Decision Making in Statutory Reviews and Children in Care

by

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ABSTRACT

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This thesis reports on a study into the decision-making that takes place within the six monthly statutory review of the cases of children in the care or under the supervision of the Local Authority.

The research had four aims:

1. To develop a typology of review decisions whereby decisions taken in reviews could be classified according to their salient features.

2. To ascertain the level of the subsequent implementation of the decisions taken in reviews and to consider what factors contribute to or hinder their implementation.

3. To identify the functions of statutory reviews and the perceptions of the members of social work teams of the functions appropriate to reviews.

4. To consider the role and the importance of statutory reviews within the context of overall child care practice.

The empirical research was undertaken in three social work area offices within one local authority. Information was gathered from almost three hundred reviews. The researcher, having first read the case record, attended two consecutive six-monthly reviews on the child. The social workers involved in these reviews were questioned on their opinions on reviews in general and on each review attended. Those 'researched' reviews gave rise to almost nine hundred review decisions, which were analysed according to the typology of decisions, and the level of their subsequent implementation was assessed.

This study was designed as a policy-orientated study. Hence the research is presented first, within the broad context of developments in child care policy since the war, and second, in relation to the literature on statutory sreviews arising both from research studies and from policy documents. Furthermore, the concluding chapter points to the policy implications that may be drawn from the research findings, together with suggestions for policy changes.

KEY WORDS : CHILDREN IN CARE STATUTORY REVIEWS DECISION-MAKING
SOCIAL WORK IMPLEMENTATION CHILD CARE POLICY

CONTENTS

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

When preparing a thesis for submission for a higher degree one is confronted with questions about the nature and purpose of research, the purpose of the particular research project, and the audience to whom the final research report is addressed. While answers to such questions may be important to the individual researcher, they may also provoke lengthy philosophical debate, which is not the intention of this introduction. Nonetheless, as the research enterprise takes many forms, the problems posed, the methodology employed and the reporting of the findings are influenced by the type of research that is being undertaken. Hence a fuller understanding may be gained of the research that follows if it is first located within a categorisation of research types.

Various suggestions have been put forward for classifying research studies, particularly to develop a framework that is more relevant to modern social science than the traditional divide in the natural sciences between pure and applied research. One such classification is that of Cherns, which postulates four 'ideal' types of research, while recognising that in practice many studies will be of a mixed variety. The terms used by Cherns to describe types of research may not be the most appropriate, especially 'basic objective' and 'operational', but the definitions of these terms provide a useful basis for distinguishing between types of research.

"Definition of types

1. Pure basic research

This arises out of perceived needs of the discipline and is
generally speaking oriented towards resolving or illuminating
or exemplifying a theoretical problem.

2. Basic objective research

This is oriented towards a problem which arises in some field
of application of the discipline, but is not aimed at
prescribing a solution to a practical problem.

3. Operational research

This aims at tackling an on-going problem within some
organisational framework but does not include or involve

experimental action. This kind of research is
distinguished by its strategy and methods. Broadly speaking
these are:

> (a) observation of the 'mission' of the organisation;
> (b) identification of its goals;
> (c) establishment of criteria of goal attainment;
> (d) devising measures for assessing performance against
> these criteria;
> (e) carrying out these measurements and comparing them
> with the goals;
> (f) completing the feedback loop by reporting on the
> discrepancy between goal and achievement.

4. Action research

This may involve as part of its strategy a piece of operational
research, but is distinguished from an ordinary piece of
operational research by the addition to the strategy of the
introduction and observations of planned change."

(Cherns, 1979)

Under this classification much of the research carried out in
universities by postgraduate students will fall into the 'pure basic
research' category. Typically the questions posed in research of this
nature will arise after a close examination of the literature, starting
from a broad subject base and focusing onto a narrower topic that is
susceptible to enquiry by a single researcher. Also typically, the
final outcome of such research will be a doctoral thesis with the pos-
sibility of a few articles in academic journals. Once again, this
follows the characteristic of pure basic research from the Cherns' model.
The further development of this model pointed to the preferred diffusion
channels associated with different research types, as shown in the
table on the following page.

Indeed as one moves through this categorisation of research types
it is less probable that the sole or primary purpose of the research
is postgraduate training. What becomes more significant, however, is
the nature of the interaction of the researcher with the 'researched'.

A Source of problem	B Type of research		C Generality of results	Generality of strategy	D Primary diffusion channel	E Secondary diffusion channel	F Feedback
Discipline	Pure Basic	historical theoretical or empirical	High	High	Learned publications	Possibly professional publications	Into disciplinary store of knowledge from D.
Field	Basic objective	Mainly empirical	High	High	Professional publications	Learned publications	Into professional store of knowledge from D. Into disciplinary store of knowledge from E.
Section of field	Operational		Low	High	Private reports and feedbacks	(a) Professional publications (b) OR journals (c) Disciplinary journals	
Single site	Action		Low	Low	Part of research	Case study	

(Cherns, 1979)

In discipline based or basic objective research, where this is supported by empirical enquiry, the subjects of the research may be passive participants, or if involved it may be in the role of respondent. In such an instance an organisation may offer a willing research site, but have little or no input into the research design and may receive little or no direct feedback on any findings. This is not to say that such research cannot be applied or policy-oriented, although links with policy changes are likely to be diffuse. However in much applied or policy oriented research the relationship with the 'subject' organisation takes on a greater significance. For instance, the organisation may be the commissioner of the research; there may be what Rothschild described as a customer/contractor relationship.

> " The customer says what he wants; the contractor (that is the researcher) does it if he can and the customer pays".
>
> (Rothschild, 1971)

This type of relationship is characteristic of the 'engineering'
model where the influence of research upon policy is represented as
a linear model.

Definition of social problem	→	Identifi-cation of missing knowledge	→	Organisation of social research data and relationships	→	Interpretation for problem solution	→	Policy Change
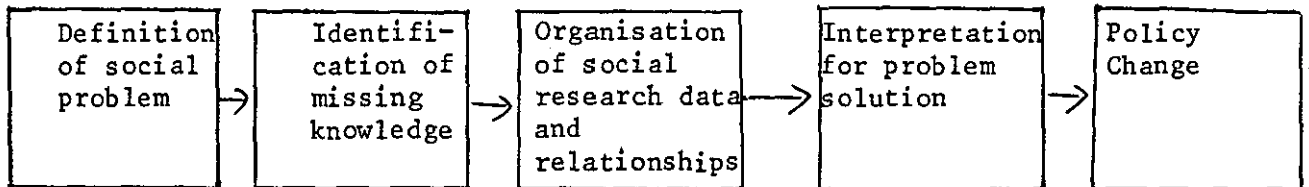
(Bulmer, 1982)

There are those who would question the effectiveness of social
science research which supplies policy-makers with empirical findings
which are only loosely established within a theoretical or conceptual
framework or where insufficient cognizance has been given to the policy
making process. One response to this has been the development of action
research in which the relationship between the participating organisation
and the researcher can be described as one of partnership - what Clark
(1972) calls "collaborative/dialogic", where the client and the researcher
engage in joint decision making to determine the nature of the problem,
possible forms of solution and the methods of investigation. However,
as Cherns has pointed out, although action research may increase the
probability of implementation of research findings within the research
site, the nature of such findings are so specific as to make more general
application unlikely. Much Social Administration research, however,
remains within the tradition of linking sound empirical research to
policy matters, hopefully ensuring greater impact of the research through
strong conceptualisation and by developing an understanding of the policy
process.

Where then does the research reported in this thesis fit into this
brief discussion of research characteristics?   The classical model
for postgraduate research is one in which the researcher starts with a
thorough review of the literature from which a problem is identified and
formed into propositions or hypotheses; a programme is then designed for
testing these experimentally and a research site sought. The usual

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products of such research are training for a future academic, an increased conceptual or theoretical understanding of a relatively narrow aspect of the discipline and a research report that is rarely addressed to relevant policy makers. The thesis that follows has not arisen from research undertaken in this way. The research problem in this instance was not identified by the researcher from an investigation of the literature; interest in the particular topic was initially raised by an outside agency when a senior officer of a social services department expressed his dissatisfaction with the outcome of the statutory reviews that were undertaken on children in Residential Homes. Thus the research arose from a real-world problem within a particular organisation and as such would fit within Cherns' definition of 'operational research'.

The subject organisation, and not the researcher, had identified the problem area initially and in this sense the research had some of the elements of a customer designed project; if the agency were to allow access to its records, observation and reporting on its working practices as well as the time of its staff then it would feel entitled to obtain concentrated effort on the problem as identified.

However, the SSD in question did not commission the research; it was financed by the DHSS primarily as an academic exercise. As such and as an applied research project within a policy related area, it seems to fall between 'basic objective' and 'operational' research - with outputs including not only learned and professional publications, but also private reports and feedback. Furthermore, as the research was designed from the outset with the intention of submitting for a higher degree, an expected further output from the study was a doctoral thesis. The nature of this relationship meant that it was necessary for the researcher to enter into a form of intellectual and 'political' nego-tiation with the subject organisation to design a research project that had an intellectual soundness and rigour, that did not impose undue burdens on the staff of the participating organisation, and which offered at least some insights into the initial query. Starting with a problem that was in part defined, the researcher's task was to broaden the context and conceptual framework within which that problem was

considered, thereby increasing the generality of any findings without
losing the confidence or support of the agency. The resultant aims and
objectives of the research will be detailed in Chapter 5 but they are
set down briefly here by way of introduction.

The original query was "why is it that many of the decision taken
at reviews on children in residential care do not appear to be imple-
mented?". The statutory requirements to conduct reviews are laid down
in the 1955 Boarding Out Regulations and the Children and Young Persons
Act 1969. However, the regulations do not apply solely or particularly
to children in residential care and therefore it was felt that the study
should concern itself with all children subject to review in the
authority, regardless of their placement or legal status. This broadening
of the initial query would make it possible to gain a much fuller under-
standing of the whole review process and to pose more fundamental questions
about reviews. What purpose or purposes are served by reviews? Do
social workers feel they are a useful expenditure of their time? How do
reviews relate to other aspects of child care practice, especially to
planning for children?

The social services department was happy with this initial
broadening of the context of the research, however the researcher
pointed to the need to further develop the scope of the study. In
particular it was felt that any assessment of the level of decision
implementation will only have meaning when full consideration is given to
how the decisions are made and to the nature of the decisions themselves.
To take account of this meant that the original question had to be
considerably re-designed so as to introduce and to strongly weigh the
study towards an investigation of reviews as decision-making processes,
including the characterisitics of the decisional outputs. Despite some
concern that the research might become too remote from the agencies'
immediate needs and interests, this further broadening of the brief was
also accepted. Consequently the first component of the research became
a detailed account of how reviews were organised in three different
social work areas within the authority. Some of the questions posed
were: how were the reviews arranged; what preparations were made; who
was the reviewing officer; how long did they last; who attended; did

residential reviews differ in character, in purpose or in effectiveness from reviews conducted in area offices?

Furthermore, the commitment to examine the nature of the decisions pointed to the need to describe and classify review decisions. Thus another early component of the research was the development of a research instrument that would enable the researcher to describe the review decisions along several dimensions.

Briefly then this research was designed to produce a detailed account of the conduct of reviews in three social work areas; by observation of reviews and questioning of social workers to consider the possible functions of reviews and to assess their importance and usefulness in child care practice, in particular their role in planning for children in care. Having obtained agreement from the social services department thus far, it was then possible to establish the framework within which review decisions were to be examined. Consideration of all these factors, together with a classification of the decisions, allows for more accurate and meaningful inferences to be drawn from an assessment of decision implementation and suggested reasons for non-implementation.

It is also of interest to note the agreement reached with the local authority concerning publication of research findings. Although the agency expected early feedback to its staff, it also recognised that the conduct of reviews was an issue of national interest and therefore it encouraged early publication of interim findings. It was under such an understanding that early findings were published in the professional press and a summary of draft conclusions were submitted as evidence to the House of Commons Select Committee and acknowledged to have influenced the thinking of that committee. It would appear to be the case, therefore, that the conduct of this research and the relationship to the local authority has proved to meet the criteria of 'operational research', as defined by Cherns.

Returning to the content of the study, it is recognised that statutory reviews are only one aspect of the obligations that social service departments have to children whom they supervise or who are in their care. To appreciate the role of reviews within that total child care package it is necessary to be aware of the current state of child care policy. Hence this thesis starts by considering the major developments in child care policy that have produced the context in whcih child care is at present practiced.

Following this, the next chapter draws together the literature on reviews. There has been a limited amount of research focusing specifically on reviews, although the topic has been given some coverage within wider child care projects. Much of the literature on reviews, however, does not derive from research per se, but from practitioners or policy-makers or from interest groups attempting to link practitioners to policy-makers.

Narrowing the focus further brings us to decision-making and decision implementation. These are concepts which have been explored fully within the disciplines of psychology and management science and which have been examined in a great variety of contexts and at differing levels from the individual upwards. Our interest, however, is in a particular form of decision-making, therefore it is appropriate to be selective when examining the large volume of writing on decision-making. Thus chapter 4 contains a selective review of the literature, concentrating only on that which it is felt is relevant to, or which increases our understanding of, decision-making in statutory reviews.

Chapters 5 and 6 set out the aims of the research project and the methods employed, together with characteristics of the SSD used as a research site. Also included here are the criteria used to select the sample of cases.

The next five chapters, chapter 7 through to chapter 12, contain the results of the empirical study, each chapter presenting the findings on a different component of the project.

The final chapter of any thesis should confront the empirical findings with the original research objectives. In this way the researcher can indicate the extent to which the outputs from the research fulfil the earlier established aims. However, in this concluding chapter it is hoped to do more than this. Because of the policy-oriented nature of the study it is appropriate to consider some of the policy implications that can be drawn from the research, together with suggestions for possible policy changes.

CHAPTER 2

THE DEVELOPMENT OF CHILD CARE POLICY

INTRODUCTION

The development of child care policies in Britain since the war
is characterised by a series of parliamentary acts which resulted from
an expressed dissatisfaction or concern with existing services. These
dissatisfactions were the subject for enquiries and reports which in
turn resulted in new legislation. Thus, in the 1940's, the death of
foster child Dennis O'Neill was followed by the Curtis Committee
(HMSO, 1946) and the 1948 Children Act. In the 1950's rising delinquency
rates lead to the establishment of the Ingleby Committee. However, as
part of its brief it was also asked to consider "whether local authorities
should be given new powers and duties to prevent or forestall the
suffering of children through neglect in their own homes". In the event,
it was this aspect of their report which had most lasting impact, by
acknowledging the need for 'preventative' social work. The findings
from this committee, when it eventually reported (HMSO, 1960) became
the basis for the 1963 Children and Young Persons Act. In the 1960's
the continuing concern with the substantial increase in levels of juvenile
delinquency lead to two white papers, 'The Child and the Family and the
Young Offender' in 1965 and 'Children in Trouble' in 1968. It was the
latter which became the model for the 1969 Children and Young Persons
Act. In the 1970's the child care services were faced with a series of
very damaging reports on child deaths, the most explosive being the report
into the death of Maria Colwell (HMSO, 1974). This, together with the
Houghton Report on Adoption of Children (HMSO, 1972), provided much of
the impetus for the 1975 Children Act.

Each of these new Acts brought about major changes in the organi-
sational structure and administrative procedures for dealing with
children in need of care and protection. Each of these acts also, to
some extent, represented a compromise between conflicting assumptions,
values and aims for child care practice which may well explain why the
same problems so often reappear. As Packman says in her study of child

care policy in Britain:

> "despite all these changes and some palpable improvements
> in service, we are now faced with many of the same problems
> and failures with which the era began ... standards of
> child care practice are as much in question now as they
> were then."
>
> (Packman, 1981)

Indeed once again in 1984 we have the results of a government enquiry into Children in Care, this time in the form of a Report from the Select Committee of the House of Commons, known as the Short Report. Despite having its deliberations interrupted by the parliamentary general election of June 1983, the committee produced a lengthy report containing 150 recommendations. Such a report however is not a commitment to action, although it may create a spur to rethinking and hopefully to better practice on the part of child care agencies, as well as providing a framework for further, better informed, public debate.

The present position on children in care however can best be appreciated through an understanding of the changes that have occurred over the last forty years in the legal and administrative framework, in the knowledge base and in the emphases and trends in child care practice.

THE CHILDREN ACT, 1948

The attitude to child care that was inherited by the new Children's Departments, when they were created in 1948, was largely one of 'salvationism' - whereby children were viewed as being in need of protection from the inadequacies and undesirable influence of unsatis- factory parents, and in need of training in social and vocational skills in order to achieve an early independence. There was a mood of optimism that children could be rescued from unsatisfactory homes and directed to a new and better life, in particular through foster care (BASW, 1983). Thus much of the work of the early children's officers was in the development of foster care; in the finding of suitable foster homes and the placement in those homes of children who had been separated from their natural parents: a policy of 'rescue and remove'. The requirements of the new service to meet the needs of deprived children had to be learnt

step by step. In particular, one aspect of this service reflected a new departure: a commitment to a personal service - so that each child in care would have its individual needs looked after by a Child Care Officer.

THE CHILDREN AND YOUNG PERSONS ACT, 1963

Although the major emphasis in the early work of the Children's Departments was on the need to improve standards of substitute care, it became increasingly apparent to the children's officers that more attention needed to be placed on prevention - both prevention of the separation of a child from its family and prevention of neglect and cruelty within the family. Many Children's Departments did take initiatives in this direction, but because there was no firm legal standing many were hampered by a lack of any resources for preventative work and a lack of cooperation with other agencies, particularly housing departments. These initiatives in providing resources and facilities to vulnerable families were eventually given statutory recognition in the 1963 Children and Young Persons Act, which placed a duty upon local authorities:

> "to make available such advice, guidance and assistance as may
> promote the welfare of children by diminishing the need to receive
> children into or keep them in care ... any provisions made by a
> local authority under this subsection may include provision for
> giving assistance in kind, or, in exceptional circumstances, in
> cash."

This new emphasis on prevention led to an important shift in the focus of the child care service. The cases of children supervised in their own homes were soon to greatly outnumber those of children 'in care', as both the scale and the range of services to families expanded. Part of this expansion was the growing involvement of child care officers with juvenile delinquents or young people at risk of becoming delinquent. Packman (1981) gives a detailed account of the work of the Oxfordshire Children's Department in developing policies to deal with young offenders. Many such initiatives influnced the thinking behind the 1969 Children and Young Persons Act. As Packman says, "local experiment had become national policy".

THE CHILDREN AND YOUNG PERSONS ACT, 1969

There were two opposing philosophies on the appropriate way to deal with young offenders. One school of thought saw delinquent children as no different from deprived children, except they were in trouble with the law; both were victims of poor environmental backgrounds or of neglectful, often broken, homes and therefore in need of care and protection. The other school saw the young delinquent as an offender, who must suffer the due process of law and whose behaviour must be subject to training and control. The 1969 Act was an attempt to reconcile these views. This almost impossible task was made even more difficult by the changes made to the original package by the new Conservative government before implementation took place. Briefly, the Act removed the distinction between children who came before the courts because of unsatisfactory home circumstances and those who had committed an offence: both could be made subject to a Care Order, which gave the choice of residence of the child to the Social Service Department. The duty which the Act placed upon local authorities and the courts to develop strategies to deal with these young people in the community was to be fulfilled in part by the introduction of Intermediate Treatment.

Effective implementation of the Act was however hindered by the confusion which followed the reorganisation of local government services in 1971. Although most people welcomed the new Social Services Departments as a continuation of the move towards a more integrated, broad based, family approach to the personal social services, the process of reorganisation had an almost paralysing effect on much social work. The skills and training of the old child care officers were diluted in the expanded service. This, together with acute shortage of residential accommodation, meant that the early years of the operation of the 1969 Act lead to much criticism of social workers by magistrates and police. Indeed, throughout much of the 1970's social work as a whole was faced with a 'bad press'. Despite some examples of exciting developments in child care practice such as the special family placement project in Kent (Hazel, 1981) and other specialist fostering schemes (Shaw & Hipgrave, 1983), the general picture of social work was of overloaded, generic, often young, case workers with increasing statutory respon-

sibilities: a situation which encouraged a move away from a family or community centred approach back to individually focused and crisis orientated work, although still following, theoretically, a policy of prevention and rehabilitation.

THE CHILDREN ACT, 1975

The concerns and controversies that had arisen within child care are well illustrated by three events which occurred in 1973. These were: the death of Maria Colwell; the publication of an American book 'Beyond the Best Interests of the Child', (Goldstein, Freud and Solnit, 1973); the research findings published in 'Children Who Wait' (Rowe and Lambert, 1973). Each of these events was influential in the debate which preceded the passing of the 1975 Children Act, and we shall briefly consider them in turn.

Maria Colwell died at the hands of her step father, having been returned by the Social Services Department to live with her natural mother after six years in a seemingly happy foster home. Maria's death and the subsequent enquiry were to receive maximum press publicity. The enquiry team said "What has clearly emerged, at least to us, is a failure of a system" (DHSS, 1974). However, much criticism was also expressed of the decision by the Social Services Department to allow Maria to be returned to her mother, a situation which highlighted the lack of security of foster placements. One of the strongest criticisms of the handling of the case came in a book 'Remember Maria', in which the author accused social workers of being too strongly influenced by notions of maternal deprivation and giving too great a prominence to the 'blood-tie' relationship. Adherence to such attitudes, he suggested, resulted in the adoption of policies of rehabilitation without sufficient thought being given to the child's best interests (Howells, 1974).

A similar theme was prominent in the influential study, 'Beyond the Best Interests of the Child' (Goldstein, Freud and Solnit, 1973). These authors believed that what was important to a child was his 'psychological parents', that is, the parents to whom he had an emotional attachment - an attachment which resulted, not from biological ties but rather from day-to-day interaction in a caring and sharing relationship.

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Furthermore this study suggested that children were incapable of loving two sets of parents, especially if they were hostile to each other. Therefore continuity and security were seen as vital to a child and the authors argued that this should be reflected in placement decisions.

The third influential event in 1973 was the publication of a study which had been undertaken on behalf of ABAFA by Rowe and Lambert. In contrast to official policy this study pointed to the fact that many children stayed in care, often in residential establishments, for most of their childhood; furthermore, once a child had been in care for six months he had only a one in four chance of returning to his family. Rowe and Lambert found that from a sample of children under eleven years old, who had already been in care for six months, 22% were thought by their social workers to be in need of a permanent substitute family. These then are the 'Children Who Wait' - children who are inappropriately placed and who are 'waiting' for a decision that will place them more appropriately. Why do so many children 'wait'? Lack of resources is obviously one cause, but Rowe and Lambert concluded that lack of commitment to long-term planning and poor quality decision-making were also vitally important factors.

All these studies pointed to a need for greater protection for children from irresponsible parents and for children in care to be provided with greater security. Perhaps as Adcock et al suggest "children might well need as much protection from inadequate local authority care as from their birth parent" (Adcock, White and Rowland, 1983).

By no means did everyone accept that local authorities should be given increased powers which would restrict those of natural parents. Thorpe (1974) argued that natural parents were not given the necessary social work support to maintain contact with their children, and indeed social workers often discouraged contact. Yet there is evidence of the crucial role of social work activity in the successful rehabilitation of children (Aldgate 1977, 1980). Holman argued for the development of 'inclusive' rather than 'exclusive' fostering, whereby a foster parent could work with both the social worker and the natural parents to facilitate the rehabilitation of the child, if at all possible, (Holman,

1975). Others stressed the links between poverty, homelessness, social deprivation and the receipt of children into care (CPAG, 1975; Wilson, 1974). Indeed BASW joined with four other organisations, NCOPF, CPAG, Gingerbread and MIND, in issuing a joint statement because they were concerned that children were coming into care because of social deprivation or lack of preventative social work.

Fox labels these two value positions as the 'kinship defenders' and the 'state-as-parent protagonists'. This author provides a useful summary of these two value positions which are quoted in some length:

"The position of the 'kinship defenders' may be briefly outlined as follows. The natural, i.e. biological, family is perceived as being of unique value to the child and as being, for the vast majority of children, the optimum context for their growth, upbringing and development. State intervention should therefore be directed to preserving, supporting and strengthening the family unit; only in unusual and extreme situations should it be disrupted.

"In contrast the 'society-as-parent protagonists' place greater faith in the possibility of beneficient state intervention to protect children's well-being. The responsibility and necessity for such action to defend children against parential mistreatment is strongly emphasised. When parental care is inadequate, children should be placed with those who are best able to care for them ... a high value tends to be placed on certainty and permanence so that when a child is removed from his natural parents and rapid rehabilitation seems unlikely, he should not be confused by multiple parent figures or uncertain plans for his future ... the emphasis is on the child as a unit distinct from his family and on the responsibility of society to care for him in the best way possible - by giving his care, permanently and legally to adults other than his parents if necessary."

(Fox, 1982)

The differences between these two schools of thought were very evident in the debate surrounding the passing of the Children Act, 1975.

This Act was wide ranging and its implementation was phased over a lengthy period. Indeed, it was not until 1984 that the majority of the Act was implemented; a 'dribs and drabs' approach to implementation of the law that has been severely criticised. In general terms the Act gave more power to local authorities to assume parental rights over children in voluntary care; it made the process of adoption easier, even against parental wishes; it gave greater security to placements in

substitute care and for the first time it gave children in care
the right to be consulted about decisions affecting them. The overriding
principle inherent in the implementation of the Act was to be 'the
welfare of the child'. It placed the duty upon local authorities, in
reaching decisions about a child in their care, to give first consideration
to the need to safeguard and promote the child's welfare throughout
his childhood.

THE NINETEEN EIGHTIES

Social work in general and child care in particular entered the
1980's in an atmosphere of growing public scepticism about both the
purposes and practices of social workers. As Barclay says in the
introduction to his report:

> "Too much is generally expected of social workers. We load
> upon them unrealistic expectations and we them complain when
> they do not live up to them."

