods, sites of information dissemination and issues of confidentiality could be discussed. Two demands were made of the research in return for access: the presentation of a full report of the findings and anonymity of response. Following a vote, full and open access to all aspects of the ACPC was sanctioned by the committee members. However, whilst the ACPC was able to grant access to its work, access to its constituent agencies needed to be negotiated at each stage. It was decided that the researcher would be responsible for instigating and arranging interviews and that these interviews would be taped providing the individual respondents agreed.

Data sources

There were three primary sources of data for this project. The most important and the one which provided the bulk of the information was a series of semi-structured interviews with the members of the ACPC. The ACPC consisted of twenty five members and it was decided to interview each member. Three declined to be interviewed, two citing lack of knowledge as a reason, the third repeatedly ignored telephone calls and letters requesting an appointment. The length of time for each interview varied depending on the respondent. The shortest was inside twenty minutes, with the longest taking over two hours. In line with acknowledged good practice (Bryman 1989) some of these respondents were re-interviewed at a later date.

In addition to the semi-structured interviews with ACPC members, eight unstructured interviews were undertaken with 'front-line' staff, two from each of the four major agencies (health, police, social services and education). This course of action was
unexpected in the planning of the research and only undertaken following the first few interviews of the ACPC members (again, illustrating the pragmatic nature of much research). It was deemed necessary because it was becoming increasingly clear that there was little happening in the way of information dissemination from the committee to front-line staff in the constituent agencies. Interviewing front-line staff over their knowledge of the ACPC enabled some insight as to the impact of the ACPC on front-line practice.

In the results section it will become clear that following the presentation of some interim findings, the research generated an impetus for change within the ACPC, leading to a substantial reorganisation. This development, albeit inadvertently, moved the research into the realms of action research. The report itself reflected to the ACPC some of the weaknesses in partnership working which had been described during the course of the interviews both with front-line staff and ACPC members. As a result, the chair decided that a major restructuring of the ACPC was required. At this stage, it was necessary to undertake a small series of unstructured interviews with a sample of the committee, in order to gauge the response to change. In essence the sample proved to be self-selecting in as much that it consisted of the sub-group charged with implementing the changes to the ACPC. In whole therefore, the research project generated a total of 35 interviews.

The second data source came from non-participant observations of both full ACPC meetings and a number of sub-group meetings. This amounted to seven full ACPC meetings spread over 15 months and nine sub-group meetings within the same period. The ACPC meetings were scheduled for three hours and that period was ruthlessly adhered to. The sub-group meetings tended to be shorter and more fluid with time
constraints being decided by the diary of those taking part. It was not uncommon for one person to leave and those remaining to carry on without them.

The third data source was minutes of past meetings. These were obtained from the social services who were responsible for acting as secretarial staff for the ACPC. They provided minutes which went back as far as the beginning of 1992.

The research instrument

The chief research instrument employed in this research was a semi-structured, or semi-standardised, questionnaire (see appendix one), for which Fielding provides an excellent description of both the instrument and its application:

> here the interviewer asks certain, major questions the same way each time but is free to alter their sequence and to probe for more information. The interviewer is thus able to adapt the research instrument to the level of articulacy and comprehension of the respondent, and to handle the fact that in responding to a question, people often provide answers to questions we were going to ask later.

(1993: 136)

Where it proved necessary to supplement the semi-structured interviews, an unstructured or non-standardised interview technique was used. Tradition dictates that the interviewer has a list of topics which they want the respondent to talk about (Silverman 1994; Fielding 1993), and that tradition was upheld by this project. The topics themselves were derived both from events which were unfolding during the process of research and from the review of the literature. This section of the chapter has dealt with the 'what' aspect of the methods: what was done in order to obtain the data on which the results are based. The next section will consider the suitability of the methods chosen for the task in hand.

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Some considerations of methods

An alternative sub-heading here would be "A justification of the methods" as an examination of other research reports illustrates that, invariably, researchers resort to explaining why certain methods are employed over others (Gibbons et. al. 1995). This section will continue that trend by exploring a number of methodological considerations raised by this piece of research. This is a necessary diversion, because, unlike Professor Anthony Giddens, I am unable to utilise the tactic he employed when he lectured at Exeter University during 1992, dismissing a question on his methodology by telling the audience 'I'm not prepared to discuss methods, I want to concentrate on results'. Rather, as an embryonic academic it is important to heed Yin's words that, for a thesis:

mastery of the methodology and the theoretical issues of a case study topic, an indication of the care with which the research was conducted and evidence that the student has successfully negotiated all phases of the research process are important. 


The first aspect of the methodological approach which may need defending can be seen to be the efficacy of the case study method, as a research project based on an unsuitable method will have serious repercussions for the validity of the project.

Case study research

The case study method is an acknowledged and successful tool in investigating aspects of organisational behaviour (Blau 1955; Gouldner 1954). However, that is not to say that the method is without criticism. Bryman (1989: 172) notes the tendency of those who undertake case studies to 'adopt an almost apologetic stance'. The main critique is that case study research suffers from a lack of validity and reliability: in short case study research is plagued by the question "can we generalise
from the findings?". Bryman (1989: 170-1) articulates this view, noting that 'Case study evidence...[is] derived from one or two potentially untypical organisations and seemed to capture less well the scientific approach with its search for universal laws'. One is left with the impression that case study research should be approached with caution as any results have the potential to be dismissed as irrelevant.

Yet, as noted, researchers need to become pragmatic. A result of this pragmatism is an acceptance that whatever the preferred approach, it is the research question itself which derives the final methodological decision. Any research question will fall into the familiar pattern of 'who', 'what', 'where', 'how', 'why' (Yin 1994: 5). In this instance the primary research question was to ask why inter-agency working remains problematic, supplemented with the second question how does the discourse of new public management affect partnership working. Yin provides a useful table which is aimed at clarifying the type of methods a researcher may choose to employ (Table 2).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>strategy</th>
<th>form of research question</th>
<th>requires control over behavioral events?</th>
<th>focuses on contemporary events?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>experiment</td>
<td>how, why</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>survey</td>
<td>who, what, where, how many, how much</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>archival analysis</td>
<td>who, what, where, how many, how much</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>yes/no</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>history</td>
<td>how, why</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>no</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>case study</td>
<td>how, why</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>yes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Relevant situations for different research projects
Table 2
Source: Yin, 1994: 6
This project thus fits the criteria for employing a case study, as suggested by Yin. He argues that in order to ascertain the type of research method most suitable to the project, researchers should decide the form of the research question, which in this case was *how* and *why*. The next step is to decide whether or not the situation requires control over behavioural events. In this research, control over behaviour would have been a disadvantage as it would have undermined the aims of the project. Finally, Yin (1994: 5-6) suggests that the researcher needs to confirm whether the project deals with contemporary events.

Therefore, there seems little need to 'adopt an apologetic stance' for using a case study method in this particular piece of work. A case study was clearly the most appropriate method within the context of the research. Other methods would have been unsuitable given the aims of the project, the internal constraints placed on the research and the primary research questions of how and why. Moreover, as noted at the beginning of the chapter, realist research emphasises the importance of context: mechanisms produce different outcomes in different contexts and unless these contexts are studied in detail - something non-case study research often fails to do - a full understanding of the process will not be forthcoming. The second area of critique lies in the areas of validity and reliability, specifically in terms of the ability of case study research to produce data from which generalisations can be made.

**Validity, reliability, and the 'problems' of generalisations**

Questions are the foundation of all social science research, especially projects which rely heavily on data gathered from interviews (Nachmias and Nachmias 1992). It is axiomatic that the success of such a project depends on what is asked in order that any questions posed can provoke a response which is both relevant and pertinent and reflects the situation being studied. This leads us to the concept of validity.
Hammersley (1990: 57) demands high standards from social science researchers when he bids them to view validity as '...truth: interpreted as the extent to which an account accurately represents the social phenomena to which it refers...'. It is an area which is problematic in undertaking research and one which has received attention in numerous research texts. In order that the same criticism cannot be aimed at this piece of research, it was essential to devise a method whereby the final results were valid, in the sense that they reflected the situation from the perspective of those being studied.

Two approaches, aimed at achieving this goal, were adopted by the research. Firstly, in respect of the construction of the questions, it was decided to consult the respondents before writing the questionnaire. Five members of the ACPC were contacted, one from each of the four major agencies and one from the voluntary sector, and asked if they would take part in a preliminary interview. The respondents were asked to give their impressions of the ACPC in terms of plusses and minuses. They were also asked to highlight areas of partnership work which they felt were in need of an overhaul, as well as those which appeared to be operating successfully.

It emerged that there was an element of consensus surrounding issues of concern. Broadly speaking, these concerns can be located under the headings (i) communication; (ii) roles and responsibility; and (iii) overall impact. The questionnaire was subsequently constructed around those topics and reflected not only the concerns of the ACPC, but also most of the problematic areas of partnership working, concurring with most of the literature reviewed in Chapters two and three.

The second approach to ensure validity was to search for what Silverman (1994: 156) defines as respondent validation, where the researcher 'Tak[es] one's findings back to the subjects being studied. Where these people verify one's findings, it is argued one can be more confident of their validity'.

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This was achieved by the presentation of a report to the ACPC. Following this presentation, the ACPC decided that it was not operating to its full potential and that the research, acting as a mirror, had highlighted concerns which were clearly alive in the minds of many individual members but hitherto had not been expressed collectively. It can be claimed that the report reflected the situation as perceived by those being researched and internal validity was achieved. This was also achieved by the re-interviewing of some ACPC members, previously discussed above.

Reliability has always been seen as problematic for qualitative research projects, especially where the researcher is studying a fluid and changeable research site (Whyte 1993). Reliability, defined by Procter as 'whether a measure works in a consistent way' (1993: 126), can be claimed for this research by referring the reader to the methodological approach. Yin (1994) expands this point by claiming that any later research conducted in the same manner should find the same results and conclusions. He suggests a fundamental step which this project has adhered to rigidly. Yin urges researchers to document all the relevant research procedures, in a similar manner to managers awaiting audit. In this respect, I took my supervisor as the auditor and maintained a highly detailed research diary.

The other area where case studies have been criticised is their inability to provide information which is generalisable and, consequently, case studies are often seen as unable to claim external validity, or produce generalisable results. Generalisability has been defined by Nachmias and Nachmias as:

Impl[ying] that what one really wants to know about a set of measurements is to what extent and with respect to what properties are they like other sets of measurements that one might have taken from a given universe of potential measurements.

(1992: 552)
The short answer appears to be that case studies are generalisable to theoretical propositions, but not to the Nachmias' 'universe of potential measurements' (Bryman 1989; Silverman 1993; Yin 1994). Bryman (1989) expands this point by firstly acknowledging that nobody believes that a case study, being in statistical terms a sample of one, can be representative of a wider population. He tempers that assertion by then arguing that the linking of statistical concepts and case study work is erroneous, with each method having different aims.

Bryman, echoing Sutton (1987) and pre-empting Yin (1994), suggests that case studies should be judged in terms of their ability adequately to defend any theoretical inferences made by the research. For Bryman and others, the aim of a case study project becomes one of engendering patterns and linkages of theoretical importance and not one inferring the findings of a sample of one to a wider population. Bryman makes two vital points concerning case studies. Firstly, he claims that they are useful in providing an understanding of areas of organisational life which are not well documented or easily accessible via fleeting contact. Secondly, he suggests that they are integral to the building of theoretical insights (Bryman 1989: 172-3).

Does this serve to devalue the research findings? The answer depends on a number of perspectives. Firstly, if the aim of the research was to provide the reader with statistical generalisations then, clearly, the research findings presented here are worthless. However, in this case the aim of the study was to expand the theories which focus on partnership working, thus aiming for analytical as opposed to statistical findings. Secondly, and linked to the latter point, Silverman (1994) outlines the tendency for some social scientists to assume that research work must be either statistically or practically generalisable in order for it to be relevant to a wider community. To a point this is true, however, in action research where the findings of research may influence the well-being of millions, loose generalisations have the potential to be dangerous (Mann 1996).
For this particular project, statistical generalisability is not an issue. The research makes no claims that its findings are generalisable in terms of fitting each and every ACPC across the country (indeed as noted above, Armstrong (1994) questions whether a ‘standard’ ACPC exists). In fact the reverse is true. What is on offer in this project is an account of the workings of an individual ACPC, at a specific time, in a specific context, and with specific members. Those highly individualised characteristics created a research site which was both temporally and spatially unique, making replicability of findings virtually impossible. What is being claimed however is that this research provides a theory which others can take out and test with diverse ACPCs across England and Wales, albeit in their own, unique, set of circumstances.

Having presented the reader with a review of the literature and an overview of the methodological approach the next section of this work moves on to present the fruits of the research. The results section begins with an introduction to the research setting, the participating agencies and the key actors.
Chapter Seven

An introduction to the research setting, participating agencies and key actors

This chapter begins the process of delivering the fruits of the research field work. It begins by introducing the participating agencies and the *dramatis personae* who comprised the ACPC. The sections begin with the official roles and functions of each agency, with this information being taken from the ACPCs' joint training manual, or as it was referred to throughout the research by the respondents, 'the green book'.

A condition of research access was anonymity of response. Social science has traditionally turned to the use of a pseudonym to mask identities. Most pseudonyms exhibit little originality and have a tendency to be bland (for example, Whyte's "Comerville" is hardly inspirational). Faced with the prospect of re-naming an existing location it has become apparent why blandness rules: creating the name of a 'new' town is intrinsically difficult (hence Milton Keynes ?). Therefore, continuing the trend of lack of originality in social science literature, it has been decided to re-christen the location of the study 'Greentown'.

The structure of Greentown ACPC

Greentown ACPC comprised twenty five members representing two sectors (voluntary and statutory) and twelve discrete agencies. It had been meeting in this format for just over four years, prior to the research beginning. Previously, the committee had been much smaller, although its exact size proved difficult to determine. Consensus amongst those who could remember puts the figure at 'about eight members'.
The composition of Greentown ACPC was as follows:

- **Health:** eight members
- **National Children's Home (NCH)** one member
- **National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children (NSPCC)** one member
- **Youth Enquiry Service (YES)** one member
- **Police** two members
- **Probation** one member
- **The Army** one member
- **The Navy** one member
- **Education** two members
- **Housing** one member
- **Social Service Department (SSD)** five members
- **Area Solicitor's Department.** one member

Most Greentown members held managerial posts, although, following the trend noted in Chapter One, the majority of respondents in this research were ex-practitioners removed from practice by a number of years.

Greentown ACPC met once a quarter for three hours. The committee gravitated toward delegating tasks to sub-groups which were almost exclusively chaired by those few members of the ACPC who retained an active role in practice issues making the sub-group chairs either health or social service staff. Analysis of the past minutes shows that this ACPC had created a mandate to set up and run four standing sub-groups; 'training', which was meant to co-ordinate inter-agency training programmes; 'practice audit', which was designed to make sure that there was a regular check on events at the front line; 'therapy', whose task was to explore the developments of therapeutic treatment for survivors of abuse; and 'prevention', a sub-group whose
primary task was to investigate the possibility of child protection becoming more proactive through preventative action. Ironically, the same minutes reveal that the latter two had failed to convene within the last eighteen months.

Alongside these, the ACPC ran a number of other sub-groups working on issues as and when they were raised. For example, at the time of the research there was a sub-group charged with looking at a range of policies designed to deal with juvenile perpetrators of sexual abuse. Reliance on sub-groups adheres to a pattern identified by Murphy (1995) and noted above. Reference to Chapter One shows that Greentown ACPC appears to be fairly routine in terms of composition. There is one important point to note here, however. Although many members had difficulty in either accepting or even acknowledging the fact, and the ACPC itself acted as if it were autonomous, Greentown ACPC was a sub-group of a County ACPC.

Unitary Authority Status: the right place at the right time?

This situation deserves some clarification. Greentown is by far the largest and poorest of three urban areas within a predominantly rural county. Being the largest, and most industrialised, its social problems and socio-economic structure are akin to larger conurbations which have witnessed the decline of core industrial bases, albeit in Greentown's case, on a smaller scale. The uniqueness of Greentown within the County setting led planners at County level to make the decision to split the County ACPC into two regional sub-groups, but with ultimate responsibility remaining under the umbrella of a County ACPC. The rationale for such a move was to allow each ACPC to reflect the flavour of its area, with the more rural northern ACPC presenting an interesting contrast to the problems encountered by the southern ACPC, which included Greentown, its suburbs and some of its feeder communities. The nature of the relationship between the County Child Protection Committee (CCPC) and the
Greentown ACPC became a thorny issue and one which presented some interesting observations.

This complicated local picture was further clouded when the Association of District Councils, decided to opt for unitary authority status for Greentown. The research coincided with this decision which had obvious implications for Greentown's ACPC, as Greentown and its local administrators were headed for unitary authority status. The research took place as a direct result of this forthcoming change, although this reason was never made explicit by any key members of the Committee. This proved to be something of a God-send in research terms. It transpired that there were two conflicting groups on the ACPC who both saw the research has having the potential to shape the post-unitary status Greentown ACPC.

Having established the background, the next section moves on to introduce the agencies and their representatives. In order to achieve this the official description of the roles of the agencies, supplemented with some academic insight in order to provide an overview of their key tasks and positions within the system, will now be provided.

**The dramatis personae**

At first glance, those agencies with child protection as a direct remit of their work appeared most involved in the ACPC. To ensure that this was not a construction of the research, ACPC members were asked "which is the most influential and important agency within the ACPC?". Their responses provided an ideal way with which to provide introductions to the agencies and the *dramatis personae* of the committee.
"Local Authority Social Service Departments have a statutory responsibility to investigate reports of children at risk of significant harm, to take appropriate action to protect children and to promote their welfare'. (Greentown Multi-Disciplinary Child Protection Handbook 1992: 39).

Murphy (1995: 63, original emphasis) notes that, within the British context, 'child abuse is the Social Services Department'. Murphy continues, informing that following the death of Maria Colwell in 1973, social services were given a key role in co-ordinating the system with the Department taking a lead role in the ACPC and the individual field worker adopting a facilitative role in preventative intervention. Social services departments can be seen as major player in the child protection system and a lead agency in any partnership approach.

This was clearly the case in Greentown, where respondents replied to the question "which is the most influential agency? with answers such as:

*the Social services are the lead agency, they're the lead agency they dominate it* (Youth Enquiry Service)

or;

*Easy question to answer, social services run the show* (Probation),

The other agencies also appeared to believe that Greentown social services 'owns' child protection. This view was endorsed by the social services staff themselves. Their belief that they owned the child protection system was made visible time and
time again throughout the research. Indeed, ownership of child protection proved to be precious to them.

Social services also had the Chair of Greentown ACPC. Away from the ACPC he held the post of Assistant Director of Social Services and also had a seat on the County Child Protection Committee. The Chair attended every full ACPC meeting during the research period. He was identified by the entire ACPC membership as the most influential person on the committee, in terms of setting the agenda, dominating discussions and censoring information which came up from field workers or down from the County Committee. There was a unanimous response to the question 'who sets the agenda?' with all respondents naming the Chair, although, ultimately this proved to be a misconception on behalf of the membership.

His power also extended to the decision making process, according to the adult mental health psychiatrist, who claimed that:

well, making decisions is easy, we talk about things for a bit, then the Chair looks at the clock, re-summarises what we said into his own words and asks us if we're all agreed. The response is like one of those nodding dog things, we all nod our heads in agreement.'

This domination was not always popular, nor was it seen as entrenched. A member of the increasingly powerful health group commented:

at the moment its like the Emperor's new clothes, no one wants to be the first to say it, but the time is coming when there will be a challenge. I have to say though, at the moment we've got a strong personality in the Chair and he pulls most of them along with him'.
There were four other people from social services on the ACPC. One, the local child
protection officer, was also influential, but in a more subtle manner and sometimes
appeared to undermine her assistant director. Her primary function in her own eyes,
as well as those of her colleagues on the committee, was as to act as a net-worker.
Importantly, she was seen as the accessible link between social services and the other
agencies. For example, the NSPCC representative noted that:

*I like her, I use her all the time. To be honest with you there's quite a bit of what goes
on that I don't understand. I know that one quick phone call to the council house
[local name for the City Hall] and she'll put me right'.

Another representative made the point that 'she's like a catalyst for the committee'.
The Child Protection Officer was an excellent attendee, having a full attendance
record at ACPC meetings as well as being involved on a number of sub-groups. The
philosophy and approach between the Child Protection Officer and the Chair of
Greentown ACPC were poles apart, a difference which the child protection officer
was aware of:

*that's where we disagree, me and him. There's a big gap between what he  [the Chair]
thinks and what I think. I'm that much closer to practice and my concerns are for
their needs, not the needs of management. I don't care about maintaining good
friendly relationships, if someone needs a kick up the backside we should say so, we
should use our power overtly, not in some backsliding deal behind closed doors'.

The three other members of social services can be split between supporters of the
Chair and the Child Protection Officer. The Child Protection Officer's closest ally
was an assistant Child Protection Officer who came to ACPC meetings on a relatively
frequent basis. The other two members from social services aligned themselves with
the Chair. These two held the posts of District Manager and Planning and Contracts
Manager and were members of the ACPC as a direct result of the managerial nature of their post, due to the fact that the social services had fragmented into a purchaser/provider model. It was generally agreed that these two were appointees of the Chair and could be relied on to 'toe the party line' in times of conflict. This was expressed during an interview with a field social worker. When asked about the domination of the ACPC by its Chair, she replied:

I'm not surprised at that. You know, it seems to me that one way to make sure that all your ideas become policy is to appoint people that you can rely on. She [the District Manager] has only relatively recently qualified and was promoted over better people. She knows, and everybody else here knows, that she owes him [the Chair] her job.

