

Preface

This Discussion Paper brings together six papers delivered at the annual ADSS/PSI Seminar held on 8 July 1988 at Policy Studies Institute which looked at the developing role of Social Services Departments as Managing Agencies. The aim of the seminars organised by the Association of Directors of Social Services and Policy Studies Institute is to stimulate debate among practitioners, researchers and policy-makers on the most topical issues in social policy.

The Griffiths report, published in March 1988, recommended that social services departments should act as ‘the designers, organisers and purchasers of non-health care services and not primarily as direct providers’. There can be little doubt that fundamental changes in the role of social services departments are on the way.

The seminar looked at the implications for social services departments of acting as managing agencies. It examined the question of how accountability for vulnerable members of society will be maintained if most day-to-day management of their care is carried out by voluntary or private organisations. And it looked closely at the relationship between social services departments and those with whom it will be drawing up contracts. The question of what kinds of contract will be drawn up and how they will be enforced came in for scrutiny.

The implications of the widespread introduction of competitive tendering in social services were discussed, and the question of quality and standards was seen to be paramount, particularly in guaranteeing quality of care for those consumers least able to protect themselves. Experience from other local government departments and the health service was called upon, and a warning was given that social services departments needed to acquire some new attitudes and new skills to meet the challenges of their future role.

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Isobel Allen
Policy Studies Institute