<div align="right">(Barclay, 1982)</div>

The Barclay Report was the outcome of an independent enquiry into the
'role and tasks of social workers', requested by the Secretary of State
for Social Services because of continuing, underlying uncertainties
about the future of social work. Given unfavourable public attitudes
it was reassuring to the profession that Barclay was able to say:

> "In spite of all the complexities and uncertainties
> surrounding the functions of social workers, we are
> united in our belief that the work they do is of vital
> importance in our society ... and social workers are
> needed as never before."

The complexities of the social work task as identified by Barclay are
exemplified in the field of child care. The implementation of the 1975
Act has done nothing to reconcile the 'kinship defenders' or the
'state-as-parent protagonists'. If anything a greater polarization of
views has occurred which is being crudely characterised in the national
and social work press as parents' rights versus children's rights.
While there is a large measure of agreement that the focus should be
on the welfare of the child, the controversy surrounds the way in which
'a child's best interest' is defined and the ways of fulfilling that
definition.

Although the 1975 Children Act gave the local authority the power
to offer greater protection to neglected or abused children, doubts
have continued to be expressed over the ability of the local authorities
to fulfil a parental role and to offer secure and stable substitute homes
to children in their care. These doubts stem from continuing evidence
of the failure of Social Service Departments to implement effective
long-term plans for children in care. One example of this has been
brought to public attention through the biography and subsequent television
play which tells the story of the early life of Graham Gaskin in the
care of a local authority. This young man believed that his unhappy
history was the result of continuous ill considered and reactive decision-
making on the part of the Social Services and which in turn was compounded
by appalling standards of substitute care (McVeigh, 1981). This is but
one vivid personal illustration of the disasters that can befall
children allowed to 'drift' in care.

It is from consideration of the evidence of multiple episodes in
care and the large numbers of different placements that many children
in care are subject to that a 'philosophy of permanence' has been
articulated. One of the strongest promoters of this philosophy is the
British Agencies for Adoption and Fostering, which sees planning for
permanence as a way of avoiding long-term care while recognising the
interests of both parents and children.

> "The underlying philosophy of the new approach is that children
> need and have a right to a stable permanent home and should be
> given the legal security to make this possible. A child in care
> cannot have a permanent home; permanence can only be achieved if
> the child has a stable home, either with birth parents or with
> adoptive parents."
>
> (Adcock, White and Rowland, 1983)

The emphasis of this approach is still on a need for rehabilitation
and a permanent place for the child with his natural parents, but with
a recognised alternative course of action available if the optimum
plan is not achieved within a time limit.

Whether in response to such a 'philosophy of permanence', or as a
result of pressure from public criticism, the application of the 1975
Act has seen an increase in the use of compulsory powers by the local
authorities: increasing assumptions of parental rights over children

in voluntary care; increasing use of Care Orders for younger children or children who have committed less serious offences; increasing use of Place of Safety Orders; increasing applications for adoptions without parental consent; increasing use of wardship proceedings.

This greater use, by the local authorities, of formal powers over children and families is subject to increasing challenge from several quarters, in particular the Childrens Legal Centre, The Family Rights Centre, and The National Council for One Parent Families. The objections of these organisations are prompted by a concern with the infringement of civil liberties or denials of natural justice that arise from the exercise of the powers of local authorities, for instance in terminating contact between a child and his family, or in assuming parental rights over a child. They argue that such action should only be taken when authorised by the courts, and not through administrative procedures. These arguments have achieved a measure of success: the DHSS issued new draft guidelines on the assumption of parental rights and parental access to children during Autumn 1983, and early in 1984 new legislation included clarification of parents' right of access to their children. This new law allowed appeal to the courts by parents whose access had been totally terminated and also included a Code of Practice on the planning, restricting and reviewing access orders and on communicating and consulting with the child and his family on these matters. (Murray, 1984). Practice on the assumption of parental rights is at present governed by DHSS guidelines: the Short Committee made a firm recommendation on this.

> "We recommend that the process of transfer of parental rights to local authorities should henceforth have to be undertaken by the courts."
>
> (Short Report, 1984)

Simultaneously, pressure continues to give children and young people in care a greater say in decisions that relate to them, which is, after all, a requirement of the 1975 Act. The initiative taken by the National Childrens Bureau in their conference for young people in care has lead to the establishment of several Who Cares? groups (Page and Clark, 1977). The National Association of Children and Young People in Care is growing in numbers and experience, giving it the confidence to question the

actions of local authorities in dealing with children in their care. The effectiveness of this organisation has further been increased by the recognition it has received from the DHSS, not least in the form of a grant towards its costs.

Because of a recognition of the uncertainties, indeed conflicts, surrounding child care law and practice there was a general welcome for the establishment, in 1983, of the enquiry into Children in Care by the House of Commons Select Committee on Social Services. As noted earlier this Committee produced a lengthy report which will not bring sudden change, not least because many of its recommendations are not open to action by government, but are addressed to local authorities or professional bodies with the intention of encouraging and promoting better child care practice. The committee did recognise the current dissatisfaction with the confused state of child care legislation and recommended:

> "a thorough going review of the body of statute law, regulations and judicial decisions relating to children in care."
>
> (Short Report, 1984)

In its response to the Short Report the government agreed to the establishments of a working party to review present child care legislation. This interdepartmental working party, chaired by the DHSS will aim to both consolidate existing law and if necessary propose changes in the law covering such aspects as place of safety orders, voluntary admissions to care, but excluding the criminal law as it relates to young offenders (DHSS et al, 1984).

Looking at the development of the child care services since the war, one could ask: is it inevitable that there will be uncertainty and conflict in this area? The situation is certainly full of inherent contradictions. A first choice may be to help keep a child united with his parents, but some parents are not able or willing to provide for the needs of their children. Not only must these children be protected, they must also be offered an alternative that will serve them well throughout the whole of their childhood. As BASW notes:

> "All too often there's no ideal solution, but rather a question of weighing unsatisfactory options and selecting the least detrimental alternative."
>
> (BASW, 1983)

However, one could also ask, is it possible that the conflicts surrounding child care issues are more apparent than real? The polarisation of the argument has lead to a simplification of the discussion so that children in care are treated as a single aggregate, rather than the heterogeneous group that they are. A policy that is appropriate for a very young child is unlikely to serve the needs of a disaffected teenager; nor are the needs of a handicapped child with no parental contact the same as those of a child whose mother is temporarily unable to care for her through illness.

How does this confusion among child care policy makers impact on field social workers? There may be a danger that because of the complexities of the pressures and the undue simplification of the debate that social workers may be inhibited in acting decisively on behalf of their child clients or they may adhere too rigidly to a single vogue practice. It is necessary to ensure that an environment is created in which social workers feel sufficiently secure to be guided in their practice solely by the needs of each individual child.

The discussion in this chapter of both the development and present state of child care policies sets the broad context for an understanding of current child care practices. In the next chapter the discussion will move from this broad consideration of policy issues to focus more narrowly on child care practice and to one aspect of practice in particular, namely statutory reviews.

CHAPTER 3

STATUTORY REVIEWS ON CHILDREN IN CARE

INTRODUCTION

This chapter begins by setting out the statutory requirements for reviewing the cases of children in care. This is followed by an examination of some of the existing literature on reviews, together with a comparison of judicial reviews in the United States of America, and the Scottish Children's Hearings. Consideration is then given to the purpose of reviews, and to recent attempts within the child care field to ensure that reviews are used more effectively. The chapter concludes with a short section reporting on the evidence relating to reviews that was submitted to the House of Commons Select Committee on Children in Care, the report of that committee and the government's response to the report.

THE STATUTORY BACKGROUND

Section 21 of the 1955 Boarding-Out Regulations requires that foster placements must be reviewed within three months and thereafter at least every six months. The general instruction contained in these regulations is to review "the child's welfare, conduct, health and progress". (These regulations are now included under Section 22 Child Care Act, 1980).

Section 27(4) of the Children and Young Persons Act of 1969 amended the law to require reviews to be held every six months on all children in the care of the Local Authority. If a child is in care under a Care Order, this Act added an additional requirement, namely 'to consider in the course of the review whether to make application for the discharge of the order'.

Apart from the timing of reviews these laws contained no regulation on the conduct of the review. Section 3, par.7(1) of the 1975 Children Act (now section 20 of the 1980 Child Care Act) gave the Secretary of State the power to make regulations governing statutory reviews by

local authorities. This includes the power to make regulations about:

- the manner in which cases are to be reviewed
- the considerations to which local authorities are to have regard
  in reviewing cases
- the time when a child's case is first to be reviewed and the
  frequency of subsequent reviews.

So far no action has been taken on defining or implementing such regulations, although a DHSS circular (LAC(76)15) provides some guidance on the possible nature of such regulations, with reference to:

(a)   the timing of reviews

(b)   who should be present.

The relevant sections of this circular are quoted below:

> "(a)   A second stage (i.e. after reception into care) for
> decision would be reached when the child has been in care for
> between two and four months. Careful planning at this stage for
> all children may prevent some children from drifting into
> situations which may not be in their best long-term interests.

> "(b)   Discussions of a child's future should always include
> parents except where this is obviously inappropriate. Foster
> parents, residential staff, teachers and other people directly
> involved in the child's life should also be included in the
> discussions. A child who is mature enough to understand the
> implications of such a review could be invited to be present,
> or at least during part of the discussion at the review."

                                        (DHSS/LAC, 1976)

These guidelines carry no statutory backing, nor do they represent current practice on the conduct of reviews.

As we shall see later, many of the organisations submitting written evidence to the House of Commons Select Committee, pressed for the speedy implementation of this section of the 1975 Children Act, a proposal supported by the Short Committee. However, in November 1980 Sir George Young stated that the government would only press ahead with implementing those sections of the 1975 Act that entailed no net additional costs. The joint working party on the cost of operating the unimplemented provisions of the Children Act reported in October 1980 that;

> "review regulations will involve local authorities in a substantial
> amount of additional work and estimated that their additional cost
> might be in the region of an additional £6 million annually."

                                        (Adoption and Fostering, 1981)

One might ask how well the statutory obligations of the local authorities are presently being fulfilled if the regulation of their conduct would involve so much extra work as to make them financially unacceptable to the government. In delaying the implementation of this section of the 1975 Act the government may well be sacrificing long term benefits for the sake of containing expenditure in the short-term.

A REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The existing literature on statutory reviews falls into three categories. First, reports from research projects which have been specifically designed to examine reviews. Second, reports from research projects on other aspects of child care practice, but which include some findings or discussion on reviews. Third, reports or articles which are based upon experience or accumulated knowledge of child care practice, rather than deriving from specially formulated research projects.

Examples of the first category are very limited, and concentrate on two aspects of reviews in child care: the extent to which the regulations are fulfilled, in particular the boarding out regulations; and the degree of participation in the reviews by children and their families.

A major recent survey which monitored social services department compliance with the regulations was carried out by the Social Work Service and published by the DHSS in 1982. This report was very critical of the work of social service departments in fulfilling the Boarding Out Regulations. In referring to the conduct of reviews the report noted that:

> "Files were examined in 28 authorities but only in eleven were
> reviews carried out regularly within the statutory limits ...
> In some authorities reviews were regarded as a paper exercise or
> administrative routine and some consisted merely of retyping
> previous reviews ... Limited use was made of the reviews in
> planning a child's future ... a very much better standard of
> work would have been achieved if greater attention had been paid
> to them as a process for making decisions. "

(DHSS, 1982)

At present the review process is left to the discretion of individual authorities or even to individual area officers. This has lead to an immense variation in the conduct of reviews, a point made by Stevenson et al in their study of Social Service teams (Stevenson, 1978). This has been confirmed by the first findings from a recent study of review procedures by McDonnell and Aldgate. These researchers surveyed, by questionnaire, all local authorities in England asking them to provide factual information on the conduct of reviews, together with examples of review forms or written aids. By its very nature such a study cannot identify what local authorities actually 'do' in the course of their reviews, but it can tell us something of the procedures involved. These authors point to a problem arising from the great variety of practice reported to them:

"Given the wide variation of procedures, it would appear that social workers or seniors moving to a new department are likely to have to learn a very different range of administrative processes."

(McDonnell and Aldgate, 1984)

A similar study was commenced in 1983 by the Children's Legal Centre who undertook a survey - as yet unpublished - of the policies and practices for conducting reviews that had been adopted by all Social Services departments. This survey took the form of a questionnaire plus the collection of written information that had been produced by the authorities, such as review forms, guidelines, policy documents.

The Childrens' Legal Centre is particularly interested in the policies of local authorities with regard to the involvement of young people in their reviews and in decision-making in general. This is a topic which is also of immediate concern to the Family Rights Group. In 1983 this organisation embarked on an action research project with the aim of working together with two local authorities to devise a system for including parents and children in all reviews, whether held in a Children's Home or an area office. This research is still in its early stages and therefore no findings are available as yet. However, one study on the involvement of children in their reviews was published in 1983, under the title of 'Gizza Say' (Stein & Ellis, 1983). This was the largest research project to have specifically sought the opinions of young people in care and was undertaken by the National

Association of Young People in Care with the help of the Centre for Applied Studies at Leeds University. In all, 465 young people were questioned about their attitudes to reviews, how much they were involved and how they thought reviews could be improved. The authors concluded:

> "It is clear from our research that there is no national policy or practice about allowing young people to attend their reviews. Some go in for the whole review, some attend for part of the review, some go in to be told the decisions at the end and some young people are never invited to attend at all ... At the present time how young people experience reviews is therefore very much a lottery."
>
> (Stein & Ellis, 1983)

Many other studies of various aspects of child care practice have made mention of reviews, without making this the primary focus of the work. Examples of these are the study by Stevenson et al on the work of several social service teams (Stevenson et al, 1978); the study by Lambert and Rowe for the ABAFA of children in care who are in need of permanent substitute families (Rowe and Lambert, 1973); the National Childrens Bureau 'Who Cares?' project (Page and Clark, 1977); several research projects set up to monitor the effects of the implementation of the 1975 Children Act (Rowe, Hudleby, Paul and Keane, 1981 and 1984; Adcock, White and Rowlands, 1982 and 1983). In general the tone of all these studies has been critical of reviews, mainly in relation to whether, and how, they were conducted. This is well illustrated by the following quotations:

> "found that 82% of the reports on boarded out children were overdue, and 53% were more than three months overdue; 76% of all reviews were overdue and 50% of them by more than three months. "
>
> (Stevenson et al, 1978)

> "In 37% of cases social workers were unable to provide information about whether reviews had been carried out. In 12% only half or less of the required reviews had been done. Social workers could tell us confidently that the full number of reviews had been done in only 35% of cases."
>
> (Adcock, White and Rowlands, 1982)

"Most, but not all, the study agencies had found it possible to complete the statutory reviews. In the light of this rather encouraging picture on regularity of reviews it seemed somewhat strange that in many cases there should have been such long delays in coming to a decision about a child's need for a substitute family ... even when agencies had carefully devised proforma for reviews these were often completed in such a routine way that they were relatively useless."

(Rowe and Lambert, 1973)

"The reviews of children every six months is in danger of becoming an administrative procedure rather than real dialogue, and radical rethinking of a child's treatment is militated against by a felt lack of alternatives and insufficient priority being given to preparation for the reviews."

(Sayer, Forbes, Newman and Jamison, 1976)

The picture presented here of ineffective review procedures was repeated in evidence to the Select Committee:

"All of those who submitted evidence agreed that reformation of current review practices was badly needed to transform reviews where the past months' experiences are summarily presented to a senior manager and no definite plan of action is agreed for a child's future into a much more positive process."

(Short Report, 1984)

Rowe and Lambert also found that although reviews were held regularly in most of the agencies in their study, they did not necessarily result in action. The authors gave four reasons for this:

"This is almost certainly due to (i) failure to set clear priorities, (ii) review decisions which the field work staff do not understand or accept, (iii) team leaders or area directors who were not present at the review, and are not aware of the plan, do not agree with it or do not see what is required and do not allow the social worker time to carry it out properly, (iv) using reviews in a stereotyped way which complies with regulations but with no real grasp of their potentialities.

(Rowe and Lambert, 1973)

While considering research projects that have concerned themselves in some way with statutory reviews mention should be made of three large scale projects on various aspects of decision making in relation to children in care that have been financed by the DHSS. These studies, which commenced around 1977, are 'decision making concerning the admission of children to local authority care', which is being investigated by

Jean Packman at Exeter University; 'social work decision-making and
its effect on the length of time which children spend in care', which
is being researched by David Fruin and Jeni Vernon at the National
Childrens Bureau; and the maintenance of links between children in
care and their families which is being undertaken by the Dartington
Research Unit. Although these projects are nearing completion, no
material has as yet been published. However, it is anticipated that in
the course of conducting these studies information will have been
gathered on reviews and their place in decision-making for children in
care.

Our knowledge base on statutory reviews is not only derived from
academic research but also from accumulated experience of social work
practice and from specific examples of either good or bad practice
that have been shared through publication.

Thus the DHSS 'Guide to Foster Care', which was the outcome of a
DHSS working party on good fostering practice, contains a chapter on
'reviewing progress'. This contains much sound advice on how to use
reviews to their best advantage, for example:

> "There is general agreement that formal reviewing is essential
> for good case management and that procedures for this need to be
> established and maintained ... In addition good administrative
> and clerical support will be necessary ... at the review the family
> situation, the appropriateness of the current placement and plan
> and the efficacy of the social work input will all need to be
> evaluated ... a team or case conference approach has much to
> recommend it ... where the child is not included he should ... be
> given a specific opportunity of expressing his opinion prior to
> the review."

(DHSS, 1976)

Similarly, a section on reviews was contained in the report of the
working party established by the National Childrens Bureau 'to consider
the care, welfare and education of children separated from their
families for recurrent or long periods. In particular, to examine the
means of planning for these children so as to promote continuity and
quality in their care, education and welfare'. This report offered
several suggestions for improving the effectiveness of the review

27

process, some of which are below.

"Regular reviews should be conducted for all children in
substitute care, ideally when matters have not reached a crisis
point ... provides a means by which continuity of planning may
be achieved. Carefully conducted it ensures that children do
not languish where they are for want of reconsideration...regular
reviews which from the start include all interested people will
reduce the likelihood that smouldering differences are pushed out
of sight only to flare up later but unexpectedly ... a review must
allocate tasks if work is to be done and must set time limits for
their fulfilment and reporting back."

(Parker, 1980)

The very serious criticisms of foster care practice contained in
the Survey of Boarding Out Regulations (DHSS, 1982) persuaded the
British Association of Social Workers of the need to give careful
consideration to ways of raising the standards of foster care practice.
Having established a working party to consider the matter BASW produced
their 'Guidelines for Practice in Family Placement' (BASW, 1982).
The key concept of the guidelines is that every child in a placement has
the right to a written agreement which will cover five basic points
concerning that placement. These are: the purpose of the placement;
its duration; the contact with social workers; contact with natural
family; the prodedures for review and termination of the placement.
The Guidelines then elaborate on the purpose of the review, the expected
outcomes from the review and the membership of the review. Hence the
BASW guidelines say that every review should produce:

"1. a consideration of the events of the last (six) months,
    including developments in the foster home, school/work,
    health, contact with family of origin and social work
    input;
2. an assessment of the present situation in relation to the
    original agreement and/or last review;
3. a plan of work for the next (six) months;
4. a long term plan (if appropriate). "

(BASW, 1982)

Having considered the process for conducting statutory reviews
on Children in Care in England and Wales, let us compare this with
aspects of child care practice in Scotland and in the United States
of America.

Statutory reviews in England and Wales and the Children's Hearings in Scotland differ in context, role and purpose. Nonetheless they are both key mechanisms for decision-making in child care cases and hence studies from one situation may be relevant to the other. The Children's Hearings were established as part of the Social Work (Scotland) Act 1968. The Hearings consider the grounds for the referral of a case and having discussed this with the child and her/his parents the Hearing can make one of three decisions: to discharge the referral; to require the child to submit to a stated form of supervision; to require the child to reside in a named residential establishment. This decision is to be made solely in the best interests of the child. The Hearing is usually attended by three lay members, the reporter, a social worker, the parents and the child and any other relevant professionals.

One large scale study of Scottish Children's Hearings set out to look at those factors which directly or indirectly influenced the decision-making process. This was published as 'Children Out of Court' by Martin, Fox and Murray (1981). Like the reports on statutory reviews that we have considered, this research was critical of the widespread laxity in the conduct of hearings and listed a great many breaches of the approved procedures. It also found disturbing features in the style of some hearings and, while emphasising the importance of social worker reports, was critical of the information contained in them and of the way in which recommendations were made:

> "Recommendations usually have the appearance of having been grafted on at the end of a somewhat discursive description rather than of flowing logically from an incisive review.

> (Martin, Fox and Murray, 1981)

The study did report that the children's and parent's response to the panels was very positive, they understood what the panels were about, and they saw the panel members and social workers as helpful rather than punitive. Despite their criticisms of failings in the system the authors judged them as 'distinctly successful'. However, it should be

noted that this study did not make any evaluation of the effectiveness
of the system from the point of view of the subsequent history
of the children who passed through the system. The authors state:

> "The reason we were not in a position to pass any final
> judgement in terms of success or failure was the lack of any
> agreed criteria by which judgements should be made. If those
> who designed the system had made an unambiguous statement of its
> central objectives, it might have been possible to assess empir-
> ically with what degree of success this objective had been attained."
>
> (Martin, Fox and Murray, 1981)

A very similar situation pertains to the statutory review
system in England and Wales as constituted at present. The confusion
surrounding the purpose of reviews is one aspect that will be considered
when we discuss that topic later in this chapter.

JUDICIAL REVIEWS IN THE USA

The concerns and anxieties expressed about child care practice
in Britain are mirrored in the USA where the activities of social work
agencies are increasingly the subject of judicial processes (Pierson,
1983). Hence in an attempt to reduce the uncertainty for children in
care by more decisive planning, many states in the USA now demand that
'service plans' are made for children in care and furthermore that
these plans should be reviewed and evaluated on a regular basis. For
example, the state of Texas requires that:

> "A plan of service shall be developed which specifies each
> child's need and the way these needs will be met ... The plan
> shall include the objectives of placement and the estimated
> length of stay in care."
>
> (State of Texas, 1976)

Not only do many states require that these plans be reviewed
regularly by the agency, but many now require that they are reviewed
and evaluated through the court system. In 1971, Section 392 of the
New York Social Services Law was enacted to provide judicial review of
all children who had been in foster care continuously for 24 months.
(In 1975 this was amended to 18 months.) A study carried out in 1974
of children in care since 1970 was able to compare the subsequent case

histories of those children who had been reviewed by the courts and those who had not. It was:

> "found that the court review appeared to act as a catalyst in getting agencies to examine cases of children in care more carefully, develop plans for them, and take steps to implement such plans."
>
> <div align="right">(Festinger, 1975)</div>

The same researcher carried out a later study of children reviewed by the court. She concluded that:

> "the legislative intent in enacting Section 392 of the Social Services Law was to reduce the number of children who remained in the limbo of foster care, and to obtain permanent homes for as many children as possible, either through discharge to their familes or through adoptive placement. The data in this study show that the '392 court reviews' had had a cumulative effect in moving to accomplish this goal."
>
> <div align="right">(Festinger, 1976)</div>

This study also reported data on the process of the reviews and the implementation of the court orders. Two sets of findings from that study are very relevant to the research on statutory reviews reported in this book. The courts required the social work agencies to submit reports within a certain time. Thirty percent of these reports were not submitted on time, but the courts were very slow to follow this up:

> "The failure of the court to require reports on time and the failure of the agencies to submit them on time thus results both in waste of court time and possible postponement of action on cases. These findings indicate a poor record by agencies in fulfilling their responsibilities and by the court in failing to monitor and compel compliance with its orders."
>
> <div align="right">(Festinger, 1976)</div>

A monitoring of reports, both in terms of timing and content, has since been instituted by the court. These findings show that, as with statutory reviews in this country, a legal requirement is not of itself sufficient. It is essential that it is combined with an efficient monitoring and enforcement procedure.

The second finding which is very pertinent is the assessment by the researcher of the extent of compliance with the courts' directives, based on the reports of the social worker to the courts:

> "These ratings were based on the activity reported by each agency without attempting to evaulate the quality of the work done."

<div align="center">31</div>

This method of assessment is very comparable to that used in the study of decision implementation which follows. Festinger found that the lack of precision in both court orders and the agency reports led to a high proportion of 'high compliance' ratings:

> "a report that mentioned 'working with the mother on discharge' or 'exploring plans' could mean many things. Unfortunately, the lack of specificity in many of the reports forced a relatively lenient view of compliance ... With lenient interpretation, three quarters of the reports were rated as in high compliance."

(Festinger, 1976)

The problem of effectively evaluating the implementation of very imprecise directives was one that arose in the present study, as will be discussed in Chapter 11.

THE PURPOSE OF REVIEWS

From the review of the literature in the last section it can be seen that thought has been given to how reviews may be used more effectively. However, the evidence of review practice suggests that these good intentions do not represent current reality. Poor practices arise when reviews are accorded a low priority and hence they lose out when other demands are more pressing. The low priority accorded to reviews may arise because of a confusion over their nature and purpose. This is a point which was highlighted in the editorial of Adoption and Fostering, No.99, 1980:

> "There is no consensus about the object of reviews or the form they take or even their importance."

What then is the purpose of reviews?   Why is there such confusion over this? Although the statutory basis for conducting reviews, the 1955 Boarding Out Regulations, still exists, since that time there have been several changes in the expectations of reviews. As different aspects of child care practice have become a dominant concern so the expectations of reviews have changed, and additional functions have been included alongside those which reviews already attempted to fulfil. The boarding out regulations themselves were introduced at a time of great expansion

in the number of foster homes. Hence the primary purpose in making
reviews statutory was supervisory or managerial: to ensure that
Children's Departments at least kept track of all the children on their
books and monitored standards of care. With the growing evidence in the
early 1970's of children 'adrift' in care, reviews were promoted as a
way of monitoring not only the material care that children receive, but
also the decision-making or planning that social service departments
undertake on behalf of their children. Similarly, the growing trend in
consumerism and self-advocacy in the later 1970's and early 1980's has
created pressure for reviews to be a vehicle for increased client partici-
pation, enabling children and their families to be more involved in the
service that is provided to them. A further aspect of the current child
care debate that has implications for the review process is that of
protecting clients' rights by monitoring the use of the increasing power
of the social service departments to intervene in the lives of their
clients. We shall briefly consider each of these three developments in
turn.