Within the social services department the Chair was seen as a careerist determined to get his own way. For example, the child protection officer alluded to the fact that the Chair had pre-empted much of the forthcoming move into unitary authority status, suggesting that if the Chair failed to move quickly there was a chance that control of the ACPC would be wrested from his grasp by outside events. This somewhat cynical view of the Chair was not restricted to people within his own agency. For example, the NSPCC representative suggested that:

At the moment the chair has his own agenda. I'm very wary of him and the way in which he passes down information from County level. Well, he doesn't really. I'm lucky because I've got a direct line to County outside the ACPC so I can keep my finger on the pulse so to speak. In the past year we've [Greentown ACPC] had some fairly heavy stuff held back from us, especially stuff relating to death and serious injury. It's really his duty to circulate the minutes of the County meetings, which would be useful. Because of the way he works we don't really know what's going on at that level....by the same token we are reliant on him taking our proposals forward. It's pretty clear from what I've heard that sometimes our thoughts are given to County
in less than positive fashion by the person responsible for passing them on...perhaps a sort of revolving, or I mean rolling, chair system would put an end to the domination of the committee by a select few.

The Head of Purchasing for Health was less than positive about the Chair. Most of her critique centred around the charge that he operated in an autocratic manner. Off the record the word 'fiefdom' was employed more than once. The Head of Purchasing had this to say:

_The Chair is open to challenge, but some times you can see by the way he reacts that challenges to him aren't going anywhere because he is very experienced at committee work and knows how to block challenges. You can see that some people are thinking "I don't think this is a very good idea", but they dare not express it for fear of displeasing what is a very strong and domineering Chair._

Overall, the health group were far from happy about the domination of the ACPC by social services and gave the impression that as a result of Health's superior financial status they had the resource to finance more ambitious projects, but were reluctant to do so whilst the ACPC was chaired by someone they found threatening and ungrateful.

However, whilst health were concerned about, and presented a united front against perceived social service domination, internally, this group proved to be far from united, despite having the second most influential individual and potential chair as one of their number. The health group's divisions centred around the role and position of their respective units. Furthermore, health representation on the ACPC can be seen as an example of the need to alter the shape of the ACPC in order to accommodate newly appointed managers.
"The Health Authorities have duties to ensure the provision of a comprehensive Health Service. These services should be provided with the view to promoting health, affectionate and positive relationships between parents and their children".

"The FHSA is responsible for disseminating information to all contractor units, based on policies agreed by the ACPC". (Greentown Multi-Disciplinary Child Protection Handbook 1992: 40).

Murphy (1995: 87) describes the role of the health service in child protection as dealing with 'some of the most crucial tasks associated with child protection work'. He suggests that this task is far from easy for a variety of reasons, including the tension between the needs of the child patient and the adult patient, as well as the ethical dilemma surrounding informed consent to treatment. Further, he suggests that the internal reorganisations in health have shifted the balance of power toward managers 'traditionally less fully involved in the child protection service' (1995: 105). Greentown's health contingent reflected the recent internal fragmentation of the NHS, with the number of representatives from this sector on the ACPC multiplying four fold since 1990, rising from two to eight members.

Some other ACPC members queried why there were so many health representatives on the ACPC. The answer lies in the fact that as individual provider or purchaser units the managers of each unit expected to be on the committee as a facet of their jobs. Moreover, such was the inter-unit rivalry that omission of any unit would have been seen as a slight on the importance of both the unit and the manager in charge. Child protection, because of its high profile, was seen as an ideal vehicle by which to promote units. The NSPCC representative noted, in regard to health that:
look, you need to be aware of all what's going on. At the moment there are lots of power struggles going on there [in health]. People are trying to cement their territories by throwing weight around everywhere, including the ACPC.

The internal complexities of the health group became apparent quite early in the research process. Very few members outside of the health cadre were fully aware of the nuances of the intra-agency breakdown of this sector, being unable to identify where each health representative sat in relation to the purchaser/provider dichotomy in health. The internal divisions in health were further compounded by the unique professionalisation process within that sector: representatives were either doctors or nurses and the divisions and deference between the two were apparent throughout.

The health representatives consisted of the Head of Midwifery, who was a nurse, and attended only two meetings during the research; the Head of Community Child Health, a doctor and an irregular attendee of meetings; Head of Accident & Emergency (A&E), a doctor who failed to attend a single meeting during the duration of the research project; Head of Child and Family Mental Health Services, a doctor who came to most full ACPC meetings; Head of Community Trust Services, a nurse, and a frequent attendee, missing only one meeting; Head of Adult Psychiatry, a doctor who only attended half of the observed full meetings; Head of Community Child Health Services, a nurse who had a full attendance record; and Head of Purchasing, a nurse who missed only one meeting. With the exception of the Head of Adult Psychiatry, all doctors were male and all nurses were female, further reinforcing the traditional doctor/nurse role.

There were two key players in the health group. The first was the Head of Purchasing. She was seen as important by her colleagues for one primary reason - money:
'if you think about it, she's got enormous clout, because she controls what health spend'. (Head of Community Child Health Services).

This fact was recognised was by the post-holder herself. When asked which were the most influential organisations she replied:

'Social services of course, and, to be frank, health purchasers, thanks to me, for no other reason that I control the money within the group which gives me influence within health and other areas related to health spending, including the ACPC'.

The second influential member of the health group was the Head of Community Child Health Services and held the post of the vice-Chair of Greentown ACPC. She was an extremely knowledgeable and informed individual, and one who was generally seen to pose the greatest threat to the Chair's domination of Greentown's ACPC, a point not lost on the Head of Community Trust Services:

the child health rep. consults widely, she's on the CCPC, she discusses within all areas of health about child protection issues and policies. I think she is in a good position to challenge the Chair if the opportunity comes.

The potential of becoming a child protection 'expert' within the health group was not lost on the Head of Child Community Health Services. She clearly saw child protection as a vehicle for self-promotion, a point which she made during her interview:

...within all of health, where child protection is concerned, everybody within the Trust knows that it is my special area. If people can't sort out their own child
protection issues, well they all know I've got an open door, all sorts of people, from top to bottom ask me what I think on child protection

In the course of five years she had systematically manoeuvred her way onto the County Committee, also as vice-chair, and onto all the important sub-groups of Greentown's ACPC. This allowed her to cement her reputation as a child protection 'expert', and ensured that the Chair of Greentown ACPC was not the sole link to the County committee. Such a self-promoting stance did not always go down well with other unit managers. For example, the Head of Adult Psychiatry was scathing when asked about the 'expert' status of the Head of Child Community Health Services:

Is that what she's saying? It's amazing. What she forgets is that there are people here who remember her as a ward sister.

ACPC members outside health were often overawed by the scale of health representation:

There are bloody hundreds of them. Every second person around the table comes from health. (Youth Enquiry Service).

or;

What do you know about purchaser provider splits? I know very little, so I don't fully understand the significance of health. I do know there seem to an awful lot of them at meetings. Not just child protection either. (NCH representative).
"The Police are involved in cases of child abuse as a consequence of their general responsibility for the protection of life and limb, the prevention and investigation of crime and the submission of cases for criminal proceedings" (Greentown Multi-Disciplinary Child Protection Handbook 1992: 39).

Murphy notes that in the early stages of the creation of the child protection system, there was a reluctance to allow police involvement (1995: 139). Quite clearly, the police have a duty to investigate infringements of criminal law. However, their duty exceeds that, according to the Home Office (1988: 10), who suggest that 'success is not measured in prosecutions but... of the protection their actions bring to children at risk'. Moreover, the police are able to fill a role as suppliers of information about related criminal activity. Murphy states that this latter role has meant that 'the Police...have become active members of ACPCs...' (1995: 140).

ACPC members nominated the police as the third most influential agency, but few representatives, when pressed, could supply a coherent explanation or reason for their choice. For example, the social services child protection officer had this to say:

'The police are given a lot of credence within the group, and their opinion is constantly sought, but when you look at the number of cases which go to court, its all out of proportion to what they actually do for the committee.

Other responses included:

They need to be there, just like the rest of us. We sort of turn to them for, well, legal advise, sort of. (Education)
I'm not sure why there needs to be two of them. There is less tension between us and them than I expected. We always seem to agree about the general direction we should take but I'd be pushing it to claim any clear idea of why we see them as vital.  
(Contracts Manager, Social Services)

The police had two representatives on the ACPC. Both officers were excellent attendees which meant that the police were always represented at every meeting. In contrast to their colleagues from other organisations they were always extremely well briefed. The two police representatives on the ACPC had differing views on their role and status within the ACPC. One, who described himself as 'an old school copper', saw the police's role as minor:

'social services are the most influential. On the Richter scale they must be eight, the rest of us are around twos and threes'.

Yet his colleague, a younger officer who was the antithesis of the 'old school copper' had this to say about the influence of the police within the ACPC:

'In pecking order; Social services, the police, health and education'.

This split between the two police officers is important, as it was the younger officer who was the dominant of the pair, despite their shared rank of Inspector. He had a clear mandate in mind and one which was linked to the needs of the police force. His self-appointed primary task within the ACPC was simple:

I need to keep some kind of continuity. Its all right for the local politicians to talk about unitary authority; I've got to make sure that the different areas remain roughly the same, to get them on side with the police's view on these things.
For this police representative the move into unitary authority status can be depicted as a potential problem and one which seemed to make the rationale for being on the ACPC not the protection of children, but the protection of his own organisational interests.

Education

"Teaching and other staff in education normally have a great deal more contact with children and young people than the staff of any other agency. They are particularly well placed to notice signs of abuse or neglect, behavioural changes or failure to thrive or develop, and seek help for such children" (Greentown Multi-Disciplinary Child Protection Handbook 1992: 40-41).

Once again, Murphy provides the national perspective regarding education's role in child protection. He suggests that, next to their parents, most children spend the bulk of their time in school under the gaze of teachers (1995: 107). This provides teachers with the potential to see the signs of child abuse and places education in a pivotal role in the detection of abuse. Despite this, Murphy suggests that the advent of LMS and its fragmented approach to school management has impacted on education's ability to become a fully participating member of the system (1995: 109).

In Greentown, the members of the ACPC viewed education as influential, but failed to provide a concrete reason as to why. Most often, other members of the ACPC cited the traditional affinity between education and children, and the centrality of education in making referrals to social services, as being the reasons why education was influential. This was not a view shared by the education representatives who presented an image of being thoroughly disillusioned with the restrictions placed on their role in the ACPC by their intra-organisational changes.
Those questioned from the education sector cited the fact that the LEA was unable to speak for the schools en-masse, which resulted in a weakened input from education. Education's attendance at both ACPC and the sub-groups was irregular and poor.

Education had two representatives, one describing themself as:

...a schools representative. I'm not a line manager to all the other child protection designated staff in other schools, I just represent this particular school, I'm the voice of the average school I suppose. See, we can only inform colleagues in other schools. We're no longer in a position to direct any school about anything.

The other described her position as:

initially, when I was first on the committee, I was the LEA representative. At that time that was a post of some significance. Now, since restructuring, my role is the same, I'm still the LEA person, but the influence of the LEA within schools has diminished. We are more a supporting agency these days. These days I would say the role education has in child protection is a minor one..

There was a major disparity concerning between the views of the committee and the representatives of education concerning the influence of education in the ACPC. This point was not lost on the core group of Greentown's ACPC who provided several telling comments about the demise of education within the inter-agency forum.

When I see education, all I see is a reservoir of problems for the future. For whatever reason people from education just don't attend meetings any more. I don't think, well, that is I'm sure, it's not because they don't want to, or they can't be bothered, but because, especially the schools representative, I know he thinks that there's little
point in him coming because he is disempowered from making any telling comment, which is a shame. (Chair, Greentown ACPC)

The ACPC itself did little in the way to support education in what was clearly a difficult time for those working in the sector. In many respects, education was seen as 'unmanageable' in a partnership sense, due to the highly localised management base LMS introduced into schools. It was felt that the inability of education to provide a person who was able to speak for the sector cast them as outsiders in an ACPC where status was seen as an important factor.

This is indicative of the role and status of the ACPC amongst the managers who attended. They appeared unconcerned about the loss of a key player in the 'system', doing very little to facilitate greater participation.

There was little disagreement amongst Greentown's ACPC that these four agencies were the primary organisations. However, there was one key member from outside of those four: the NSPCC.

NSPCC

"The NSPCC has a responsibility to investigate and prevent cruelty to children. Additionally, in Greentown, the NSPCC services certain aspects of the Child Protection system, including the maintenance of the child protection register"


NSPCC clearly had an important role in running Greentown's ACPC. In the words of the NSPCC representative their mandate was one of:
providing all the facts and figures. Traditionally, we've always batted third. After the Chair says his bit and health say theirs I get up and present the stats. We own the figures, so it's me that tells them whether figures have gone up or down, which area has the highest incidence of abuse and so on.

The NSPCC member was referred to throughout the research as 'an honest man'; or 'a really nice bloke'; or 'straight as a die'.

The NSPCC, although from the voluntary sector, has its own section. The next two organisations to be introduced fall under Greentown's blanket heading of 'Voluntary Organisations'. The Greentown handbook states:

"A wide range of voluntary organisations provide services to help parents and children. Staff in these organisations should be alert to the signs and symptoms of child abuse and bring to the attention of the statutory agencies children who are thought to be in need of protection" (Greentown Multi-Disciplinary Child Protection Handbook 1992: 42).

National Children's Home

The NCH (Action for Children) representative on Greentown's ACPC was a regional manager responsible for all NCH's' work within Greentown. It is impossible adequately to convey the vagueness with which she answered questions concerning her personal role and her organisations part in the ACPC. This air of uncertainty was reflected in her attendance, which was minimal, and resulted in her making no contribution to discussion during the meetings.

Some examples which relate to this are:
I can't quite remember, I think I was invited by social services.

This is something I haven't got clear in my mind...sometimes I go along to meetings not really knowing what it's about, I'm never terribly clear what the brief is. If you're in a big meeting you can't ask the group to define its purpose.

Well, I'd have to say no to that one. It's never been made clear...I never had much sense of the whole, just what I put in.

Youth Enquiry Service

Youth enquiry service provided a line manager as their representative on the ACPC. She was in little doubt about either her personal position, or that of her organisation in the forum:

Certainly as an individual, and from a minor agency, as one of the people with the least perceived power...
Yet despite this, she was clearly flattered to be invited on the committee, both personally and for her agency:

Well, its seen as a bit of a feather in your cap isn't it? I mean its certainly enormously helpful, its very helpful for me and for the agency I work for in terms of visibility and in terms of appropriateness...Its the networking thing that's important. At last we, that is me and my direct boss, we feel involved in Greentown's child protection work which boosts our presence in the city.

However, despite being a regular attendee, it would appear from her own admission that the YES representative was far from conversant with process, procedures or even basic information concerning her fellow workers on the committee:

I've been to about five or six meetings. It wasn't until the last time I went that I knew that there were other independent organisations sitting on it. Last time was the first time I knew there was another voluntary member on it. I thought I was the only one, because I never heard any one else, or been aware of anyone else coming from an independent agency.

(Question) What about NSPCC and the statistics from the at risk register?

I

is that them?

The Armed Services

"The life of an armed service family differs in many respects from that of a family in civilian life. When a service family becomes the subject of a child abuse investigation it is essential for the civil agencies to lilies with the relevant
Service Welfare Officer in accordance with the agreed Procedures". (Greentown Multi-Disciplinary Child Protection Handbook 1992: 44)

The Navy

The Navy representative was an ex-Captain who, on retiring from active service, moved into the family welfare unit, which is responsible for all aspects of family life amongst navy personnel, a remit which covers moving house to child welfare. Technically, the navy member was a civilian, although in reality his bearing and mannerism ensured that he was seen as a military person by his colleagues on the ACPC. He was an assiduous member of the committee and was clearly well briefed on processes and procedures, as well as being a regular attendee and participant in discussion.

He was also clear as to why he was on the committee:

*I make no bones about it whatsoever. My primary task on the committee is to supply a voice for the navy. It's important that my welfare officers are kept up to speed with the developments elsewhere. I'm there to fight the corner for the service, to provide feedback on what we do, and to glean information from other agencies.*

The Army

The army was represented by a retired Major, who retained his title, despite leaving active service. In that respect there were similarities between the army and the navy: both had recruited senior figures in their welfare department from their former executives, and both representatives retained a military air and bearing. It is at this point the similarity ended. The army appeared to have a less well developed sense of
inter-agency working than the 'senior service'. Equally, the army member had little clear idea concerning his responsibilities on the committee:

(Question) In light of what you just told me, I think it would be really helpful if you could let me know what your understanding of the ACPC is?

That's a question I would have a lot of difficulty answering because I don't go very often. It's a vehicle full of experts, which I'm not... They often send me more information than I need. If I were a professional child care worker in the fullest sense of the word it would interest me greatly, but, as I'm not, well, if I have time I read it but often its filed away.

It would appear therefore that the army viewed the ACPC as a necessary inconvenience, but membership of which fulfilled their need to be seen to be part of an inter-agency forum.

Probation

"Staff in the Probation Service may become involved in cases of Child Protection because of their various responsibilities to the Courts in respect of offenders or of children following marital breakdown. They also become involved when people convicted of offences against children are discharged from prison. Consultations must take place with Social Services to ensure safety of children following the offenders' release from prison". (Greentown Multi-Disciplinary Child Protection Handbook 1992: 47)

The probation representative was a newly promoted line manager who was aware of her limited knowledge in the field of child protection, stating that:
twelve months ago I was running a hostel for adult offenders and not working in the field of child protection.

Nevertheless, she embraced her new role with some vigour, becoming a regular attendee and a vocal contributor to discussion. What she was able to do (which was an ability not all members were able to claim), was to analyse the rationale for probation's involvement:

Child Protection has such a high profile, although it represents only a very small percentage of our work, conversely, it has the highest priority of all our tasks.

(Question) Any particular reason, that you’re aware of?

A. Well, probation is all about risk management so every case that we work with has to be assessed regularly throughout our contact, for the risk that the service user presents, to the public, to staff, to children, or to themselves, possibly. I mean its just built in to the work we do, with the people that we work with, a regular risk assessment. So, its very high profile in peoples minds. Its our business really, in this agency, managing risks. You know, over recent years, when the squeeze has been on, financially, and training has come under pressure, its always been made explicitly clear that the one area that will be given priority is Child Protection training...

The City Housing Department

The Greentown handbook failed to provide a role or rationale for the inclusion of housing on the child protection committee. This failed to deter the representative from becoming a regular attendee, unafraid to take part in the discussion or to question contentious issues. Again, this member of the committee had a clear vision of the reasons behind his particular involvement:
A. Well, it was an invite from social services. The, my belief is, there are two aspects. Over the years social services and the district housing officers have created a very useful inter-agency communication, and, a working relationship across the county...the understanding and awareness of housing in terms of families and the effect housing can have on families, and indeed, for that matter, the restricted resources that mean its no longer a case of a social worker ringing up and saying, give us a house. The recognition of that, and the fact that, in terms of housing corporations and the Department of Environment, encouraging agencies to have common strategies where common issues are being addressed, the Chair in particular, recognised that housing was missing from the ACPC so he made contact, and, because my own particular responsibilities cover social needs housing that's why I was the rep.

The housing representative was an astute manager and answered every question in a manner calculated to place his department in the best possible light.

**Area Solicitors Office**

This agency refused all requests to participate in the research and was absent from all tangible involvement with Greentown's ACPC during the period of the research.
Summary

The introductions are complete. It is important to provide some form of overview in order to clarify the situation prior to providing a more detailed account of the research findings.

In essence, Greentown ACPC was dominated by a core group of six people who comprised the Chair and the Child Protection Officer from social services, The Head of Purchasing and the Head of Child Community Health Services from health, plus the NSPCC representative and the younger police officer. The remaining nineteen members can be further categorised into three bands: (i) those that made an independent contribution from time to time in order to further their particular cause or organisation; (ii) those that attended from duty but were pulled along by the chair; and (iii) those that were members in name only.

Most representatives of health and social service not in the core group, the probation and city housing representative fall into category (i), the education, navy and the YES members into category (ii) and the area solicitor, the army, the A&E consultant and the midwives’ representative fall into the final category (iii). However, within those cleavages it was possible to detect clearly marked differences of opinion that created two factions each aiming at shaping the new unitary authority ACPC.

These can be identified as the managerialists and the incorporatists. The term 'managerialist' refers to those members of the ACPC who were convinced that the committee needed to retain its manager base, and actively sought to exclude any direct front-line involvement. The managerialists were headed by the Chair and contained both the police members, the probation representative, and the education, navy and YES members, plus the District manager and Planning and Contracts managers from social services.
The incorporatists had a much more open approach to the membership of the ACPC and openly canvassed for front-line representation at ACPC level. They were headed by the Head of Child Community Health Services from health, and contained the Child Protection Officer from social services, The Head of Purchasing from health and the NSPCC representative.

Of those remaining, only the city housing and the Head of Community Trust Services appeared aware of the power struggle between these two factions. They tended to side with one or the other factions on the basis of their organisational needs and not any personal preference as to the future shape of the ACPC. An illustration of this can be seen in an extract from an interview with the Community Trust Services representative. To contextualise the comment, the Trust representative expressed a concern that the Head of Community Health Services was the wrong person to carry the voice of health to the County level Child Protection Committee:

*We now have a nurse rep. who represents all nurses at the County Committee. It's a fairly unusual, and I must say, unsatisfactory arrangement.*

(Question) can you expand on that a bit?

*What I mean is this: how do we know that she's giving a clear picture of what my nurses think and want? Her job is to look out for the community health services. Here, we compete, sort of, for money that that part of health gets. I find that I have to trust the Chair in the sense that information I want to go to County goes through him and not the health person. My suggestion is that each organisation gets a member. If that did happen, I could be sure that the Trust would get a fair say in the decisions they make.*
What this introduction provides is an indication that managerialism and new fragmentation has either one of two effects. Either, as in the case with health, inter-agency bodies invite all managers from all of the new managerial units and import intra-agency rivalry onto the joint body, or in the case of education, managerialism effectively disempowers a formerly important contributor to joint working. One question for consideration in the conclusion must be to examine the point of setting up strategic bodies such as the ACPC and then staffing them with agencies which no longer have strategic concerns or influences?