Reviews and Long Term Planning

Section 59 of the 1975 Children Act (now Section 18 of the 1980
Child Care Act) states that:

> "In reaching any decision relating to a child in their care, a
> local authority shall give first consideration to the need to
> safeguard and promote the welfare of the child throughout his
> childhood."

This requirement is now being widely interpreted as a duty placed upon
the local authority to make adequate plans for their child clients,
and reviews are one obvious occasion for ensuring that this happens.
This understanding imples that the functions of reviews are no longer
simply to 'safeguard' children by monitoring the care they receive,
but should include the more active duty of 'promoting their welfare'.
This purpose of reviews is well recognised in the literature:

> "The responsibility of care agencies to make and carry out indi-
> vidual plans which meet the needs of children entrusted to their
> care cannot be over-emphasised ... The aim of all case reviews
> will be to agree a plan tailored to meet the needs of each individual
> child and his circumstances."
>
> (DHSS, 1976)

"The main purpose of a review is to agree a clear plan for the
future of the child or young person."

<div align="right">(BASW, 1982)</div>

"If drift and indecision are to be prevented and if the concept
of planning for a child's future with some degree of permanence
is to have any meaning, the review process must be tightened up."

<div align="right">(Short Report, 1984)</div>

Policies to try to relate reviews and long-term planning have been
adopted by several local authorities. Three examples are mentioned
briefly below.

Yvonne Auger discusses the policy and practice of Lewisham Social
Services Department as set out in their 'Guidelines for the Under Sixes'
(Auger, 1980). Reviews play an important part in this. The guidelines
say 'until long-term plans have been made and implemented the cases of
all children under the age of six years will be reviewed every three
months'. These reviews proved to be an essential part of the improvement
in planning. 'The pattern of reviews this set up have served to stress
the urgency of the situation to the social worker.' The undertaking of
reviews is not sufficient; they must be part of the planning process.
'It has been very important in these reviews for goals to be set from
one review to the next, and for any progress to be real and to be seen
to be made.'

The Social Services Department of Essex County Council developed
what they termed a Child Care Career Planning (CCCP) section. The first
objective of this section was to ensure:

"that the future of every child in care or about to come into care
is positively and decisively planned at the earliest and most useful
time either before or after the commencement of the care episode."

This CCCP was seen as an extension of the review system and not a
replacement for it. 'If however the present review system were to be
supervised in accordance with the principles and practice of CCCP it
could be argued that there would be no need for CCCP.' (Read, 1981)

The London Borough of Wandsworth similarly established a
Children's Advisory Group 'to improve practice in the area of planning
and communicating plans for children in care'. The research team explain

the emergence of this group as follows:

"Within our own Department the longstanding concern about the failure of the statutory review system to produce the necessary plans for children has been given new emphasis by the closure of some children's homes."

The group concluded that:

"the service to children and their families can be improved only by ensuring that plans which are comprehensible to all concerned are made at the outset, and that any changes in those plans are recorded and communicated, together with the reason for the change."

(North Area Research Group, 1981)

Reviews and Participation in Decision-Making

One part of Section 59 of the Children Act, 1975 has already been quoted. That section continues:

"and shall so far as practicable ascertain the wishes and feelings of the child regarding the decision and give due consideration to them, having regard to his age and understanding."

This statement clearly places on local authorities the duty to consult and involve children in their care in the decision-making process. The case can therefore be made that if the functions of reviews are expanded to include a more active concern with decision-making then they should also serve the further function of providing a forum for participation by children and their families. Participation in reviews is not only canvassed in terms of enhancing the client's rights, but also for the overall improvement it can bring to child care practice.

As Parker noted in the National Children's Home Convocation Lecture in 1971:

"Unless and until authorities identify and work with the network of interests woven around a child, they will not be able to make reasonable predictions about his future ... The best designed plans will, I am convinced, prove empty academic exercises and founder unless it is recognised that our interest in deprived children is not the monopoly of a particular officer, or a special children's organisation, but is dispersed among many."

(Parker, 1971)

A similar point is made by the DHSS in their Guide to Foster Practice:

"A team or case conference approach to reviewing has much to recommend it, although it may appear to be expensive in terms of manpower. The membership might include parents, foster parents, the child, residential staff, teacher, medical and nursing personnel. In the long run this may be more economical since it can prevent confusion, provide a better basis for planning and facilitate good woring relationships and communication."

(DHSS, 1976)

BASW in the 'Guidelines for Practice in Family Placement' are even more explicit in specifying who should attend a review:

"The review itself is a formal event at which all concerned with the placement should be present. Membership of the review should consist of:

(a) the core members who are party to the agreement to the placement. If any of them cannot be present the reason should be given in writing;

(b) other persons invited because their knowledge or experience is considered to be helpful in this specific situation, or to help put forward the views of the child/young person;

(c) managers or other specialists, provided that the reviewing team is kept as small as possible but its ability to take decisions is not impaired.

(BASW, 1982)

As mentioned in the previous chapter there has been in recent years a growth in awareness of the consumers perspective, with the increasing prominence of the Children's Legal Centre, the Family Rights Centre and the NAYPIC, all of whom make a strong plea for increased participation by children in reviews. While proposing that there should not be a statutory right of attendance at reviews the Select Committee did accept the need to take children's wishes seriously.

Reviews and Monitoring

Monitoring, both of the care a child receives while placed in a substitute home, and of the work of the social worker, has always been implicit in the review process. As the statutory responsibilities and formal powers of the social service departments have grown, so has the demand for greater protection of clients' rights. This was a topic

that was of concern to the Barclay Committee. They concluded:

> "Whatever arrangements are made by individual social workers and
> their organisations for evaluating their work and effectiveness,
> we are convinced that this will not be sufficient to ensure that
> all clients' interests are protected and public confidence in
> social work maintained ... There should be, in our view, an inde-
> pendent inspectorate which would monitor the practice of both
> social workers and their employing agencies."

<div align="center">(Barclay, 1982)</div>

Supporting this recommendation, the second Report of the House of
Commons Select Committee on the Social Services, published in the summer
of 1982, called for an inspectorate based on the Social Work Service.
This suggestion was echoed by the Secretary of State with the publi-
cation of a discussion document in April 1983 (Community Care, 21.4.83).

It is not possible at this point in time to say exactly how
this call for greater monitoring and inspection will manifest itself.
BASW certainly see a part for their 'Guidelines' which, as we have
seen, are based on the concept of written agreements and collective
reviews:

> "The Barclay Committee has suggested an inspectorate for all
> social work. Where family placement is concerned, the imple-
> mentation of the guidelines would clarify the inspector's task and
> would facilitate the monitoring of practice within the
> departments."

<div align="center">(Hazel, 1982)</div>

Given that statutory reviews are, at present, the primary forum for
monitoring child care practices, it is likely that these will figure,
in the future, in any increased inspection of the work of the Social
Service Departments.

Having discussed the purposes of reviews from several perspectives
and viewpoints, let us finally return to the more official guidelines
contained in paragraph 27 of 'A Study of the Boarding out of Children':

> "The overall purpose of the review can be summarised as bringing
> knowledge of the past and present to bear on formulating plans for
> the child's future. In order to do so it is necessary to bring
> together and consider all the aspects of parenting shared by the
> agency, by those caring for the child and by his natural parents.
> The review must take into account the views of the child and make
> use of the expertise of other professionals who are involved, for
> example in his health care and education. The review can also
> provide an important opportunity for monitoring the work of the

social worker who is responsible for ensuring that the child's needs are met. Plans may have to be made within the constraints of resources but they should form the basis of future work with the child, his family and his carers and be related to well-defined time scales. They need consideration both between and at subsequent reviews to ensure that they are amended as appropriate, that there is a commitment to them by those responsible for taking action and that the action required is carried out."

<div align="right">(DHSS, 1982)</div>

In this section we have presented many and varied statements about the purposes of reviews. How far do these represent what is actually happening on the ground? Given that many authorities find it difficult to even conduct reviews regularly, is it likely that changes in practice will have kept pace with changes in thinking or in policy? The adoption of new practices arises from a recognition of the limitations of the old practices or from benefits to be derived from new ones. However such an evaluation must be related to objectives. Almost all evaluations of social work practice have shown that the benefits which the client gains from casework are greater when the objectives of the casework are explicit (Goldberg & Connelly, 1981). Similarly any increased benefits to childcare practice to be derived from changes in the review process are likely to be greater if the purpose of the review is made explicit. The perceptions of the functions of a review therefore would seem to be an important factor and one which will be explored fully in this research.

This review of the literature relevant to statutory reviews will be completed by an examination of some of the evidence submitted to the Select Committee.

THE HOUSE OF COMMONS SELECT COMMITTEE ON CHILDREN IN CARE

As noted in Chapter 2, throughout the first half of 1983 the House of Commons Select Committee on the Social Services held an enquiry into Children in Care. Evidence was submitted to the Select Committee from many groups and individuals with an interest in child care. In many instances these submissions took the form of substantial documents containing very careful considerations of current and possible future

child care policies. The evidence covered all aspects of child care policies and practices from a variety of different perspectives. While our concern is only with one small part of that practice, it is worth noting that many organisations drew the attention of the Committee to statutory reviews and in particular urged that Section 3, paragraph 7(1) of the 1975 Children Act (now Section 20, 1980 Child Care Act) should be implemented immediately. The Committee received specific recommendations on the content of any new regulations covering the conduct of reviews from many quarters. Although there were differences of detail the recommendations presented displayed a high level of consensus. There was broad agreement that:

- regulations on the conduct of reviews should be introduced immediately by the Secretary of State;

- reviews could have a significant part to play in raising the standards of planning for children in care;

- the views of children should be presented at reviews.

By way of illustration of these points some extracts from the evidence presented to the Committee are presented:

"The plan itself needs to be subject to continuous review, not just to secure its implementation (or amendment if necessary), but to monitor the quality of services provided. Section 20 of the Child Care Act 1980 empowers the Secretary of State to make regulations concerning reviews and it is a matter of some concern that consultations with interested organisations have not yet been held. Regulations need to be issued as soon as possible, preferably before the end of 1983.

"These regulations should provide for the first review of the child in care to take place within six weeks of admission, and thereafter at not more than four-monthly intervals. Each authority should designate officers to chair reviews who should not have the management responsibility for the case but be of a sufficient seniority to question and challenge those who have."

(BASW, 1983)

"Young people of any age have a right to know what is happening to them and every effort should be made to involve them in the decisions made about them; each local authority should draw up a policy about reviews which makes sure that young people fully understand the review process.

"Young people should be able to choose people they trust to help them put their point of view and back them up."

<div align="center">(NAYPIC, 1983)</div>

"The Secretary of State should issue regulations to ensure the function of reviews is to find out how the child is faring, to consider whether care should continue and on that basis, to make plans and decisions for the future and to designate responsibility for carrying out these decisions.

"Young people over the age of 13 should be entitled to attend the whole of their review.

"Reviews should be organised in a place and at a time which is convenient to the child."

<div align="right">(Children's Legal Centre, 1983)</div>

Several of the reflections on reviews by the Select Committee have already been noted; these reflections led the Committee to make five specific recommendations:

"We do not recommend any change in the present statutory frequency of reviews, but do look to authorities to fulfil their statutory duties.

"We recommend that children should attend their reviews unless there are good reasons for their not doing so, and that children should be told of those reasons. We also recommend that the Department remain in close contact with NAYPIC in order to keep abreast of continuing discussion on review procedures among children in care.

"We recommend that authorities examine their practices on those attending reviews with a view to keeping those attending to a reasonable number.

"We recommend that, in drawing up Regulations for the conduct of reviews, the Department do not allow any dilution of the undivided responsibility of local authorities for the review process."
(i.e. the Committee rejected the idea of a judicial review or independent chairmen)

"We recommend that the Department proceed with the issue of Regulations which will restore to the review process its central role in child care management."

<div align="right">(Short Report, 1984)</div>

The Government responded to these recommendations in the following way:

> "The Government welcomes the Committee's comments on reviews and has this matter currently under consideration. The intention is to issue shortly to local authorities, voluntary organisations and other interested bodies a consultative document which will set out guidance on the handling of reviews and will propose the possible content of regulations. These regulations would clearly define the review process as being central to the management and monitoring of the child in care. The consultative document will refer in particular to the extent to which the child should be present at the review and the ways in which parental views should be sought.
>
> (DHSS et al, 1984)

This would suggest that we cannot expect an early issue of regulations. However, this does not prevent local authorities from engaging in serious deliberations on their expectations of reviews within childcare practice, nor on ways to ensure that those expectations are met in practice. Experience of the operation of the existing statutory regulations suggests that the mere issue of regulations is not sufficient, in itself, to ensure good practice; this needs to be promoted and encouraged in other ways simultaneously.

CHAPTER 4

DECISION-MAKING

INTRODUCTION

Although this study is concerned with decision-making in statutory
reviews, the relationship between these two is a complex one.

Reviews are not wholly about decision-making - they perform several,
sometimes divergent, functions. Similarly, by no means all child-care
decision-making takes place in reviews. Indeed, one of the primary
purposes of this research is to establish how far reviews are used as
a decision-making forum.

The complexity of this relationship yields three primary needs:

(i) to develop an understanding of the review process in its
entirety;

(ii) to assess the review as a decision-making forum;

(iii) to establish the role of reviews in the wider process of
child care decision-making.

What these three needs underline, however, is the importance of
an understanding of decision-making to any assessment of reviews as a
key element in child care practice. This chapter consists of a
selective review of some basic literature on decision-making together
with that which is relevant to this particular context and topic.
From this an identification has been made of issues to be highlighted
in the empirical research.

DECISION MAKING AND SOCIAL SERVICE ORGANISATION

Much of the literature on decision-making in the social services
relates to policy planning at central government level and at local
authority level. This has generated discussion of the role of the
social worker as an employee of a bureaucratic organisation and hence
as the instrument through which policy decisions taken at a higher level
are made operational (Hill, 1976). To ensure that these policies are

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applied consistently and fulfil their intended objectives, the organi-
sation develops a set of rules and procedures in an attempt to regulate
the activities of the employees. Much discussion in the literature
revolves around the inherent conflict between this bureaucratic model
and that of the professional model (Benson, 1973; Davies, 1983). Among
other considerations, the professional model envisages members of a
recognised profession exercising a high degree of individual autonomy
that derives from the level of skill and knowledge of the trained
professional worker (Hall, 1975). Because of the importance that has
been attached to the high level of expertise that is expected of a
professional, it has been suggested that social workers are more accurately
classified as semi-professionals (Etzioni, 1969).

Bureaucratic controls may not only be difficult to apply because of
aspirations to professionalism, they may also be weakened by the nature
of the social worker's task (Wilding, 1982; Hill, 1972). As Smith (1979)
points out, front-line workers usually have considerable freedom to decide
their own objectives and methods. They often work independently, away
from the departmental office and immediate supervision, in a close
relationship with their clients. Indeed front-line workers can easily
identify with their clients and, like them, may feel the constraints
imposed by the Social Service Department as a bureaucratic organisation
(Jordan, 1974). The Barclay Committee recognised the difficulties
inherent in this three sided relationship:

> "We believe that there will always be a degree of tension between
> practising social workers and the organisation which employs them
> and the public at large."
>
> (Barclay, 1982)

In calling for greater delegation of decision-making to social
workers and for formal recognition of their discretion, Barclay argued:

> "The challenge for local authorities is to find ways to reconcile
> controls with a substantial and consistent degree of delegation to
> social workers. Much of the present tension seems to arise from
> the fact that social workers have a great deal of de facto discretion
> and that they need to have it in order to help people properly, yet
> they work in a structure in which, in theory, they have little or none."
>
> (Barclay, 1982)

In his discussion of 'street-level bureaucrats' Lipsky also points to the dilemma arising from the need of a bureaucratic and hierarchical organisation to exercise control over its employees. Yet, as he says:

> "bureaucratic accountability is virtually impossible to achieve among lower-level workers who exercise high degrees of discretion, at least where qualitative aspects of their work are concerned."

(Lipsky, 1980)

In the discussion in the previous chapter on the purposes of reviews, it was suggested that the primary function of reviews was still a monitoring one. Can we, therefore, describe statutory reviews as a formal mechanism whereby the front-line worker must periodically account for the decisions that he has made through the exercise of his professional autonomy? Insofar as reviews are used to make plans for the future, are they a means of establishing a framework for social worker activity - thereby limiting the discretion of the worker? The answers are likely to vary in practice. In particular, the extent of the control which a reviewing officer can or wishes to exercise over the operation of a social worker will largely depend on how the functions of the review are perceived and on the nature of the decisions taken at reviews. These are both issues which will be examined in some detail in the light of the findings generated by the research project.

THE DECISION-MAKING PROCESS

So far decision-making has been considered as part of the policy planning and implementation process and in relation to its organisational setting. We shall now turn to decision-making at a casework level and consider the processes whereby decisions are actually made. This is not a topic which, in the past, has greatly occupied those in the helping professions. This neglect of the decision-making process may stem from an ideological commitment to self-determination, an ethic whereby the social worker enables the client to decide for himself, rather than have a course of action imposed on him by the power and authority of the social worker. Despite their statutory responsibilities few social workers are eager to act as 'the coercive social worker'. Nonetheless, the writings

of psychologists and management scientists on the processes of making decisions are increasingly being seen as relevant to the social services, not only to administrators and managers, but also to practitioners (Ashton, 1974).

Perhaps the first thing we should ask of such literature is what is meant by the term decision-making? Etzioni (1968) defined it as 'making a conscious choice between two or more alternatives and selecting the most appropriate means to achieve the end'.

Simons (1965) took a somewhat broader definition: 'It is becoming alert to a problem, exploring it and analysing the different components of the problem and finally deciding on a course of action'.

Definitions such as these can provide the basis for a model of the decision-making process. The classical model of decision-making is a set of logical steps and has been described by many authors. Lindblom suggests the following formulation:

"(1) Faced with a given problem

(2) A rational person first clarifies his goals, values or objectives, and then ranks or otherwise organises them in his mind

(3) He then lists all important possible ways or policies for achieving his goals

(4) And investigates all the important consequences that would follow from each of the alternative policies

(5) At which point he is in a position to compare consequences of each policy with goals

(6) And so choose the policy with consequences most closely matching his goals."

(Lindblom, 1968)

Many modern decision theorists see this rational-economic model of decision-making as being unrepresentative of what actually occurs in practice. Because of limitations on the information that humans can handle and the tasks they can perform simulatneously most decision-makers do not seek for optimal solutions but accept solutions that will solve the problem satisfactorily, although not necessarily in the best possible or ideal way. This concept of limited search and of 'satisficing' was first propounded by Simon (1957) and is generally recognised as a

more realistic description of how decision-makers actually perform.

> "Decision-makers should not really expect perfection; they should
> look simply for solutions that meet minimum aspiration levels."
>
> (Drezner, 1973)

Nevertheless this classical model can still be used as 'an ideal
type' against which decision-making performance can be compared.

Drezner applies such a model of rational decision-making to a
particular problem, namely programme planning for a voluntary agency.
A more relevant example for our purposes is given by Hardiker and
Barker (1981) in 'Theories of Practice in Social Work'. These editors
include an exmaple of the use of a model of rational decision-making to
evaluate a social worker's assessment in a case of suspected child abuse.
The model of decision-making used by Hardiker and Barker is similar to
that given by Drezner and consists of five distinct stages:

> "1. Understanding the problem
> 2. Identification of objectives
> 3. Identification of alternative solutions
> 4. Evaluation of alternatives
> 5. Choice."

Each of these five stages are explored through their application to a
particular case of suspected child abuse. This example shows decision-
making to be a complex activity, undertaken in a climate of great
uncertainty and limited information, yet by structuring the process
and being explicit in its operation it is possible to reduce the
uncertainty and to clarify the purpose and nature of the task. As
Hardiker and Barker conclude:

> "In offering this model of rational decision-making as a frame-
> work within which to discuss the social worker's actions, we are
> suggesting that a cognitive approach, identifying logical steps
> needed to reach a decision, will be a helpful tool in social
> work practice."
>
> (Hardiker & Barker, 1981)

An added dimension to the complexity of decision-making in the
social work arena is that of the emotional or subjective involvement
of the worker. A social worker needs to be empathetic, to be able to

identify with the client's problems, but requires more than hunches or gut reactions when making decisions that have major consequences for their clients. The logical processes inherent in a rational decision-making approach may help to make such emotional responses explicit and thereby raise the level of understanding of all aspects of the situation.

How appropriate is a model of rational decision-making to statutory reviews? The answer to this question depends greatly on the extent to which reviews are perceived as decision-making occasions. To ascertain the extent to which reviews are perceived as decision-making occasions it is necessary to consider all possible functions of a review and then to examine how far they appear to be fulfilled in practice. However, it must be remembered that, unlike case conferences, reviews are not called into existence because of the recognition of a particular problem: a review is convened at a particular point in time in order to fulfil a statutory requirement.

> "Reviews are artificial devices to replace the continual review of each child's need that takes place within an ordinary family."
>
> (Brill, 1976)

While a review may be set in motion through administrative procedure and may serve other purposes than decision-making, a problem may be raised during its course which requires a specific decision. Ideally, the review would then proceed along the lines of the classic decision-making model in formulating a solution to that problem.

Moreover, it was suggested earlier that many writers believe that reviews have a part to play in improving the standards of long-term planning for children. What is the relationship between this need for a longer-term perspective and the classical model of decision-making?

Advocates of 'planning for permanence' would argue that unless, and until, a long-term plan has been developed and recorded in relation to each child in care, a specific 'problem' does exist. If a long-term plan has not been recorded, all reviews - and in particular early reviews - should start from the position that correcting this

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short-coming is the primary goal. A logical exploration of long-term
options should result, followed by the selection of a plan. However,
this again suggests that reviews can be and should be used to make
decisions rather than to ratify or to record them. The prior need is
to establish the extent to which statutory reviews are in fact being used
to make new decisions or simply to ratify actions or goals which the social
worker has already established and furthermore to assess the appropriate-
ness of the review as a mechanism for decision-making of this kind.
That is a major aim of this research.

DECISION DIFFERENTIATION

The extent of decision making in reviews is one issue; another is
the heterogeneity of child care decisions. Reviews can be seen to
encompass several different types of decisions. Sometimes they will
be concerned with new or fundamental decisions (for example, to move a
child to a new placement) and at other times they will be concerned with
more minor or routine decisions (for example, to continue to liaise
with the school). This being the case, perhaps an appropriate decision-
making model to apply to review situations is what Etzioni (1968)
termed 'mixed scanning'. This model employs a combination of the
rational and incremental approaches in which fundamental decisions are
separated from small decisions, and subject to different decision-
making processes. Fundamental decisions are subjected to a broad search
process which concentrates on covering alternatives, evaluating and
rejecting them until only one remains, but this process pays little
attention to the details - hence it could be said to be more concerned
with establishing goals rather than actions. Minor decisions are given
less coverage of alternatives but great attention is paid to the details
with the intention of constantly improving, rather than radically
changing, the way in which things are done.

This model suggests that different styles of decision-making are
appropriate for different types of decision. Applying this to reviews,
it further suggests that different patterns for conducting reviews may
be appropriate to different situations depending on the particular
circumstances of the case. The possibility which arises is that of
categorising and differentiating between reviews such that the conduct

and organisation of the review may vary according to the purpose to be fulfilled and the nature of the decisions to be taken in each case. This is a possibility that we shall examine further in this thesis and in the concluding chapter.

Another classification of decisions that is well established in the decision-making literature is that by Simon (1965). Simon divides decisions into two polar types - programmed decisions and non-programmed decisions. This is not a dichotomy but a continuum with highly programmed decisions at one end and highly non-programmed decisions at the other end.

> "Decisions are programmed to the extent that they are repetitive and routine, to the extent that a definite procedure has been worked out for handling them so that they don't have to be treated de novo each time they occur.

> "Decisions are non-programmed to the extent that they are novel, unstructured and consequential. There is no cut and dried method for handling the problem because it hasn't arisen before, or because its precise nature and structure are elusive or complex or because it is so important that it deserves a custom-tailored treatment."

> (Simon, 1965)

Simon's distinction between programmed and non-programmed decisions can be seen as building on Etzioni's distinction between fundamental and routine decisions (Etzioni, 1968). This takes the differentiation a stage further in that it can be used to establish criteria for distinguishing between important and less important decisions. In particular, the notion of decisions that are 'consequential' or are so important that they 'deserve a custom-tailored treatment' seem particularly pertinent to child care decision-making. Relating this to a classification of review decisions we could say that decisions which are consequential are likely to be important in that they have a great impact on the child's life. This method of differentiating decisions will be used in developing a typology of review decisions in Chapter 10.

A further refinement of the term decision-making which seems relevant to review decisions is that proposed by Levin (1972). Levin

defines a decision in the following way:

> "A decision is a deliberate act that generates commitment on the
> part of the decision-maker towards an envisaged course of action
> of some specificity."

Let us look more closely at the two terms specificity and commitment.
Levin uses the term specificity in the following way:

> "is simply the property by virtue of which one course of action may
> be distinguished from another. The higher the specificity of an
> envisaged action, the more closely will that action be specified."

This definition is too circular to have a great deal of meaning,
nonetheless Levin has identified an important issue. This is especially
so as the specification of the action appropriate to the decision also
establishes the means of judging the implementation of the decision,
or its 'ultimate manifestation' as Levin calls it. One of the aims of
this research is the assessment of levels of implementation of review
decisions. Hence the concept of specificity and its relationship to
implementation is one which will be explored in the empirical research.