Having identified this fact as well as the key players and their respective agencies, provided an insight into mandatory roles for each sector, and identified the factions within Greentown's ACPC, the next chapter turns to the findings of the research.
Chapter Eight

Greentown ACPC at work: environmental context

The previous chapter was devoted to introducing the component agencies of the ACPC and their representatives. It also established that within a large and diffuse group of people there was a clear and established hierarchy of agencies and personnel, with the accompanying potential for conflict and rivalry such groupings almost always carry in their wake. In many respects this chapter maintains that focus. Taken together, this and the previous chapter employs the first aspects of Hudson's (1987) framework of analysis - environmental context - to provide some background and to allow the reader to gain a feel of the manner in which the ACPC conducted its business.

The chapter is structured in a sequential manner. By this it is taken to mean that the reader is: briefed as to the history of Greentown ACPC prior to its managerialist inspired expansion; taken from the recruitment process and through an introductory meeting; provided with samples of 'typical' ACPC meetings; and informed as to the position of Greentown ACPC in the child protection system for the area. Data for this chapter are drawn from three sources, the past minutes, interviews with the members of the ACPC and observations of ACPC meetings.
Greentown ACPC: a brief organisational history

Reference to the history of Greentown's ACPC informs that from the period when it moved from being an ARC to an ACPC up until about 1992, the committee comprised of between eight to ten members, drawn exclusively from health, social services, police and education. Due to the internal structure of the agencies participating in the ACPC, it seems that obtaining both intra and inter organisation agreement for action was a relatively simple process. Moreover, there appears to have been a system in place, which enabled the ACPC to ensure that important agenda items were followed-up and actioned. For example, reference to the January 1992 minutes note that each agenda item had an action plan with a named representative charged with ensuring that the matter was followed up and any outcome was reported back to the ACPC.

Similarly, as noted above, Greentown ACPC followed a pattern whereby it employed sub-groups, which reported back to the main committee. Up until 1993 each sub-group had a standing agenda slot where they each reported back to the ACPC, noting policy developments, new matters arising or work in progress. The information provided by each sub-group depended upon the activity of the sub-group in question—the minutes show that that there were degrees of activity for each group with some being busier than others. Overall, the minutes for the period 1989 until 1993 provide the impression of a small, but highly structured ACPC with a clear sense of purpose and formalised procedures that ensured monitoring of both the work of the ACPC and the child protection system as a whole.
The information provided in the ACPC’s minutes, post-1993, provide an indication of two striking developments. Firstly there was a huge growth spurt which was still occurring up until the research started. Reference to the minutes from 1993 until 1996 show that new members were appearing at almost every meeting. These new members originate from two sources. Firstly, one group appeared as a result of intra-agency fragmentation. For example, education, following the introduction of LMS, gained a schools representative in addition to the existing LEA representative. The second group consisted of representatives of non-profit and non-statutory agencies who were invited onto the ACPC by the chair.

The second development seems to be a slide into apathy, or at least a loosening of the formalised reporting-back structures, outlined above. Examples of this are that, post 1993, the sub-groups lost their standing agenda slot. The minutes show a complete absence of sub-group reporting back from June 1993. Similarly, within the same time period, the system of allocating a named person to oversee the progress of actioned agenda items stopped.

The impression gained from the minutes and informal discussions with long-standing members of the ACPC is of a committee which formally consisted of a small, tight knit group of like-minded, similar status professionals able to control and monitor both its own business and partnership working between its component parts. Latterly, the committee had grown almost three-fold in size, in a relatively short time, and its former control structures were seemingly unable to cope with this growth spurt, leading to the creation of a large, unwieldy and disorganised committee.
Greentown ACPC: joining the club

ACPC guidelines, as pointed out above, are ambiguous about membership, with a built in capacity for local scope and variation. All the members of Greentown's ACPC, both old and new, fulfilled the requirement of being at an appropriate managerial level, but that fact alone could not explain how the disparate individuals had become members. A point on which there was unanimous agreement by those interviewed, and confirms the information in the minutes, was the fact that, in common with most other ACPCs around the country, Greentown's ACPC had undergone a considerable expansion during the 1990s, both in terms of numbers and the variety of organisations represented. This expansion proved to be both positive and negative for the individual members, the inter-agency forum and the newly co-opted organisations.

Greentown ACPC was an exclusive club with membership being strictly 'invitation only'. Joining the ACPC was regarded as something of an honour both personally and professionally. ACPCs are notionally made up of the 'great and the good', therefore members become 'great and good' by association. As the Youth Enquiry Service member put it:

*It seems to be presented as a sort of feather in the cap...in the sense that your agency is felt to have something to contribute.*

However, based on some members' responses, joining Greentown ACPC was a daunting experience, despite most committee members being senior professionals with an intimate and extensive knowledge of child protection issues and a familiarity with the workings of committees. Implicated in the feelings of being daunted was the venue for the meetings. Greentown ACPC met in the very formal surroundings of the Lord Mayor's chambers, which served to heighten the anxiety levels of those
participating, but more especially the new recruits. These three comments illustrate
the point:

*In order to attend the first meeting I needed to go past uniformed commissioners, past
security guards and meet an usher. After waiting outside the room for about fifteen
minutes, the usher opened the door and officially announced my presence. The room
itself was very impressive, with everybody sat around a highly polished table, various
papers and blotters marking out their territories. My seat was at the far end of the
table and the distance covered to get to my place was out of proportion to the time it
seemed to take. A table plan was given to me by the Contracts and Planning
Manager from social services. I already knew her as a facet of this job. What is
interesting, especially give what we’re talking about, is that this meeting was also the
midwives representative’s first meeting and obviously the introduction process failed
all concerned, as the table plan, given to me by [names person], calls her ‘midwife:
first meeting’. (YES)*

*In all honesty, if you go in as a new person, it can be a bit intimidating. It takes you
so long to get to know everyone. You need to be Einstein to remember who represents
what. (Police officer;)*

*The first time I walked in I thought, shit, I can’t talk to this lot. (NSPCC
representative)*

With reference to the above and other comments of the same nature, it appears that it
took a long time for new committee members to build up even a basic working
knowledge of their fellow members. For any new recruit, learning names and faces
was also undertaken alongside a familiarisation of new procedures, getting to grips
with long-standing issues as well as gaining the confidence to make a contribution to
this high-level forum. Therefore, for some members of the committee, notably those
from the voluntary sector, joining the ACPC and obtaining the confidence needed to make contributions became a intimidating prospect.

Most of those interviewed agreed on the process of becoming members of Greentown ACPC. For the majority it was their organisation that was invited to send a representative and, they, as post-holders of a particular job, became the representative, almost by default. So, for the teacher's representative membership was gained as a consequence of being:

...a member of the Secondary School Head Teachers group. When it became apparent to whoever deals with that sort of thing that schools were no longer represented by the LEA, they decided that teachers needed a representative at the committee. We've had some experience of the sharp end of an investigation here at [names school] and everyone on the Heads group were aware that I had the most recent experience of the process. It seemed natural that I should be the one to sit on the committee after they invited us on.

In much the same manner the doctor representing Child Health informed that:

The paediatric consultant traditionally sits on the ACPC. When I arrived in Greentown to take up this post it was a facet of the job. I have to do it.

It should be noted that whilst the majority of ACPC members became involved as a facet of their employment, due to the high status accorded ACPC members within Greentown's professional community, very few members actively sought to leave. The Chair gave some insight into this, making what was to become a prophetic statement:
It is big, yes, it has grown and there is, in all probability, too many people who really serve very little purpose as committee members...What you’ve got to remember is that no one ever wants to leave it once they’re on it.

This view was confirmed by many of those interviewed. Whilst most agreed that the ACPC was somewhat unwieldy and its size prevented intimate knowledge of partner agencies, most of those asked seemed unwilling to relinquish their place. A variety of reasons were given for this reluctance. Most people who were on the ACPC saw it as a recognition of their managerial position within their respective organisations, making it, as already noted above, 'a sort of feather in your cap'. Others saw it as a means for them to keep up to date with current developments in child protection, whereas some saw it as a networking system. Interestingly, none saw their membership of the ACPC as vital to the workings of the committee itself.

So, it transpired that for the majority of ACPC members, their initial membership resulted as a facet of their job. After membership was established, taking an active part became problematic for some members; some people openly expressed misgivings about their ability to adequately contribute to the forum. Once aboard however, few openly expressed a desire to relinquish such a highly esteemed post. Indeed, although membership of a child protection body was not anticipated by some members of the ACPC when they embarked on their careers, all those ACPC members interviewed stated a deep conviction to child protection and a firm personal and organisational commitment to partnership working within that particular field.

It may well be the case that members of the ACPC were slowly socialised into accepting that what they experienced as new members was the way things were done in child protection circles at this level of involvement. This is despite the fact, as the following chapters will show, that it was apparent to many of them that Greentown ACPC was at best slow and ponderous and was struggling to cope with its growth.
spurt in terms of monitoring work and actually guiding child protection work in the locality. Perhaps this degree of confusion and inertia is best understood by referring to and describing specific meetings.

**Observing full ACPC meetings**

In terms of group dynamics and individual behaviour the meetings were informative. There was a distinct division between those on the ACPC who had embraced the managerial ethos discussed in Chapter Four, and those who were closer to practice. For those of a managerialist persuasion, any existing or future problems relating to child protection could be solved by reference to, and reliance upon, managerialist practices. Those with a more practice based perspective expressed a belief that it was absence of front line input which had made the committee lose its way. In their eyes, the committee could be improved by a constant exposure to ‘life on the streets’. As an example, members of this group often referred to a presentation given by a social work team operating in the most impoverished district of Greentown. It was their contention that the reaction of the committee following the presentation illustrated that front line intervention had the potential to galvanise the ACPC into action and destroy the existing climate of inertia and apathy.

The result of this cleavage was an air of tension and an ever-present potential for conflict within the ACPC especially between members of the two groups. This was expressed in a variety of subtle, but nonetheless telling, ways. For example, the field notes inform that often, when any member of the practice group attempted to make a point, the Chair would gaze around the room, read or shuffle his papers, or engage in conversation with his neighbours. Equally, when any of the managerialist group spoke or made a point, meaningful glances, low volume mutterings, notes and moves into defensive body postures were tactics members of the practice cadre employed to express their disapproval. Overall, observing the meetings reinforced the impression
gleaned from the minutes - the ACPC was in a state of disarray. The field notes from the first meeting observed make the following points:

* There is a lack of standardisation with regard to report writing which makes the communication of information difficult
* The paediatrician noted that GPs didn't have access to an up-to-date child protection register
* Definitions concerning aspects of work differ from agency to agency. This led to a call for standardisation of definitions

These items, although raised at that particular meeting, failed to reappear either in the minutes or in subsequent ACPC meetings. Subsequent sets of field notes reflect a growing sense of incredulity at events in such a seemingly important committee. Perhaps the best illustration of this is to offer the reader a copy of a summary of field notes for one meeting in particular:

**ACPC MEETING 29th SEPTEMBER 1995**

This meeting highlighted the three main areas of concern that have emerged during the interviews. These are;

1 Lack of communication between agencies, and between the ACPC and CCPC
2 The potential for items to become 'lost'
3 The inability of the ACPC to direct action, or take action on its own behalf.

Apart from 1, concerns are seldom voiced in those terms. They are mostly brought up in phrases such as, 'I'm not sure of what goes on at County' (NCH); 'You see, if we find a problem with a situation, we need the power to put it right' (Trust services); or '[items get lost] through neglect...poor minuting
or process’ (Child mental health). What has happened is that a number of related issues have arisen that can be broadly categorised under one or more of the three major concerns.

Going through the list of observations I made on Friday, it's possible to see the ACPC in terms of the three main issues. There were numerous examples:

* To start with, several representatives again failed to receive minutes
* Vice chair called chair’s attention to an agenda item he missed. Would this have become another ‘lost’ item?
* The NSPCC and YES statistics do not reflect the changes to SSD’s areas, therefore, in some respects, the statistics are meaningless. On the positive side, the chair called for these boundary changes to be noted.
* The information on the Child Protection register is not up to date. Police called to domestic incidents are routinely informed if there is a child on the at risk register in the house. This information is (quote) ‘years out of date’ apparently.
* CPO stated that there may not be an agreed purpose between the members of the ACPC. This was then reinforced by Police
* Quotes such as ‘we don’t know what each others policies are’; ‘we don’t know what each other does in training’ give an indication as to the lack of understanding, inter-agencies
* There was a call for a ‘corporate understanding of what the ACPC believes. Surely that should have been done, (and therefore be familiar to all) ages ago?
* It became clear that, because of the lack of budget, the ACPC can only advise and endorse.
* The chair called for other agencies to launch bids for SRB and Euro money. Why doesn’t the ACPC do this if that is what it wants?
There may be constraint as to the behaviour of the ACPC. It could be possible that it is outside its remit to make bids for funding, for example. However, if that is the case, the members of the committee that I have interviewed are as much in the dark about what it does as I am. It is from them that my understanding of the committee and its functions arise. Clearly, from Friday's meeting, there are serious problems. It is apparent that the ACPC is fumbling along at the moment with very little clarity of role, purpose, or future.

It is perhaps germane at this point to offer some indication of what went on in ACPC meetings. Much of the time was taken by standing agenda items. For example, the NSPCC representative always took the number three slot in the meetings and provided a breakdown of the child protection register, which took the form of some statistical information presented via overheads and supplemented by printed handouts. The information contained in these documents was an area by area review of the number of children on the 'at-risk' register in any area, noting rises and falls in numbers. In the observed meetings these almost always elicited the same comments of 'why is [inner city area] so busy?'

A similar recurring comment was the fact that there was no GP representative on the committee. Again, this was old ground that had been extensively covered. What was interesting was that it was not controversial: every one present knew the answer as well as the solution. The meetings can be summarised as 'time-passers'. Little new was discussed and very few contentious issues were raised. Generally, people would talk in very broad terms about child protection issues and thus avoid specifics which related to child protection within Greentown. Thus, the majority of meetings had an air of conflict avoidance and, to a point, non-decision making about them. However, this lack of direction or impetus was not restricted to routine meetings. Even when
presented with a situation which clearly needed addressing, Greentown’s ACPC was still unable to take the necessary action.

Greentown, as previously stated, is an urban pocket in an otherwise rural county. Within Greentown itself there are a number of pockets of severe deprivation. It had been noted by the ACPC that one particular inner city area, with a local reputation of being a 'dump' estate, had a disproportionate number of children on the at-risk register, even when compared to similar areas in other cities. It was decided at ACPC to ask the social services team for the area to present a report outlining possible reasons and their response to such high numbers.

The social services team's report painted a picture of a team under pressure and under-resourced. What was interesting, especially given that one of the primary tasks of the ACPC is to co-ordinate partnership working, was the fact that the front-line social workers gave a number of examples where joint working was problematic. Some examples were: a lack of co-ordination between social workers and class room teachers; the repeated failure of a probation officer to attend a case conference; a seemingly insoluble dispute between one health visitor and a GP which was spilling over into child protection work. The most chilling system failure concerns the reaction of an head teacher when informed that one of his pupils was placed on the at-risk register. It was alleged that his response was:

"she told me about that a couple of years ago. I'm surprised it's still going on: I had her father in and we had a man-to-man chat. He told me it was going to stop".

On completion of their presentation, the social services team left the meeting. The reaction of the majority of the members of Greentown ACPC was one of incredulity. They appeared to be genuinely shocked at the level of deprivation, the extent of the
problem, the apparent breakdown of partnership working and the lack of checks and balances within their child protection system. The overall impression was that, as managers, they had constructed a 'system' which was based around an abstract notion of 'management' and an unswerving belief in the ability of managers to police such a system. The fact that there were alarming differences between organisations and workers in what constituted management and system came as a shock and surprise.

The meeting ended with firm calls to have a follow up discussion and create an action plan to investigate the inconsistencies within the system. At the time of the completion of the field work no such meeting had been convened.

The last task for this chapter in its endeavour to offer some insight as to the environmental context in which Greentown’s ACPC worked is to locate the committee within a larger child protection arena.

The position of Greentown ACPC in the child protection 'system'

Much of the literature surrounding child protection talks, unproblematically, about the existence of a 'system' (Leathard 1994). In terms of environmental context, it is useful to attempt to unearth the extent of any such 'system' and the position Greentown occupied within it. This proved to be an illuminating and challenging task. Part of the problem lies in the fact that Greentown’s multi-disciplinary child protection handbook, whilst outlining the roles the various agencies fill, fails to describe or even suggest how those roles fit in to a unified whole. As Chapter One noted, the locally produced handbooks have the potential to drive their particular local child protection system. Within Greentown there are no formally published ground rules for the creation or maintenance of any such a system.
This lack of direction created a situation where many committee members appeared confused about a number of issues. One such lack of insight centred around the position Greentown ACPC occupied in the child protection system as a whole. Many of the periphery of Greentown ACPC believed that they were serving on an autonomous body with ultimate responsibility for child protection in Greentown, which was ultimately accountable only to central government. This was, however, a mistaken conception.

As mentioned in the previous Chapter, Greentown ACPC was in reality a sub-group of the County Child Protection Committee. However, this information did not emerge until the research was established and long underway: the past minutes did not contain any reference to the county committee and it was not until the fifth interview that an ACPC member even acknowledged the presence of a higher body. This raises points which go beyond the aspect of Hudson's (1987) work being employed in this chapter, and these points will be reviewed in detail in the following chapters. For now, it is perhaps most illuminating to allow the members of Greentown's ACPC to demonstrate their understanding of the place they occupied within the 'system':

*It was interesting to hear the comments about County 'driving'. You know, that may be the theory, but it's never what I've experienced in practice. I think the local ACPC is autonomous actually. They seem to jolly along doing their own thing...*(Child Protection Officer, Social Services).

This was a point endorsed by many of those who commented on this relationship. Furthermore, it appeared that the two committees were unable to share information, despite this being part of their rationale for existence. For example, the Paediatrician noted that:
As far as County is concerned communication is virtually non-existent...I really feel as if information is not shared. If we work as part of a system it would be good for me to know what they talk about. I find it handicapping in trying to get the whole picture, I would like information from County to come directly to me. They seem really distant from what we do, there really is a big gap there. We only seem to communicate with them when we need to. I'm not sure they have a clue about what we do, because I haven't got a clue about them.

I'm not sure how much information relating to the concerns of practice reaches County. Certainly, not much comes back from them. I would guess that most of those who are child protection workers in our area don't even know what the County Child Protection Committee is...We have links though I don't get the feeling of back and forth communication. It doesn't feel like we're linked to them, or that they're really linked to us (NSPCC).

This situation was further complicated because there was a distinct lack of clarity and a tangible air of confusion concerning the roles and responsibilities each committee held within the child protection system. The probation representative summarised the situation thus:

I'm not really sure what the County committee does. Does it make policy or do we? County and Area have the potential to work together, but the major problem is that we lack any clarity or definition of who does what. You know, where they end and we begin.

This brief introductory diversion into the relationship between Greentown ACPC and the CCPC should not be seen as anomalous, even given that the research was primarily concerned with Greentown ACPC. It is interesting and deserves inclusion because there is a recognised tendency to talk about child protection in terms of a
'system' and by including this data, it allows for a brief examination of the extent to which Greentown fitted into the larger picture. It also raises issues relating to how much of a 'system' was visible outside of Greentown's sphere of influence. Some key points emerged immediately concerning the relationship between Greentown and the County committee.

For example, only three people seemed aware of the division of responsibility between County and Greentown, and two of those, the Chair of Greentown ACPC and the vice-Chair of Greentown ACPC sat on both committees. Many of those interviewed exhibited little or no knowledge of the County committee's existence. Of those members who were aware of their County based counterpart, the most used expression was

'Oh, that gets sent to County, I don't know what happens to it after that'.

The presence of the County Child Protection Committee, in many respects, allowed a degree of inertia to be justified. Although those members of Greentown ACPC 'in the know' about their County colleagues were small in number, they were large in influence, and as will be demonstrated below, the presence of another committee could justify lack of action, decision making and responsibility taking.

Summary

Context is an important facet of the empirical work of this thesis. This and the previous chapter have attempted to provide the reader with a sense of the environment and context in which Greentown ACPC operated, prior to and during the research period. There are two key points which emerge from this and both of these have clear implications in terms of understanding the nature of this particular partnership site.
Firstly, all the ‘big four’ agencies - social service, health, police and education - had no choice as to whether they were members of the ACPC, theirs being a mandated relationship. However, within a relatively short period of time, intra-agency reorganisations in each of these four meant that the number of representatives from each agency grew. At the same time, the ability of representatives to provide a voice, agree on policy or ensure co-operation by the agency as a whole diminished. As a direct result of managerialist inspired changes the ACPC had to devise strategies designed to cope with growth and devolution of power. This proved to be problematic, leading to drift and apathy.

Secondly, a number of other agencies were co-opted onto the ACPC. There are various reasons for this, not least the direction of central government policy with the Working Together inspired move into prevention and its concomitant requirement to embrace the incorporation of a number of agencies. In effect, the changing nature of the child protection system’s understanding of ‘partnership’ created conditions which further expanded an already expanding partnership forum.