Levin defines his second concept - commitment - in the following
way:

> "Commitment towards an intended course of action may be defined
> as the state of mind arising from the expectation, whether
> conscious or not, that a penalty - for the decision-maker personally
> or for the group to which he belongs - will follow from the
> abandonment of the intention. Commitment is a relative quality,
> and its strength will be measured by the penalty which is perceived
> to be associated with substituting another action (or no action
> at all) for the one intended, before it is implemented."

<div style="text-align: right">(Levin, 1972)</div>

As we have noted previously, a review is a formal occasion with
one function, among others, being that of monitoring casework. If long
term planning and the implementation of such plans are crucial to the
quality of child care, reviews may have an important part to play in
enhancing commitment to the achievement of such plans. At the most
basic level, the penalties for failing to achieve an objective may be
increased simply by having that objective stated and reviewed. As
Levin says:

> "once his intention is made known to others, he is likely to feel
> that to alter it without the excuse of new information or a change
> in external circumstances will lower his standing."

But commitment may be enhanced in other ways. As we have already noted there is a growing demand from many quarters to extend the level of participation in reviews and in child care decision-making. It is certainly possible that decisions made publicly and participatively will carry a heavier penalty for non-implementation and that this in turn will increase the level of commitment to the decision. This was certainly felt to be one of the outcomes noticed by the staff of one Childrens Home following an experiment to include children in their reviews.

> "The reviews served to make all the staff more responsible to the children as clients. Decisions have been put into practice more promptly than previously. Staff have been forced to scrutinize their actions more carefully."
>
> (Skinner, 1980)

However, the level of perceived penalty for failing to implement review decisions may vary with the precise range of functions fulfilled by the review - if decision-making is not perceived as the over-riding purpose of the review then the penalty for failing to implement decisions may be perceived as less severe. In so far as the functions of a review may determine or influence the structure and conduct of the review these may also in turn impact upon levels of commitment to the decision. This then suggests that one variable which may impact upon the level of decision implementation is the way in which the review is structured. It is a factor which will be explored in Chapter 7.

Given the lack of research specifically relating to statutory reviews, it is worth turning once again to work conducted on the Children's Hearings in Scotland. In their study of decisions taken at Children's Hearings, Smith and May (1980) were concerned with the processes of decision making and decision-making behaviour. They did not consider whether the Hearings were conducted according to the rules or established procedures, nor were they interested in the content of the decisions or their eventual outcome. Their specific concern was the nature of decision-making in a situation that was characterised by great uncertainty and ambiguity. The uncertainty and ambiguity of the Children's Hearings arises in part from their multifarious functions (are they for control, for treatment?, etc), in part from the lack of rigid rules or procedures and in part from inequalities in the perceived status of the participants and their 'evidence'. (Remember

that the Hearings are conducted with the child and parents as
participants.)   Smith and May concluded that to understand the nature
of decision-making in a situation of such uncertainty and ambiguity
it is necessary to got beyond the rational model and to see decision-
making as a flexible endeavour which is framed to manage uncertainty,
to control the situation without an overt display of authority and to
obtain consensus between client and professional. Observation of panel
discussions led Smith and May to identify six features of the activities
that members of the Hearing panel engaged in and which they understood
as decision-making. These observed behaviours may represent a con-
siderable departure from the classical model, but they are

> "the ways in which purposeful and meaningful activity is main-
> tained in the light of the problems that panel members face."
>
> (Smith and May, 1980)

In summary,
- the panel saw a decision as 'obvious' and did not look for
  alternatives
- the outcome was determined by pre-hearing discussions
- the panel passed over major decisions and gave much time to
  discussion of peripheral matters
- in complex cases, where the panel was unsure how to proceed,
  they might postpone any action until the next review
- where there were difficult or unmanageable aspects to a case
  the panel might narrow the focus of discussion leaving funda-
  mental problems unresolved
- the panel might spend time in discussing matters which were
  outside their power to direct.

The approach described here may be peculiar to the particular
instance of the Children's Hearings, but the conclusions reached by
the researchers alert us to the important relationship between the style
of decision-making and the role and function of the decision-making forum.
The appropriateness of different styles may vary considerably with these
functions; for instance the style of decision-making that is appropriate
when the child and his parents are involved may be different to that
which is appropriate to decision-making by a group of professionals.

Despite the large volume of literature on decision-making that exists there is only a limited amount of research on decision-making that is of direct relevance to statutory reviews and their place in child care. Nevertheless, from this brief review some useful leads have emerged. For instance the literature does alert us to the importance of

- differentiating between decisions and therefore of the need to describe decisions;
- relating the style or process of decision-making to the nature of the decisions;
- the possible impact of public or participative decision-making on the commitment to implement the decision;
- the relationship between the specificity of the decision and future assessments of its implementation;
- the need to accommodate the style of decision-making to all the functions of the decision-making forum.

All of these points are taken into account in the design of the research project which follows. Further consideration will be given to them in the light of the findings from the research.

CHAPTER 5

THE RESEARCH PROJECT: THE AIMS AND LOCATION

THE RESEARCH AIMS

In the introductory chapter to this thesis it was explained that
the starting point for this research was the suggestion from a senior
member of a Social Services Department that the review process,
particularly for children in residential care, appeared to be charac-
terised by a repetitiousness arising from a failure to implement review
decisions. Was this indeed the case? Was there a general lack of activity
related to review decisions? If this was happening was it true for all
children in care, or only those in residential care?

Any attempt to answer these questions raises many others.
Before we can effectively evaluate the rates of implementation of decisions
we must know something of the nature of the decisions - do they relate
to large scale objectives, or specific tasks? Do they include long-term
plans, or short-term activities? Decisions which are recorded in a
very generalised way, which do not specify goals or actions or which
do not include an expected time-scale for implementation, offer very
limited criteria against which an evaluation of implementation can be
made. As decisions taken at reviews will not be of a uniform nature,
any study of decision-taking and implementation must begin with the
development of a typology of decisions whereby review decisions can be
classified according to their salient features. Only when this is done is
it possible to assess the value of the recorded rate of decision
implementation. The development of such a typology was the first aim
of this project.

The second main aim of the research was to ascertain what factors
contriubte to the effective implementation of review decisions.
Obviously the nature of the decisions themselves, as discussed above,
may be one set of factors which affect implementation. Another main
source of variation in the review process was in the manner in which
reviews were organised. Within the particular local authority in
which this research was conducted, statutory reviews on children in

residential care were organised by Care Branch at County Hall.
Reviews on all other children in the care, or under the supervision
of the local authority, were arranged at area office level. The
organisation of these reviews was at the discretion of the Area
Director and in each of three social work areas visited the review process
followed a different pattern. (A description of the research site
follows later in this chapter). This then gave two main sources of
organisational variation:

    i)   between reviews conducted in residential establishments and
           those conducted in area offices; and

    ii) between reviews conducted in different area offices.

To fully appreciate the impact of these different organisational
arrangements it is necessary to ascertain exactly how reviews are
conducted in each area office and in residential homes.

As well as organisational or administrative variations, differences
in the style and content of a review may be reflected in the nature
and subsequent implementation of review decisions. Does the reviewing
officer act as a 'chairperson' or is he closely involved in the case?
Is the review discussion mainly retrospective concentrating on monitoring
social worker input, or does the reviewing officer initiate new approaches
or new resource inputs? The researcher aimed to develop a framework for
describing the style and content of each review and to gather the
necessary data from observation of the reviews.

The style and content of a review will be governed by the
perception that the 'reviewing officer' and other participants have of
the function of the review. As we saw in Chapter 3, there is
considerable confusion over the purpose of a review. Is it seen
primarily as a management tool - 'a fail-safe mechanism '- - is its main
purpose to monitor the work on a particular case, is it to make decisions,
to develop and record long-term plans? Moreover, is the perception of
the purpose of a review likely to vary depending on the characteristics
of the particular case? Answers to such questions are necessary in
order to establish the context of our descriptions of review decisions
and review processes. Hence a further aim of the research was to explore
the ways in which members of social service teams viewed the purpose

of reviews. Once all the likely functions of reviews have been identified, this can be used in several ways:

- to enable the researcher to assess how far each review was fulfilling each function
- to ask the social workers which functions they thought each review should perform
- to ask the social workers which functions they thought each review did perform
- to ascertain the opinions of members of the Social Services staff (including residential workers and team leaders) on the functions of reviews in general.

A fuller appreciation of the perceptions of the review process would also enable us to assess more accurately the role that reviews play in decision-making for children in care. Decision-making is only a part of the review process, and the review process is only a part of total decision-making. Before the effectivenss of reviews as decision-making mechanisms can be assessed it is necessary to place the review within the context of the total decision-making for children in care. This then was the final aim of the research project.

In summary, the aims of this research were:

1. to develop a typology of review decisions
2. to ascertain the level of subsequent implementation of review decisions and what factors contribute to this
3. to identify the functions of reviews and the way in which these are perceived by members of Social Service teams
4. to place the review within the context of the total decision-making for children in care.

The fulfillment of these aims would generate three distinct and equally useful outputs:

i) a description of the review process detailing what happens in a review and further increasing our knowledge of 'what social workers do',

ii)   an analysis of the opinions of members of social work area
      teams on the role and importance of reviews, particularly
      in relation to planning for children in care,

iii) the generation and testing of specific hypotheses.

THE HYPOTHESES

Following from the second aim of the project (to ascertain what
factors contribute to the effective implementation of review decisions)
two very general hypotheses were established together with a set of
more specific hypotheses. These general hypotheses were:

- the rate of implementation of review decisions would be related
  to the way in which the decisions were made

- the rate of implementation of review decisions would be related
  to the nature of the decisions.

These general hypotheses generated many small scale, but more specific,
hypotheses:

a)   the greater the level of agreement between the participants
     on the decision, the greater the likelihood of implementation,

b)   the fuller the participation in the decision-making of those
     affected by the decision the greater the likelihood of
     implementation,

c)   the greater the specificity of the recorded goals the greater
     the level of implementation,

d)   the greater the level of specificity of action, and the more
     responsibility was specifically delegated, the greater likelihood
     of implementation,

e)   decisions which included a time-scale for implementation
     would be more likely to be implemented,

f)   decisions which had a major impact on the child's life style
     would be more likely to be implemented.

Having established the aims of the research, attention is now given
to the location in which the research was conducted.

THE RESEARCH SITE

The research was undertaken in the Social Services Department
of a shire county, which for the purposes of this thesis shall be
called Wainshire*.   Like most shire counties Wainshire has a mixture
of urban and rural environments. It includes one large city with a
substantial 'immigrant' population, three medium sized towns, each
serving as an industrial centre and as a market town, several smaller
towns and an extensive agricultural sector.

It is of interest to compare Wainshire with other local authorities
in England and Wales, particularly in terms of demography, numbers of
children in care and the resources and facilities available to them
through the Social Services.

Table 5.1 below presents demographic statistics for Wainshire,
the average for all local authorities in England and Wales and the
range covered by individual local authorities.

We can see from this table that local authorities vary greatly
in the composition of their populations and therefore in their
demands for welfare services. The table also shows Wainshire to be
a very average authority in terms of these population characteristics.

Similarly, we can compare Wainshire with other local authorities
in England and Wales in terms of their Social Services provision, and
more specifically in terms of the number of children in the care of
the local authority. Table 5.2 shows the figures for Wainshire; the
average for all local authorities in England and Wales and the range
covered by local authorities.

Table 5.2 shows the great diversity in Social Service activity within
local authorities in England and Wales. The metropolitan boroughs and
the London boroughs in particular spend considerably more per head on
Social Services than do the shire counties. These figures once again
show that Wainshire is very representative of local authorities in
England and Wales.

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* The descriptions given in this thesis of the organisation of Wainshire
   Social Services Department and three of its area offices applies to
   the time when the research was conducted, that is 1981 and 1982.
   Since that time changes have occurred at both area and county level.

TABLE 5.1

	Wainshire	Average for all local authorities in England & Wales	Lowest figure for a local authority	Highest figure for a local authority
Total population in local authority	839,400	424,630	116,100 (excluding city of London)	1,468,200
% of population under 5 years	6.3	6.0	3.6	7.4
% of population under 18 years	26.9	25.7	14.4	32.7
% of children in low socio economic group households	14	16	7	31
% of children in one parent or large families	18	22	13	30

Source: DES Statistical Bulletin 8/82

TABLE 5.2

	Wainshire	Average for all local authorities in England & Wales	Lowest figure for a local authority	Highest figure for a local authority
Total gross expenditure on Social Services per head	£34.00	£34.50	£28.0	£139.5
Total number of Social Services field work staff per 1000 population	0.46	0.50	0.27	2.8
Number of children in care per 1000 of the population	7.2	7.8	1.7	24.6
% of children in care who are fostered	52%	46%	27%	77%
% of children in care in community home	40%	38%	14%	58%

Source: DES Statistical Bulletin 8/82; DHSS Children in Care of Local Authorities 1980
CIPFA Local Authority Statistics 1981

WAINSHIRE SOCIAL SERVICES DEPARTMENT

Wainshire Social Services Department is administered from County Hall. Its responsibilities are carried out through five branches. These are Research; Development and Training; Personnel and Coordination; Administration and Finance; Domiciliary; and Care. This type of organisational structure approximates to model A as outlined in the work of the Brunel Institute of Organisation and Social Studies (Rowbottom et al, 1974). This is basically a functional structure in which the Social Services Department is divided so as to reflect major areas of activity. A summary of the main advantages and disadvantages of functional, specialist, or geographical structures is included in Payne (1979).

Two of the branches of Wainshire Social Services Department are directly involved with children in care - Domiciliary and Care branches. Care branch is responsible for all day care and residential care provided by the Social Services Department for all ages of the population, including therefore the provision and management of community homes for children in care.

The Domiciliary branch is organised into two sections, field social work and field support services, each headed by an Assistant Director. The field support services section is responsible for such services as meals on wheels, home-helps, voluntary services, O.T. The Domiciliary Social Work section is responsible for all field social work, social work for courts, in hospitals, emergency and out-of-hours cover, etc. Much of the work of the Domiciliary Social Work branch is carried out through the Social Work Area offices. Wainshire is divided into eleven area offices, each headed by an Area Director.

The provision of resources and facilities for children in care is therefore under the direction of two different branches of the Social Services Department - the Care branch being responsible for the management of residential care and day nurseries and the Domiciliary branch for other child care services. However, the cases of all children in the care or under the supervision of the local authority are held by a social worker based in an area office, regardless of where that child is placed. Field work staff seemed to work closely with the members of

the Care branch, yet many complained of difficulty in implementing decisions which related to placements in residential care.

These difficulties may be due to lack of resources, but they may also be emphasised or felt to be emphasised because of departmental divisions at County Hall. Similarly communications between residential staff and field workers may be difficult for many reasons, but lack of a single line of responsibility may exaggerate them. This, however, may not be a problem peculiar to Wainshire. Stevenson et al (1978) came across this in their study of Social Service Teams:

> "However, reading the eight studies of area teams, one is struck by the amount of tension and frustration created in individual workers when residential places have to be found. What emerges is not only to do with shortage, though this is in some areas acute, but with the difficulties experienced in making contact with those, usually 'at HQ' who allocate places ... it would seem that more consideration needs to be given to the procedures as much as to the actual deficiencies (in resources)."

<div align="right">(Stevenson et al, 1978)</div>

The Domiciliary branch of the Social Services Department had responsibility for all foster care. However, this responsibility was shared between the staff at County Hall and those in area offices. Foster parents were regarded as a 'county' resource, rather than an 'area' resource; a child from any area could be placed anywhere within the county. The recruiting and assessing of foster parents was in part shared by both levels, although County Hall were more active in the former activity, field work staff in the latter. The Adoption and Fostering Officer, and the Special Placements Officers based at County Hall played the major part in matching children to particular foster parents, especially for long-term or special fostering, but were much less active in short-term foster placements. The monitoring of foster care and support of foster parents was almost entirely the responsibility of field work staff, as were the reviews on foster children.

The departmental division in responsibility for domiciliary care and residential care had implications for this research, in that the review process for children in residential care was different from that for other children. The reviews for children in residential homes

were organised from County Hall and were similar for all homes in the authority. Reviews on other children were the responsibility of each Area Director and therefore varied considerably between different social work areas.

The view was expressed to the researcher by one area director that having delegated this activity to the areas that senior staff at county hall did not maintain any further interest. Hence the conducting of reviews within the area offices was never monitored (indeed the findings of a project such as this is one of the ways in which senior management gain information on the activities of their area offices.)

SOCIAL WORK AREA OFFICES

The three social work areas employed as research sites encompass the total environmental variety of the shire. Area X is basically a rural area; Area Y is a city area; and Area Z is centred on a medium sized town.

The different environments in which these area offices are situated are reflected in the nature and pressure of requests for social work services and in the resources available to social workers to assist their clients. Table 5.3 compares the three areas in terms of their

TABLE 5.3

	AREA X	AREA Y	AREA Z
Geographical type	Widespread rural area	City area with high population density	Large town plus villages
Total population	73,900	64,000	69,100
Caseload/ 1000 population	6.3	12.5	10.6

Source: Wainshire Social Services Department
Quarterly Statistics, June 1982.

geography, their population and their caseloads. Area X covers a widespread area; it has the largest population, but has the smallest caseload. Area Y on the other hand serves a smaller, high density population, but has a caseload level which is twice that of Area X. The different character of these areas is also reflected in the management and organisation of the area offices.

Area X

This rural area contained two market towns. The social work was available from two offices, one situated in each of the towns. Each office was open five days a week, by and large serving its own locality. The Area Director and the Administrative Assistant spent three days of the week in the larger office, two days in the smaller. The social workers, however, rarely moved between offices, except for staff meetings. The larger office had two senior social workers and six social workers, the smaller had one senior social worker and four social workers. No 'intake' team operated in this are; new cases were either dealt with on a 'duty' basis or allocated at weekly meetings. All the social workers therefore had regularly to perform office duty. If the team were temporarily reduced through illness or holdiay, etc., office duty could become a time-consuming part of the job. In comparison with most inner city areas there were fewer local facilities that social workers could utilise on behalf of their clients - e.g. no day nursery was available; there were few facilities for teenagers either for recreation or for employment or training purposes.

Both the buildings housing this 'area office' were modern and spacious with very good secretarial back-up. Indeed high standards in administration and casework recording were expected by the Area Director, and in general were achieved.

Area Y

This was a city area covering a part of the city that approximated to a quadrant, reaching from the city centre to the city boundary. Included in the area was a large prewar council estate with a very high level of deprivation. This social work area also had two offices, but these operated in a somewhat different way to those in Area X.

The main office was in the city centre. The Area Director was assisted by a Deputy Area Director. There was an 'intake' team and a long-term social work team. This research only involved members of the long-term team which consisted of two senior social workers and eight social workers, a social work assistant, and a specialist fostering social worker.

The other office was a sub-office situated on a large council estate and was not attended on any sort of regular basis by the area management team. The sub-office saw itself as operating a 'patch' team, closely involved in the local community and somewhat cut off from the rest of the area. As well as a team leader, there were seven social workers and two social work assistants. No 'intake' team operated although distinction was made between short-term and long-term work and caseloads were biased accordingly. Office duty was a fairly demanding aspect of the job - indeed, in an attempt to try to control the bombardment from clients the team leader had decided to close the office to the public during part of the normal working week. This team had developed a very thoughtful approach to the role of the Social Services in their area. They were developing special skills within the team and liaisons across the community in an attempt quickly and accurately to identify the needs of a client and hence to involve the appropriate skills or resources straight away.

In comparison with the rural area, the social workers in this city area had more resources, both of their own and from outside the social services, with which to involve the client (e.g. day nursery, mothers' groups, active I.T. group, Homestart volunteers, Family Service Unit, probation and social skills schemes, various industrial enterprise schemes for unemployed youths). Other resources which were available on a county basis but located in the city were more accessible to the city area than to county areas: for example child guidance, pediatrician specialists, schools psychological service. Also, in comparison with the rural area, the job of the city social workers, including those working on longterm cases, involved considerably more liaison with other welfare or service agencies, e.g. housing department, social security, electricity, gas.

The accommodation for the two offices in this area was of a very poor standard. The sub-office was situated in a council house; eleven people worked in four tiny rooms upstairs. There was inadequate room to interview clients; one secretary shared a room with a social worker; there was no administrative officer and constant movement to and from the main office of stationery, letters, files, people. The main office was equally overcrowded. All the long-term team, including the seniors, were in one office with no spare rooms for consultation with the senior. On several occasions when carrying out the reviews, the senior social worker, the social workers and the researcher had to carry all the files and necessary paper work outside the building, along the street and into another building, where the use of a spare office had been begged. Again there seemed to be inadequate secretarial support to keep case records, reports and review forms up to date, although the obvious gaps in case work recording cannot all be blamed on overstretched typing facilities.

Area Z

The bulk of the population served by this area office lived in one large industrial town; the remainder lived in a number of nearby villages. All the Social Services were housed together in one modern office near the centre of the town. The social work staff was divided into an intake team and a long-term team. No members of the intake team were involved in this research. The long-term team comprised two senior social workers and eight social workers. As in Area Y the members of the long-term team helped with office duty, but this was a much less significant task than for those workers in Area X or the sub-office of Area Y where no intake team operated. Secretarial support did not appear to present any problems in this office but - unlike the other offices visited - the reviews were spread throughout the year. This office, more than the others, showed a continuity of staff - indeed several children had had the same social worker for sixteen years. The Social Services Department had good resources, and had excellent relationships with voluntary agencies and organisations in the town.

Without wishing to place too much emphasis upon it, one way of establishing how these different offices picture themselves, is to

compare their advertisements for new staff. The examples below all
appeared towards the end of the empirical research period.

Area X

"To complete social work team serving this area. If you want ...

* a manageable generic caseload

* regular supervision and opportunities for professional
  development

* membership of mainly qualified teams covering mixed
  urban/rural areas presenting a variety of problems

* time, facilities and encouragement to do the job
  properly

* no standby duties "

Area Y Sub-Office

"HELPING LOCAL RESIDENTS HELP THEMSELVES!

A skilled worker is required to join this experienced and
enterprising 'patch' team, situated on a postwar Council
Estate with the highest concentration of deprivation in 'the
city'. The team has built a reputation for providing a service
which attempts to meet local needs most appropriately and
effectively. This includes - information and counselling;
contract work; behaviour modification; family therapy; women's
group work and I.T; liaison with local residents and agencies
and community development; family placements. There is short
and long-term involvement and co-working. The team is well
integrated and supportive, offering excellent opportunities for
the expression of particular abilities and interests and further
training. A post for the experienced, looking for new challenges
or a newly qualified seeking rapid professional development."

Area Z

"Qualified, enthusiastic person required to join the long-term team
in which child care policy is being examined. (I.T., foster parent
applicants groups, G.P. liaisons and mothers' group now established).
Case loads have child care bias, but room exists for individual
interest to be followed. Regular supervision given high priority,
and a case load weighting system exists, although this is currently
subject to area review."

COMPARATIVE STATISTICS FOR THE SOCIAL WORK AREAS

Comparative case loads

Having looked at the different environments in which these three
social work area offices are located, we now turn to look in more detail
at the caseloads held by each office and the proportion of child care
cases within the total caseload.

Throughout this local authority not only are children who are in the
care of the authority subject to statutory review, but all children under
supervision orders or on the 'at risk' register are also included in the
review process. Cases in all these categories are referred to as
'statutory' cases.

The use of this very broad definition of 'statutory' cases seems
to be a widespread practice, although this does not necessarily mean
that other authorities included all their 'statutory' cases in the
review programme. The researchers on the DHSS study of Social Services
Teams certainly found a broad use of the term statutory:

> "We asked all our respondents what work was considered to have
> priority. The answer hardly varied – it was 'statutory' work.
> This phrase is vague and imprecise. When we probed we found that
> it referred to children in care, or to work with families and
> children which either came from the courts or might lead to some
> public investigation by a court of inquiry if 'things went wrong'.
> 'Statutory' did not, amongst our respondents, mean all or only work
> required by statute."
>
> (Parsloe, 1981)

Table 5.4 below shows comparative statistic on the caseloads of
each of the three areas, including statistics on the total caseload,

TABLE 5.4

	AREA X	AREA Y	AREA Z
Total case load	504	726	802
Number of cases dealing with children and families	186	561	420
Number of cases subject to review	121	489	226
As a % of total caseload	24.0%	67.4%	28.2%

Source: Wainshire Social Services Department Quarterly
Statistics, June 1981

those dealing with families and those subject to review. This shows
that a very much higher proportion of all cases in Area Y are child care
cases which are subject to six-monthly review. One can see, therefore,
that in this area the completion of reviews must be a sizeable task.
Indeed the number and proportion of all cases which are reviewed must
have major implications for the organisation of the review process.

Comparative legal status/placements

The composition of the 'review cases' in terms of placement and
legal status within the three areas is shown in Table 5.5

TABLE 5.5

	AREA X	AREA Y	AREA Z
Total number of review cases	121	489	226
% of those boarded out	25.6	20.0	19.5
% in residential care	19.8	28.0	13.7
% home on trial	12.4	10.8	6.2
% other	2.5	1.6	1.8
% on supervision order	13.2	24.7	31.0
% on at risk register (this includes only those children who are not included elsewhere - many children may be on 'at risk' and be in care)	26.4	14.7	27.9
% of review cases who are 'in care' (i.e. first four categories)	60.3	60.5	41.2

Although we have already shown that the child care statistics for
Wainshire are very representative of England and Wales as a whole,
and in particular of the shire counties, we can see from the statistics
in Table 5.5 that different areas within the authority do produce dif-
ferent patterns of child care cases. This is in part due to demographic
and environmental factors and in part due to different emphasis or
policies pursued by each area director, within the overall policy of the
Social Services Department. For instance, although Area Y has a large
number of children on the 'at risk' register (116 compared with 55 in

Area·X and 73 in Area Z) a much smaller proportion of these cases have
no other statutory order. Review discussions showed that in Area Y
social workers, under the direction of the Area Director, were much less
likely to remove a child from the register or to leave an 'at risk'
child at home with no statutory supervision than was the case in other
areas – no doubt as a result of a relatively recent public inquiry into
the death of a child supervised in that area. Area Y also has a much
higher percentage of children in residential care than other areas.
This was not an issue which the research examined, but several factors
probably contributed to this. Area Y is an area of high social depri-
vation, particularly in the large council estate. Here the problems of
delinquency meant that many of the children coming into care were
teenagers and therefore less likely to be immediately fostered. As in
many social work offices, social work practice in this area was under-
going change, and staff did express the view that they were still dealing
with the backlog of consequences of past social work decisions, when a
higher proportion of children were placed in residential care. Whatever
the reason for the high proportion of children in residential care in
this area, the concern generated by this and the desire for change had
lead to the first and, at the time of the research, the only appointment
of a fostering specialist within an area office.