Thus, in terms of environment and context it can be seen that Greentown’s ACPC, as a co-ordinating body, had a number of problems relating to the growth in size. At the same time, those agencies which were integral to the success of the ACPC had their own problems, namely learning how to cope with intra-organisational change and fragmentation, devolution of decision making power and putting the concerns of the managerial unit over that of the organisation as a whole. On top of all this each participating agency had to not only to become comfortable with its own changes, but also had to come to terms with the changes besetting its partners on the ACPC. Finally, casting a shadow over all concerned with the partnership forum was the unknown, but unavoidable spectre of unitary authority status and the changes that would carry in its wake.
Having explored and identified the environmental context in which Greentown ACPC was located, the next chapter moves to employ Hudson’s (1987) second analytical lens, that of the comparative properties approach.
Chapter Nine

Greentown ACPC at work: the comparative properties approach

The last chapter demonstrates quite clearly that there was a change in the environmental context in which the ACPC operated, creating, in turn, a reduction in the ability of the committee to maintain its former level of control and direction over child protection policy in Greentown. However, as Hudson (1987: 177) notes the environment and context alone cannot adequately explain the nature and existence of partnerships between organisations. According to Hudson, there are two other lenses through which to view partnership working. This chapter explores the nature of partnerships in Greentown's ACPC in terms of the comparative properties lens.

Essentially, this lens asks researchers to examine the nature and degrees of similarity between organisations participating in collaborative arenas. As such, it can be argued that its primary area of concern is the mezzo level of analysis. By this it is taken to mean that, in contrast to the environmental context lens which deals with macro level changes often precipitated by factors outside the partnership forum, the comparative properties lens deals with those factors which relate to the manner in which participating organisations and their representatives 'fit' into each others standard operating procedure. Moreover, the comparative properties lens also searches for indications of degrees of mutual knowledge and depth of understanding between and across participating agencies and within the partnership forum itself.
Hudson (1987) offers five independent variables related to the comparative properties lens. In order to provide an indication of how the ACPC fared in relation to each, the independent variables will now be reviewed in turn. Data for this section is drawn from the interviews and observations of both full ACPC and sub-group meetings.

**Inter-organisational homogeneity**

To re-cap, Hudson (1987: 177) sees this variable as related to shared goals. He pre-empts much of this section when he notes, in relation to community care, that all participants may find virtue in the banner goal, but the operationalisation of that goal differs from agency to agency. In many respects, Greentown ACPC’s problems went beyond this. It became clear from the outset of the research that very few members of the committee had any idea what the overall goal or purpose of the ACPC was beyond a highly generalised notion of ‘child protection’. Essentially, the situation appeared to be that the ACPC itself lacked a tangible ‘goal’, creating a situation where achieving a shared goal between the participating organisations became difficult.

A number of questions were constructed around the need to discover the goal of the ACPC. One asked the members what difference the ACPC had made in terms of child protection within Greentown? The vagueness of the following responses provide an indication of a lack of clarity of purpose:

*That's a difficult question. I'm not sure that I can answer that. What I could answer it from is in terms of what it's like from my perspective. I think my brief there is to enter the discussion and debate and planning and learn about what you do for children after you've decided they're being abused. Really what I'm concerned with is*
recovery, treatment and prevention, at a later point in time. I find it very difficult to know, in terms of what ACPC has done actually. It's brought me into contact with other managers of other agencies where the planning of future services might evolve, and support for my own services into treatment and help for children might be available. In practice, I wonder whether that's the case. In theory it's a good idea. ACPC is quite a big organisation, I'm not sure whether its got any executive powers or not, I'm not sure whether its correctly enough linked into what those people in the different agencies do. I'm looking for things that might change practice or develop in certain ways. I really can't quite grasp how that actually might happen. I haven't, in practice, seen it yet. I guess that if I can't see it we haven't been responsible for any great change.

(Doctor, Child and Family Mental Health Services)

I think the ACPC has been good at stimulating some training events, and I've been participant in planning a training event...so it does produce some things, but it, I think its got in-built problems attached to it. No, I'm not really sure we've done much else since I've been involved.

(Planning and Contracts, Social Services)

Many others responses indicated that the idea of 'making a difference' was a new way of looking at Greentown ACPC's work. The NSPCC person answered the question thus:

I haven't a clue. I know that sounds a really woolly answer...I would imagine that it has had an impact on managerial collaboration as opposed to coalface collaboration...I don't know.
In Chapter Two, it was noted that great store has been set by central government policy makers in the ability of the local handbooks. These handbooks, it will be recalled, are written and distributed by the local ACPCs, and possess, in theory, the ability to become the drivers of the system, providing guidance and policy direction aimed at tackling area specific problems: in effect to outline goals and priorities of each ACPC.

The official handbook or 'Green Book' as it was known was referred to during the interviews. All members of the ACPC held copies, as did all organisations that had an interest in child protection. In theory, the green book became the first point of reference for any professional unsure of any situation related to child abuse. The rationale for Greentown's handbook was all professionals had shared information thus ensuring a co-ordinated systemic response. It was published in loose-leaf form with the intention of updating the sections as and when practice changed.

The practice was somewhat different. The handbook had not been up-dated since 1992 leading some social services representatives to claim that social services were two or three years in front of what the handbook cited as good practice. One small example is that the handbook cites the Family Health Services Authority (FHSA) as having responsibility for disseminating information to all health’s contractor units: the FHSA did not exist in Greentown at the time of the research, as a result of the managerialist changes. For health, the role of information dissemination was spread amongst the various management teams responsible for all aspects of health within Greentown. Moreover, key front-line staff were seemingly unaware of the handbooks existence:
'Oh, it's highly unlikely junior doctors at the local hospital A&E would have the faintest idea what the green book was'.

(Paediatrician)

The lack of agreed goals created a situation where agencies had started to work outside the confines of the Greentown ACPC's handbook, and to produce their own in-house guidelines, driven by organisational goals and priorities. It became apparent that education had produced their own handbook and this was distributed to schools. Furthermore, schools were employing the education handbook as the primary source of information. Many ACPC members were aware of this and expressed concerns that, as a result, the policy and practice of education were out of step with other agencies within the system.

The fact that this was happening in education was transmitted to the Chair during his interview. It drew this heated response:

*I think any deviation from the Green Book is dangerous. It is the signed up inter-agency thing. If people want to bastardise that in any way, they do it on their own head. There are some examples where there have been difficulties. The Green Book is set up for the importance of getting the protocols in place, across a lot of agencies. The trouble with Bibles is that they are overlong in word and limited in deed...I would be unhappy if agencies developed policy outside the Green Book. The ACPC would want to know it's happening. It would need to be looked at. The Green Book was updated last year, it's got inserts, you can put new instructions in as and when they arrive.*

However, even in this crucial area there was disagreement. The social service child protection officer first alerted the research to the fact that unilateral working was taking place. As noted, she placed much of the blame on the fact that the handbook
was outdated and, contrary to the Chair's assertions, had not been up-dated since its initial publication:

Well, we've got this little green handbook. That was ACPC driven and that happened and that's wonderful and that was brilliant. What the hell has happened to all the amendments that have been made I have no idea? This is the bit that really gets me going, because, people like myself wrote, ah, amended those procedures two years ago. It's gone, God knows where it's gone, there's not been one single amendment in that handbook since it was issued, two, three years ago. I think that says something. There has been plenty of work gone on, there has been an awful lot of work in amending that book, I know lots of people who've written lots of things and things have been amended, re-drawn, new procedures drafted, it would be interesting to know what happens to them.

Working outside of the ACPC in pursuit of individual organisation's goals was a sensitive issue. Most reports on system failures within the child protection arena cite breakdown of inter-agency communication as a causal factor and this was well known to many ACPC members. There would, therefore, be obvious implications for those agencies that engaged in unilateral working which was identified as a key determinant in any tragedy. Despite this risk, the following quotes illustrate that, at the time of the research, individual agencies were engaged in their own goal driven uni and bi-lateral working:

People have been saying at the end of meetings 'can we go away and talk about this and that?' Work happens outside the Committee, and that's frightening. Either we do it through the Committee or we don't. (Head of Purchasing, Health);

At the moment, I look at it as depositing information at the ACPC, distinct from taking problems there. There seems little point in doing that because we don't make
decisions; things can take forever to rumble around that committee. Often, what we need is action, how can you get that with three months between meetings? Normally, if we've got problems, we take the problem to which ever agency is involved and then we take the problem and the solution to the committee, and pass it off as a sort of fait accompli. Does that make sense? (Police officer).

What these comments illustrate is that, amongst the core agencies especially, the lack of an agreed, shared goal on the part of ACPC had lost it a great deal of credibility as a facilitator or co-ordinating body. The result was a growth in, and openness about, joint working taking place informally and outside the ACPC. What was happening in Greentown appears to be agencies and their representatives were aware of the need for a co-ordinated approach, but, when it became apparent that the ACPC either could not, or would not aid the achievement of organisational goals, agencies were resorting to unilateral or bilateral arrangements to achieve their respective ends.

Domain consensus

Linked to the above point is the issue of domain consensus. Here, organisations strive to 'claim' territories or areas of expertise as their own, thus creating the potential for conflict especially where two or more organisations have overlaps in expertise. The establishment of a hierarchy by organisations in partnership forums often sets the seal on issues of domain consensus. This is based, initially at least, with reference to an organisation's historical association with a particular social problem and reflects the previously mentioned functional principle in British social welfare. In many respects, this reflects the findings outlined above in Chapters Two and Eight, where social services were identified as the lead agency in child protection. However, there are two interesting points to note. Firstly, Hudson (1987: 178) claims that domain consensus is not fixed and can be removed or added as circumstances change. Secondly, historical association relates to service provided and does not reflect the
changing nature of the public sector in respect of managerialist changes. Thus, there emerged scope to question if the competing discourse of partnership and managerialism had created alterations in the domain consensus of Greentown ACPC.

Looking at the fluidity of claims to domain consensus first, it became evident that education's status as a key player within Greentown's system was under threat as a result of managerialist changes:

*Take us here at education as an example. We're not stupid; both myself and [names school's representative] are aware that there's a lot of bad feeling about the fact that we don't seem to be contributing to the ACPC any more. That's fair enough actually: we don't to be honest. But what everyone else seems not to understand is that we can't do it in the way we used to. I used to come to ACPC as LEA rep. and that gave me the authority to speak for every school in the area. I simply can't do that. We can't send teachers on joint training courses any more because each school is responsible to fund cover and they choose to spend their own budgets on what they see as more pressing needs. The upshot is that we appear to be losing interest.*

(LEA representative)

*Education are in grave danger of being marginalised at ACPC level. I understand their problems because, frankly, it's part of my job as chair to understand. Many of my colleagues at ACPC don't realise that poor attendance, lack of support for joint training and so on is a direct result of changes beyond the control of the people we see from education at committee meetings. Personally, I think the two education people
are some of the most committed, but they are in danger of losing support and respect for reasons beyond their control.

(Chair)

Education? To be fair they're a bit of a waste of time. As I see it they have no interest, no opinions and no way of funding any projects. If I were to be cruel they're freeloaders really.

(Adult mental health)

What also emerged is the fact that ACPC members felt able to criticise education's performance publicly at meetings seemingly not worried by any conflict such comments could cause. This is interesting and demonstrates that power in the shape of the ability to retain and protect domains becomes important in conflict avoidance. Perhaps the best example of this is to contrast the comments about education with this comment regarding the police made by the Health Purchaser:

You can appear critical of others, and that's quite sensitive when you're working with people outside your own agency. I mean, we've identified a flaw with the police's work at ACPC a couple of times in the past, but, realistically, could you see the ACPC going to the Chief Constable and saying, 'excuse me but you're doing this or that wrong?'

However, claims over domains were not restricted to inter-agency disputes. The move into managerialised units within formerly holistic agencies created conditions conducive to intra-agency disputes. This has already been covered above in chapter four. There, it was noted within the highly fragmented health group, the vice-chair of
Greentown ACPC was making claims to be the child protection 'expert' for health as a whole, often to the chagrin of her colleagues in the other health units.

Moving to the second point, it is possible to suggest that the move into managerialism and its associated ideology was beginning to disturb the nature of the hierarchy of professions. As noted above, traditionally this hierarchy has been based on service provision, mirroring the functional principle enshrined in British social administration and reviewed in Chapter Four. However, part of the rationale behind the move into managerialism was to disrupt the status quo created by the old bureau-professional structures, which by extension must include the tendency toward constructing hierarchies based on functional principles.

Evidence of this began to emerge during the research and revolved around the issue of who was the lead agency and more specifically whether 'lead agency' should be conceived of in terms of the bureau-professional inspired service provision perspective or the managerialist inspired funding perspective:

*Recently I've been chairing an audit group that's been looking at the way in which the description, 'emotional abuse' is actually used in the case notes of case conferences. We produced recommendations out of that. Now I'm not sure what's going to happen in terms of changing practice. Talking to the trainers, we talked to practice supervisors, it might result in something, some change. Really, though, social services lack funds and now we have a situation which changes the relationship and the actual power bases in the agencies. The purchasers in health don't always come to the meetings for instance, so, you know, if the purchasers in*
health that are responsible for buying and deciding on purchasing resources on behalf of the community, if they're not there well...

(NSPCC)

Here, it is worth recalling the thoughts of some of the health group on the growing importance of funding:

'If you think about it, she's got enormous clout, because she [Head of Purchasing, Health] controls what health spend'.

(Head of Community Child Health Services)

...health purchasers, thanks to me, for no other reason that I control the money within the group which gives me influence within health and other areas related to health spending, including the ACPC.

(Head of Purchasing, Health)

Network awareness

Hudson's (1987: 178) third variable is network awareness. He claims that in order for partnerships to be successful it is a pre-requisite that agencies have an awareness of each other, each other's goals and each other's problems and the greater the understanding, the stronger the partnerships will be. Equally, the reverse is true, with partnerships that exhibit a lack of network awareness often foundering. As the following section will demonstrate, Greentown ACPC represented the latter model.
For the outset it was clear that very few members of the ACPC were fully aware of every aspect of the committee. However, the depth of understanding, or to use the work of Nocom (1989) the level of ignorance, demonstrated by some members was little short of breathtaking. For example the City Housing representative admitted that:

*I suspect there are a variety of levels of understanding as to what the others do. I suspect some of my colleagues on the committee have very little understanding because of the nature of their jobs. Others have a lot of understanding. For example somebody like [Child Protection Officer] I mean, that's what their job is about. They're doing it everyday and the whole of their remit is about this job. They would be very knowledgeable...I've got a reasonably good handle on it, because of my past experience and because of the involvement of housing in child protection. I suspect there are some people there who turn up briefly and don't really get involved in all the bits. Some people would go away and that would be it till the next meeting. For some of us we have tasks in between that have nothing to do with child protection. So, our main work has to be done...yes, I couldn't describe everybody like that, but some people, yes.*

The Community Child Health representative made this salient point:

*We all come from different backgrounds. For a start, I don't know what housing do. I have this common sense sort of idea what the police do: they arrest bad people. I think we all only have common sense, highly generalised pictures of what we all do. Even within health where I work I only have a vague notion of what [Head of Purchasing] does. I'm not sure where to go if I had a problem which fell between the obvious boundaries of an organisation, and that comes back to not knowing exactly what we do when we aren't on the committee.*
More worryingly, the Youth Enquiry Service representative commented that:

*It was only recently that I realised that there was anyone else from the voluntary sector on the thing. I didn't realise that [names NSPCC representative] worked for them. In fact, I suppose it would help if I did find out who was who.*

This person had been attending for just over a year (five meetings) and for a significant percentage of that time was completely unaware of the presence of the NSPCC despite the fact that NSPCC deliver the at-risk register's statistics at each meeting. This lack of basic knowledge extended beyond the ACPC and into the agencies themselves. Time and again representatives expressed confusion as to what agencies did and the manner in which they were structured. The following are a selection of many similar quotes:

*Health seems so fragmented...the purchaser provider split...It's hard to know which bit of Health you're talking to.*

(Police Inspector)

*I've tried really hard, you know, to keep up with what's happening in health, education, this unitary authority stuff. It's so difficult, you've got purchaser provider splits, devolved budgets, staff changes, bits of information about this and that, but no one really knows. If, for example me and [Child Protection Officer, Social Services] could spend a bit of time together and find out what we really did, it would clear up all that confusion. Maybe we ought to have an induction package where we could read profiles of the others and a bit about what they do.*

(Probation representative)

*The point is, I don't think all of the rest of the committee understand what goes on in education. Oh sure, they're all informed people, most of them have kids, they realise*
that we have parent governors and such like. What they don't seem to have grasped is the full implications of the changes in education. They just don't know how we work these days.

(Teacher's representative)

Whilst these issues relate to general awareness, more concrete examples of a lack of awareness which affected the working of the committee became apparent, especially surrounding the issue of client confidentiality. This emerged following a routine report which was circulated to the ACPC concerning an alleged breach of client confidentiality by a social worker. This revolved around a GP's diagnosis of a father and daughter. The daughter was eleven years old and had been diagnosed as suffering from the same sexually transmitted disease as the father. This was made known to the social worker by the GP on the basis of a strict need-to-know arrangement. During the course of a case conference the social worker made this fact public knowledge, against the wishes of the GP.

Some agencies, notably the health cadre, seemed determined to make a point about the different approaches to confidentiality and how their approach was somehow 'better'. Health achieved this by drawing attention to the delicate balance that faces GPs involved with inter-familial abuse, where the perpetrator and the victim are both patients and the fact that social workers seem unable to comprehend the medical definition of client confidentiality. So, for the Adult Mental Health Representative:

*It's a niggle for me. It's a different environment because confidentiality is different in different agencies. What is normal for one professional to divulge, another may feel bound to keep secret.*

It would appear that many members were unsure of where they were expected to stand on this point: were they to abide to the definition of confidentiality as their own
agency saw it, or were they to abide by some holistic ACPC definition? This confusion was further compounded because despite being a concern, it was not openly discussed at ACPC meetings. So, for the City Housing representative the issue of client confidentiality became problematic and led to a potential breakdown of communication within his agency:

*We had that report that was an investigation that was very confidential. Since then I haven't actually established in my own mind the confidentiality of some of the things that are said at the committee meetings, or in the stuff we get from it, when discussing items informally, or even with our day-to-day stuff here. I haven't actually asked the meeting's views about what we do in these cases so I've stopped distributing information. I don't know, maybe everyone else has stopped as well.*

From this, it emerged that communication, vital in establishing and maintaining network awareness was problematic to almost all the agencies on the ACPC. Overall, many members thought that lines of communication could be improved at each and every level of Greentown's child protection system. The following exchanges give an indication of the extent of concern around the issue of communication between the different layers involved in Greentown's child protection system:

*(Question). It has been suggested by one or two members that communication is not particularly good?*

*I couldn't give you anything that would change that view.* (City Housing),

And for the Child Protection Officer:

*(Question). ...and the communication between...*
Similarly:

(Question). What about the communication processes?

*There is no communication...it just ain't there.* (NSPCC)

However, whilst widespread and held with some degree of conviction, such views were not universal. Some respondents, notably the Police and the Navy, exhibited great faith in the channels of communication, especially their own intra-agency procedures. This is only to be expected given the military background of both organisations. Others, however, expressed the opinion that communication had always been problematic and would most likely remain so. As the Social Services District Manager noted:

*I suppose in a way I've got used to it...I know there is a big lack of understanding...there is a gap, I don't know how to make it work better, because it really is all about communication. Communication is one of the most difficult things to get right anywhere.*

At this point it is perhaps useful to turn to the data which was obtained from the front-line staff of the four major statutory agencies. The idea here was to ascertain whether the ACPC was communicating down to front-line level and thus had an effect on the day to day work of child protection workers. The results were illuminating. There is a word of warning attached to these data. This was an extremely small-scale survey and the respondents were selected on the basis of availability and little else. It would be remiss to claim any generalisability about these data.
Workers in Social Services were able to give a sketchy outline of the duties of the ACPC. However, they were only able to suggest three other agencies which may sit on the ACPC and failed to name the Social Service representatives, or any one else from any agency that sat on the ACPC. Workers from the Police child protection team were vaguely aware of the existence of ACPC, although they had no comprehension of the role the ACPC played in shaping their day-to-day work patterns, they could however name both officers sitting on the committee, but not any other representatives. Classroom teachers had no knowledge at all of the ACPC, neither were they able to name the LEA representative, the teachers representative or their own designated member of staff. Similarly, nurses working in a paediatric ward knew of the existence of the local guidelines, but were unaware of the role(s) of the ACPC, its composition, or the names of any representatives.

Organisational exchange

This relates to the nature of exchange between organisations, but especially where exchange is one sided and one side clearly gains at the expense of others. According to Hudson (1987: 178) these types of exchanges are often avoided because it exposes power differentials and can upset delicate balances in the domain consensus area. Further, if it becomes apparent that one party is powerless in relation to others the domination inherent in such a relationship becomes formalised and established, thus reducing the status of the powerless organisation.

Much of this can be related to the discussion above surrounding the issue of ‘lead agency’. At the ACPC the health group were by far the richest in terms of being able to fund new projects and resource existing work. Other agencies were either unwilling, as in the case of the police, or unable, as in the case of the smaller voluntary sector agencies and education, to find the necessary resources to fund collaborative projects. Moreover, as noted in the preceding sections, many of those
smaller agencies were sufficiently devoid of financial resources as to be unable to adequately participate in mundane ACPC projects such as joint training and participation in sub-group activities.

Thus, the growing tension over the degree of reciprocity in terms of exchange between organisations mirrors and reinforces the struggles over domain consensus and the title of 'lead agency'. Clearly, there was something of a core/periphery dichotomy within the ACPC. Many of the smaller, newly co-opted agencies and some of the purchaser/provider units from within health and education had little to give and were demonstrably subservient to the dominant parties which were health and social services. Equally, this notion of exchange and domination was visible intra-agency, especially in health where all the provider units were in a subservient position to the dominant-purchasing group. This latent struggle concerning the source of resourcing the ACPC provoked some interesting comments:

*Quite simply, the ACPC is hampered because it doesn't have its own resources. I think that it would be much better if all the major players put some money into it... The study for [name of a project] demonstrated that it was a useful and valuable thing to do but it took ages to get the pennies. And that is what it is about. It's about the budget in the end...It's only when everybody is actually putting money into it that you can get total commitment to it and total involvement in it.*

(Chair Greentown ACPC)

**Alternative resource sources**

Linked to the above independent variable is the issue of alternative resource sources. Here, agencies that have access to alternative resources are less likely to take part in partnerships, or in the case of mandated joint working become reluctant participants. This has a clear resonance with some of the points detailed above: because of the
breakdown of the ACPC's capacity to facilitate and co-ordinate joint working agencies and their representatives were searching for, and forming, alternative resource networks. Moreover, if resources is taken beyond finance and broadened to include information, there was evidence that actors and agencies were becoming guarded about when, where and with whom such scarce resources were shared. This had the effect of compounding a potentially damaging scenario.

Looking first at alternative resources sources, it has already been established that many agencies were conducting uni- or bi-lateral working outside of ACPC. Beyond this, others were claiming access to a number of alternative sources. For example, both the NCH and NSPCC representatives claimed direct access to information held at County level:

...I effectively by-pass the ACPC's information providing role. You see, I've got a direct line to the county through my boss. I don't need [names chair] to tell me what's going on above and beyond Greentown. Sometimes it's funny because I'm sure he knows that I know and if he's, well, if he's a bit economical with the truth shall we say, he often gives me a sort of knowing look.

(NSPCC representative)

Equally, representatives often expressed an opinion that withholding information from the committee was an accepted part of the ACPC 'partnership':

I see it as need to know really. We [at ACPC level] don't have an agreement on procedure and process that all the world can understand, so therefore I don't really feel obliged to impart everything we do to the world and its mother. Our unit's policy is that if it's a big issue that we feel needs to be shared then we'll raise an agenda item and share it. If not, then we'll find another way of dealing with it.

(Adult mental health)
This lack of readiness to share information as a resource was not confined to inter-agency situations. ACPC members in key organisations admitted to being selective with information sharing intra-agency. In the words of the NCH representative:

*There isn’t a formal arrangement whereby all the minutes get passed to everyone. Here, at NCH, it’s a selective process. We haven’t actually talked as a group about what we do with ACPC information...you know, how we share the information. I tend to look at what we’ve done then select the staff who I think are most appropriate.*

It is interesting to note that at least two members, the Teacher’s representative and the Child and Community Health person, called for some form of newsletter or bulletin to be published by the ACPC which could be circulated, not only to members of the committee, but to all front-line staff as well. This proposal elicited this response from the Chair:

*This brings us into the relationships between ACPC and practice, doesn’t it? One of the key elements of that linking is the child protection contracts and planning officers. Their roles are very much as controllers, as auditors of individual case's work in terms of chairing meetings. They are an integral part to the communication chain, and holding to account chain really. They will tell me if there is an individual case problem. Equally they will feed into the ACPC and do work on behalf of. Whether the ACPC should have a relationship with the 170 Social Workers who are in Greentown I think is a naive question. They simply do not need to know what goes on at this level as most of it isn’t relevant. No, that’s wrong, it is relevant, it might not be of direct interest. Similarly, its wrong to assume that we have to know of every case they are involved with.*
This is a key passage in the research findings and one that casts light on the support for, and influence of, partnership working in the Greentown ACPC. It is quite clear that the Chair is demonstrating strong territoriality at this point, as well as showing his belief in a 'top-down' managerialist approach and discounting a possible future for 'bottom-up' communication and influence at ACPC level. He makes it quite clear that what occurs within the key child protection agency, social services, is their concern, and their concern alone. Further, it is quite explicit that he believes that a partnership forum such as the ACPC cannot, and should not influence day-to-day practice. In many respects, this quote vindicates the contention that the ACPC and its constituent parts had embraced the managerialist ethos.

What this attitude also creates is conditions and working environments where there is minimal resource sharing. In turn, and supported by the above quotes, agencies had to cultivate alternative resource networks, thus further eroding the power and influence of the ACPC.

Summary

This chapter has sought to explore Greentown’s ACPC at an organisational level and to establish how the participating organisations worked together. Hudson's (1987) framework of analysis provided a number of lenses through which to gauge events. Before summarising, it is important to reiterate the context in which these organisations were working; namely a rapid rise in size and composition of the committee leading to a situation where the majority of those attending meetings and participating within the forum were new additions. The overall effect was to create a sense of confusion for new and established members over a number of key procedural arrangements. Moreover, the ACPC itself suffered from contextual changes in respect of its ability to control and co-ordinate an expanding group.
This chapter has concentrated on the organisational aspects of the ACPC with particular reference to the extent to which the participating agencies were able to fulfil a number of set criteria. The degree to which the agencies of Greentown’s ACPC were able or willing to fulfil these criteria partly determines the whereabouts of Greentown ACPC on the continuum of co-operation outlined above in chapter three. The results indicate that in organisational terms, there were a number of problems, inter-agency and intra-agency, as a result of the changing context and environment. The key problems that emerged were:

(a) A growing number of diffuse and heterogenic agencies were expected to work together without a tangible, end-driven ‘corporate goal’ for the ACPC beyond the banner goal of ‘child protection’. This resulted in the participating agencies attempting to maximise their own organisational goals, often subverting or ignoring frameworks devised to aid organisational homogeneity.

(b) There were problems in relation to the establishment and maintenance of domain consensus. This revolved around two issues. Firstly, intra-organisational changes that resulted in the fragmentation of agencies into managerialised purchaser/provider units removed the capacity of some agencies, particularly education, to maintain their former claims to an area of domain consensus. Equally, the same intra-organisational changes meant that there were areas of tension between the parts of fragmented agencies over which managerialised unit was best placed to (re-) claim domain consensus.

(c) The growth of the ACPC and the fragmented nature of many of its participants meant that the degree of network awareness between and across the constituent parts suffered, leading to a degree of confusion over roles, responsibilities and procedures.

(d) The dynamics of organisational exchange meant that power, and with it domination of the forum, was split between two powerful groups, health and social services. Moreover, corresponding with tensions over domain consensus,
the embracing of a managerialist ethos created a situation where the traditional conception of ‘lead agency’, based on the functional principle of service provided, was being questioned, with suggestions being made that ‘lead agency’ be conceived of in terms of ability to fund.

(e) Finally, frustrations over the lack of resources added to a tendency of agencies to be territorial over service provision areas and information created a situation where agencies were actively seeking and employing alternative resource sources.

The next chapter moves the discussion to consider Hudson’s (1987) final lens, that of collaborative linkages.
Chapter Ten

Greentown ACPC at work: collaborative linkages

The previous chapter established that in organisational terms the participating agencies of Greentown ACPC had a number of problems in ‘working together’, many of which stemmed from changes in the environment and context. This chapter takes as its focus the area Hudson (1987: 179) identifies as the collaborative linkage lens, which he claims examines the dimensions of interaction and exchange. This is taken to mean the practicalities and frameworks for partnership working. Specifically, this concentrates on the area where the diffuse organisations that participate in partnership forums ‘touch’ and the mechanisms through which they (attempt to) work together. In this respect, this final analytical lens provides scope for a micro level analysis of Greentown’s ACPC. Again, as in the previous two chapters the data is drawn from a variety of sources including minutes, observations and interview data.

Hudson sub-divides this lens into four independent variables, degree of formalisation, degree of intensity, degree of reciprocity and degree of standardisation. Each one will now be reviewed in turn.

Degree of formalisation

There are two main ways in which to assess the formalisation of collaborative activity: either through legislative sanction or the presence or absence of an intermediary or co-ordinating body. Both were clear in the case of Greentown’s
ACPC. The nature of the first, the legal requirement for agencies to take part in child protection, was not an issue in the research and none of the respondents referred to it. It is the second area, the role of the co-ordinating body which is of interest.

Hudson (1987) claims that in many situations the role of the co-ordinating body becomes problematic due to the high level of independence and/or conflict between participating agencies. He proceeds to suggest that the co-ordinating body must 'induce' closer co-operation via the use of resources controlled by the co-ordinating body, but desired by the participating agencies. However, as previously noted, the ACPC had no resources of its own and was reliant upon the goodwill of participating agencies to fund any projects. As a result achieving or facilitating co-ordination was problematic for the ACPC.

In turn, the credibility of Greentown's ACPC suffered. The term 'talking shop' was often employed by members to characterise their general impression of how the ACPC operated and the term represents a substantive and recurring description for the work of Greentown's ACPC. The general impression was that whilst some members felt that the ACPC had contributed in bringing agencies closer together, the majority agreed that it had failed to make a substantial impact in that remit, and therefore could be seen as ineffectual. Somewhat surprisingly, it appeared that many of those interviewed had never thought of the ACPC as a vehicle which could make a difference in bringing participating agencies closer. It needs to be made clear that those who expressed a positive opinion concerning the ACPC as a co-ordinating body were unable to give a specific, concrete examples of this in action. Perhaps the general impression is best summarised by this quote from one of the health group:
The ACPC? It’s not seen as a significant forum, more a pleasant way to spend a morning out of the office once in a while.

Degree of intensity

Here, Hudson (1987) is referring to the amount of investment organisations have with each other. Drawing on the work of Aldrich (1979) it is possible to identify two measures of intensity; amount of resources invested, and the frequency of the interaction. In both instances, Hudson claims that unless the success of a venture has be proven organisations will increasingly opt for less intense relationships. Again, this tendency was clear in Greentown’s case.

In terms of investment of resources many participants were unable or unwilling to invest financial resources. For those agencies which can be broadly defined as social care agencies - health, social services, NCH Action for Children and the NSPCC - this stemmed from the splitting of service into purchaser and provider units. Some of the others, notably the police, army and navy, had the where with all to invest in programmes but were unwilling to do so. Some claimed lack of control over resources as a key determinant:

*I suppose we have some money to fund projects. The problem is that we have to be responsible for our own money. It’d be difficult for me to go to my seniors and say that we spent x amount of money but only had y to show for it because one of our partners spent money unwisely.*

(Navy representative)

*The police do have specialist units and, to a degree, we do work in conjunction with other agencies. However, we don’t fund projects as such. What we tend to do is to*
make sure that our work is up to speed. My priority as a manager is to ensure that the books add up and we retain control over what we do. Bringing other agencies in can be a recipe for problems of control and accountability.

(Police officer)

However, it would be remiss to view resources as simply finance. Time, in the shape of attending meetings or working on behalf of the ACPC, and information can be seen as possible resource investments. Again, the data confirms that members of Greentown ACPC were withdrawing both. Above, in Chapters Seven and Eight it was noted that many members of the committee were poor attendees and were seemingly reluctant to invest time in the ACPC. In turn, the vast majority of organisations appear to lack enough commitment or faith in the ACPC to invest resources beyond the minimum requirement.

Equally, not all members of the Greentown ACPC felt strongly about resourcing the committee. Significantly, those who did comment on the dwindling resource investment tended to be drawn from those agencies which had a direct, hands-on involvement with child protection, and were responsible for funding most of the work of the ACPC: namely health and social services. For the others, the issue of resourcing was either dismissed as being beyond the remit of their role on the committee, or thought of as a problem for the key agencies and not those smaller, less directly involved agencies on the periphery of the committee.

Looking next at the frequency of interaction between organisations it can be seen that for many, and again especially those on the periphery of the ACPC, there was little in the way of interaction. Some, as noted, were poor attendees and others saw the ACPC as:
Not really central to what I do. I’m not a child protection expert as such...I don’t go much and I certainly have little contact with the others on the committee.

(Army representative)

I’m not that involved in child protection. Well, being involved with young people it’s obviously a part of what we do and we need to be informed and perhaps consulted from time to time. If you like, we need to be in the loop so to speak. But it’s only a small part. Occasionally I get to meet other people who are on the committee, but it tends to be either [names NSPCC representative and child protection officer].

Much of this can be linked to the nature of the posts which many members of the ACPC occupied. Arguably, at managerial level (which, it will be recalled is a pre-requisite of ACPC membership) there is little call to interact with other professionals in the same way that front-line professionals dealing with the day-to-day consequences of child abuse do. Thus for many ACPC representatives from the key agencies they found that:

I’m removed from hands-on work now. I still see social workers but really I don’t get that much feedback. Likewise, I don’t get to see many people outside social services unless they have some sort of input into the planning and contracts side of what we do.

(Contracts and Planning, social services)

It became apparent that amongst the members of Greentown’s ACPC there were only three who were in regular contact. One, the child protection officer, was the key reticulist in the whole network and made it clear that she felt that part of her remit was to ensure that she kept in touch with as many representatives from the constituent parts of the ACPC as possible. Secondly, the NSPCC representative was in almost daily contact with the child protection officer and by virtue of that fact had some
knowledge of developments across the ‘system’. He was also in weekly contact with the third member of this particular triumvirate, the vice chair of Greentown ACPC. Those apart, there was very little in the way of regular or planned interaction beyond the three-monthly ACPC meetings.

**Degree of reciprocity**

This returns the focus on the notion of exchange between organisations. It is important to note that, as in many cases above, that the commodities being exchanged goes beyond finance. Resources means, amongst other things, information and prestige. Hudson (1987: 180) issues a word of warning that mandated relationships with their high level of formalisation often pose problems for reciprocity due to the pre-set arrangements and skewed balances of power and prestige.

Much of this can be seen to revolve around control of resources and the degree to which key sources of commodities are controlled and distributed. Above, it has been noted that financial resources were scarce and jealously guarded. It was also stated that information exchange was poor leading to low levels of network awareness. However, it emerged that the chair of Greentown’s ACPC was adept in controlling much of the key work of the committee. Moreover, if reciprocity is taken to mean some form of collective ownership of the partnership forum, then reciprocity over decision making and agenda setting, two key areas of the work of the ACPC, was not in evidence. Here it is possible to see examples of where prestige and status also became issues of reciprocity.

Turning the focus to the decision-making process of the ACPC, for many representatives the size of the Committee was seen as culpable for several of its obvious failings. It was certainly seen to be hampering the decision-making process. Several others intimated that they felt the ACPC itself was not an ideal forum to make
decisions. One of the arguments put forward in support of this view was that some members lack the necessary mandate to make key decisions on behalf of their agency. Thus allowing ACPC members to question the status and power of their fellows:

Some people can make decisions. Equally, there are people there who just go to take information back. I'm not certain the meeting is the best way...You see people there who have not even read the papers being presented.

(Head of Purchasing, Health)

This perspective was shared by the LEA representative who claimed that:

Often it's just a reporting committee, decisions aren't there...it becomes an attempt to get collective ownership. Equally, it's something that can be done within an individual agency. It's trying to work out what is collective and what is individual...It's a co-ordinating thing. It doesn't have decision making power over agencies that are represented...[goes on to talk about own role within education following the reorganisations] There are some people who have no power within their organisations...and very few have resources, some are part of a contracting structure. I think there is a fundamental mismatch.

Most people gave vague answers to this question, or claimed, rather surprisingly given its remit to control local policy, that the ACPC did not make decisions, as in this instance:

Are decisions made at ACPC? I don't think I've ever seen a decision made... I don't know what happens to things like investigations, I think they get dealt with by social services don't they?

(Child and Family Health Services)
Similarly, the Adult Mental Health representative replied to the question in this way:

That's a good one. With difficulty I think. It varies, it varies on what the issue is I think....I can't remember any conflict, generally it's agreement. What happens in the majority of cases is the chair says does everybody agree and we all say yes, or he looks at the clock and moves us to the next agenda item...Is that heresy? I'm saying it [Greentown ACPC] avoids carrying the can for making decisions.

It quickly became obvious that, for some, there was a perceived lack of decision making which led to a series of supplementary questions which attempted to find out why this was the case. However, it must also be noted that given the structure and content of the ACPC meetings, there was often very little to make decisions about. Subsequent supplementary questions produced the following quotes:

Well, they do it as a sort of vote. But it seems to me that it's easier to say yes than dissent I think. Maybe that's not the best way. Nobody want to be the one to say the emperors got no clothes on...you can see people thinking I don't think this is a good idea, but they don't say it out loud.

(Probation)

I would say, probably, we're not good at making decisions. I don't see it as being done on purpose. I would be surprised if it was. It is probably non-decision making just through neglect, rather than purposeful.

(Planning and Contracts Manager, Social Services).

Some people linked the decision (or non-decision) making process to the location of power within the ACPC. It has already been established in Chapter Seven that the members of Greentown's ACPC viewed social services as the lead agency. It was suggested that, because of the location of power, the ACPC meetings, and the
decisions taken, became little short of a rubber stamping exercise for social services. In the words of the Vice-Chair:

*My guess is that sometimes, like a lot of groups with a diversity of interests, the wishes of certain groups is presented in such a way as to ensure rubber stamping...So, I don't know whether that's an example of decision making, it's certainly an example of non-decision making. It goes back to the feeling that ACPC, well its about keeping bridges built, but the actual changing of the world side of it is not happening because it's all about what one agency wants, and not what's best for the rest of us.*

Clearly, there were issues here about the level of control exercised over the committee by one agency, and in effect, one powerful individual. Many saw the chair’s style as autocratic and concerned with retaining control over the ACPC, which raise issues around the degree of reciprocity. Equally, discussions with ACPC members over the agenda setting process for the committee demonstrated a lack of knowledge amongst many members, but also a degree of control and retention of ownership by social services.

The issue of agenda setting proved to be an important aspect of the research. Indeed, one of the interview questions was "How is the agenda set?". There were a variety of answers to this fundamental aspect of the ACPC's work. The majority of respondents commented that they were invited by the chair to submit items for the agenda. In that respect, the agenda of the ACPC, and its core concerns, originated from within the committee, being set by the members themselves. However, there are two points of note. Firstly, the navy representative was under the impression that:
Well, the agenda's set by things that happen, like, oh, bits of publications, national issues that sort of thing

Which can be compared to this quote from the paediatrician who was under the impression that:

*The chair or social services set the agenda I presume*

These were not the only example of this form of lack of awareness amongst the representatives. The result being that those representatives who did not understand how the agenda was set were effectively removed from raising potentially important issues at ACPC level and undermined the concept of reciprocity. The second point was raised in interviews with the NSPCC representative, the psychiatrist from adult mental health and the NCH representative. All three felt that the chair of the ACPC manipulated the agenda setting process. The NSPCC representative noted that:

*Yes, it's true, the Chair's secretary contacts us for items to be put on the agenda. But, the request for items sometimes comes around incredibly late which generates a culture where you realise you are not encouraged to put items on it*

The psychiatrist told me that:

*there is a predictability about the agenda, someone of a more cynical persuasion could think it was a rubber stamping exercise for social services.*

The NCH member was aware that the agenda was supposed to be set by members. However, it is the rider she added to this statement which is enlightening:
we're supposed to set the agenda. In theory we should get a letter prior to the meeting reminding us, although I don't recall getting one for some time.

In theory the minutes were sent from the Chair's office three weeks prior to the meeting. Included with the minutes of the past meeting were the forthcoming agenda and any papers which had been produced relevant to the approaching meeting. This was done in order that those planning to attend had time to read and digest the information. The reality was somewhat different: the research team was included on the mailing list during the research and yet minutes were only sent three times from a possible seven. It was common to see hasty photocopies of agendas and minutes being made prior to the meeting convening.

The second issue, relating to the agenda was that of 'lost' items. As noted above in Chapters Seven and Eight, the minutes of the past twelve meetings show that there was a lack of follow up of items which had been on the agenda and had been minuted as needing further action or discussion. In essence, agenda items disappeared. This situation proved to be an issue for some of those interviewed, raising issues of reciprocity, prestige and status. For example, the District Manager from social services claimed that:

Actually, I don't think our department is particularly good at minuting things where action is brought forward. I know things have got lost from the agenda. We don't have a bring forward sort of thing at ACPC...Some people feel that things get talked about once and then that's it

She was not alone in making this sort of assertion. It would appear that the majority of agenda items which required further discussion by the ACPC had, in reality, been falling by the wayside for the past three years. Many people suggested that this
occurred because the ACPC failed to allocate responsibility to ensure agenda items were followed up. One of the Police officers made this related point:

That goes back to all chat and no do. Everybody sits around and acts as nodders...Unless you specify tasks to people, things will get lost, unless you pursue agendas by making sure, whatever the minute is, that you identify responsibility and ensure that those designated with the task report back to the committee.

Thus, some respondents transferred responsibility back to the ACPC and its chair. However, other ACPC members stressed that this approach was unreasonable and the locus of responsibility in cases where individual members believe items to be 'lost' ultimately rests with those individuals who expressed this concern. As the Teachers' representative succinctly pointed out:

If people feel things get lost, why don't they raise the issue with the rest of us or the chair? To answer my own question it's because some of those on the committee haven't got either the ability to chase things up or the confidence to do so, or [names member of ACPC] a combination of both.

Degree of standardisation

Here, Hudson (1987) is referring to two separate areas of concern. Firstly, in referring to unit standardisation he remarks that the more consistent and certain the nature of exchanges of resources between participating agencies become the stronger the level of joint working becomes. Concomitantly, the reverse is true. Secondly, Hudson notes that the more formalised and standardised transactions become the stronger the partnership, with again the reverse being true. Essentially, what is being suggested is that the closer agencies are to working together the smoother and more routine exchanges become.
The research unearthed little evidence that this was the case for Greentown’s ACPC. The previous three chapter all catalogue a series of events which impaired the ability of the ACPC to ensure that there was a minimum amount of standardisation, consistency or formalisation of working. In many instances members of the ACPC had such a limited view of both their roles and the role of the ACPC that standardisation was virtually impossible. Furthermore, this lack of clarity of purpose was compounded by the changing nature of the participating agencies, many of whom had to come to terms with fundamental revisions in their own working practices and spheres of influence.