Having established the aims of the research project and provided
a picture of the research site by describing the demography and environ-
ment of the county and three of its social work areas, we turn now in
the next chapter to consideration of the methods employed in conducting
the empirical study.

CHAPTER 6

RESEARCH METHODS

In the introductory chapter to this thesis an explanation was given
of the process by which the research objectives were established and
agreed by the researcher and the subject agency. Concurrent with that,
proposals were made and accepted on the most appropriate methodology
to employ.

If the research had been limited to an investigation into the imple-
mentation of a limited range and number of decisions, then it may have
been appropriate to conduct a small scale, in-depth investigation with
objective measures of decision implementation. However, as was noted in
Chapter 1, the researcher felt that a sound appreciation of the nature of
the total review process was necessary before any accurate assessment
of the level of decision implementation could be undertaken. Given the
variation in review procedures at area level, it was considered advantageous
to include in the sample reviews from several areas. Furthermore, the
review of the literature suggested that there was limited detailed
information available on what actually happened at reviews.

All of these reasons pointed to the appropriateness of research
methods that allowed for data collection from a large sample of reviews.
The research was based on the observation of two consecutive reviews in
a sample of cases held by three social work areas; an analysis of the case
records of this sample; interviews with the social workers involved in
the cases; assessment,with the social worker, of the extent to which each
decision was implemented; and interviews with reviewing officers, senior
social workers and residential staff.

The research instruments, which are included as an appendix, were
devised after preliminary observations in a fourth social work area,
followed by a full scale pilot study. The stages in the research programme
are set out below.

1. An identification was made of the cases to be included in the sample.
   In all 312 children were selected, giving rise to 298 reviews.
   The three social work area offices used as research sites were
   chosen, with the help of senior management, because of their

diversity, as indicated in the previous chapter. The Area
Directors and senior staff in these offices were approached by
the researcher with a request for access; all were given every
opportunity to decline to participate, but none did so. The full
details of how the sample was chosen and its comparability to the
total population will be explained more fully in the next section
of this chapter.

2. The case records on all the selected cases were read; data were
collected on the past and present history of the child's career
in care, including present resource inputs, together with infor-
mation on the clarity with which the case work objectives or long-
term plans were recorded in the case notes. This information was
directly recorded onto the form labelled Questionnaire 1, in the
appendix. The decisions taken at the previous review were also
noted. Although only a limited amount of the information on the
child was subsequently used directly, the reading of case records
in this way served two different but equally useful purposes.
First, it gave the researcher background information which was
extremely helpful in understanding the subsequent review discussion
and decisions. Second, spending so much time in the area office
gave the researcher valuable insight into the working of each area
office. Equally important it gave the members of the social work
teams an opportunity to become familiar with the presence of a
researcher and therefore to be less conscious of this when the
researcher was present at reviews.

3. The next major component of the research programme was observation
of the 'first research reviews' of the selected cases, either at
an area office or at a residential home. Experience of the pre-
liminary study and the pilot suggested that information on each
review was best collected on a proforma supplemented by notes. The
data collection sheet employed for this is included in the appendix
as Questionnaire 2. The details recorded at the review fell into
two groups : information on the organisation and content of review,
including the style of the reviewer, the extent of discussion on
objectives or long-term plans and the functions fulfilled

by the review; information on the decisions taken, including the extent of agreement on the decisions, the arrangement for implementation, the extent of collaboration required and discussion on resource limitations on decision-making.

4. As soon as possible after each review the researcher made an appointment with the social worker, with the purpose of completing a questionnaire specifically relating to that review. This Questionnaire 4 included questions on the preparations for each review; the making and recording of plans for each child and the importance of the review in this process; major decisions that had been taken on the case in the past year and where they were taken; any resource constraints on case work; the extent of the social worker's agreement with each review decision. Just as a review session in the area office included reviews on a 'batch' of cases, so the completion of Questionnaire 4 was, at times, conducted as a batch process. This may have encouraged social workers to answer questions not specific to a particular child in a repetitive fashion. This however would not apply to residential reviews, which usually occurred as 'one-offs' for each social worker. After each residential review the officer in charge was asked to complete a modified version of Questionnaire 4 (included in the appendix as Questionnaire 6). As it was not always possible to remain with the officer in charge while these forms were completed it was necessary to rely on a postal return which inevitably reduced the completion rate. Overall, the completion rate of Questionnaire 4 was high: one part-time social worker found it impossible to find the time to complete any questionnaires; one social worker left immediately after completing her reviews, hence some Questionnaire 4's went unanswered. Apart from that, Questionnaire 4 was completed for each review.

5. Simultaneously with the above exercise, social workers and residential staff were asked a series of questions which related to the review process in general. Area Directors and senior social workers were also asked to record their opinions on the importance and the

functions of reviews, and their level of satisfaction with them.
These questions are contained in Questionnaire 3 for area team
members and Questionnaire 5 for residential staff. Although these
questionnaires were designed in a closed format, the administration
of them presented considerable opportunity for informal discussion
of the issues.

While not chronologically accurate this is the most logical place
in terms of research components to mention an additional, more open-
ended questionnaire that was completed by members of the area
teams at a later stage in the research timetable (see Question-
naire 9). The open-ended nature of this questionnaire produced some
valuable expressions of the opinions of social work staff which
greatly complimented and reinforced the more limited responses to
Questionnaire 3.

6. At each review a series of decisions were agreed and recorded on
the review form which was signed by the reviewing officer. It
was this record of review decisions that was used as data in sub-
sequent analysis. Each of these decisions - almost nine hundred in
number - was categorized by the researcher along seven different
dimensions: the level of impact of the decision, the type of
decision (new, repeat, modified), the specificity of the goals,
the specificity of the action, the timescale, the focus of the
decision, the nature of the resultant social worker activity.
The development of this particular classification was influenced by
several sources. The usefulness of describing a decision by its
level of impact derives from the distinction drawn by Simon between
programmed and non-programmed decisions, as we saw in Chapter 4.
Also included in Chapter 4 was discussion of the work of Levin;
this highlighted the importance of the specificity of a decision.
The distinctions that have been drawn between the varying foci of
the decision derives from contrasting social work approaches;
approaches which focus on the individual, or the family, or in a
more integrated approach on the total environment of the child.
In applying this to the nature of review decisions it was necessary

to add an additional category, namely approaches which are not client orientated but which relate to organisational concerns.

Finally, the decisions were categorised according to the social work activity that was likely to arise in implementation. One existing classificiation of social work activity that has been tried and proven is that developed by Goldberg and Warburton in the Case Review System (Goldberg and Warburton, 1979). It appeared possible to apply this classfication to review decisions. Furthermore using existing research tools as a potential comparator places individual research results within a wider relevance.

Analysis of the decisions along these seven dimensions forms the basis of the typology of review decisions. The detailed breakdown of classes within each of these dimensions can be found in the 'coding of decisions' instructions sheet, contained in the appendix.

Having thus devised the classification it was important to test if decisions could be allocated consistently. The researcher, together with two colleagues tested this on a sample of decisions. The results from this exercise suggested that the criteria for allocating decisions was sufficiently unambiguous to facilitate consistent coding.

7. Returning to the review process, immediately prior to the 'second research' review on each child the researcher re-read the case notes and recorded any major changes in the child's life or relationship with the social services department -see data sheet labelled Questionnaire 7.

8. The researcher once again attended the successive review of all those cases included in the 'first round'. The focus of observation during this second review shifted from details fo the review procedure and style to information relating to the implementation of the decisions.

At this point it is appropriate to introduce two comments on the implications of using non-participative observation as a research method. These comments concern the impact of the researcher

on the proceedings and the difficulties in remaining a non-participant. The impact of the researcher on the proceedings is best examined by considering three aspects of the process separately : the organisation or conduct of the reviews; the content of the review discussion; and the decisions that were taken.

In :my estimation, the existence of the research project had negligible effect on the conduct of reviews in Areas X and Z but probably did cause some improvement in the much slacker arrangements that then existed in Area Y. In requesting the assistance of these areas with the research, the members of the management team were likely to have been aware of the interest of the researcher in the role of reviews in long-term planning. This may have increased awareness of this theme on the part of the Area Directors who acted as reviewing officers in Areas X and Z, but in Area Y where several senior members acted as reviewing officers I could detect no suggestion that this might be the case.

My assessment is that the research had no effect on the decisions that were taken. I would, however, add a further general comment; the review process, especially in Area Y, was conducted under some pressure which afforded little opportunity for introducing changes simply because a researcher was present.

The participants in these reviews were extremely accommodating to the addition of a 'silent presence'. However, as they became more accustomed to my presence, especially during the second round of reviews, there was a temptation to succomb to their increasing requests to 'tell us what you think we should do'. The question of whether to remain totally 'non-participative' was much more problematic when the researcher was aware, from recent reading of case notes, that the discussion was based on inaccurate information. Usually these were minor points, for instance assuming a child was aged seven years rather than nine. However the question still remained should the non-participant observer interfere? In general, my decision was not to interrupt the review.

9. The next major component of the research was the assessment of the implementation of the decisions which had been taken at the first review. The assessment of decision implementation was made by the

social workers and recorded by the researcher, often with the social workers seeking confirmation of their assessment from the researcher. The respondents were obviously aware that the researcher had knowledge of the case, both from the case records and from attending two consecutive review discussions. This must have influenced the respondents to be as honest as possible in their responses and in my assessment that was the spirit in which they participated in this exercise.

As will be seen in Questionnaire 8 the assessment of implementation was divided into two aspects: (I) implementation in terms of social worker action to try to fulfil the decisions; (II) implementation in terms of the success in achieving the aims of the decision. Causes for non-implementation and lack of success in implementation were also recorded. Interpretation of this 'hard data' was greatly enhanced by the information and impressions that the researcher had gained from the review discussions.

10. All the information collected by questionnaire was analysed by computer using the SPSS package (Nie, et al, 1975).

It will be seen from this discussion that the method employed on this research was basically a quantitative one. However the interpretation of the results from this quantitative approach was greatly facilitated by the observations and opinions gathered informally. In order to complete the field work as outlined above it was necessary for the researcher to spend considerable time in social work area offices and to visit many Children's Homes. While maintaining what was hopefully 'a low profile', this did afford valuable opportunities to observe area teams at work and to talk to members of the social work area teams.

It is therefore appropriate to see this project as adopting several research methods. For instance the triangulation of data gathering is important. By using three different sources - established case records, structure questionnaires and review discussions - to collect information

on the same topics, the validity of any one source can be checked. Similarly, the informal knowledge gained by the researcher through attending social work offices and observing the review process supported the data that had been gathered, thereby establishing confidence in its analysis.

The Research Sample

As we have seen the methodology most appropriate for fulfilling the research objectives was one that included a large sample of cases. It was decided therefore to aim for a 50% sample of all the cases subject to review in each area. The required date for the review of a child's case is related to the date of his reception into care. In theory reviews will be spread over the year, with no significance attached to reviews which fall in any particular part of the year. To fulfil the original plan of covering a 50% sample of reviews, one would, therefore, include all the reviews that fall due within any three-month period as each case is subject to review every six months. However, in none of the research areas were cases reviewed continuously, according to the chronological reception into care. Therefore the method of sample selection was chosen to take account of the particular way in which the review process was organised in each area. Also, because this research was designed to follow cases through at least two reviews, it was decided at the outset to exclude very short-term cases, and cases on the point of closure. Consequently, in those areas where an 'intake team' was in operation the population was assumed to be those cases held by members of the long-term team.

In Area X, all reviews were conducted within a two-week period, twice a year. As this area had a smaller caseload, it was possible to include in the research all those cases which were reviewed.

In Area Y, reviews were conducted over a two-months' period, twice a year, so rather than cover the cases of all social workers over half the review period, it was decided to cover the cases of half the social workers over the whole period when reviews were taking place, giving approximately a 50% sample of long-term cases.

In Area Z, reviews were held every week, each time covering the caseload of one social worker. Here the sample was selected by including all the cases of the long-term social workers which were reviewed within a three-month time span, again giving a sample of approximately 50% of long-term cases subject to review every six months.

The selection of social workers and therefore the cases they held was thought to give a representative sample of all long-term cases in Areas Y and Z, as there was an even spread of cases among all the social workers in the teams.

The reviews of children in residential care were organised by Care branch at County Hall, under different arrangements from the reviews conducted in area offices. Therefore the criteria for including children in residential care in the research sample had to be somewhat different. Having selected the social workers from each area who were to participate in the research, as explained above, children in residential care who were on the case loads of these social workers were also included in the sample. Because of clashes in the review timetables it was not possible for the researcher to attend all the reviews on children in residential care. Consequently, the number of residential reviews at which research material was collected is smaller than that indicated by the sampling framework.

A COMPARISON OF THE SAMPLE CASES WITH THE TOTAL CASELOAD OF EACH AREA

Each social work area office completes quarterly statistical returns for the Research and Development branch of the Wainshire Social Services Department, as well as annual returns for the DHSS. These figures can be used as a point of comparison against which to test the representativeness of the sample. However the cases covered in the statistical returns differ from those included in the sample in four ways:

i) The sample was drawn only from cases held by the long-term team, excluding cases held by 'intake', where an intake team was in operation.

ii) The research criteria excluded short-term cases and those on the point of closure — these will be included in the statistical returns.

iii) Some children on the 'at risk' register appear twice in the statistical returns, e.g. on a Supervision Order and 'at risk'. The 'at risk' category is only used in the research for those children under no other order. Corrections to take account of this have been made from information received from the administrative officer in each area. As this was collected at a different time to the statistical returns they are subject to error.

iv) The caseloads of social workers - and the status of children on those caseloads - are very fluid, so the statistical return information will only be accurate at the time it is collected.

So long as these caveats are borne in mind it is useful to compare the sample included in the research with the full caseloads of the areas as shown by the statistical returns of June 1981. This comparison is made in two ways:(1) the placement of the children and (2) their legal status.

(1)   The Placement of Children

Table 6.1 shows the pattern of the placement of children in the three areas combined, and in each area separately. It shows the percentages taken from the statistical returns of June 1981, and those included in the sample, which was also drawn during 1981. Children who are 'home on trial' are children who are subject to a Care Order and therefore 'in care', but living at home. The last category in this table, At Home, refers to those children who are under a supervision order, or whose names are on the 'at risk' register and who are living at home. These children are not 'in care', but in this authority were regarded as 'statutory' cases for review purposes.

The figures show that the sample is under-represented in children in residential care and over-represented in children in foster care. However, given the comparatively large numbers of cases included in the total sample, these differences should not be of great importance: each type of case is represented by an adequate number of cases in the sample. Whether the sample or the statistical returns is the more

TABLE 6.1

PLACEMENT	AREAS X & Y & Z		AREA X		AREA Y		AREA Z	
	% from statistical returns	% of sample	% from statistical returns	% of sample	% from statistical returns	% of sample	% from statistical returns	% of sample
Boarded out	20.7	33.2	25.6	28.1	20.0	35.9	19.5	34.5
Residential	23.0	16.6	19.8	17.0	28.0	17.7	13.7	11.5
Home on trial	9.8	9.2	12.4	9.0	10.8	11.6	6.2	4.6
At home	44.8	41.7	40.0	46.0	39.4	34.3	58.9	49.4
	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

accurate reflection of the actual caseloads at the time that the sample was taken is impossible to say.

(2) Comparisons of Legal Status Categories

There is no one set of published statistics which shows the breakdown by legal status of all the children who are subject to review in this authority. Statistical returns of the legal status of each child in the care of a local authority are made to the DHSS annually. Although the published figures refer to the whole county, they are initially collected by area and were made available in that form. These only include children actually in the care of the local authority and exclude children on supervision orders or 'at risk'. The number of children in these later categories was collected from the Administrative Officer in the area during March 1982 and added to the equivalent DHSS annual returns. These are shown in Table 6.2, together with comparable information on the sample cases.

This table shows a wide variation between the three areas in the proportion of children in each category, according to the statistical returns. Part of this variation could be due to different methods of collection or to accounting error. The rest must be explained by the differing environments of areas and the pursuit of different child care policies.

Comparison of the statistical returns with the sample shows a much larger proportion of children in the sample who have been subject to assumption of parental rights resolutions. It is felt that much of the explanation for this lies in accounting error. Children who are subject to a parental rights resolution come into care voluntarily in the first place. The actual procedure which moves a child from one category to the other can be lengthy and notification of the change-over may not be immediately passed to the administrative officer.

The low representation in the sample from Area Y of children on supervision orders is most likely to have arisen because reviews on these children are a non-statutory obligation and therefore likely to be given a low priority. For instance, some of these cases, while being held officially by the local authority, were on the caseload of the Family

TABLE 6.2

Legal Status	AREAS X & Y & Z		AREA X		AREA Y		AREA Z	
	Statis-tical returns %	Sample %	Statis-tical returns %	Sample %	Statis-tical returns %	Sample %	Statis-tical returns %	Sample %
Section I* (1948)	15.2	8.8	24.0	7.9	8.6	8.3	15.2	11.5
Section II* (1948)	6.6	11.4	5.6	12.3	3.4	8.3	6.6	16.1
Care Orders & Interim Care Orders	25.5	36.7	25.6	30.7	48.2	45.3	25.5	24.1
Supervision Orders & Matrimonial Supervision Orders	29.2	20.5	17.6	19.3	26.3	16.0	29.2	29.8
'at risk'	23.3	21.5	27.2	28.1	13.5	18.8	23.3	18.4
Ward of court	0	1.0	0	1.8	0	3.3	0	0

* (Now Section II and Section III of 1980 Child Care Act)

Service Unit, which carried out all necessary social work intervention, and therefore these may have been missed at review sessions.

In summary, the sample selected for this research comprised all cases reviewed in Area X in one six-month period, and approximately 50% of the cases reviewed by the long-term teams in Area Y and Area Z, in one six month period.

A comparison of the composition of the caseloads of these areas, in terms of the placement of children and their legal status, reveals considerable variation between the areas. A comparison of the total caseloads with those in the sample also shows some differences. These differences are not felt to be of any great importance, given the large number of cases included in the sample and the caveats which surround the comparison with the statistical return data.

THE REVIEW PROCESS

In this chapter we shall examine the data on the organisation and structure of reviews. The review process can be divided into three stages: the preparation for the review, the arrangements and conduct of the review, and the follow-up to the review. We shall look at each of these aspects in turn. However, before doing so, it may be best to give a brief overall description of the conduct of reviews in this particular authority. As was pointed out earlier, there were two main divisions in the organisation of reviews: between residential and non-residential reviews and between reviews carried out in different area offices. Thus the research covers four different arrangements for conducting reviews.

Residential Reviews

The reviews in residential homes were organised by Care branch staff at County Hall. For most community homes this meant that two dates were set aside each year for holding statutory reviews. On these dates the statutory reviews would be held on all the children living in the home at that time (individual reviews could be held at other times, if necessary).

In two community homes in the city with a high proportion of teen-agers, one date each month was set aside for reviews and in the two O and A centres one morning each week was set aside for reviews or case conferences. Because of the nature of O and A establishments case reviews were held much more frequently than was statutorily required.

Two specialist residential establishments in the county arranged their own reviews. The consensus of opinion voiced by workers was that these establishments gave statutory reviews an exceedingly low priority. At times this resulted in a failure to conduct reviews when statutorily required; failure to complete the necessary review forms; failure to use reviews to develop long-term plans; and a failure to implement them.

This criticism is related specifically to statutory reviews and not necessarily to the quality of their work with the children, or relations with social workers.

The policy in most community homes of holding all the reviews in a batch once every six months, meant that up to twelve (most commonly, between seven and ten) reviews are held on one day, chaired by the same reviewing officer and with the officer-in-charge in attendance at each. This may have the advantage of focusing the mind on reviews, but one must seriously question if the cases reviewed at the end of the day received as much attention as those at the beginning. However, most reviews will involve different personnel and this can help ensure that each session has some elements of a fresh start.

Area X

In this area all cases were reviewed within a two-week period. For a fortnight, twice a year, therefore, the Area Director would concentrate, almost exclusively, on reviewing cases. Each social worker in turn would present all their 'reviewable' cases. However, the caseloads in this area were comparatively small: no more than ten cases were presented by any one social worker. This policy of concentrating the reviews, together with the stress that the Area Director placed on administrative efficiency, made every one in the area team very 'review conscious' - thereby ensuring that reviews were given a high priority. Given this attitude, the arrangement for conducting reviews ' en bloc', did ensure that all cases were reviewed on time. Even if a case were transferred from one social worker to another it would not fall outside the six-monthly review period. However, this arrangement may also raise problems of tight scheduling, which may not be flexible enough to cope with difficult cases. For instance, in one review it became apparent that there were very complex issues at stake, of which the Area Director had not been aware. This needed detailed and lengthy consideration - much more than was allowed for in a review. The Area Director remarked ' a review is not the place to bring this up' - because it was a serious matter which needed immediate attention. However, this suggests that the

role of reviews is seen primarily as monitoring past work and trans-
ferring information rather than casework planning - a topic which will
be discussed in Chapter 9.

This arrangement meant that the Area Director was chairing over
eighty child care cases in two weeks. Did this level of concentration
have any implications for the quality and incisiveness of his performance
as a reviewing officer? One senior social worker did suggest that
content, in terms of in-depth or insightful probing, may be sacrificed in
order to achieve administrative efficiency, although Table 7.4 shows
that the average length of reviews in this area was longer than in the
other areas.

Area Y

As pointed out in Chapter 5, this area had a very high proportion
of 'reviewable' cases. Because of this a two-tier review system was in
operation. Cases were initially reviewed and review forms completed by
the senior social worker; the up-to-date files and reviews were then
passed to the Area Director or Deputy Area Director for scrutiny, and
a second, much less detailed, review session was arranged.

Because of the total number of cases to be reviewed, the two-tier
system, and the fairly complex nature of many of the cases, the whole
review process was a time-consuming exercise. The aim was to complete
all reviews within a two-three month period. Dates for the review with
the senior and the Area Director were arranged about a month in advance.
However, these dates were often rearranged because of illness, holidays
and case 'blow-ups', so the whole process often stretched over a longer
time than anticipated. From reading the case files and records of case
loads it was apparent that some cases did escape review. These were most
often: children on supervision orders, especially matrimonial supervision
orders; private fostering arrangements which are not statutorily required
to be reviewed, but which departmental policy suggested should be
reviewed; cases held by the Family Service Unit; or cases in which there
had been a change of social worker. The frequency of changes of review
dates also meant that more than six months often elapsed between reviews.

Area Z

In this area the Area Director held revewing sessions on
Tuesday mornings, reviewing all the cases of one social worker on each
occasion. Each social worker would have two such sessions in a year.
The timetable for these reviews was set well in advance and the dates
rarely changed. The sessions with one social worker could last from
four to six hours, depending on the number of reviewable cases. Although
this batch reviewing could present problems of decreasing freshness as
the session wore on, at least the occasion only occurred once a week and
did not therefore present problems of cumulative lack of freshness.
The social workers in this area kept detailed caseload lists which were
regularly updated, so it was rare for a case to miss a review - although
a change in social worker could well mean an extension of the interval
between reviews. The senior social workers were not included in review
sessions, and did not appear to be greatly involved in the preparation
for the review. The exception to this was that seniors regularly attended
residential reviews with their social worker, more so than was the case
in the other areas.

Having briefly described the four different arrangements for
conducting reviews we shall now look at the review process in three
stages. The preparation for the reviews; the arrangment and conduct of
the reviews; the follow-up to the reviews.

THE PREPARATION FOR REVIEWS

Under this general heading we shall look at two sets of tasks:
i) the use of review forms; and
ii) other preparatory tasks undertaken by the social worker.

The Review Form

(a)   Layout of the forms.   Three different review forms were used
throughout Wainshire: one for residential reviews; one for children who
are boarded out; and one for all other casework reviews. The headings
used in each of these forms were varied to suit the particular purposes.

Social workers were asked how satisfied they were with the forms and if there were any changes they would like to see made. Satisfaction was lowest with the residential review forms; over one-third of respondents were fairly or very dissatisfied, compared with one-fifth who were dissatisfied with forms used in area office reviews. Over 70% of social workers and residential staff wanted some changes made. These changes ranged from specific details to more fundamental changes such as asking children or parents to complete part of the form. In relation to residential reviews the most frequently cited change was to reduce the section given details concerning reception into care so as to allow for much fuller discussion of changes since the last review, particularly in relation to the family situation. Indeed, several homes abandoned or supplemented the prescribed form and produced their own review reports. Several residential staff also asked for information on fieldworker involvement (e.g. the number of visits) to be included.

None of the review forms included the decisions from the last review, nor did any of them ask about the objectives of the casework, or the long-term plans for the child. Inclusion of such material could increase the extent to which the review is used for critical evaluation of the objectives as well as the details of casework.

b)   The completion of review forms.   This was a task that was fundamental to all reviews and was basically the same for all social workers, regardless of the organisation of the review or the characteristic of the cases. However, completion of residential review forms differed from the completion of area office forms in several ways:

- for the social workers they were one-off reviews and scattered through the year, hence allowing for great concentration on a single case. However, residential review forms were not seen by the Area Director, which appeared to reduce their significance to the social worker, as they were often completed with minimal attention.

- the social worker only completed one part of the residential form, the residential staff prepared one part and the reviewing officer completed the final section at the review.

- the social worker had the responsibility of collating all these
  and ensuring that copies were sent to everyone who kept records
  on the child. Social workers seemed to feel that this task
  symbolised the administrative clumsiness of the department which
  may explain why it was not always carried out as well as one
  would expect. Indeed, at one residential review no-one - neither
  the social worker, residential staff, nor chairman - had a copy
  of the previous review and as a new social worker was involved
  no-one seemed to know much about the case.

The design and completion of the review form is an example of
standardisation, over the county, of one aspect of the review process.
This is one type of standardisation which could be expected if that
part of the 1975 Children Act on regulating reviews was eventually
implemented. Does it increase the quality of the review? It does to
some degree, in that at least once every six months the basic details
on a case must be noted. Could this be increased further? Almost cer-
tainly yes, by the inclusion of questions on the objectives and long-
term plans for each child. However, from observation and discussion it
was clear that the gains from completion of a review form varied
dramatically, largely dependent on the style of the individual social
worker. Some social workers took the opportunity presented by reviews
consciously to stand back from their work on a case and systematically
to reappraise it, reaffirming or modifying their objectives and methods.
Other social workers simply copied not only the details of a case but
their comments on behaviour etc. from the previous review form, hence
adding or gaining nothing from the process. The gains from completing
the review form are likely to be diminished by the 'batch' review system.
If a social worker who is working under pressure has ten or twenty
reviews to complete in a limited time then she cannot afford to take
too long on each. Neither is the social worker able to overcome this
problem by starting the reviews well in advance of the set date, as in
many cases the information, or conclusions, get out of date very quickly.
It was not a rare occurrence for a social worker to have to start again
from scratch having completed a review form in good time only to find

the circumstances of the case suddenly and drastically altered.

When the reviews of several social workers are concentrated together this can create great pressure on the secretarial staff. This was particularly a problem in Area Y and often social workers had to retrieve hand-written reviews from the secretaries' 'in-tray'. The team leader in the sub-office in Area Y tried to overcome the necessity to complete review forms hurriedly by giving all his staff three working days at home, away from the pressures and constant demands of the office, so they could gain the most value from completion of their review forms.

The value to be gained from well prepared review forms will be greater if these forms are then used both in the review discussion and in supervision when considering casework plans and priorities. Reviewing Officers used the review forms at most reviews but in a variety of ways. For instance they could be the main source of information on a case with which they were not familiar; indeed merely reading and signing the review form with minimal discussion did constitute the total review on several occasions. At other times reviewers asked the social workers to report verbally on progress and made scant use of the material on the form.

In Area Y which operated a two-tier system, the seniors used their review sessions to check on both the details and comprehensiveness of the form and ensured these were accurate and adequate before being passed on to the Area Director. In all areas examples were found of inconsistencies between the details on the case record and those on the review form, which were often repeated at consecutive reviews.

The practices in Wainshire would seem to be fairly typical, judging from the study by Aldgate and McDonnell:

"It would appear that many authorities present their workers with a formidable task of assembling and distributing appropriate forms, linking these with detailed notes of guidance, completing relevant sections, and in some cases exchanging forms with colleagues before the review meeting. Exchanging, assembling and reading relevant reports may form an essential part of preparation for the review meeting and can reduce the time spent in straight exchange of information but the administrative wheels of an organisation need to run very smoothly if these tasks are to be efficiently handled

without paper going astray or blockages occurring at different stages of the operation."

(McDonnell and Aldgate, 1984)

(c) <u>Recording review decisions</u>. The last section on each form concerned future plans. The recordings made in this section were the source of the sample of 'review decisions'. It perhaps appears odd that consideration should be given to review decisions in the section on 'preparation for the review', but in fact many social workers come to the review with their decisions already prepared and recorded. There was a range of practices of formulating and recording review decisions not all of which are appropriate to this section on preparation. However, for ease of comparison, it is best to discuss these together.

In residential reviews the final section was seen as arising from the review discussion. In most Children's Homes the chairman formulated and recorded these towards the end of the review. One must seriously doubt whether a chairman hurriedly composing plans for the future and recording them on the review form while the rest of the group continue the discussion is the most effective way of ensuring comprehensive decision-making. In a group discussion it would be more appropriate for someone other than the chairman to keep a record.

In the case of area office reviews, practice varied from area to area. In Area X social workers discussed their decisions with their senior prior to the review and came with these prepared. Modification or addition to these by the Area Director was always possible, but in practice this was not a frequent occurrence.

In Area Y there was no single pattern. The practice adopted reflected the preference of the individual social worker and each seemed to be quite unaware of the practices of others in their team.

In Area Z the Area Director formulated all the decisions during each review. The style of this particular reviewer was first to record summaries of the present situation. These sometimes lead on to a 'decision' in terms of action to be taken, sometimes not. This was a useful guide to the reviewer as to whether he had covered all necessary points, but it tended to combine and thereby confuse information with

decisions. This may reduce the impact of the decision-making aspect of the reviews and increase the informational and monitoring aspects.

Tasks Undertaken in Preparation for Reviews

Social workers were asked which of the following list of eight tasks they undertook specifically as preparation for a review. Table 7.1 shows the percentage response rate for all reviews combined, for residential reviews, for all area office reviews and office reviews for each of the three areas.

~ Obviously not all tasks are appropriate for all cases. For instance 'talks with the foster parents' will only be relevant to children who are boarded out. Social workers talked with foster parents in 68% of cases where a child was fostered, although answers to a subsequent question show that less than half the foster parents were told about the forthcoming review. Table 7.1 shows differences between preparations for residential reviews, area reviews and also between the different areas. Social workers do less administrative work for residential reviews but do talk to the children and their families more often. This could be related to the age of the child as the mean age of children in residential care is higher than that of children who are fostered or on the 'at risk' register. Also children in residential homes are very aware that 'it is the reviews' and are therefore able to prompt social workers to talk to them about this.

Comparisons between the areas show that social workers from Area Y spend more time immediately prior to a review in updating their records. From our observation it would seem that this is not because they wish to achieve a higher standard at the review but because their records were not as well kept in the intervening six months. Failure to make case recordings on a continuous basis increases the pressure prior to a review session, which must decrease the opportunity to use the preparation for a review constructively. The greater consultation with Health Visitors in Area X is probably due to the larger proportion of children who are 'at risk' and a greater reliance on the health visitors

TABLE 7.1

	All reviews	Residential reviews	All area office reviews	Area reviews in X	Area reviews in Y	Area reviews in Z
	n = 246	n = 37	n = 209	n = 72	n = 85	n = 52
1. Updating case records	59.3	37.8	63.2	52.3	83.5	44.2
2. Talks with child	26.0	43.2	23.0	22.2	27.1	17.3
3. Talks with child's family	35.4	43.2	34.0	36.1	32.9	32.7
4. Contact with school	28.0	24.3	28.7	36.1	24.7	25.0
5. Contact with Health Visitor	7.7	0	9.1	15.3	4.7	7.7
6. Talk with Foster Parents	29.3	5.4	33.5	27.8	43.5	25.0
7. Talk with residential staff	12.2	78.4	0	0	0	0
8. Talk with colleagues	54.1	62.2	52.6	63.9	40.0	57.7

due to the lack of a day nursery. Social workers in Area Z are least likely to talk specifically about the review with the child, the family, or the foster family. Indeed social workers in Area Z carry out fewer tasks as specific preparation for the review. This could be because they visit homes and liaise with other professionals as a matter of course. Or it could be because the greater spread of reviews in Area Z prevents the office from becoming so 'review conscious'.

THE ARRANGEMENT AND CONDUCT OF REVIEWS

In this section we shall move from the brief overall description given earlier to more detailed information on the review process in each area. We shall use responses to three questions to raise several important issues on the conduct of reviews. These three questions are:

(i) What was the interval since the last review?

(ii) How long did the review last?

(iii) Who attended the review?

(i) What was the interval since the last review?

This research was not designed specifically to test how far the statutory regulations were being adhered to in terms of the interval between reviews. However, we do have some information on this. As we noted in Chapter 3, much of the criticism of reviews points to a basic failing to carry out reviews on time. The national study carried out by the Social Work Service during 1979/80, and published by the DHSS in 1982, showed that out of twenty-eight authorities examined only eleven regularly conducted reviews within the statutory time limits (DHSS, 1982). Three areas in Wainshire (different from those used in this research), were included in the Social Work Service study and their unpublished report relating to these areas suggested that the organisation of reviews ensured that most were held within the statutory limits. Wainshire is almost certainly not a typical authority in this respect. As we have noted previously the organisation of reviews is at the discretion of the area director, but the lead given by senior management from County Hall on the expected standards and priorities undoubtedly has an impact at area level. The introduction of a social worker manual

is an example of an attempt by senior management to influence the work of social workers at area office level. These manuals were issued to all social workers in Wainshire and set out the procedures to be followed in particular situations. The entry on reviews included the basis of statutory requirements, the timing of reviews and the particular points that should receive consideration in appropriate instances.

At each review attended, note was taken of the date of the previous review. Table 7.2 shows the results for all reviews combined, for residential reviews, for all area office reviews, and for reviews in each area office.

These results show that the vast majority (93.4%) of reviews in residential homes were carried out within six months and the remainder within eight months. Overall, 81.7% of reviews held in area offices were within six months of the previous one; however, 4.6% of these reviews were more than three months late. There are differences between the area: Area X has only 3% of reviews over the six months, compared to 28.4% of reviews in Area Y and 16% in Area Z. This confirms our earlier description of Area X as being administratively efficient, and of Area Y as struggling to cope with a large number of reviews with poor secretarial back-up. The delays in Area Z were largely caused by changes of staff and illness.

Statutory reviews are part of the long-standing boarding-out regulations; are the cases of children in foster care more likely to be reviewed on time? Table 7.3 shows the interval since the last review

TABLE 7.3

Placement	Interval since the previous review		
	0 - 6 months	7 - 8 months	9+ months
Fostered	77.7	17.4	4.8
At home	84.2	11.8	3.9
Home on Trial	88.9	3.7	7.4
Residential	93.4	6.5	0

for children who are fostered, at home on trial, at home under supervision and in residential care. There is no statistically significant

TABLE 7.2

TIME SINCE LAST REVIEW	All reviews n =292	Residential reviews n = 61	All area office reviews n = 231	Area X reviews n = 73	Area Y reviews n = 100	Area Z reviews n = 58
Less than 3 months	8.3	18.0[1]	8.4	9.1	12.5[2]	0
3 months to 6 months	75.7	75.4	73.3	87.9	58.3	84.0
7 months to 8 months	11.9	6.5	13.1	1.5	20.8	14.0
9 months to 12 months	1.9	0	2.3	1.5	4.2	0
12 months +	1.9	0	2.3	0	4.2	2.0

1. The larger proportion in this category is due to the inclusion of reviews from O and A centres.
2. The larger proportion in this category in Area Y is because several reviews from the last round were very late in being held.

difference (at a 5% confidence level) in the timing of reviews for children in these four categories.

As was noted earlier this research was not specifically designed to test how far the regulations were being adhered to. Data were collected on a sample of cases presented for review. Therefore, cases which had fallen through the review net could not, by definition, be included in the research. We do not know how many cases this involved. However, observation and quick comparison of caseloads with cases reviewed suggested that it was unlikely for cases to be missed in Areas X and Z, but that this did occur occasionally in Area Y.

(ii) How long did the review last?

In this section we are reporting on the length of the actual review, including the reading of the review form, the discussion and recording of decisions. This however does not take account of any prior activities such as listed in Table 7.1 nor the completion of the review form.

Table 7.4 shows the distribution of the length of reviews for all reviews, for residential reviews, for all area office reviews and for reviews in each area office. These results point to the striking differences in reviews in residential homes and those in area offices. In residential homes no review lasted less than eleven minutes and over 20% lasted more than fifty minutes. In contrast, in area reviews 7% lasted less than five minutes and 50% were no more than ten minutes in length. There were differences between the areas in the time that was spent on reviews. Reviews in Area X were longest and Area Y shortest. This could be explained, in part, by the thoroughness with which the review forms were studied in Area X and in part by the two-tier system in Area Y - where reviews were held by senior social workers who should have greater knowledge of case details. However, the differences between the areas are insignificant in comparison with the difference between residential and area reviews, see Figure 7.1.

TABLE 7.4

LENGTH OF REVIEW	All reviews	Residential reviews	All area office reviews	Area X reviews	Area Y reviews	Area Z reviews
	n = 292	n = 62	n = 231	n = 73	n = 100	n = 58
Less than 5 minutes	5.5	0	7.0	1.4	8.0	12.1
5 - 10 minutes	33.8	0	42.6	34.3	54.0	32.8
11 - 15 minutes	15.7	3.4	19.1	17.8	19.0	20.7
16 - 20 minutes	11.0	0	13.9	20.5	8.0	15.5
21 - 30 minutes	16.1	33.5	11.6	13.9	8.0	15.5
31 - 40 minutes	7.2	21.8	3.3	8.4	1.0	1.7
41 - 50 minutes	5.8	19.6	2.1	4.2	1.0	1.7
51 - 60 minutes	4.1	19.6	0	0	0	0
60+	0.3	1.6	0	0	0	0
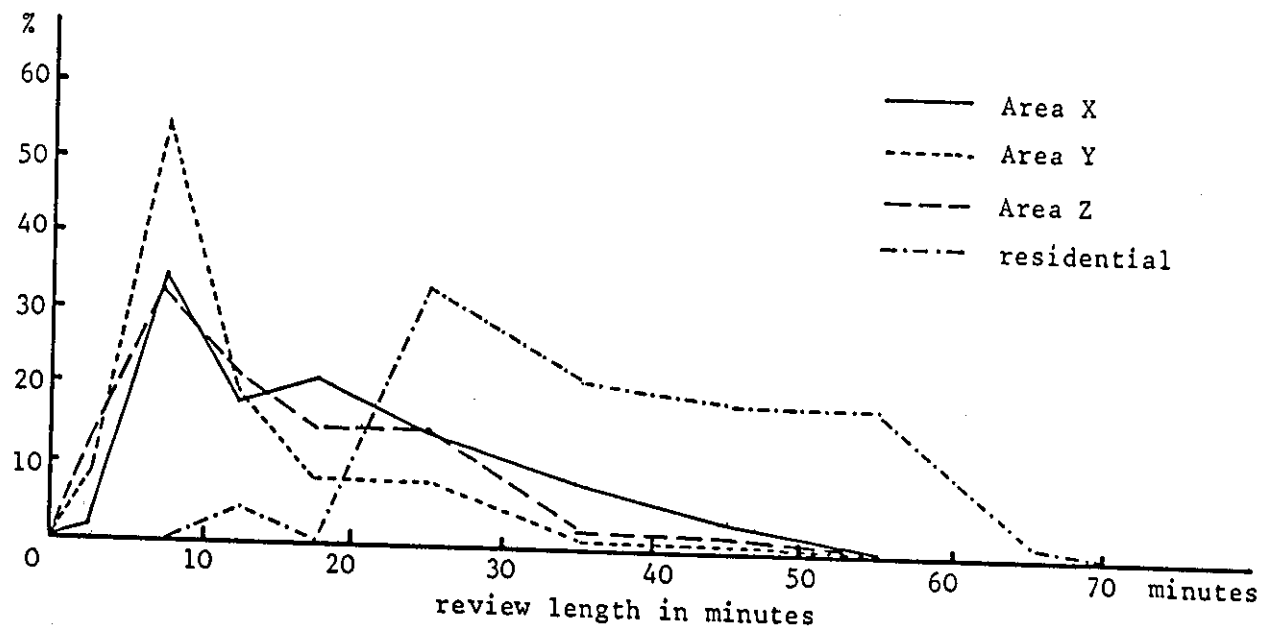
FIGURE 7.1

Among area reviews, were children in care given longer reviews than those being supervised?

There was no statistically significant difference in the length of area reviews for children who were fostered or home on trial or at home under supervision. Table 7.5 shows that more than half the reviews on children in foster care lasted ten minutes or less.

TABLE 7.5

Length of Review	Children in foster care	Children home on trial	Children living at home under supervision
10 minutes or less	51.9%	57.2%	42.9%
11-20 minutes	26.4%	39.3%	39.6%
20-30 minutes	15.1%	3.6%	11.0%
30+	6.6%	0	6.6%

The length of time a review lasts is not in itself an indicator of the value of a review, but presumably it does say something about what the participants hope to gain from a review and therefore how they perceive the purpose and importance of the review.

Another example of decision-making for children in care which we discussed in Chapters 3 and 4 is the Scottish Children's Hearings. Although these Hearings are not initiated for the same reasons as statutory reviews in England and Wales, they offer a useful comparison of decision-making processes. Martin and Murray found in their study of children's hearings that on average the hearings lasted forty minutes. This is very similar to the length of residential reviews included in this study, but much longer than the average length of reviews held in area offices (Martin and Murray, 1976).

Another established forum for decision-making on children is child abuse case conferences. Evidence was collected by the NSPCC on 777 conferences on child abuse cases. This shows that 42% of the conferences lasted up to one hour, that 52% lasted between one and two hours and 5%

lasted even longer than two hours (Castle, 1976). These conferences are therefore much longer than those reported by Martin and Murray and the residential reviews included in this investigation.

However, in their study of case conferences on suspected child abuse cases, Hallet and Stevenson (1980) point to the many complaints that are expressed especially by doctors, about the length of these meetings. Child abuse case conferences serve somewhat different functions from those of statutory reviews but the large number of participants, from different professions probably contributes to the length of the conference, and to the probability that beyond a certain length conferences yield diminishing returns. This is a point that should be considered in any proposals to extend the membership of reviews.

(iii) Who attends reviews?

The difference in the character of residential reviews and area office reviews is again strikingly demonstrated by the attendance at the review, as is shown in Table 7.6.

TABLE 7.6

Number present at review	Area Office reviews n = 231	Residential reviews n = 61
2	93.5	0
3-4	6.5	8.2
5-8	0	52.5
9-11	0	36.1
12+	0	3.2
	100%	100%

In only one area review was anyone other than the reviewer, social worker or senior social worker present. This was the inclusion of foster parents at one review in Area X.

In contrast residential reviews are much more akin to case conferences in that outsiders with knowledge of the child are invited to attend. These were most frequently representatives of the school,

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although employers, health visitors, doctors and police also attended at least one of the reviews studied. The natural parents were present at four reviews and the child was present at six reviews.

The question of 'who attends a review' raises three very different issues. The first is the wider participation in decision-making of those affected by the decisions, the second is who should act as chairman or reviewing officer and the third is the organisational impact of a broadening of reviews.

Participation in Reviews.   This topic was considered in general terms in Chapter 3, where note was made of the relevant section of the 1975 Act. This reads as follows:

> "In reaching any decision relating to a child in their care, a local authority shall, so far as practicable, ascertain the wishes and feelings of the child regarding the decision and give due consideration to them, having regard to his age and understanding."

To what extent did the social workers covered by this research fulfil this duty by including children in their reviews? In only 2.1% of all the reviews studied were children included. All of these were children in residential homes, so in 9.8% of residential reviews were children included. On these occasions the children or young people were usually only brought in for part of the review; on only one occasion did a young person attend throughout the review. On several other occasions the young person had been given the option to attend but had declined to do so.

It is of course possible for children to express their wishes or feelings without actually attending the review. However the evidence from this research suggests that this was not happening. Social workers were asked if the child had been informed that a review was taking place; only 19.9% of all replies were affirmative, although 56% of children in residential care had been so informed. Also, as reported earlier, for only 26% of all reviews, or 43.3% of residential reviews, did social workers report 'talking to the child' as part of the preparation for the review. This survey, therefore, suggests that most children in Wainshire are not included in their reviews, nor are they informed that

a review is taking place. Although a greater proportion of children
in residential care are involved in reviews, the numbers are still
very small. Instances of the involvement of the natural parents or
the foster parents are even less frequent (Sinclair, 1982). It has
been hoped to test the hypothesis that decisions made when the child
is present are more likely to be implemented than those taken when the
child is not present. However, the small number of cases at which the
child was present makes the testing of this hypothesis impossible.

The reviewing officer. In all the reviews conducted in these area
offices, the role of the reviewing officer was taken by either the Area
Director or by the senior social worker; in the residential reviews
this task was performed by the representative from Care Branch who had
responsibility for the establishment, or occasionally by the Area
Director from the area in which the Home was situated. If reviews are
to offer a truly critical evaluation of a case then a reviewing officer
who is independent from the case, and is not in a position of line-
management responsibility may be better able to undertake this task.

As we saw in Chapter 3, in the United States of America the desire
for an independent reviewing officer has been met through the use of
judicial reviews. This is not a system that has many advocates in this
country. However, in their evidence to the Select Committee, BASW
recommended that:

> "Each authority should designate officers to chair reviews who
> should not have line management responsibility for the case but
> be of sufficient seniority to question and challenge those who
> have."
>
> (BASW, 1983)

A very similar conclusion was reached by McDonnell and Aldgate. In
proposing External Review Panels they note:

> "The proposal for the Review to be conducted by personnel located
> outside the area structure recognises that other members of the
> social workers' hierarchy may well have played a part in decisions
> which have been taken and are less likely to be able to pass an
> impartial judgement on the quality of the work."
>
> (McDonnell and Aldgate, 1984)

However this form of argument does not seem to have found favour with
the Select Committee:

> "But we do not consider that the participation in management of an
> independent element could do other than confuse the individual
> responsibility which a local authority currently has for children
> in its care."
>
> (Short Report, 1984)

Would the use of independent chairmen have made any significant
differences to the reviews studied in this research? The chairmen of
the review can influence the style and the conduct of the review, as
we shall discuss in the next chapter. A chairman who does not have
line management responsibility for a case is likely to have less know-
ledge of the case, and therefore a review could consist largely of infor-
mation exchange. However this is less likely to happen if the reasons
for holding a review are clearly articulated. However it must be
recognised that the adoption of independent reviewing officers for all
the reviews undertaken in this authority would have major organisational
implications.

The organisation implications .   The opinion expressed by almost all
organisations interested in promoting good child care practice is that
the review process should be broadened to include those most closely
affected, the child and his family. This opinion was also voiced by
many of the social workers included in this survey. Such a move would
have little impact on the basic structure of residential reviews; it
would totally alter the ways in which reviews on other children were
carried out in Wainshire.

As has been pointed out earlier, a very large number of cases
were due to be reviewed every six months, because of the Wainshire
policy of including in the review process not only children in its
care, but also children on supervision orders and on the at-risk register.
In all areas reviews were conducted in 'batches' covering one social
worker's caseload at one session. This form of organisation is only
practicable if the review time per case is comparatively short. As
the previous section has shown many reviews held in area offices are
of a very short duration. If every review were to be broadened,

allowing for greater participation by the child and his family and other interested professionals, or if the reviewing officer was independent and not involved in line management of the case, then a structure more akin to a case conference would have to be adopted. This would certainly imply that more time and resources would need to be committed to reviews. The joint working party on the costing of the implementation of the 1975 Children Act attempted to estimate the additional costs involved in adopting regulations on the conduct of reviews. On the assumption that these regulations would require reviews to be more thorough and involve a wider group of participants, the working party estimated "that the effect of review regulations might be to require local authorities to spend about six more hours on each review than at present" (DHSS L.A.A. October 1980).

If this estimate were applied to Area Y, in which almost 500 cases were reviewed, twice a year, then the estimated additional work load would be a phenomenal 6000 hours a year!

The actual net addition would depend on the existing standards of review, those functions being carried out elsewhere at present that this different review style could fulfil, and the improvement in overall standards of child care practice that followed from changes in the review structure. Nonetheless to change the existing pattern of area office reviews to one which involved a greater range of personnel undoubtedly would have a major impact on the work in the area offices in Wainshire. An alternative approach may be to prioritise reviews so that a different review structure was adopted depending on certain criteria (Such as length of time in care, legal status, placement, etc.). In Chapter 4 we introduced Etzioni's concept of 'mixed scanning' as a method of differentiating decision-making. Etzioni introduces this concept to suggest that different decision-making processes may be employed for different types of decisions. If this is applied to the review situation one can see different review processes being appropriate for decision-making related to different situations. For instance a large-scale case conference style of review, where all options are explored fully, may be appropraite as a first review, or where there has been

major changes in the child's circumstances. A smaller review may be
appropriate when a case has been reviewed thoroughly in the recent past
and no changes have occurred since. The members of the Select Committee
may have been thinking along these lines when they recommended:

> "that the new Regulations on reviews include an obligation to pay
> particular regard to any review on a child already in care for two
> years."

<div align="right">(Short Report, 1984)</div>

THE FOLLOW UP TO THE REVIEW

If reviews are to have real significance, the outcome of their
deliberations must be fed back into casework plans. Was this done as
a formalised process, in an ad hoc way, or possibly not at all?
No direct quantitative measures were taken which would answer these
questions, but we can make some generalised comments on the basis of
observations and discussions. It would appear that limited use is
made of the review forms after the review. Indeed one gained the
impression that generally they were looked at again only when
preparing for the next review.

A social worker or senior social worker may use a supervision
session as a means of ensuring that reviews are adequately followed
up. However, this did not appear to occur consistently in all of the
areas studied. Supervision sessions were usually limited to a few cases
which were particularly active. Nonetheless, despite the lack of any
formal follow-up procedure, the majority of decisions were implemented.
Interestingly, during the research on implementation, social workers
expressed surprise on several occasions when reminded of a decision that
had been reached at the previous review and which subsequently had been
implemented. This suggests that social workers carry in their heads
a 'framework of action' for each case and that they use this framework
 rather than written records to guide them in their day-today activities.
Such an approach has limitations - it makes it difficult for other
workers who become involved in a case and it reduces the capactiy for
effective monitoring and supervision. These limitations emphasise the
need for both aims and casework plans to be properly recorded and for

these records to be employed in regular reassessment.

Furthermore, when social workers were asked to give their objectives on a case, without reference to their records, they found it much easier to list necessary short-term or continuing activities than long-term goals. This suggests that the practice of 'carrying cases in your head' gives emphasis to the short-term at the expense of the long-term, and to means at the expense of ends.