Finally, the lack of purpose for the ACPC created a situation where the only regular and tangible exchange was the four meetings per year. Yet, as the previous section demonstrated there was a degree of ambiguity about this exchange. Members were clearly unsure as to their role in agenda setting as well as their capability to influence decisions.

Summary

Given the information supplied in the previous chapters it should come as no surprise that Greentown ACPC had major problems in the micro field of collaborative linkages. Many of these issues are related to problems in the other two areas, context and environment and comparative properties. Taken together, all three helped to create a situation where the partnership forum in Greentown’s child protection system
was in a state of turmoil and flux. It is possible to now summarise the combined
effect of all three lenses on the ACPC.

(a) The changes in the environment and context created a situation where there were
key changes in the nature and structure of all the participating agencies of Greentown
ACPC. As a result, because of factors outside of the control and sphere of influence
of the ACPC, the ACPC grew at an almost uncontrollable rate. In turn, this had the
effect of undermining and de-stabilising the existing control and procedural structures
of the ACPC leading to conditions of drift and uncertainty.

(b) These changes had a knock on effect in terms of comparative properties. Inter-
and intra-agency changes created situations where there were significant difficulties in
ensuring some form of collaboration between the participating agencies. Growth in
the committee ensured that vital areas such as network awareness and agreement over
domain consensus became contentious issues causing some degree of conflict. More
worryingly, factors which had consistently been seen as determinants in child
protection tragedies elsewhere, notably uni-and bi-lateral working outside of
formalised child protection arenas, had become more frequent and overt.

(c) In turn, the problems created by the previous two lenses undermined the ability of
the ACPC to formalise and standardise its collaborative linkages. Significantly, there
was very little evidence of exchange reciprocity. What was more evident was a large
degree of territoriality and retention of key resources, primarily finance, but also
important areas such as information sharing and control over the decision making
process. Equally, the fragmented nature of the ACPC and its constituent parts added
to the lack of tangible objectives beyond the banner goal of ‘child protection’ ensured that exchange and degrees of intensity of exchange remained at very low levels. Accordingly, the participating agencies had no tradition of regular contact upon which to base and nurture quality collaborative linkages.

This was the stage at which it was envisaged the research would cease, however, the reader is asked to refer to the epilogue chapter which provides details of an unexpected but illuminating end to the research project. For now, all that remains is to embark upon the concluding chapter of the thesis.
Chapter Eleven

Conclusions

This thesis has generated both data and theory. Moreover, because of the nature of the research there are a number of policy related issues which came to light and are in need of discussion. The methods chapter highlighted some concerns regarding the need to be mindful of the impact context has on research sites and research projects. With that in mind, the concluding chapter is constructed in the following manner: it begins with an overview of the research findings, followed by a discussion and analysis of the findings in relation to the overall aim of the thesis. Following this, the chapter will discuss the implications of the research for future policy developments. The chapter will conclude with some thoughts on methods and the overall validity of the theoretical implications of the research.

An overview of the research

The thesis began by presenting the reader with a (necessarily) brief history of the structural changes and accompanying developments of the child protection system of England and Wales. Specifically, this review began from what many see as the beginnings of the contemporary approach to this social problem, the death of Maria Colwell in 1973. The chapter identified two watershed events which have both had a significant bearing on subsequent policy developments. The first, as noted, was the death of Maria Colwell in 1973 and the second was the Cleveland enquiry of 1987 which gave rise to the Working Together documents.
Between them, these two events created conditions where significant structural changes impacted upon the shape of social provision in child protection. From the point of view of the theoretical direction of this work, the most significant contribution made by the Colwell era was the identification that 'good' child protection policy depended upon a number of autonomous agencies working together. Accordingly, the thrust of the changes post-1973 was the establishment of a framework and administrative system that would enable a diffuse group of social welfare agencies to work within a newly evolving system of mandated inter-agency working. The policy pivot of this new arrangement was to be a managerial level forum known as the Area Review Committee, which later became known as the Area Child Protection Committee. The second contribution, which originated from the post-Cleveland (1987) era, was the promotion of prevention instead of therapeutic intervention, but within this new paradigm joint working was retained as a means of policy delivery.

However, both periods of reform reflected the dominant organisational paradigm of their respective eras. The Colwell era's focus on inter-agency working was one of a number of attempts to merge the workings of the big 'super-ministries' (Butcher 1995). The Working Together era can be seen to reflect the current trend of seeking to concentrate on risk management and prevention of problems within a broader milieu of management. In sum, chapter one identified that partnership working is the cornerstone of the child protection system yet it has remained problematic, despite two major structural shifts within the system itself. The chapter concluded that there
are presently two identifiable discourses within the child protection system: 
partnership working and new public management.

The next chapter moved the debate toward the on-going problem of facilitating 
partnerships and concentrated upon a review of the contested nature of partnership 
working. Because of the growing centrality of ‘joined-up’ working there is a large 
body of literature exploring the problem. The chapter chose to ignore some of this 
and focus more closely on the problems of mandated partnerships. It also selected a 
model which was constructed specifically to examine partnership working within a 
British welfare setting, thus ensuring that one of the key theoretical foundations was 
highly relevant to the site of the empirical research.

The literature points to a consensus regarding how best to gauge the degree to which 
agencies are actually working together, with a number of authors (Halpert 1982; 
Crawford and Jones 1996) suggesting the use of a continuum as an heuristic device. 
Partnership working in different inter-agency forums will thus be at varying points 
along the continuum which will range from near merger at one pole to minimum 
contact at the other. Most of the literature also notes that due to a number of factors 
partnership working has always been problematic and these problems tend to be 
magnified in settings where working together is mandated.

Hudson's (1987) framework of analysis synthesises much of the literature and 
identified three problem areas for partnership working - environmental context, 
comparative properties and collaborative linkages. Broadly speaking, Hudson’s 
framework can be seen to encompass the macro, mezzo and micro areas of
organisational behaviour. Based on this, it was argued that changes in one or more of those three areas could cause partnerships forums to move along the line of the continuum depending on the positive or negative nature of the change.

Chapter Four explored the nature and extent of one such change in the child protection system, namely the move into new public management. Here, it was noted that all the agencies which comprise the system had experienced fundamental shifts in their standard operating procedures and day-to-day working arrangements. In turn, it was suggested that the fundamentals of managerialism, including core business, ownership, and audit had created an ideology leading, in turn, to the creation of a new orthodoxy in welfare agencies. Moreover, in order to achieve this agencies have become increasingly fragmented into managerial sized units, each lead by a manager who defends their own ‘right to manage’.

The result of these environmental and contextual changes have been to increase levels of competition, increase defence of areas of domain consensus, increase ownership of core tasks and resources and increase the need to be able to ‘prove’ that each unit is working in an economical and efficient manner. In the wake of this there has been a change in the landscape of welfare agencies and the need to re-evaluate and re-negotiate relationships both intra- and inter-agency.

Chapter Five moved to locate the two discourses prevalent within child protection inside the context of the empirical research, and to provide the main theoretical argument of the work. It commented that each of the two discourses had undoubted merits and that both were seen as vitally important in the management of social
problems. However, the chapter cautioned against the assumption that both could work unproblematically together and argued that there is an inherent tension between the needs of partnership working and the ideology and practice of new public management.

In order to cement this argument the chapter reviewed the four core principles of managerialism - ownership, core business, audit and ideology - in light of Hudson's (1987) framework of analysis, noting that with each there were areas where the needs of partnership working in terms of sharing and co-operation ran contrary to an ideology which preaches competition and protection of domains. Thus, the first five chapters established the core research question of why inter-agency working remained problematic and by way of a theoretical answer suggested that part of the problem lies with the inherent conflict between the two principal discourses of the welfare system.

Chapter Six explored the more practical concerns of data collection as well as justifying the methodological approach and offering some thoughts on the need for researchers to be more aware of the need to include a consideration of context in the research. In so doing it opened up a further theoretical consideration which revolved around the realist notion that the context within which a process takes place can act as an inhibitor or facilitator. This point will be explored in more detail below.

The next four chapters presented and explored the empirical data. Although many of the key points will be reviewed below, for now it is important to remind the reader of the key areas and provide a generalised overall impression. Essentially, the research showed that Greentown's ACPC had grown at an exponential rate and had expanded
in order to include the intra-organisational changes generated by the move into new public management. Concomitant with this was a reduction in the control exercised by the ACPC over its work and its members. This manifested itself in a number of ways including the gradual decline in some of the reporting back functions of the sub-groups of the committee.

Hudson’s (1987) framework was used as the organising structure for Chapters Eight, Nine and Ten. The research demonstrated that the context in which the ACPC operated had changed in a two or three year period leading up to the research. Not only had the committee grown to three times its previous size but also the key agencies had their own internal problems in dealing with the changes wrought by the onset of managerialism. Accordingly, the system and the participating agencies were undergoing significant change simultaneously. The net result of these changes in environment and context meant that the former stability and control mechanisms of the ACPC could no longer cope with the newly enlarged committee. However, whilst this was recognised and commented upon by the chair and other leading figures of the ACPC, the pressures of needing to incorporate newly fragmented managerialised units into the existing structures meant that growth continued.

The next chapter demonstrated that the changes in the environmental context had a knock-on effect on the comparative properties of the agencies. In detail, this is reflected in a number of ways. For example, there was a lack of an overall goal for the ACPC beyond the banner goal of some form of ill defined ‘child protection’. As a result, agencies operating in a managerial discourse sought to maximise their own agencies’ goals. In addition to this many ACPC members revealed that the idea that
the ACPC ought to have a goal, or 'had made a difference' to Greentown's child protection system had never occurred to them.

The chapter remarked that the contextual and environmental changes to Greentown's ACPC had created a situation whereby the committee operated in a sense of confusion relating to its own position and the internal organisation of its members. Equally, due to the newly established managerial imperative, there were tensions around the establishment and maintenance of domain consensus. Some agencies, notably education, were beginning to lose their claims on being 'expert' in certain areas. Others, such as the health-purchasing cadre, were beginning to flex the muscles provided to them by increased financial resources.

One other effect of the changes in context and environment was the inability members of the enlarged committee to exhibit little in the way of network awareness. This manifested itself in terms of both unawareness of roles and responsibilities and in very general terms such as not being aware of personnel and agencies represented. Finally, and again arguably as a result of new public management, agencies began to become increasing territorial in terms of resource allocation and service provision, seeking out alternative ways and forums to ensure their organisational goals were maximised.

The final results chapter concentrated upon what Hudson (1987) termed collaborative linkages, which essentially relates to the micro level of working. Somewhat unsurprisingly, the chapter identified that there were problems in this level of working, due, it was argued, to the cumulative effects of changes on the macro and
mezzo levels of work. The chapter reviewed the combined effect and suggested three inter-related factors, causing the ACPC to be in a state of flux and turmoil. These were:

- Environmental and contextual changes centring around the on-set of managerialism, altered the nature of the participating agencies of the ACPC, to the extent where the old control structures and certainties were unable to cope
- In turn, these changes affected the agencies and their ability to co-operate with each other in all but the most superficial manner.
- As a result, there were significant problems in arranging and cementing the ways in which organisations worked together.

Having summarised the findings of the research the next section offers some thoughts in relation to the principal aims of the research.

A discussion of the findings in relation to the overall aims of the thesis

Clearly, there can be little in the way of argument that partnership working in this particular location remained problematic. Indeed, it is possible to argue that, over a relatively short period of time, the research findings indicate that partnership working within the Greentown ACPC worsened. The key questions here are why partnership working remains problematic and has the on-set of new public management contributed to this situation?

Looking at the first part of the question, a number of points emerge. Firstly, it would appear that many of the long-standing issues surrounding partnership working still
remain. For example, the main analytical framework for this thesis was designed around the key existing literature and highlighted a number of recurring features which inhibit partnerships. Essentially, these revolve around issues incorporating power, resource sharing and erosion of organisational autonomy. The research demonstrated that these concerns were uppermost in the minds of many members of Greentown ACPC and made significant contributions to inhibiting partnerships.

In itself, this is unsurprising as many studies examining partnerships arrive at the same conclusions. Indeed, to merge Crawford and Jones' (1996) typology with Hudson's (1987) warning about mandated partnerships being intrinsically more difficult than voluntary unions, it would be unusual to find a mandated partnership which went much beyond multi-agency working. However, the research indicated that in this particular forum there had been a relatively recent deterioration in all aspects of partnership working.

Here, it is possible to draw upon some of the arguments discussed in the methodology chapter. Essentially, this chapter argued that if a realist research approach were adopted, a recognition would be made as to the importance of context. To re-cap, realists argue that the context in which events happen can and do, have an effect on whether the mechanism, or desired outcome, occurs. By extension, changes in context can work as either further facilitating or further inhibiting the successful firing of the desired mechanism.

With this in mind, the research endeavoured to unearth and identify any changes in the context in which the ACPC operated that may have impacted upon the
partnerships. The main change in context was identified as the on-set of new public management and the promotion of the new orthodoxy of ownership, core task and audit. Moreover, it was identified that in order to ensure that managerialism was successfully implemented, agencies were fragmented into managerialised units, causing changes in relationships, both intra- and inter-agency.

In practical terms, one of the unintended outcomes of this move was to cause the ACPC to grow at a rate beyond its capacity to cope. As a result, as discussed above, the ability of the ACPC to facilitate 'good' partnership working diminished, making it possible to argue, tentatively, that new public management had at least some impact on inhibiting partnership relations in this instance. However, it is important to inject a note of caution here. These problems occurred because at this time key personnel across all the participating agencies were being asked to cope with major changes. Firstly, key workers had to come to terms with the on-set of new public management within their host organisations. Secondly, in terms of partnerships, members of the ACPC were being asked to come to terms with managerialist changes in other agencies, and the concomitant impact on partnership working.

Thus, at the time of the research, managerialism had become a contextual and environmental issue leading to a decline in agencies' ability to work together. The argument here is that the problem emerged because of the newness and depth of the changes. It is possible that future researchers into this phenomenon will not encounter the same degree of uncertainty due to the fact that key personnel will be more fully attuned to the subtleties and nuances of managerialist inspired changes both inter- and intra-agency.
Nevertheless, the problem for partnership working remains that the central tenets of new public management run counter to the co-operative culture needed to enable agencies to forge partnerships which can transcend the long established obstructions to joined-up working. Given this, and given the importance both discourses have in policy circles, there are clear implications for the policy community inherent in this research. Some of these will now be discussed.

**The implications for policy inherent within the research**

It appears unlikely that either the commitment to partnership working or the influence of NPM will wane in the near future, making it imperative for policy makers to be aware that the tensions between these two discourses may, in certain circumstances, undermine the positive aspects of the respective approaches. For example, fragmenting agencies into managerial sized units may facilitate their ability to work in an efficient and economic manner, but, as this research demonstrated, too many of these units operating in a partnership setting undermines the ability of the partnership forum to co-ordinate, plan or monitor policy developments.

Arguably, part of the problem stems from the fact that it is a requisite for an unspecified number of diverse agencies to be included within the child protection system. As a result, and especially at managerial levels, involvement in child protection for many of the agencies co-opted onto Greentown ACPC tended to be conceived of in terms of a general commitment to the banner goal of ‘child protection’, but little concrete beyond that. In Chapter Nine, it was claimed that there
is a need to consider the point of setting up strategic bodies such as the ACPC and then staffing them with agencies which no longer have strategic concerns or influences. As the epilogue will demonstrate, this was the conclusion Greentown ACPC arrived at.

The problem which remains is one that (as Chapter Two outlined) has bedevilled policy makers in child protection for a number of years: namely excluding any agency from a policy area like child protection where any number of agencies have at least some potential input, risks creating a situation where the omitted agency could prove to be the vital point of contact or intervention, and, in the worse case scenario leads to the death or serious abuse of a child.

Paradoxically, managerial changes, designed to rationalise and streamline provision, have created a situation for policy makers which has increased the number of players in the system and made inter- and intra agency communication more difficult and complex. Equally, the traditional willingness of agencies to provide resources for child protection work, noted above with reference to the work of Murphy (1995), may be under threat due to the need for managerialised units to audit and monitor their work and concentrate upon key goals.

Perhaps what policy makers need to realise is that the tensions between the two discourses need not necessarily be negative. With a re-configuration of approach, policy could utilise the positive aspects of each discourse to overcome the inherent tensions and produce a more co-ordinated, fully ‘joined-up’ approach to child protection. Thus, future policy directions could include an identification of each
agency's core child protection task, which could be formalised via contractual and
calculative accountability to a co-ordinating body such as the ACPC. In this way, the
managerial imperative of ownership, audit and identification of core task could be
included, and putting this on a contractual basis satisfies the managerialist ideology.

Peripheral agencies could be retained within the system but not at strategic level.
Policy makers need to be aware that in this situation information sharing and
communication, noted above as being viewed as a valuable resource to be protected,
would need to become of paramount importance. Equally, peripheral agencies would
need to be able to communicate up to the strategic body as well as receive information
down.

The key task for policy makers thus becomes a recognition that managerialism is not a
panacea, and its introduction can and does worsen some situations. The challenge for
the future is to find a way whereby the undoubted positives of the new public
management discourse can be employed to overcome existing long term problems
such as facilitating partnerships in welfare delivery.

The final part of this chapter, and of the thesis, is to offer some thoughts on the
problems encountered in the research process and, with the benefit of hindsight,
discuss some alternatives and some ideas for further research into this fascinating area
of service provision.
Problems, alternatives and further research

This final part of the thesis, written with the benefit of hindsight, offers some reflexive thoughts on the work, as well as suggesting areas which need further exploration.

There is greater scope to explore the linkages between the constituent parts of the ACPC, especially the impact the local policy making body has upon day-to-day practice. Greater depth here would enable researchers to gauge many of the issues which have emerged during the research. For example, the issue of network awareness is clearly one which needs to be addressed. It is axiomatic that high levels of ignorance between and across agencies creates areas where, as one respondent put it, child protection workers would 'have no idea where to go if an issue fell between the obvious boundaries of agencies'. This became evident in the small number of interviews conducted with front line workers in all four of the key agencies.

Of equal use would have been some research into how the participating agencies deal with and disseminate ACPC related information across their own agencies. The impression from some of the peripheral agencies was that information was seldom distributed. A possible consequence of this was the lack of bottom-up feed into the ACPC. This manifested itself as problems in agenda setting and decision making by the committee. Again, rather worryingly, there was the admission from the chair that he felt little need to disseminate high level ACPC based information to his front-line social workers.
One other area which needed investigation was the issue of resourcing the ACPC. There were clearly some joint funded projects and some joint funding of training days. However, the research failed fully to explore the funding ratios of these projects. It would have been illuminating to discover which agency funded what and whether all those who participated actually contributed anything in the way of resources, broadly defined. So, for example, it may have been that one agency failed to finance the event but provided other resources such as premises or secretarial support.

Finally, the research occurred as a preliminary to other changes related to the advent of unitary authority status. This was clearly an important issue as Greentown’s ACPC would move outside the umbrella provided by the County committee and assume direct and overall control of the child protection system. In many respects, as the epilogue shows, the research evaluated the ability of the ACPC to assume this mantle. However, whilst this move was always given some cognisance, it was never seen as central. Accordingly, little attention was paid to the development of unitary authority status related to child protection. This was an important omission as the relevant City Council committees were in the process of discussing how they would tailor their response to this new and important role in child protection.

For the future, there are a number of avenues which need to be explored. The thesis employed a highly specific analytic framework which has only been tested on one ACPC and, as the methods chapter took pains to point out, no claims for generalisability are being made here. Thus, it would be useful to take the theory that
there is a conflict between the two dominant discourses, and the analytical framework and test them on more ACPCs in other locations. Two aspects could emerge from such action. Firstly, it may prove that the findings of this case study are unique to the Greentown location with other ACPCs not suffering the same problems and tensions. Secondly, it may be that ACPCs which have had to contend with similar events have found ways to overcome NPM driven exponential growth and the concomitant problems. If this were to be the case dissemination of such findings could aid good practice elsewhere.

Child protection, as this thesis has demonstrated, has been, and continues to be, an area which causes problems for practice and management alike. The need for agencies to 'get it right' is intensified because of the emotive response by society to the unnecessary suffering of any child, especially if it transpires that the suffering could have been prevented or terminated if the agencies charged with protecting children had operated more effectively. Such a stance, whilst understandable, fails to give cognisance to the realities of joint working. Academics have long been involved in dissecting this problem area and have made great steps in understanding why mandated partnerships in child protection still remains problematic. In its own small way this thesis has added to this body of knowledge by highlighting some of the extra problems brought about by the introduction of NPM to the environment and context in which child protection takes place.

However, whilst making a contribution, the research itself is far from perfect and only begins to scratch the surface of what appears to be a constant on-going challenge to academics and practitioners alike. In a society where the government sees itself as
promoting a caring and inclusive stance it is imperative that research which focuses on the manner in which the agencies charged with the protection of children conduct their business, order their affairs and co-ordinate their approach remains in the vanguard of the concerns of social policy.
Epilogue

Managing fragmentation in Greentown ACPC

The previous chapters have provided details on the aspect of the research I 'expected' to find. To clarify that point, the results have been a fairly standard description of inter-agency working, and thus support and reinforce many studies to date: in short, my work confirms that inter-agency working is difficult to achieve, especially where large numbers of people and agencies are involved. However, this chapter is the result of an unexpected development. Circumstances conspired to allow me access to the internal workings of the committee on a far more intimate basis than observing meetings and conducting interviews, and this access allows me to present some detailed ethnographic research into managerialism and change. What I have attempted to do in this epilogue is to provide a much more personal and ethnographic account of an unexpected but immensely interesting period of time.

The winds of change

Clearly, as the interviews and observations illustrate, there was a general perception amongst its members that there was a great deal wrong with Greentown's ACPC. This was certainly the feeling that I had when I began writing the report of my findings for the ACPC.