SUMMARY

In this chapter we have considered the arrangements for conducting reviews in four settings; residential homes throughout Wainshire and in each of three area offices.

Each of the three area offices were different from each other in all aspects considered, but these differences were minor, particularly in comparison to the differences between 'residential reviews' and 'area office' reviews in general.

Some of these differences are summarised below:

RESIDENTIAL REVIEWS	AREA OFFICE REVIEWS
Reviews were arranged by Care branch from County Hall.	Reviews were arranged by each Area Director.
Reviews were often arranged as a 'batch' within the Home but were 'one-offs' for the social worker.	'Batch' reviews for each social worker's caseload - although the total review process was spread differently in each area.
Review forms were completed by the social worker, the Residential Officer-in-charge and the Reviewing Officer; they were not seen by Area Director; the decisions were recorded at the end of the review by the Reviewing Officer.	Forms were completed by the social worker; all seen by the Area Director; decisions were recorded in different ways in each office.

RESIDENTIAL REVIEWS	AREA OFFICE REVIEWS
Preparation for the review	Preparation for the review
- updating of case records was not an important task.	- updating of records was an important task.
- discussions with the child were held in 43% of cases.	- discussion with the child were held in only 23% of cases.
93.4% of reviews held within six months of the previous review.	81% of reviews held within six months of previous review.
No review was less than 11 minutes in length; 20% were more than 50 minutes in length.	50% of reviews lasted ten minutes or less.
The average attendance was eight people, ranging from four to fifteen.	In only one case was anyone other than the social worker, senior social worker or Area Director present.
Children were included in 9.8% of reviews.	No children or their families were included in any reviews.
56% of children were informed that that a review was taking place.	Only 11% of children were informed that a review was taking place.

As well as these differences between residential reviews and
area office reviews the findings from this chapter highlight three
issues:

- the potential for improvement in the use of the review form.
- the lack of family participation in reviews.
- the organisational implications of expanding area office reviews.

None of the review forms used in Wainshire included the decisions
from the last review, nor did any ask questions about the objectives
of the casework or the long-term plans for the child. Inclusion of
such material could increase the extent to which the review is used
for critical evaluation of the objectives as well as the details of
casework. This may also increase the use of review forms subsequent to

the review which could reduce the dangers that arise when social workers are too reliant on caseplans that they carry in their heads.

In the social work areas studied in this research participation by the children in their reviews was extremely limited. Although residential reviews did involve several different professional groups, the child was included in less than one tenth of the reviews. In area office reviews no children were involved. Indeed only once, when foster parents attended, did area reviews include anyone other than the social worker, senior social worker or the Area Director. Furthermore, only a small minority of children had been informed that their review was taking place.

Not only are area office reviews limited in their participation, many are of a very short duration, suggesting limited discussion. However, because of the large number of cases which are reviewed in these areas, any change from the existing pattern would have major implications for the organisation of work. Indeed it would seem to be impossible to restructure all the reviews at present undertaken along the lines suggested by BASW, among others, in their evidence to the Select Committee. If area office reviews were to be broadened both in scope and participation then some system of prioritising may be necessary.

THE CONTENT AND STYLE OF REVIEWS

THE CONTENT OF THE REVIEW

In this chapter we shall develop further the descriptions of
reviews by considering the content of the reviews and the style gener-
ated by the reviewing officer. The content of each review discussion
is particular to that child and his circumstances at the time, and
hence any generalisation or meaningful measurement of the content is
not easy. Nonetheless, the content of all the reviews was analysed
by serveral complementary methods. The findings from this analysis
are summarised in two ways:

(a) by using a 'check list' of possible discussion topics;

(b) by highlighting the extent of discussion on the objectives
of each case and the means and the time-scale to achieve
these objectives.

(a) Check list of possible discussion topics

Our pilot study suggested seven broad headings which would be
likely to encompass the range of the topics discussed. These were:
medicals, the present placement, the behaviour of the child, the progress
of the child, family relations, finance, and social worker contact.
A record was made each time a topic was discussed to some purpose,
during a review. The results can be seen in Table 8.1. However, a
reviewing officer may have noted details from a review form, e.g. that
a medical had been conducted, and it this was satisfactory he may not
have raised the issue in discussion. In so far as this was happening,
it suggests that reviews were being used for information exchange.

Obviously the topics discussed will vary with the type of case.
For instance, medicals are specified in the boarding-out regulations
and are therefore more appropriate for children who are fostered.
Similarly finance will be important in terms of boarding-out allowances
especially for requests for special payments, and for families with
children 'at risk', where an area officer may use his discretion to

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TABLE 8.1

DISCUSSION TOPICS	All reviews	Residen-tial reviews	All area office reviews	Area X reviews	Area Y reviews	Area Z reviews
Medicals	16.8%	11.5%	18.2%	4.1%	9.0%	51.7%
Present placement	28.4	31.5	27.7	31.5	29.0	20.7
Behaviour of child	53.4	72.1	48.5	56.2	50.0	36.2
Progress of child	51.0	78.1	43.7	28.8	34.0	79.3
Family relations	51.4	73.8	45.5	56.2	44.0	34.5
Finance	11.0	3.3	13.0	12.3	5.0	27.5
Social worker contact	11.0	1.6	13.4	12.3	20.0	3.6

approve expenditure for 'preventative work'.

Table 8.1 shows some interesting differences in the content of
reviews. Residential reviews are more often concerned with the child's
behaviour and progress, but much less interested in finance or social
worker contact. The differences between the different areas in part
reflect the distribution of types of cases in each area and in part
reflects the particular concern of the reviewing officer.   In Areas
X and Z all cases were reviewed by the Area Director, in Area Y the
cases were reviewed by three different senior social workers, which
explains the greater emphasis in this area on social worker contact -
senior social workers are more likely to adopt elements of a supervisory
role, within the review setting.

(b) Objectives and Means

In Chapters 2 and 3 references were made to the growing concern
over the lack of planning for children in care. One of the questions
which this research addresses is the role of reviews in improving
planning. It is important therefore to ascertain how far reviews were
being used as an occasion to either develop or reassess or reaffirm
long-term plans. Each review was assessed by the researcher in three
ways, using different sets of alternative descriptions. The first set
related to the discussion of long-term case objectives. The next two
considered each review as a decision-making exercise and the researcher
assessed which of five alternatives gave the best overall description of
the discussion and of the decisions.

TABLE 8.2

Long-term Objectives	All area reviews	Residential reviews
Assumed and not discussed again	25.2%	6.6%
Reaffirmed	19.1	26.2
Re-examined	26.0	52.5
None of these	29.6	14.8
	100.0%	100.0%

Table 8.2 summarises the way in which long-term objectives were
covered in reviews in area offices and in residential homes.

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Long-term objectives were discussed in considerably less than half the
reviews in area offices, although in a quarter there was an unspoken
assumption about what these objectives were. However, information
gained from reading the case records show that in only a quarter of all
cases were long-term objectives explicitly recorded in the case files.
This is interesting in the light of the case being promoted by BASW
and others for written agreements to be made which set out the objectives
of the social services when taking a child into its care or under its
supervision. Discussion on long-term objectives occurred more frequently
in residential reviews. A placement in residential care is often regarded
as temporary or as a stepping stone to a more permanent placement or to
independent living and hence one would expect to find a greater emphasis
on the longer term in residential reviews.

The five alternative ways of describing, overall, both the discussions
and the decisions taken at reviews are shown in Table 8.3.

TABLE 8.3

	DISCUSSIONS		DECISIONS	
	Area Reviews	Residen- tial Reviews	Area Reviews	Residen- tial Reviews
1. A holding oper- ation because of expected changes	3.9	3.3	7.4	9.8
2. Development of long-term plans without specific decisions about means	4.8	6.6	3.1	4.9
3. Development of long-term plans including short- term goals	17.5	62.3	14.0	50.8
4. Short-term tasks with no reference to long- term goals	25.3	16.4	27.5	19.7
5. Maintenance of the status quo	48.5	11.5	48.0	14.8
	100%	100%	100%	100%

This again points to a limited emphasis on long-term plans in the content of area reviews, in contrast with a major emphasis on this in residential reviews. Almost half of all area reviews were best described as 'maintaining the status quo'. In these cases the review is most likely to be fulfilling a monitoring function, rather than a decision-making one - a point which shall be developed in the next chapter. The general picture of review discussions drawn from this summary of their content is of an emphasis on retrospective analysis rather than prospective planning. A picture which can be compared to 'the position of a driver travelling forward but steering himself by the view his driving mirror affords of what has already happened'. (Sheldon, 1982).

STYLE OF THE REVIEW

As with the previous section on content, the style of the review is closely related to its functions and this aspect will be discussed later. What we are concerned with now is the extent to which the reviewing officer can determine the character of the review, either by the seriousness with which he treats the occasion or by the nature of his chairmanship. It was apparent that individual social workers varied in what they put into reviews and in what they felt they got out of them. However, this variation was to some extent limited by the standards established by the reviewing officer. Variations of these standards in turn limited by the declared expectations of senior managmenet iat County Hall. Both the Domiciliary and Care branches of the Social Services Department appeared to give reviews a fairly high priority, at least in terms of ensuring that they were completed on time. It is possible that this was reinforced by the inclusion of parts of Wainshire in the DHSS study on boarding-out regulations carried out in 1979/80 - as no doubt the study reported here also influenced the review process in those areas which were researched. Senior management had also approved a section on Reviews for inclusion in the procedures manual held by all social workers. This set out the derivations of the requirement to review and quations that should be considered. One must say however, that this represented the ideal rather than the actual picture of review discussions.

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Although Senior Management signalled the high priority they gave to reviews in this way, they did not monitor or receive feedback on the operation of the review process within the areas. Indeed the designing and issuing of review forms by County Hall for use in the areas, without sufficient consultation or feedback from members of the area teams, was perceived by them as an illustration of the one way traffic from County Hall to the areas.

Hence, even within the climate which the Social Services Department attempted to establish, the Area Directors still had considerable scope to influence the general attitude to reviews in their area, as had Care Branch officers in the Homes they supervised. One important way of doing this is through the organisation of the reviews and the time spent on them, as reported in the last chapter.

Other actions of the Area Director help to establish the priority or seriousness with which reviews are treated. For instance, does the reviewing officer accept telephone calls or other interruptions during a review? If he makes it clear that there are to be no interruptions, except in absolute emergencies, this establishes the reviews as having a high priority. Similarly, a high priority will be established if only unavoidable absences or emergencies are seen as acceptable reasons for postponing a review. Using thse criteria, all the reviewing officers could be said to take their reviews seriously - in particular the Area Director in Area X.

NATURE OF THE CHAIRMANSHIP

We have already discussed in the previous chapter, the various arguments that have been put forward in the debate on the use of independent chairmen. It may be useful to keep that discussion in mind while we focus more closely on the nature of the chairmanship of the reviews covered by this research.

Each reviewing officer will have his own way of chairing a review. Does this produce important differences in the style of the review? Twelve phrases were used to describe possible reviewing styles. These were:- has prior knowledge of the case; systematic; acts largely as chairman; explores new approaches; asks about the child's wishes; probes social worker input; accepting of the status quo; reflects policy down-

Wards; emphasises accountability; accepts the social workers assessment; accepting of resource constraints; explores new resource alternatives.

Although several different chairmen were involved in both area and residential reviews there are still some points of generalised comparison to be made between these two types of review. In area reviews the reviewers took a more directive line; were more systematic in their questioning; had greater knowledge of the case; probed social work input much more fully; emphasised the need for accountability. In contrast, the reviewing officers in residential reviews were more likely to act as chairman, facilitate discussion rather than initiate it - although they were more likely to explore new approaches or new resource inputs; more likely to ask about the child's wishes; express less concern about accountability, and the need to reflect the policy of senior management. In comparing reviewing styles between the different areas we must remember that in Area Y several different people acted as reviewing officer, most often this was a senior social worker so we could expect the style of these reviews to be somewhat different. In comparison to an area director a senior social worker would have more knowledge of the cases and may have recently held supervision sessions with the social worker at which these were discussed. Nevertheless, in summary, the main differences are:

AREA Y   Less systematic questionning
          More acceptance of the social worker's assessment
          Less probing
          Less exploration of new approaches

AREA Z   More concern about the child's wishes
          Less acceptance of the status quo
          More exploration of new resources

AREA X   Very systematic
          Fuller probing of social work input

SUMMARY

From this analysis of the content of reviews it can be seen that the discussion in residential reviews tended to cover different topics from those in area offices and also to examine these topics with a more purposive and longer term perspective. Indeed, in a high proportion of area reviews the content of the discussion was confined to a summary of events of the past few months and anticipation of the next few months.

However, any meaningful discussion of the content of a review must be related to the review process, as was discussed in the previous chapter, and also to the functions of the review – which is the subject of the next chapter. Furthermore, before making any assessment based on their content, reviews need to be considered in the wider context of overall child care practice. This is an issue which will be considered in Chapter 12.

THE FUNCTIONS OF REVIEWS

INTRODUCTION

Earlier, in Chapter 3 attention was drawn to the confusion which surrounds the purpose of reviews. It was suggested that there have been changes in the perceived purposes of reviews in recent years, in that many writers assume that the range of functions appropriate to, or expected from a review has broadened. However much of this discussion has been based on what is considered as desirable, even possible, for a review to achieve; it has not been based on knowledge of the way in which reviews are presently being used.

Furthermore, the appropriateness of any proposed structure for conducting reviews, or any guidelines on their content or decision-making style is likely to depend on their explicit functions.

For these reasons it is important to have a full understanding of all the functions actually fulfilled by reviews and also of the opinions of members of the reviews on the functions that they feel they should fulfil.

In this chapter we shall examine the range of possible functions of a review and assess the importance of these in practice.

WHAT ARE THE FUNCTIONS OF REVIEWS?

Through observation and discussion with members of social service teams during the preliminary and pilot studies a check list was developed which contained ten possible functions of reviews.

1. ADMINISTRATION   - A check on case records and the details on the review form.

2. MONITORING   - Monitoring the implementation of earlier decisions.

3. SUPERVISORY   - A check on the work input of the social worker.

4. DECISION-MAKING   - To make new decisions

5. INFORMATIONAL (i)   - To inform Area Director and/or senior of
                           work input and problems and hence safeguard
                           the social worker.

6. INFORMATIONAL (ii)   - To co-ordinate information on case/resources
                           from different personnel.

7. SPECIFICITY   - To make earlier decisions more specific and
                           to identify subgoals.

8. DEVELOPMENTAL   - Staff training and development

9. REASSESSMENT   - To reassess systematically the appropriate-
                           ness of earlier decisions.

10. LONG-TERM PLANNING   - To develop and record long-term case plans.

Each of these functions is self-explanatory and the respondents had no
difficulty in understanding them, with the possible exception of No.5,
INFORMATION (i). This was intended to cover those instances where the
social worker purposefully initiated the information transer so that
they were no longer solely responsible, however it seems that this was
interpreted by most respondents to include any transfer of information
to the Area Director or senior, regardless of its initiator or purpose.
It also followed from this that function 6, INFORMATION (ii), was used
most often in reference to residential reviews where others than the Area
Director or senior were present, and hence information exchange was very
relevant.

The check list was used in several different ways to gather
information about the functions of reviews. The format in which the
different questions were asked are listed below, with the number of
respondents.

(a) A questionnaire to members of the Social Services area teams (31)
    and senior residential staff (11) asking, in relation to reviews
    in general:
        (i) Consider the list of possible functions of a review.
            Tick any you feel a review ought to fulfil.

(ii) Which is the one most important function in residential
reviews; in area office reviews?

(iii) How satisfied are you with the review procedure in relation
to those functions which you have ticked below? (see
Questionnaire 3 in the appendix)

(b) A questionnaire to social workers after the completion of indi-
vidual reviews (246) which asked 'which functions should have been,
and were, the main concern of this review (please tick up to
maximum of five different functions)'. (See Questionnaire 4 in
the appendix).

(c) Data collected by the researcher when attending reviews as an
observer (292) which addressed the following question: how far
does the review appear to be carrying out the functions listed?
(see Questionnaire 2 in the appendix).

The first point to make about reviews is that they are multi-
functional. The complexity of the purposes that reviews are expected
to fulfil is seen by the number of functions ticked by each respondent.
Members of Social Services area teams ticked an average of 6.5 functions
which residential staff saw reviews as even more diverse in their purpose
and ticked an average of eight functions.

WHICH FUNCTIONS ARE MOST IMPORTANT?

If we rank the 'functions that a review ought to fulfil' by the
number of times it was ticked by respondents, we see four clear
priorities: (see Table 9.1a)

1. Monitoring
2. Making new decisions
3. Long-term planning
4. Reassessment of previous decisions

Two functions were clearly regarded as least important:

9. Supervisory
10. Staff training and development

In the middle ground a number were bunched closely together:

5. Administrative check
6. Information (i)
7. Making decisions more specific
8. Information (ii)

The only real difference in the ranking produced by residential staff and field social workers was the relative importance the latter attributed to reviews as an administrative check - residential staff saw this as least important, social workers ranked it as fifth out of the ten possible functions. Given the very different procedures for residential and area office reviews that was highlighted previously, this result is not surprising. Field social workers certainly use reviews as a way of prompting or enforcing the completion of case records as well as review forms - only in area office reviews were these examined by the reviewing officer.

As 'monitoring' was the function which received the largest number of positive responses, perhaps we should expand on what the term 'monitoring' means. Monitoring can be used in at least two ways, both imply that it is a check on events - in this case on recent past events. The first usage of the term sees monitoring as a straightforward check: 'have we done what we said we would do?', or 'have we followed the regulations?'. In its weakest form monitoring may thus be little more than a recap of what has happened and in a sense may be more appropriately allocated to the informational category. In a second usage monitoring can be seen as evaluation; as rigorously assessing the impact of previous decisions and changing course if necessary. From what has already been said about the content of review, and of area reviews in particular, it was apparent in this study that the monitoring of decisions, or case-work, that takes place in reviews is rarely in the evaluative mode.

When asked to choose the single most important function of reviews in area offices and in residential homes, social workers produced a reasonable consensus of opinion concerning reviews in the latter - residential homes. Information exchange was seen as the single most important function by a majority of respondents. Long-term planning was

the only other function to be mentioned a significant number of times. Replies to this question in relation to reviews in area offices produced a more diffuse pattern of responses. 'Informating the Area Director of social work input' was the function which was seen as most important by most social workers, but long-term planning and decision-taking followed very closely behind.

Several respondents explained their coice of the single most important function as being that function which was least well covered by other social work activities. For instance, many of the functions of reviews can equally be applied to supervision sessions; if reviews are to serve purposes over and above those of supervision then one would expect that those functions which social workers do not see as appropriate to supervision should be given prominance in the review situation. This observation highlights the relationship between reviews and other aspects of social work practice, and therefore the need for clarity in establishing the purpose of these different aspects.

SOCIAL WORKERS' SATISFACTION WITH REVIEWS

Having recorded the functions they though that reviews ought to fulfil, social workers were then asked to indicate their level of satisfaction with reviews in fulfilling those functions. Social workers' satisfaction is of course related to their present understanding of the purposes of reviews. This understanding may be based on a very general acceptance of 'that's how things are done here', rather than on any purposeful or deep thinking. Indeed, while working within the area offices several social workers commented that until questioned in connection with this research they had never previously considered or thought about reviews in this way. Although the responses are subject to variation, in general the social workers in this sample showed a clear satisfaction with the way reviews fulfilled the functions of monitoring, checking on the administration, and information exchange. However, they showed much less satisfaction with reviews in carrying out those functions which relate to planning, i.e. in making long-term plans, the systematic reassessment of earlier plans and in making decisions more specific (See Table 9.1b).

TABLE 9.1 a

TABLE 9.1 b

% of all respondents and their level of satisfactions with the functions they feel a review ought to fulfil

Functions	'functions a review ought to fulfil'	very satisfied	fairly satisfied	fairly unsatisfied	very unsatisfied
administrative	24	29.0	35.5	3.2	0
monitoring	40	22.6	64.5	3.2	0
supervisory	21	9.7	35.5	3.2	0
make new decisions	38	19.4	58.1	9.7	0
Informational (i)	27	22.6	35.5	6.5	0
Informational (ii)	26	16.1	25.8	9.7	0
make decisions more specific	27	12.9	35.1	12.9	0
training	15	3.2	16.1	9.7	3.2
reassessment of decisions	34	19.4	32.2	22.5	0
long-term planning	27	12.9	51.6	19.4	0

These results may reflect the increasingly defensive stance taken by many Social Services Departments, generated by concern over media exposure, such as that reported in Chapter 2. This, together with criticisms such as those in the recent DHSS (1982) study of the Boarding Out of Children, tend to encourage reviewing officers to concentrate on the more measurable aspects of social work, such as fulfilment of regulations, rather than the more intangible qualities of casework or planning.

The discussion thus far has been based on the responses from social workers to questions on reviews in general. We now turn to the information which was gathered in relation to 246 individual reviews. Detailed analysis of these results gives several bases of comparison: between what the researcher thought the review was about and what the participants thought; between what social workers thought actually happened and should have happened; between residential reviews and area reviews; between social workers in different area offices; and between individual social workers. A summary of some of the findings follows below.

RESEARCHERS' ASSESSMENT OF REVIEW FUNCTIONS

One might well expect that all reviews would have some minimum functions which almost by definition would occur every time, e.g. one could say that all reviews must at least involve some form of information exchange. Here the use of the word function, however, does assume some, even if small, measure of considered purpose. Viewed thus, there was no single function that appeared to occur on every occasion, though at reviews held in area offices (when normally only the social worker and reviewer were present) the researcher identified two functions in the great majority of cases, namely 'administrative' and 'informational'. At the area office reviews the case records are presented and review forms scrutinised before signing. The check on case records may not always have been thorough, but mostly was sufficiently purposeful to be recorded as a function of the review. No other functions came close to these in their frequency; the next two functions which could be said to have occurred to some extent, if not as the dominant purpose, in at least half of the reviews were those of 'monitoring' and 'supervisory'.

The functions relating to decision-making were much less in evidence
- if ranked by frequency they appear as:

6th   making new decisions
7th   long-term planning
8th   more specific decisions
9th   reassessment of previous decisions

The use of reviews as staff training occurred very rarely. The ranking
of the functions of reviews is strongly supported by the data which has
already been presented in Table 8.3, which sets out the best overall
description of both the review discussions and the decisions. Since
well over 3/4 of the reviews were described by the researcher as 'main-
tenance of the status quo', 'short-term', or 'holding', it is not
surprising that functions relating to decision-making were less prom-
inent than those relating to information or monitoring. This is not to
suggest that one would expect to find all reviews producing new decisions
or long-term plans. However, if long-term plans have been developed
already then a review session would seem to be an appropriate occasion
systematically to reassess or evaluate these plans. In fact this function
was even less evident, further supporting the contention that the
monitoring which was taking place was of a limited nature.

Table 9.2 shows the researcher's assessment of how far each review
conducted in an area office fulfilled each function. Table 9.3 shows
the same information in relation to residential reviews. There are some
noticeable differences in these tables, particularly in the greater
emphasis in decision-making in residential reviews. These differences
between area and residential reviews are also apparent when consideration
is given to the social workers responses to questions on the perceived
functions of each review.

WHAT SOCIAL WORKERS THOUGHT HAPPENED IN REVIEWS

There was no one function that all social workers thought applied
to all reviews. The function which social workers saw as happening
most often was that of 'monitoring' and this was seen as occurring just

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TABLE 9.3

Researcher's assessment of the functions fulfilled at each Residential Review

Functions	Undertaken fully	Undertaken partially	Not Undertaken	
Administrative	0	11.5	88.5	100%
Monitoring	44.3	32.8	23.0	
Supervisory	3.3	4.9	91.8	
Making new decisions	42.6	32.8	24.6	
Informational (i)	6.6	4.9	88.5	
Informational (ii)	88.3	8.3	3.3	
Making decisions more specific	24.6	36.1	38.4	
Staff training	3.3	11.7	86.7	
Reassessment of decisions	25.0	13.3	61.7	
Long-term planning	46.6	36.2	17.2	

TABLE 9.2

Researcher's assessment of the functions fulfilled at each area office review

Functions	Undertaken fully	Undertaken partially	Not Undertaken	
Administrative	84.4	14.7	0.9	100%
Monitoring	18.3	53.0	28.7	
Supervisory	10.1	41.9	48.0	
Making new decisions	14.8	22.3	62.9	
Informational (i)	14.5	25.9	59.5	
Informational (ii)	74.9	16.9	8.2	
Making decisions more specific	5.3	26.0	68.7	
Staff training	0.4	8.3	91.3	
Reassessment of decisions	7.9	21.9	70.2	
Long-term planning	8.8	25.4	65.8	

over half of the time. Closely following this came 'administrative checks' and 'informational' (see Table 9.4a). The higher incidence of information rather than monitoring that was observed by the researcher, in comparison to that reported by social workers, may be explained by the researcher's previously expressed opinion that if the monitoring is of a very low order it is little more than information exchange. There are only two other notable differences in the recording of the researcher and the social workers. The latter saw long-term planning as occurring slightly more frequently, and the supervisory function occurring much less frequently than did the researcher. The hypothesis I would suggest to explain the former is that social workers are very aware of the highly volatile world of many of their clients and therefore tend to regard a year or so ahead a long-term from a planning point of view, whereas those viewing children in care from the outside tend to see the long-term as stretching towards adulthood.

The different perceptions of the importance of the supervisory function may be semantic and conceptual in that supervision has a specific meaning to social workers and may relate in particular to the checking and development of detailed casework plans - which is something none of the reviewing officers in this sample saw as an appropriate activity for a review session. However, if the supervisory function refers to a general check of the social worker input into a case, then this was apparent in many reviews. Indeed, content analysis of the reviewing officers' questioning shows a dominance of 'probing of social worker's input'. Furthermore, Area Directors expressed the opinion in interviews that they used reviews, especially those organised in batches by caseload, to make an overall assessment of the social worker's work. As one Area Director said:

> "they provide an opportunity to assess the performance of the social worker and the nature and quality of the supervision being provided by the senior."