I had not been given a deadline for the completion of the report into the workings of the ACPC but the Chair of Greentown ACPC phoned to tell me that the next full ACPC meeting would focus on the effect the forthcoming move into unitary authority
status would have on child protection. As this coincided with the completion of the
interviews, and as one of the requirements of access to Greentown ACPC was a report
outlining the findings, the Chair 'suggested' that the forthcoming meeting would be a
good time to present the report. This was duly written and posted to each member of
the committee.

The report itself was presented at the meeting and was structured around an outline of
the statutory requirements of ACPCs, some general observations taken from key texts
(for example Hallett and Birchall 1992 and Evans and Millar 1995), and some keystatements from the interviews. In this way the report echoed the observations of the
committee members themselves, and did not contain my subjective impressions. The
report also attempted to balance positive comments with negative ones, although
finding the latter was easier than locating the former. The report concluded with a
section entitled "The shape of things to come", in which I presented some of the
respondents' ideas for a different ACPC. Most of those thoughts came from the
Chair, the vice-Chair and the child protection officer. Given the tensions between
these three, their views on the future shape of the committee were remarkably similar.
In order to allow an insight, "The shape of things to come" is reproduced below:

10.1 Changes to the ACPC are inevitable given the reorganisation of local government.
Members were not asked directly about the form that these changes should take. However,
during the course of the interviews a number of respondents raised some general issues
related to the shape of the ACPC. In addition members spoke of particular aspects of ACPC
working arrangements which they felt could be improved. From the evidence presented,
there is clearly an element of dissatisfaction with certain procedures. The time would thus
appear ripe to address those concerns. The aim in this section is to provide the committee
with some of those comments, in order to generate discussion. The most voiced concerns fell
into seven question areas:
(i) how decisions are made;
(ii) the size and composition of the ACPC;
(iii) the frequency of meetings;
(iv) the lack of a process which enables monitoring of ACPC decisions inter-agency
(v) the lack of clarity of role, purpose or direction of the ACPC amongst its members;
(vi) the communication process;
(vii) resource issues.

10.2 What then of the future? Should there be a different way of organising the ACPC?
Members offered the following observations on alternative models, procedures and methods of working. They are presented without commentary:

If we are going to be different after unitary status, we’ve got to find a better way...its finding a balance between organisations and going back to consult.

If you were to look at a different model you could see a model for an operational role, and then a policy making resources role. You may have different membership accordingly, influencing purchasing strategy for health, somebody that could guarantee that contracts would vary over time to achieve a policy. You would have a health provider the same...I would have a different [ACPC] for a unitary [Greentown]. The potential is there. It could be an incredibly powerful advisory body.

I think also there are, I do wonder about...Are there too many...why do...need to be on it? At one time it was only...Again, that’s four levels. You have got people at different levels, different involvement, different influences in their own departments. That’s the biggest problem.

I’m in favour of having a core group of people and you then invite others onto sub-groups. [goes on to talk about the involvement of a colleague in a sub-group]. You’ve got to be aware of what it’s like to be out in the field. You’ve got to know the pressures and strains. It’s no good talking to people without understanding how they’re trying to manage.
People are there because there is a practical problem: How do we effectively protect children? Are we good at working together? Are we good at making sure our resources meet the need? In a sense, part of the resource directory we are struggling with is to do with that. You’ve got strands at an attempt to get outcome focus audit evaluation resource base sorted. I think that that’s potentially an effective way forward. It will depend on getting the right people involved on the ACPC. It will require a dynamic relationship between policy and practice. I’ll be interested to see what comes out of the [inner city area] stuff...How effective are we? If that goes to other agencies...connections get made, which to be frank, should have been there before. People don’t understand the full range of resources available.

You need the opportunity, the time and space at ACPC, so a quarterly meeting is not enough, its not frequent enough.

Meeting quarterly is too big a gap...If practice has a problem related to ACPC, by the time the next meeting is, well, it could be six months away, and the problem is blown over.

It’s about making things better and moving forward, especially with unitary status. The other thing is how we manage this, we need to move carefully. We need to make it more than a talking shop where people come along and feel much better when they go home, but, really, we’ve done nothing to help the children. That may show a recognition that the ACPC doesn’t do it right...It gives an indication that we have to change. I don’t see a consensus about the role of the ACPC. We have to move people along, or think about moving them off.

We need to move ahead carefully, how we make it more than a talking shop, where people come along and feel much better when they go home, but really, we’ve done nothing about helping children.
There is no point spending time and money if we aren't going to be able to act on the results...The process has got to be valid and I think we need audit expertise in any audit process. I think we need independent expertise on how to take the process forward.

10.3 The research has unearthed a healthy desire to make the ACPC more effective in the future. However, what of the present? It would seem that there is a lack of an agreed definition of almost every aspect of the ACPC's work. Members all expressed a desire to participate in inter-agency workings, and demonstrated a firm commitment to child protection. From the evidence presented here, it is that which binds the committee together, not any agreed notion of what the committee should be doing, where it should be going, or indeed what it is for. In the words of this member:

I am sitting here thinking, you are part of a big group and very often you leave it to somebody else to do it. I feel kind of bad about being critical about something because I'm part of that group. I can make changes and why don't I?

And in this person's eyes:

It's seen as a pleasant way to spend a morning...It's not seen as a major forum.

It became clear at the meeting that the report reflected the views of those interviewed, and also made public the simmering discontent within the committee. It became equally apparent that Greentown's ACPC was deemed by most of its members as unsuitable in its present format to face the challenges unitary authority status would bring. That is not to say that there was consensus about the direction it should take in the future. Above, I mentioned that the ACPC was split into two factions, the managerialist and the incorporatists. Both factions seized on the report as the tool by which they could implement their respective agendas.
The meeting began somewhat unusually in as much that the Chair announced that he had decided to 'do away with a minute taker'. He called for a full and frank discussion with 'no holds barred', which went unchallenged and serves as a reminder of his autocratic manner. There are a number of reasons behind this which need investigating. Firstly, the lack of a minute taker puts the ACPC meeting effectively in camera and outside the public realm. Secondly, as no minutes were taken, any discussion about who said what remains open to conjecture and memory, making recollection and review difficult. Clearly, the Chair was concerned about maintaining control over the meeting both in terms of the present and the future.

Interestingly, the County Child Protection Officer attended the meeting. This was the first time he had attended a meeting of the ACPC for two years. He was clearly uneasy from the beginning of the meeting and opened proceedings by talking at length about the need to retain links with the County Child Protection Committee following unitary authority status. His rationale for this was that Greentown ACPC had little experience of child protection and that it was a dangerous move on behalf of Greentown to move outside a previously existing child protection system. This comment was met with some derision from many of those attending, especially the lesser members of the social services contingent, who challenged the County officer to give concrete examples of the 'system' in operation. It must be noted that the County officer failed to respond to the challenge, and could only offer a mumbled reply which was met with large, knowing smiles by the others around the table.

After this opening gambit, the ACPC members present decided that the meeting needed a structure. In total, it took the committee 45 minutes to agree the format of the meeting, during which time my field notes became more and more scathing about the lack of direction and control the chair was giving. This proved to be a false
impression and demonstrates my continual under-estimation of the chair of Greentown ACPC.

As noted above, a majority of the members knew nothing and had failed to obtain any information about the move toward unitary authority status, despite it relating directly to their work inside and outside the committee. After the chair had offered a precis of the local government changes, the County Child Protection Officer launched into another speech about the need to retain strong links with the County group and the need to remain under their umbrella, again citing the reason that the system was already up and running. Again there was derision of this perspective and a challenge to him to come clean with his motives culminating with the vice-Chair's comment that it was apparent that 'you really don't want to give up your power base do you?'. Once again, this response was met with murmurs of approval from Greentown ACPC.

After 45 minutes aimless meandering, the Chair suddenly seemed to wake up and split the meeting up into three small groups, loosely based on their input to the child protection system. His move was not challenged, but drew puzzled looks from all present. Social Services and the police were one group, health were another and the voluntary/peripheral groups were the third. The chair did not issue any instructions as to what the groups were to discuss, the only stipulation being that they returned within twenty minutes. Each group adjourned to a smaller room to be chaired by the senior member of the group. The chair asked me if I would chair the social services and police group, which came as a surprise to me, and to the members of the group.

I chaired the social services and the police group. Once again, the County Child Protection Officer made a plea for Greentown ACPC to retain strong links with the CCPC. The Greentown Child Protection Officer and her assistant were vociferous in their critique of that idea. 'Why maintain something which clearly doesn't work?' was their main argument: a point the county officer once more failed to refute.
This provided me with the first of many dilemmas. Throughout my research training the concept of objectivity and value neutrality had been instilled in me, yet throughout the meeting I was in full agreement with the Greentown child protection officer. It was clear to all involved that the County representative attended the meeting with the clear and explicit intention of retaining the County's power base.

However, I tried to remain neutral during the ensuing discussions, whilst at the same time trying to work out why I was chosen to chair one of these groups. The only answer I can provide is that it was the chair's way of overcoming the difficulties of appearing to favour either the County social services side or the Greentown social services cadre - I was neutral and thus could be seen to be free from the internal politics. The chair absolved himself from attending any group and elected to wait their return to the main committee room.

When the meeting reformed, it was clear that the discussions had revolved around the organisational changes each agency had been subjected to in the past five years. A succession of representatives made the point that there was little chance of real coordination in any inter-agency forum which contained more than two or three different groups due to the decentralised and atomised nature of the many agencies taking part.

Each sub-group reflected what had been said in the interviews: they all knew what was wrong, they all recognised that resources were a problem, they all knew communication was a problem, they all wanted some form of standardisation of boundaries and training, and they all wanted continuation above all else. None of them knew how to achieve it within their existing framework. One point to note is that they some members expressed their desire to retain the parts of the system that worked. However, when challenged nobody could identify what these were. The
incorporatist group were the critical voices at this point. They argued, collectively, in light of the report that the system at present was obviously imperfect, so to them there seemed little point in replicating a system that was shown to be inadequate.

This point was expanded by the Head of Purchasing (health). She identified that due to the structure of some of the participating agencies, it was incredibly difficult to ensure that co-ordination took place within the local system. She cited GP fundholders as an example: it is possible for GP fundholders to contract anywhere for the nurses. The reality of this means that a Greentown GP could 'buy' a Community Nurse from, for example, Bristol. As such, that nurse could be working under an entirely different set of child protection procedures from the ones laid down by Greentown.

At this stage of the meeting, the chair turned the focus of the meeting to look at the political needs. He defined these as:

(a) how to persuade the new Authority that any new package of child protection procedures would work more efficiently than the existing one;
(b) should the new Director of Social Services by where the child protection buck stopped?; which agency should control child protection issues?; and
(c) should there be a phasing in period where certain (unidentified) aspects of the present system, and any new proposals work in tandem?

This definition was not challenged.

The management of the next point proved to be the turning point in the meeting, as it was the point where the chair assumed total control and began his domination of the agenda and the meeting. He broke across on-going discussions of the above points and announced that it was time to look at the relationship between Greentown ACPC and the County Child Protection Committee. This was defined by the chair as ambiguous and confusing, and, much to the chagrin of the County Child Protection
Officer, it was decided by the chair (and without discussion or reference to other ACPC members) that links between the two committees ought to be severed as soon as was possible. To my obvious discomfort, the report's findings were used as evidence by the chair. Once separation of the two committees was achieved the chair announced that most of the role duplication would disappear and the Greentown ACPC would be able to identify its own, unique pathway.

Following this statement there was what only can be described in terms as a stunned silence, with some uncomfortable shifting around in chairs. I was particularly shocked. What had started as a PhD thesis had led to the break-up of a prestigious local committee, which was both shocking and frightening.

The chair rounded off the meeting with the following summary:

1. The immediate need was to identify how the ACPC could make the next step happen?

2. How could the ACPC employ the research findings as a tool to improve the performance of Greentown ACPC?

3. The proposal was put forward that the first step should be to decide the fundamental question ‘What is the ACPC for?’

Three options were offered by the chair as acceptable visions of the ACPC of the future. He suggested that Greentown ACPC could become: a) More effective in the delivery of child protection services, or b) they should produce a vision of what a fully autonomous Greentown ACPC could be, and finally, c) against which objective criteria could the new ACPC be measured?
The last part of the meeting illustrated the power relations of the group. As the meeting was breaking up, and people were leaving their places *en route* for the door, the Chair announced that he had decided to allocate the membership of the group which was charged with looking at change, something which had not been discussed up to this juncture. He decided this arbitrarily, and insisted that 'the group for change', as he called it, should contain only three people, the child protection officer, the NSPCC person and the Head of Purchasing (health). This meant that the group for change was dominated by the incorporatist faction. Immediately the vice-Chair raised an objection, and attempted to co-opt herself on to the 'group for change'. What happened next was almost farcical: some people had left the meeting and had to be called back as an air of general confusion reigned. Eventually, the meeting reconvened and following pressure from the health group, somewhat reluctantly and at length the chair agreed that the vice-Chair should be co-opted onto the 'group for change'.

The group was charged with establishing a task focused work group, was to be chaired by the NSPCC representative, and was to look at proposals of common purpose of the ACPC with two guiding issues, a) the arrangements laid down under Working Together and b) Guidance from the DoH. This had to be completed by the date the chair set for the next full ACPC meeting.

Interestingly, the Chair had constructed the 'group for change' entirely from within the incorporatist cadre of the ACPC. This proved to be a highly successful move on his behalf, and only served to illustrate the chair's skill as a political manipulator, a point which will be expanded upon below.
When first meeting of the group for change took place, all four members attended. Their first task was an examination of the minutes of the previous ACPC meeting, which amounted to one side of A4. This resulted in some unflattering comments concerning the conduct and demeanour of the chair of Greentown ACPC. The general feel of the meeting was that he was nothing short of a careerist, who had little regard for others and a drive and determination to get things how he wanted them. Within social services he was treated with disdain behind his back, but recognised as someone that it was dangerous to fall out with, as it could mean an end to any career aspirations.

The group then attempted to discover why the Greentown ACPC was not performing as it should. Much of the blame was laid at the door of the County Child Protection Committee, which succeeded in passing the buck, but failed to address the question why Greentown was equally culpable of allowing things to slide. This proved to be yet another example of the dual nature ascribed to the CCPC: it was at once significant and insignificant. Further examples of looking elsewhere can be seen in the blaming of intra-organisational change in most of the participating agencies and a lack of joint funding initiatives. Each member recognised that, as managers they were increasingly concerned with their own performance and directed much of their units work to that end.

Given the nature of the group for change, there was a somewhat inevitable call from the child protection officer for more practice involvement at this stage. This proved to be the spur which started the meeting in earnest. The discussion moved toward the need to identify the link between practice, strategy and policy and the quality of standards within the child protection system. It became clear that health were in the middle of auditing the cost of their involvement in child protection, and it was
expressed that the ACPC could help this by looking at areas where there was duplication of provision. It then suddenly occurred to the group for change that the report had identified a lack of monitoring and evaluation.

This caused them to change tack and ask the questions "What is the ACPC for?" and "How do you review the system?". The answer to these questions seemed to have been made for them in the recent publication Child Protection: Messages from the Research (DoH 1995). The onus is on child protection to become more pro-active in its work, and this was mirrored by the group who decided that the new ACPC would have a 'children in need remit', but with its sharp end still aimed at child protection.

These two points need a slight clarification for the reader. The Messages from the Research document highlights the fact that the current child protection system is reactive and deals almost exclusively with casualties of abuse, often neglecting the wider social needs of the child and the family. The document argues that child protection need to become more proactive and focus on prevention and the wider social needs of the child and family in order to produce a more holistic co-ordinated family service (1995: 47-49).

It was the subsequent discussion, which revolved around the possible composition of the new ACPC, which identified the chair's political skill and cunning. There was a gradual dawning that, despite their shared belief that practice should be incorporated in the ACPC, there would be little room for direct practice involvement on the new ACPC. This gradual realisation came about during discussions concerning the number of practitioners needed to provide an holistic needs led service. Quite clearly, almost every single practice worker within Greentown had some potential claim to sit on the ACPC. The incorporatists' vision of a practice led ACPC foundered on the rocks of practicality. They had been the most vociferous about the size of the ACPC, and yet, when given the chance to design one from scratch, had devised a committee
of hundreds! The chair's plan, and political and managerial skills became evident at this point: the incorporatist group would be responsible for the creation of a managerial ACPC.

The NSPCC representative suggested that the new ACPC would construct a multi-agency strategy on child protection. He also suggested that regardless of the agency and regardless of external or internal pressures, the child protection strategy would remain the same throughout the system. Failure to adhere to the new strategy would result in expulsion from the child protection umbrella. This provoked a number of comments, mostly from the vice-chair, the gist of which was that education would find it almost impossible to adhere to this demand because, as noted, they were seen as reluctant participants due to the nature of their internal changes. There was a resigned feel about the group concerning this point, with the notable exception being the vice-chair, who seemed very dismissive of education's input and viewed their potential exclusion as being not too great a loss to the ACPC.

The group needed to decide on the way forward for the ACPC. The chair of the meeting, the NSPCC representative produced a series of five tasks which he believed the ACPC should fulfil. I got the impression that he had contacted all the members of the group for change prior to the actual meeting, because there was an absence of surprise about the five points. However, personally, this stage of the meeting was exciting and worrying because the points mentioned were all key points of my research report. It was somewhat unnerving to see my work, 18 months out of my first degree, being used as a blue-print for a major committee.

The proposition was put to the vote (the first vote I witnessed in the entire research programme). After very little discussion for such a major policy shift the suggestion was accepted as policy. It was unanimously decided that the new ACPC would have five key roles:
1) Co-ordination of services
2) Planning service delivery
3) Developing new services
4) Monitoring provision
5) Provision of inter-agency training

It is difficult to describe the atmosphere in the meeting. From the outset of the research, the incorporatist group had campaigned for greater practice involvement in the ACPC. From the outset, there were two main voices, the NSPCC person and the vice-chair, who seemed to view her role as the 'elder statesman', and often adopted a somewhat patronising tone when addressing the younger child protection officer. This was based on (as she frequently mentioned) her experience on a number of committees 'up to national level'.

At the start of the first designing the changes meeting they had their chance to create an ACPC in the image they had championed, which led to a buoyant and jovial start to the proceedings. However, the practicalities of including practice soon dawned. Issues such as the size of the committee, how representatives are chosen, how information is spread all became apparent and according to both the NSPCC representative and the child protection officer, insurmountable at practice level. This is interesting as the same people had been scathing about management's ability to perform the same tasks at inter-agency level, and yet were about to return responsibility to management.

What became equally apparent very quickly was that the blame for the current state of the ACPC fell at the feet of all those present, and all agreed that they had been guilty of presuming someone else would be responsible for action x, instead of 'chasing the matter up'. The mood swing in the room was discernible as the growing realisation that they had been charged with a task which would, publicly, force them to
acknowledge the 'supremacy' of the managerialist approach to inter-agency working dawned.

Designing the changes (part two)

The second group for change meeting took place two weeks later. It was opened by the vice-chair who informed the group that, at a County Child Protection Committee meeting the previous Friday, it was said that unitary status for Greentown was no longer guaranteed, making the need for the present review of Greentown's ACPC questionable. This view was not accepted by those present, the consensus being that there was still the need for change, whatever the outcome of the unitary authority debate. A point of interest is that the vice-chair's obsession with the 'level' of discussion at County Child Protection Committee meetings she had referred to in the first meeting became evident again. She brought the agenda with her to show that it was not parochial, but at a really high, 'intelligent' (sic) level. This stance reinforced some of her comments made during her interview. During the research she talked about the need to distance practice from management because 'management worked at a higher intellectual level'. She clearly intended to employ this elevated status as an attempt to control the 'group for change', due to her 'elevated' position of sitting at County level. As a ploy it seemed to be successful: the rest of the group for change were deferential to her 'elevated knowledge' of the great and good of their respective organisations.

The others on the group for change seemed to fall back into accepting a hierarchical pecking order. It appeared that as a consequence of the vice-chair being able to provide the impression that she was on first name terms with the organisational heads of NSPCC, social services and health, she established her superiority over what were essentially local managers. Clearly, she attempted to use this as a ploy to gain control over the group by virtue of giving an appearance of 'being in the know', what Coxall
and Robbins (1989) call 'having the ear of the powerful'. It must be noted that it worked; there was a grudging acceptance that she knew more than the rest of the group for change.

In light of the potential stoppage of unitary status, the committee decided to look at ways of improving communication between County and Area. They came up with a series of proposals. It must be noted that the vice-chair did all that was possible to defend the County Child Protection Committee at this stage. The proposals were:

1. The ACPC would form an agenda item whereby a nominated representative would feedback detailed information from the County Committee.
2. A nominated person would form the link to the sub-groups and report back.
3. The ACPC would be more actioned centred. The chair would review the meeting and delegate responsibility to ensure action, within a specified period.
4. The ACPC would have afternoon sessions for project reports.
5. Items raised on the agenda would need to be accompanied by a time-scale, and a briefing paper.

All these points were aimed at addressing issues the research report had raised. For me, this was again worrying. I began to get doubts about the report: what if I had got it wrong? Would I be held responsible for the failure and break-up of the ACPC? In hindsight I now know that the report was valid and contained a true and accurate picture, nevertheless it is disconcerting to witness your work being employed as a demolition tool.

The meeting gave an interesting insight into the jockeying for position which was going on beneath the surface. It became apparent that, if unitary authority status was granted, the ACPC may jointly fund a paid co-ordinator's post. This was news to me and the first time I had heard such a suggestion. For the others it simply reinforced what they had been told. The decision to fund a co-ordinators post must have been
taken outside of Greentown ACPC. It appeared to be as a result of a meeting between
the chair of Greentown ACPC, a senior figure in the NSPCC and a member of the city
council, and would be funded jointly with contributions from social services, NSPCC,
health and the police.

This led to the NSPCC representative making a strong case for the holder of the post
being attached to a voluntary sector agency (NSPCC by any chance?), in order that
they appeared 'neutral'. This suggestion was not received with any great enthusiasm,
especially by the vice-chair who suggested that the person who got the job needed to
be someone widely respected by all the agencies and at a senior level.

The meeting then moved on to the issue of funding. There were three agreed points:
1. It was agreed that, in order to have clout, the ACPC needs its own budget.
2. Training should be high on the priority for reviewing ACPC funds. Training was
seen as a 'nightmare' or a 'pigs ear'.
3. There appeared to be a strong case to be made for an ACPC officer to be appointed.

The meeting closed by setting the parameters for Greentown's new ACPC.
Following a vote, it was decided the new ACPC should be constructed around a 'core
group' consisting of up to 10 members. This core group should be established as
soon as possible and should run whether or not the move toward unitary authority
status took place. The new ACPC would need to concentrate on these three areas as
priorities:
1. Improving relations with CCPC
2. The move into unitary status
3 Set the standards and composition of the sub-groups

This meeting moved beyond the formal jousting of the previous meeting and began in
earnest the fight for the soul of the ACPC. Two of the group for change members,
the vice-chair and the Head of Purchasing (health) were obviously keen to protect their own power bases and prestige. Likewise, NSPCC sought to find a niche for the proposed ACPC officer within the NSPCC. The child protection officer on the other hand seemed hell bent on giving practice, (but in this instance read social workers), more power and access to decisions.

This naked power struggle changed the atmosphere of the meeting. In the first meeting those involved appeared almost conspiratorial, which fostered a feeling of togetherness. In this meeting those feelings disappeared as individuals fought to ensure that they or the organisations they represented maintained access to the ACPC. The concept of working together or partnership failed to materialise here, with each side looking out for itself and no-one else. The irony was not lost on me. Here we had four of the most critical members of the old Greentown ACPC fighting each other to make sure they remained part of the new version. Here we had four of the staunchest defenders of inter-agency and partnership work turning into the most parochial and departmentalised individuals. And here we had the most vociferous critics of management fighting for a management based ACPC.

**Designing the changes (part three)**

This was the final meeting and was held one week before the next full committee. The NSPCC representative, in his capacity as chair of the group for change, had prepared a draft of the report required by the ACPC, and this meeting was simply to get agreement on that document. The meeting itself was generally good-humoured and, at times, self-congratulatory. However, there was a stimulating moment at the end. Over coffee the child protection officer started to describe her role within the child protection system. It was obvious that the vice-chair, the NSPCC representative and the health purchaser had little idea of what the child protection officer really did, despite all four being seen as key members of the local child protection committee.
Each then began to describe their own input into child protection and the others were equally surprised at what each other did. At that moment, I felt that my research had been vindicated and all my previous doubts vanished.

It was decided to submit a report which contained the following recommendations:

1) If unitary authority status failed to materialise all members of Greentown ACPC received minutes of County meetings, in order that Greentown would be aware of what was happening at County level.

2) In the event of unitary authority status the mission statement for the new Greentown ACPC was 'To develop and monitor a multi-agency strategy for child protection that is informed by and accepted by all agencies'.

3) That the new ACPC reduce its size to become more workable. Group process would suggest a maximum membership of ten

4) Membership should consists either of budget holders or, where appropriate, the most senior figure available, with a number of sub-groups looking at a range of areas, and reporting back to the main body. This was decided to enhance the speed of decision making and agreement of joint funded projects.

5) The new model ACPC should evaluate the frequency of meetings in order to develop an appropriate time-table.

6) The new ACPC should become more action centred. The chair having heard and covered an agenda item will then clearly identify both the action to be taken and the person responsible to ensure the action is followed through within an agreed time-scale.

7) The structure of the minutes should be changed to reflect this.

8) The agenda should be drawn up and circulated as early as is realistically possible.

9) Agencies should develop and publish a plan showing how ACPC information is disseminated throughout their agency.

10) There should be a number of jointly funded test projects instigated and directed by the new ACPC.
These proposals were all agreed by those present, and they decided that they would be joint signatories of the document, but it would be presented at the full ACPC meeting by its principle author, the NSPCC representative. I did not see the final copy of the group for change's report until the next full ACPC meeting, when I did, it was something of a shock.

The beginning of the end

The final document produced by the group for change was circulated at the final ACPC meeting, which meant, as far as I am aware, that for the majority of those attending it was the first time they had seen it. The shape of the final document raised some interesting points for me as a researcher. Firstly, in the initial designing the change meeting, there was an agreement reached concerning the expulsion of those members who failed to adhere to the agreed child protection strategy. This point was never mentioned beyond the first meeting and had disappeared from the final document. Where that idea went to remains a mystery to me, but I should note that the point was never raised or queried by any of the group for change members, nor was it mentioned in the full ACPC meeting.

Secondly, the motor behind the group for change was my report on the findings of the initial research. I assumed that the final document from the group for change would reflect the list of ten points outlined above which loosely reflects my report. However, the document presented to the ACPC meeting was tightly constructed around my report and its findings.

The concluding section of my report contained the following passage:
From the evidence presented, there is clearly an element of dissatisfaction with certain procedures. The time would thus appear ripe to address those concerns. Our aim in this section is to provide the committee with some of those comments, in order to generate discussion. The most voiced concerns fell into seven question areas:

(i) how decisions are made;
(ii) the size and composition of the ACPC;
(iii) the frequency of meetings;
(iv) the lack of a process which enables monitoring of ACPC decisions inter-agency;
(v) the lack of clarity of role, purpose or direction of the ACPC amongst its members;
(vi) the communication process;
(vii) resource issues.

In the report, I highlighted seven areas of concern. In its final document the group for change specifically identified all seven points and suggested action to ensure that the new ACPC avoided falling back into their old problem areas. I now propose to provide the reader with a précis of the group for change's document and their suggestions as to addressing the seven issues listed in my report.

(i) how decisions are made;

Here the group identified 'the sheer weight of numbers attending the ACPC" as the main problem. The suggested that 'Once the ACPC has a smaller attendance...the whole [decision making] process will become clearer and ACPC members will have a much greater sense of ownership of decisions'.

(ii) the size and composition of the ACPC;
The group referred to the size of the ACPC and opined that accountability for taking forward agenda items is easily lost in a committee of more than ten. In order to overcome this the group for change called for a maximum membership of ten. Membership would be agreed upon by each cluster of organisations meeting outside the ACPC in order to decide who their representative would be. Thus, for example, the highly fragmented health cadre would be forced to reduce its membership and choose one or two representatives.

(iii) the frequency of meetings;

The group for change argued that the new ACPC would have to place greater reliance on sub-groups and therefore develop a new working pattern. Apart from that, the group for change had little to say on the future frequency of ACPC meetings.

(iv) the lack of a process which enables monitoring of ACPC decisions inter-agency;

The group for change decided that this question was very similar to question (i). They decided that the answer to this problem was to make the new ACPC more 'Action centred'. In order to do this, they suggested that the Chair of the new ACPC task a member to ensure that, where appropriate, the agenda item was followed through to a logical and satisfactory conclusion, within an agreed time scale. It was also suggested that the minutes reflect this and identified the individual responsible for each agenda item.

(v) the lack of clarity of role, purpose or direction of the ACPC amongst its members;

To answer this, the group for change produced a 'mission statement', which was
"To develop and monitor a multi-agency strategy for child protection which is informed by and accepted by all agencies".

The group also suggested number of tasks and roles. These were:

Tasks:-
   a) co-ordination of services
   b) Planning
   c) Development
   d) Monitoring
   e) Training
   f) Provision of services

Role:-
   a) Setting standards that will define quality of service
   b) Develop new ideas
   c) Resource prioritising and harmonising - ensuring non-duplication of services
   d) Influence on practice - practice informing policy
   e) Strategic thinking - Protection v Prevention

(vi) the communication process;

The group for change recommended that the agenda for future meetings be drawn up and circulated as soon as possible, the agenda should be realistic to enable discussion and that it would be the responsibility of each agency to decide on information dissemination.
This was identified as a central theme running through my report (a point that I failed to recognise, I felt it was one of many key issues). Accordingly, the group for change called for a greater emphasis on joint funding. Further, they called for a test, or pilot project, which would be joint funded and proactive. This project, the group suggested should be started as soon as possible following the creation of the new Greentown ACPC, 'as an act of faith in the change'. In talking about this point, the NSPCC member suggested that the co-ordinators post would be the ideal vehicle for a pilot project.

The group had obviously been influenced by my report and had made an attempt to address all the issues the report had raised. What I found disturbing was that the report seemed to be the work of the NSPCC representative alone. Although the group for change had discussed my report in general terms, my field notes show that they never had the detailed discussions or outlined the proposals in the final document. Two thoughts occurred to me when I saw the final draft: either there had been meetings outside of the group for change that I had been excluded from, or there had been a consensus amongst the group for change that the NSPCC representative take responsibility for 'fine tuning' the paper. Either way, the final decision had been made in my absence, and the document from the group for change was not the one I had expected, nor did it reflect the discussions which had been conducted in my presence.

The following full Greentown ACPC meeting was probably the best attended meeting observed. The meeting started with a review of the document for change, led, as previously agreed, by the NSPCC representative. Almost immediately there was a flurry of questions concerning the projected future role of the periphery on the new ACPC, which can only be seen as an attempt by the marginal members to retain their positions on the new look committee. For example, the Adult Mental Health
representative asked a series of questions about the role of minor providers, arguing that the projected look of the ACPC made it purchaser heavy, suggesting that it would be a mistake to exclude those with clear knowledge of provision of care.

A point that I found surprising was the reluctance of the NSPCC representative to respond to the questions. He simply refused, arguing that his task was to provide the ideas, and then it was up to the ACPC to debate the changes.

From the outset there was an uncomfortable feel in the room as representative after representative realised that this could be their last ACPC meeting, and that the responses they gave to the research was probably at the root of this. The only person in the room who appeared to be unmoved by the presentation was the chair, who, outwardly at least, remained calm and impassive. When the presentation concluded there was, in the words of the field notes, 'a considerable stunned silence'.

It is difficult to adequately describe exactly what the atmosphere was like in the room during the next hour of the meeting. Gradually, each representative admitted to their particular failures in relation to their input to Greentown's ACPC. For example, the probation member openly admitted little knowledge and less interest in how health was funded. After about an hour the Chair seemed to wake up and began to take command. He began by making probably the most salient point of the meeting in arguing that it was the internal fragmentation of agencies which was most culpable in obscuring shared knowledge. He suggested that:

*Inter-agency communication, joint working and everything else we do is in a state of conceptual dislocation, and is very probably an old fashioned way of thinking in our present climate*
He continued that, him apart, none of those present would get a seat on the new ACPC. This was met by some uncomfortable shifting of positions. After another long and protracted silence, the LEA representative noted that there was a major discontinuity here. She suggested that it may be the case that:

*Those with the power have little interest in the day-to-day mechanics of child protection, whereas those with the interest have very little power*

The meeting continued in much the same vein with numerous people making the point that their respective organisations' systems left little room for joint working processes. The child protection officer made the point that some agencies are constrained by national policy, whilst some are answerable only to their local political paymasters. It was, for many at the meeting, the first time that they had actually considered the mechanics of inter-agency working, despite being participants for a number of years.

At this juncture, the meeting stopped for coffee. When it reconvened, the Chair announced that some decisions would need to be made, and made soon. The Chair offered two alternatives in the event of unitary authority status: either it could become an 'action committee' or it could undertake a more strategic role. It must be noted that the Chair failed to define exactly what an 'action committee' was, nor did any one ask. That being the case, I received the impression that the 'action committee' was little more than a straw man, built to pull apart. This is based on the fact that he did make it abundantly clear that he was in favour of the more understandable strategic role. From this point onward the chair exhibited all his considerable skill and experience in committee work, and, it must be said, was ably abetted and assisted by both the Planning and Contracts Manager (social services) and the District Manager (social services), people who were universally acknowledged to owe their positions to the Chair's patronage.
To be fair to him and his colleagues, the opposition to the projected strategic role was not strong. What opposition that was made came from the incorporatist cadre, notably the child protection officer. She suggested that the present ACPC had drifted because they were out of touch with practice, and the new one was about to make the same mistakes. Other comments, based around the same idea came from the NSPCC representative and the LEA person. Despite the paucity of the arguments against the strategic option the chair employed a number of tactics to undermine the impact of speakers who seemed to be heading away from his favoured direction.

Some of these recorded included: walking toward and writing on the flip chart just as the child protection officer was coming to the conclusion of her argument. This meant that all attention was diverted from the speaker to the Chair as he sauntered across the room. Another attention diverting manoeuvre included getting a small pair of scissors from his bag to trim a loose thread on his suit during the key part of an argument between himself and the NSPCC person. This ploy included ducking under the table to get his bag, placing it on the table and noisily taking out the scissors, again, just as the NSPCC person reached the conclusion of his argument. One other of note occurred during a speech by the vice-Chair. She was arguing about continuity between county and Greentown, and suggesting that there needed to be a representative who had access to both committees. As she was about to suggest this as a motion to be debated, the Chair interrupted her and excusing himself left the room.

The meeting concluded with the Chair presenting a resume of the proceedings. Alone, he decided that:

1) The next meeting would officially disband Greentown ACPC in its present format
2) Those attending were to return to their agencies and begin discussions about the new ACPC, focusing on the following points:

a) The new ACPC would become a strategic group (no vote was taken on this, it was simply presented as a *fait accompli*)

b) The ACPC would move into a broader, child need based group

c) There would have to be evidence of the mechanisms by which information is disseminated across agencies

d) Organisations would need to feed back a written report on their reaction to the proposed changes

Whilst there is a degree of similarity between these proposals and the group for change report, it was apparent that the proposals reflected the view of the chair primarily, with the views of the report for change coming a poor second. Indeed, the content of the group for change's report was never fully explored or debated. The group for change presented some highly detailed proposals, but the debate in the meeting (such as it was) contained reference to broad generalisations. Indeed, the one striking feature of this meeting was the complete absence of detail. As the above points illustrate, the details of the change were to come from within the agencies, and not be directed by the ACPC.

At this meeting therefore the Chair achieved a number of objectives which hitherto had been hidden: he managed to make the practice group publicly admit that there was no room for practitioners on Greentown ACPC and thus undermine their credibility; he managed to circumvent the group for change report; and he managed to shape the new ACPC (of which presumably he would be Chair) in the way he desired.
The end of an era

At the final meeting of Greentown ACPC the attendance was down on the previous one, but the promise of a lunch after the meeting had attracted many of the worse attendees. The meeting had two agenda items: the first being an examination of the organisational response to the projected change; and the second being a decision on the format and make up of the new ACPC.

The first presentation was by the health cadre. What was interesting here was that the vice-chair, who previously had been vociferous and taken to be the spokesperson for health was relegated to a listener; the Head of Purchasing gave the presentation. Clearly, there had been something of a coup within the health group, the extent of which emerged at the end of their presentation.

The main thrust of health’s response centred around representation on the new ACPC. They had held a series of meetings and the consensus was that the representative on the new committee should be the Head of Purchasing. They had decided to create a number of sub-groups which were to be a mixture of purchaser and provider groups, with both management and practice membership. They felt that this would enable health to come to the new ACPC completely informed of each segment of health’s viewpoint. The Head of Purchasing noted, somewhat ironically, that it had taken a host of internal reorganisations to make them realise that, ultimately, they were working for the same aims in child protection.

In essence, there had been a shift in health’s position and leadership. It was apparent during the interviews that the vice-Chair of Greentown ACPC was not popular amongst her fellow health professionals and was seen as something of a self-
interested careerist. The move toward a strategic ACPC was the tool by which the health cadre sought to reduce her power in child protection. Her non-ACPC work centred around the provision of services, an area of work which the changes to Greentown's ACPC rendered marginal. This marginalisation of providers became the means by which her influence and power was reduced.

The second group to present their reaction was the social services. This was done by the Chair. His presentation was short and succinct. There would be two social service representatives on the new ACPC; the Chair and a purchasing manager. He stated that the Chair of the new ACPC would need to come from social services and, further, as the new Head of Social Services for the unitary authority would be ultimately responsible for child protection, it made sense that the Head of Social Services should chair. There were no dissenting voices to this. However, two points were raised from the floor. The first was a call from the NSPCC representative for an ACPC funded 'ACPC manager' whose responsibility would be to ensure that all the members were briefed and that lines of communication, issues of roles and responsibilities, and evaluation of the committees work were all being adhered to.

In response, the Chair noted the comment and reacted with some general platitudes, including the comment 'everything is possible at this moment, we shouldn't discount the possibility'.

The second point was a call from the police for some form of centrally administered communication which would be freely available to all those with an interest in child protection. The suggestion was either a newsletter or some form of electronic communication. The idea was that new moves, new directions and importantly, new appointments would be communicated via the newsletter. Whilst both points were noted by the Chair, he received neither with much enthusiasm.
The third agency to present their reaction was probation. Their representative expressed probation's desire to remain part of a general child protection system. There were however numerous problems. Firstly, in the event of unitary authority status, it was unlikely that the probation service's boundaries would be co-terminous with the City authority's. The second problem was that, within probation, child abuse was not seen as a senior management priority therefore it was unlikely that probation would be able to send a high enough ranking official to the new ACPC. Finally, probation was on the verge of a major internal reorganisation which made it difficult to talk with certainty about the future.

The police were the fourth agency to present their thoughts. It was here that their power and influence was seen. Because of local configuration there were some logistical and administrative problems which would be exaggerated by the projected move into unitary authority status. Such was the importance of the police that the meeting agreed that, whatever the final configuration of Greentown ACPC they could send whatever representative they saw fit, provided that someone attended.

Education requested one seat on the new ACPC although their plea was made with the caveat that they were unable to speak for any particular school, all they were able to do was to add the general voice of education to the overall discussions. The LEA representative made the point that it was the internal changes and the move into autonomous schools which had created this unfortunate situation.

Of the minor agencies and organisations very little was heard. The City housing department made the point that in all probability they would be the subject of an internal reorganisation following the move into unitary authority status and therefore were not able to comment. The armed forces representatives acknowledged the fact that they were peripheral and therefore did not expect to be represented on the new
committee, but nevertheless needed to be kept informed of developments. NCH decided that they too were peripheral and indicated that they had little wish to be involved on the new group. NSPCC reminded the meeting that they had a statutory duty to hold and up-date the child protection register and therefore expected a seat.

The meeting agreed to disband the existing ACPC and reconvene with a new model built around the following structure:

- **Social Services:** two seats and to chair
- **Health:** one seat
- **Probation:** one seat
- **Police:** one seat
- **NSPCC:** one seat
- **Education:** one seat
- **City Legal dept:** one seat

There was, from my point of view a certain irony to the last appointment. Throughout the whole of the research I made numerous attempts to contact and meet with the City legal department. They were so elusive that I was unable to ascertain which member of the department had responsibility for liaising with the ACPC. Moreover, I was informed that it was seen as 'a minor part of what we do here'.

The final meeting of the Greentown ACPC had centred upon constitutional issues. Those members who attended had seemingly accepted fully the structure proposed by the Chair. Indeed, they appeared to assume that the process of change and the creation of a new structure ensured that the new ACPC would be equipped to do what it was supposed to do. In turn, this raises another point: there had been no formal agreement on what the new ACPC was supposed to do beyond being a 'strategic group'.
The meeting ended with the official break-up of Greentown ACPC. It was decided that the Chair would write to all those members who had failed to turn up and inform them of the committee's decision, thank them for their services and express the wish that they would continue to support child protection in the future.

I left the meeting disillusioned and confused. I have to admit that when the ACPC decided to re-organise itself around the basis of my report I was excited and a little flattered. This, I presumed, is what post-graduate social policy was all about: academic work shaping and informing practice (ego and naivety being in abundance at that stage of my career). Even during the discussions of the group for change I really believed that the process I was observing would lead to the creation of a dynamic and innovative ACPC.

However, I did not include politics, power, and naked ambition in my calculations. I witnessed a dilution of the initial suggestion from the group for change into the creation of an ACPC which was smaller and more management based, but an ACPC which was still based on woolly notions of 'child protection systems', 'inter-agency working' and 'collective action', and one which still lacked power to ensure that inter-agency meant little beyond the narrow parameters of 'co-operation'. In essence, little had changed. My excitement at the prospect of being at the birth of a new era in child protection in Greentown had faded with the growing realisation that the child of change was simply a smaller version of its parent.

**Leaving the research: some final reflections**

According to the bulk of research methods text-books there is always a slight dilemma for qualitative researchers when making a decision to leave the field. I was fortunate in as much that, with the disbanding of the Greentown ACPC, my research reached a 'natural' break. I must admit that the temptation to remain and watch the
new committee unfold was strong. However, I have noticed that amongst my contemporaries who are also undertaking PhDs there is a tendency to keep collecting data, driven by the fear that there 'isn't enough here to write a thesis'. I was, and still am, satisfied with the amount and quality of the data my research provided, therefore I decided to leave the field at what was a convenient and logical point.

It is difficult to know how to conclude this chapter. There is a finality about finishing the results section, almost akin to closing the book on my primary objective for the past five years. Perhaps the best way to close this work is to say that I found the work stimulating and interesting and hope those emotions were passed on to the reader.
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Appendix
ACPC QUESTIONNAIRE

1 What difference has the ACPC made in the field of child protection since it has been set up?

2 How effective do you think the ACPC is?

3 It is apparent that certain issues are raised at the ACPC
   How is the agenda set?
   Who sets the agenda?
   How are the items prioritised?

4 How are decisions made at the ACPC and who are the most influential agencies?

5 How does the ACPC implement its policies?

6 How do the people in your agency get to know about the ACPC's decisions?

7 How are the ACPC's policies monitored and evaluated?

8. Is there anything that we have not covered that you think is of importance?