Does this level of supervision appear contrary to the development within social work of those characteristics associated with professionalisation, in particular individual autonomy based on the exercise

of professional judgement? Social workers operate from an organisation that more than most is exposed to a high level of public accountability: the exercise of individual professional judgement on the development of casework plans and client interaction must therefore be tempered with supervision by those held responsible. In this respect it is interesting to contrast the reviews held in area offices with those held in residential homes. In the latter situation both the researcher and the social worker saw supervision as being a very unimportant, almost a non-existent, aspect of the reviews. Here we have a group discussion where several areas of expertise are represented, there is no single hierarchical structure and the workers are distanced from each other by training, organisation, fields of responsibility, etc. In such a situation the ethics of 'professionals' do not allow for public criticism of each other's work (although such criticism was often expressed outside the review situation) and hence review discussion is restrained by the need to maintain a consensus.

WHAT SOCIAL WORKERS THOUGHT SHOULD HAPPEN IN REVIEWS

By comparing social workers' responses to the question 'what was the main concern of this review' and ' what should have been the main concern of this review', we have some measure of social workers' satisfaction with reviews and ways in which their expectations of a review differed from the actuality.

The highest level of dissatisfaction in area office reviews was with the administrative function, followed by 'decision-making' and 'long-term planning'(see Table 9.4b). In forty-six reviews an administration check occurred when the social worker thought it shouldn't and on thirty occasions they thought long-term planning did not occur when they felt it should. However, not all the differences that occurred between expectation and actuality, were in the same direction: for instance, while there were thirty reviews at which new decisions were not made when social workers thought they should have been, there were also nineteen occasions on which the making of new decisions was seen as a function fulfilled by the review when the social worker thought that

	TABLE 9.4 a		TABLE 9.4 b	
	% respondents who said each function should have occurred		% of respondents who said each function did occur	
Functions	In Area Office Reviews	In Residential Reviews	In Area Office Reviews	In Residential Reviews
Administrative	34.4	5.4	53.4	8.1
Monitoring	59.3	64.9	55.5	62.2
Supervisory	23.4	10.4	24.9	8.1
Making new decisions	45.0	64.9	39.7	64.9
Informational (i)	40.7	18.9	49.8	18.9
Informational (ii)	13.9	56.8	11.0	54.1
Making decisions more specific	26.3	35.1	25.8	29.7
Staff training	1.4	0	2.4	0
Reassessment of decisions	39.7	54.1	33.5	37.8
Long-term planning	54.1	59.5	46.4	37.8

that it was not appropriate.   This once again points to the divergence
of opinion on the purpose of reviews amongst those most closely involved
in the process.

Does this diversity arise from differences in expectation among the
social workers, or from the wide range of child care cases which neces-
sitates widely differing reviews? When the results of the questions
on individual reviews are broken down, it can be seen that more often
than not a particular social worker will see the same functions as being
relevant to all his or her reviews, regardless of the differences in
the cases. This is particularly true for functions such as 'administra-
tive' and'supervisory' and less   true for decision-making functions
- in particular whether a review is used to make new decisions. These
results are what one might expect, as the former two functions can be
seen to be related to 'style' while decisions are more case specific.
Overall, the divergences in responses to these questions are the product
of differences in the style and the expectations of individual social
workers, even from within the same area, rather than differences in
individual cases.

RESIDENTIAL REVIEWS

When we contrast residential reviews with those in area offices
there is much more consensus both within and between the responses
to all the different questions. It would seem that social workers have
a clearer idea of the purpose of residential reviews and are more likely
to be satisfied with them. Furthermore, the functions ofresidential
reviews as seen by the social worker, the researcher and the residential
officer-in-charge are substantially different to those of area office
reviews. The administration checking function and the supervisory
function are of much less importance. There is the same difference of
opinion between the researcher and the social worker about the relative
importance of monitoring and information exchange; however the most
important difference recorded is in the emphasis given to long-term planning
and to making new decisions. In fact the highest level of agreement from
the social worker response to questions on what did happen and what should

happen in reviews was on the function of making new decisions within residential reviews. The higher standing of functions related to decision-making and long-term planning within residential reviews raises some interesting questions.

We have already discussed in Chapter 7 the major differences between the organisation of residential reviews and those held in area offices. In contrast to area office reviews, a residential review is established much more formally as a decision-making occasion; the costs involved are higher; the opportunities of repeating or having an alternative occasion are much less, which increases the need for positive decision-making; the reviewing officer is more able to take the role of independent chairman; to the social worker (though not necessarily to the residential staff or reviewing officer) it is a one-off review, rather than one of a batch. Thus residential reviews have more of a 'case-conference type' structure and are more likely to be decision-making occasions.

A further reason why residential reviews are more often a forum for making decisions is the nature of a residential placement, in particular in an observation and assessment centre. Increasingly, residential care is seen as only a phase in the career of a child in care, particularly for younger children. Therefore the emphasis of many residential reviews must be to look for alternative and longer-term placements. All the work that has followed from the original 'Children Who Wait' study (Rowe & Lambert, 1973) has engendered a sense of the need for positive thinking for children in residential care. The evidence from many, but by no means all, of the residential reviews included in this study confirms this more positive attitude.

One possible conclusion to be drawn from this is the need for area reviews to adopt a similar case conference type structure if they are to engender the same positive attitude to decision-making and planning. This would greatly increase the costs incurred in conducting reviews, which would have to be balanced against the increased possibility of achieving the purposes which reviews set out to fulfil. However before such an assessment could be made the purposes of reviews would have to be clarified and made explicit. One must also bear in mind that the enhancing of the role of decision-making does not in itself mean that the decisions taken will be more successfully implemented, as we shall see later.

CONCLUSIONS

The first conclusion to be drawn is that reviews are multi-functional; they have no single overriding purpose, but fulfil several functions. Does this suggest that the various purposes for reviews that have been expressed in the literature may in fact be complementary? The evidence from this study does not entirely support this view, largely because of the lack of consensus among members of social work area teams. They expressed very diverse opinions on the functions most appropriately performed by reviews. Many would agree that reviews have a monitoring function, as illustrated by the social worker who said:

> "The Social Services Departments see reviews as a means of making sure statutory requirements are met, as a means of tightening up the system and detecting potential flash points."

However the disagreement over the purpose of reviews can be seen from the following quotations expressing the opinions of two social workers from the same area office:

> "In most child care cases long-term plans can be recognised, but it shouldn't be for the review to do this."

> "I see the review as an instrument for recording major changes to long-term plans - no individual should be in the position of making long-term plans without the resort to other members of the team."

Are these differences derived from the diverse nature of the cases subject to review or from the opinions of individual social workers? The detailed analysis of responses to each case suggests that the relevance of certain functions does differ slightly between cases, but is more likely to differ between the perceptions of individual social workers even within the same area office. Several respondents explained this uncertainty about the purpose of reviews by the lack of clear direction from management. Although there was an understanding that management saw it as important to conduct reviews within the regulations, there was not the same clear appreciation of what was expected from reviews or how they related to other aspects of the social work task.

Turning now to the analysis of the functions of reviews, the administrative, information exchange, and monitoring functions were

more in evidence in area office reviews than were functions associated with decision-making or planning. Only in a minority of cases were area office reviews used to make new decisions and even less often to formulate long-term plans. This suggests that reviews may be more accurately viewed as decision-taking rather than decision-making occasions.

Another important conclusion to be drawn from these responses and observations is the marked difference between residential reviews and area office reviews in what actually happens, in what social workers think should happen, and in their level of satisfaction with what happens. In brief, there is much greater emphasis in residential reviews on decision-making and much less on administrative or supervisory activity. There is nothing in the statutory requirements for conducting reviews that suggests that those which take place in residential homes should be any different in purpose from those conducted in area offices. The marked differences in function shown in this research highlights again the lack of clear guidelines from policy makers on the functions of statutory reviews.

CHAPTER 10

THE NATURE OF THE DECISIONS

INTRODUCTION

The last three chapters have concentrated on reviews as the forum
for decision-making. We now turn to the decisions themselves. As
shown in Chapter 4 the literature on decision-making points to the
importance of the nature of the decisions. For instance, several
writers suggest that the style of decision-making which it is most
appropriate to employ will vary with the nature of the decision to be
taken. Hence, one aim that this research set out to fulfil was the
development of a typology of review decisions. Furthermore, so little
is known about review decisions that the application of such a typology
is important for two reasons: first, it provides a fuller understanding
of the decisions taken in reviews and hence enables us to place review
decisions within the total decision-making process; second, it enables
us to ascertain if the nature of the decision is an important factor
in the successful implementation of the decision.

In considering the description of the decisions taken at reviews
it is important to bear in mind the situation in which these decisions
are being taken. Reviews take place at set intervals, independent of
the child's situation; they are not called in response to a need to make
new decisions and in that sense could be seen as an artificial decision-
making process. However, although decision-making in child care is a
continuous process, social workers will often postpone making a decision
until a reivew, if this is due to occur in the near future. This may
happen because they feel that decisions are more appropriately taken
by the Area Director or in a group, as in residential reviews, rather
than by an individual social worker.

It is also worth restating at this point that we are looking solely
at the decisions as recorded on the review form. We are not using the
rest of the information on the form, or the review discussion in support
of or supplement to the decisions. We should also restate here that
this coding of decisions was carried out by the researcher. While this

classification was as objective as possible, it must be accepted that there will be a subjective element.

In total, 894 decisions are included in this analysis:

284 were taken at reviews of cases held in Area X

397 were taken at reviews of cases held in Area Y

213 were taken at reviews of cases held in Area Z

However, as we have already demonstrated, reviews that take place in residential homes are of a very different character from those held in area offices, so a breakdown of the decisions on these lines will be of interest. Of the total of 894 decisions recorded,

175 or 19.6% were taken at residential reviews

719 or 80.4% were taken at area office reviews.

These 894 decisions were taken at 298 reviews, giving an average of three decisions taken at each review, within a range of one to eight decisions. If a review produces several decisions it is likely that some will be more important than others – it is certainly unlikely that all the decisions will be highly important. Nonetheless, in this analysis all decisions are treated independently.

THE DECISIONS TYPOLOGY

The review decisions are described in seven major ways. These are:

1. The level of impact of the decision

    – on the child's life style or situation

    – on the child/social worker relationship

2. The type of decision – new, modified or repeat

3. The specificity of the goals

4. The specificity of the action

5. The expected time-seale for implementation, if this has been included.

6. The primary focus of the content of the decision

7. The social work activity likely to follow from the decision.

The sources in the literature which influenced the development of
this classification were discussed in Chapter 6 and will not be repeated
here. Each decision was categorised by the researcher on these seven
dimensions. The results of this categorisation are reported below.

1. The impact of the decision

As mentioned previously, this analysis treats each decision as
independent, rather than taking a review as a whole, therefore we can
expect to find that the decisions vary in their level of significance.
However, it is important to differentiate the decisions in some way.
The measure that has been chosen in this research is the level of impact
of the decision on the child's life style or situation, and on the child/
social worker relationship. This measure minimises the significance of
those decisions which reflect the status quo, and also decisions which
relate to organisational aspects of the casework and which don't impinge
directly on the child.

As was noted in Chapter 4, differentiating decisions in this way
was derived in part from Simon's distinction between programmed and non-
programmed decisions (Simon, 1965). It will be interesting to see from
the analysis that follows if decisions which we categorise as having a
high impact on the child are of a different character from decisions
with little impact on the child. But first let us see how the review
decisions fit into this description.

The significance of the decisions was assessed in two ways, (a)
the impact on the child in terms of his life style or future; (b)
the impact on the social worker/child and family relationship. Only a
small proportion of the decisions were assessed as having a major
impact under either heading.

TABLE 10.1

The level of impact of the decision	Impact on the child %	Impact on the social worker relationship %
Decisions which had a great impact	14.5	15.9
Decisions which had some impact	46.3	52.6
Decisions which had little or no impact	38.4	30.8

The range in the levels of impact of decisions on a child can be seen by comparing a decision such as 'continue the fostering introduction, with a view to R moving into the family before the end of the year for eventual adoption', which would be ranked as 'of great impact'. An example of a decision with little impact on the child is 'liaise with the health visitor'. Some decisions may have little impact on the child but may have a great impact in terms of social worker relations, e.g. 'initiate discussions about removing the child's name from the 'at risk' register.

The small number of decisions that are classified as 'having a great impact' is not in itself a reflection of the significance of the reviews. Indeed it would be an alarming situation if each review on a child called forth several major decisions. However, given a situation where the significance of the decisions varies, it is very necessary to classify them accordingly, so that the significance of the subsequent evaluation of the implementation of the decisions can be assessed meaningfully.

Impact on the child/place of review. We have already seen that reviews in residential homes are of a different character than those in area offices. Do these reviews also produce decisions that differ in the level of impact on the child?

TABLE 10.2

	Decisions which have a great impact on the child	Decisions which have some impact on the child	Decisions which have little impact on the child
Area office reviews	10.7	45.1	43.5
Residential reviews	30.3	51.4	17.1

We can see from Table 10.2 that there are very marked differences; these differences are statistically significant at a 1% confidence level. A much higher proportion of decisions made in residential reviews were seen as having a great or some impact on the child than

was the case for decisions taken at area office reviews. This reinforces the conclusion from the previous chapter that the purpose of residential reviews is more often perceived to be decision-making.

Throughout the rest of this chapter we shall return to these two variables - the level of impact of the decision and the place where the review was conducted. After discussing the decisions overall along each of the other dimensions, we shall examine the relationship between the nature of the decision and where it was taken and its impact on the child.

2. Type of decision

The second way in which the decisions were categorised was according to whether they were new, were repeated or were modified.

TABLE 10.3

Type of decision	Number	%
1. New decision because of a change in circumstances	132	14.8
2. New decisions: change in casework policy	339	37.9
3. Modified: made more specific	79	8.8
4. Modified: because of changes in circum-stances	24	2.7
5. Repeated: still appropriate	233	26.1
6. Repeated: still to be implemented	32	3.6
7. Confirmation of a previous implicit decision	55	6.2
Total	894	100%

This can be summarised to show that:

52.7% of all review decisions were classified at new

11.5% of all review decisions were classified as modified

35.9% of all review decisions were classified as repeated

As over half of the review decisions were new, this would suggest that the review process must be seen as having a significant decision-making function.

However, when we refer to decisions as 'new' it does not necessarily imply that they arose solely out of the review discussion. It does mean that they were not previously recorded as part of the case-work plan for that child - often particular courses of action will have been decided before a review, indeed may even be in operation, but the review is the formalisation of the decision-making. In this sense it may be truer to say that the review is often a decision-recording occasion rather than a decision-making one.

Decision Type/Review Type. Does the pattern of decision types vary according to where the review was held? Table 10.4 shows the percentage distribution of decision types for decisions taken at residential reviews and at area office reviews.

TABLE 10.4

Type of Decision	Area Office Reviews	Residential Reviews
1. New decision because of a change in circumstances	14.6	15.4
2. New decisions: change in casework policy	35.0	49.7
3. Modified: made more specific	9.0	8.0
4. Modified: because of changes in circumstances	2.5	3.4
5. Repeated: still appropriate	28.5	16.0
6. Repeated: still to be implemented	3.5	4.0
7. Confirmation of a previous implicit decision	6.8	3.4
	100%	100%

Table 10.4 shows that reviews on children in residential care produce more 'new' decisions and fewer 'repeat' decisions than those held in area offices. This reinforces the description of almost half the area office reviews as 'maintaining the status quo', and therefore more likely to have concentrated on monitoring past work than reassessing

or planning future work, and once again shows residential reviews
as decision-making occasions.

<u>Decision Type/Impact on Child.</u>   It is also of interest to know if the
decision type is related to the impact of the decision on the child.
This is shown in Table 10.5.

TABLE 10.5

IMPACT ON CHILD

DECISION TYPE	Large Impact	Some Impact	Little or No Impact	ALL DECISIONS
1. New decision because of a change in circumstances	10.0	13.3	18.1	14.8
2. New decisions: change in casework policy	60.0	38.6	29.4	37.9
3. Modified: made more specific	5.4	10.4	8.5	8.8
4. Modified: because of changes in circumstances	1.5	3.1	2.6	2.7
5. Repeated: still appropriate	11.5	27.1	29.7	26.1
6. Repeated: still to be implemented	7.7	3.1	2.3	3.6
7. Confirmation of a previous implicit decision	3.8	4.3	9.3	6.2

    If each decision type is broken down by their level of impact on
the child, we find statistically significant differences. As one might
expect, a higher proportion of decisions which had a large impact on the
child were new decisions, and a lower proportion were repeat decisions.
Table 10.5 also shows that a higher proportion of decisions with a
large impact were repeated because they had not been implemented
(7.7% compared to 3.6% for all decisions, 2.3% for decisions of little

or no impact). It should be remembered here that 'decision type 6' refers to decisions which were originally taken at reviews previous to the one used for this research, but were repeated on this occasion through lack of implementation. Analysis of the rate of implementation of decisions recorded at the 'research review' also shows that decisions with a large impact on the child were less likely to be implemented or successfully implemented. Reasons why this might be so will be discussed later.

3. Specificity of goals

A great deal of the criticism that has surrounded social work has centred on the apparent lack of clear or meaningful objectives for working with clients (Goldberg & Warburton, 1979; Brewer & Lait, 1980). A review is one possible occasion in which such objectives can be made more specific. The aim of this classification is to see how far each decision contained a clear statement of goals. Decisions were classified into five categories as shown in Table 10.6.

TABLE 10.6

SPECIFICITY OF GOALS	% RESPONSES ALL DECISIONS
1. No goals apparent	10.2
2. Very general	15.9
3. General	29.9
4. Fairly specific	33.0
5. Very specific	11.1

The appropriate category in which to place a decision was not always obvious at a glance. Goals may have different timespans and different levels. Some decisions may detail what is to happen to the child at that point in time, but may not offer any long-term objectives, e.g. 'child to remain in this home at present'. This could be said to have specified short-term goals; but no longer-term goals or does the decision only relate to action and not to goals at all? We have assumed goals to have a time-span beyond the present and therefore decisions

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like this have been classified as specific in terms of action, but
general in terms of goals. The difficulties that are encountered in
classifying these decisions by specificity of goals and of action would
seem to arise from the confusion that exists in social work between
ends and means. For instance two decisions which were frequently
recorded were 'visit regularly' and 'support family'. Is 'to visit'
or 'to support' an end, or a means to an end? Have social workers
considered whether they are means or ends? Although one can understand
that much of social work recording will be in a form of shorthand and
carry implicit implications, the impression gained was that this form of
shorthand may be a substitute for precision in defining aims and methods.
As we can see from Table 10.6, allowing for the problems of classi-
fication, the decisions are spread throughout the spectrum of specifi-
city, with approximately 10% of the decisions containing no explicit
goal and approximately 11% with clearly specified goals. 'Reconvene a
case conference' is an example of a decision with no explicit goal,
which can be compared with a decision with clear objectives 'to aim for
a return to home by half-term'.

Specificity of goals and impact on the child.   If this data on goal
specificity is cross-tabulated with data on the 'impact on the child'
we find that decisions which have a large impact on the child are much
more likely to have greater specificity than those decisions on limited
impact. For instance, if we look at the categories at each end of the
continuum we find that of those decisions which have little impact,
27.4% are very general and 5.5% are very specific, whereas of those
decisions which have a large impact only 9.2% are very general while
23.8% are very specific.

Specificity of goals and place of review.   Table 10.7 shows the data
on the specificity of goals of residential review and area office review
decisions.

TABLE 10.7

	VERY GENERAL %	GENERAL %	SPECIFIC %	VERY SPECIFIC %	NO GOALS SPECIFIED %
Residen- tial review decisions	9.7	30.9	32.0	10.3	17.1
Area office decisions	17.4	29.6	32.2	11.3	8.5

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Perhaps the most notable feature of this table is the number of
decisions taken at residential reviews that were classified as not
specifying any goals. As explained earlier these are likely to be
decisions that refer to immediate or short-term action, such as 'remain
here at present'. However, if 'no goals' and 'very general goals' are
taken together then the differences in the specificity of goals between
residential decisions and area office decisions is slight.

4. Specificity of action

All decisions were placed into one of five categories, depending
on the specificity of action. The result of this categorisation is
shown in Table 10.8 This shows that decisions were classified through-
out the spectrum, so that a very similar proportion of decisions were
classified as general or very general, as were classified, as specific
or very specific.

TABLE 10.8

SPECIFICITY OF ACTION	% OF ALL DECISIONS
1. No action apparent	2.1
2. Very general	19.7
3. General	29.1
4. Fairly specific	27.7
5. Very specific	21.4

Consideration of the specificity of action of review decisions
raises questions about the relationship of reviews to casework plans –
there seemed to be general agreement in all the social work areas
researched that detailed casework plans were not the concern of the review,
but should be left to the professional discretion of the social worker
and senior. Therefore a decision such as 'visit the foster home' will
be classified as non-specific in terms of the action, although it is
unlikely that the reviewer would see it as appropriate to specify the
number, timing, or purpose of home visits, (although this did occur
when senior social workers were the reviewing officers). Another example
of a decision which was frequently recorded is 'support the foster
parents': this is another decision which is very non-specific in terms

of action. Can we assume that the social worker and reviewing officers understand implicitly what is meant by this, or should we expect a review to be more specific? The DHSS in 'Foster Care: A Guide to Practice' points to the dangers of recording decisions in an imprecise way:

> "To ensure that the plan formulated at the review is executed, additional decisions will need to be made concerning the action required, the methods to be adopted and the individuals responsible for action. Unless reviews decide 'what, how and who', plans tend to remain written hopes on case records."

<div align="center">(DHSS, 1976)</div>

One might say that it is less necessary to spell out actions in a review, if the goals are always clearly defined; as our last piece of analysis showed this was far from being the case. Detailed case plans may well be discussed by a social worker and a senior in supervision sessions, but how often are these recorded in the case file or social worker's notes? Observation suggests that this is not common practice. Observation of the reviews would also suggest that a further reason for the apparent reluctance to make decisions detailing specific actions, is that social workers tend to see their cases as fluid, even volatile, so casework plans must be equally fluid. Again one can see the reasoning behind such an attitude - but one can also see the ease with which fluid plans can become non-existent and social worker activity becomes purely reactive. Indeed one researcher quotes the reaction of the local BASW group as follows:

> "The BASW audience put forward the view that the consequences of child care decisions were so vital, and the alternatives so finely balanced, and the outcome so dependent on uncontrollable factors that social workers would not record or put forward their judgements and prescriptions for analysis, lest they prove faulty."

<div align="center">(Robinson, 1981)</div>

Another difficulty that arises with decisions that are non-specific in terms of their action, as well as their goals, is that of evaluating their implementation. For example, if a decision 'liaise with the health visitor' is recorded, one 'phone call to the health visitor in a six-month period could count as implementation of that decision. It

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could be said that the social worker knows how much liaison is appropriate to the situation, or that this can be decided by social worker and senior in supervision and it is not necessary to spell it out in a review. However, the same recording of a 'liaise with health visitor' decision can mean, in one instance, merely 'be aware that the health visitor is involved' but in another it can mean 'keep in very close touch as health visitor has vital information'. This underlines the limitations of the recording for research purposes and perhaps equally for professional purposes. As one of the major functions of these reviews is seen to be that of monitoring the casework since the last review, a firm statement of what is being monitored is important, if not essential. If decisions are recorded in a very non-specific style this task is harder to accomplish effectively.

Specificity of action/impact on child. As with specificity of goals, we find different distributions of specificity of action when cross-tabulated with the level of impact on the child. Looking at the very general and the very specific categories we find that of decisions that have little impact on the child, 29.4% are very general and 15.5% are very specific. Whereas of decisions that have a major impact 12.3% are very general and 40.8% are very specific, showing that decisions with greater impact tend to be more specific than decisions with little impact.

Specificity of action and place of review. Cross-tabulations of the specificity of action for residential review decisions and area decisions are shown in Table 10.9

TABLE 10.9

PLACE OF REVIEW	VERY GENERAL %	GENERAL %	SPECIFIC %	VERY SPECIFIC %	NO ACTION SPECIFIED %
Residential review decisions	12.0	23.4	24.0	37.7	2.9
Area office review decisions	21.6	30.5	28.7	17.4	1.9

These results are in line with other findings which point to
residential reviews as being different from area reviews - that diff-
erence being in their emphasis on decision-making, and in specific
rather than generalised decision-making.

Specificity of action/specificity of goals.   Before we leave this
section on action we should consider the relationship between the
specificity of goals and of action. Such an analysis shows that
decisions which have very specific goals also tend to include specific
actions and those with very general goals tend to include very general
actions. However, a higher than expected proportion of those decisions
which have no goals include very specific action. This tends to suggest
that reviews may in part be leading to decisions which detail action as
a substitute for goals.

5.   Time-scale

    If the implementation of a decision is to be effectively monitored,
some indication is necessary of the expected time-scale for implementation.
Good decision-making practice would also suggest the need to record how
long one is prepared to allow for the successful implementation of one's
plans before switching to an alternative. The essential importance of
considering the time-scale of decisions has been well explained by
BASW.

> "Those who make decisions concerning future plans for children in
> care and more particularly those who have responsibility for
> implementing them, must always have regard to time-scale. Six
> months in the life of a baby or pre-school child cannot be compared
> with six months for an adolescent. Decisions which are made by
> default; whilst awaiting more information or other developments,
> are just as much "decisions" in their impact upon the child as
> properly planned and implemented programmes, only they are liable
> to lead to less satisfactory outcomes. Those responsible for
> reviews must never forget this basic tenet."

(BASW, 1983)

    When constructing this classification it was originally assumed
that decisions could be categorised according to the length of time
thought necessary to implement the decision. However, it soon became

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apparent that the primary classification would have to be based on w
whether or not there was any inclusion of a time-scale in the decision.
Hence the classification of review decision shows (a) Table 10.10:
those decisions that mentioned a time-scale and those that did not;
(b) Tables 10.11 and 10.12: more detailed subdivision within those
two categories.

TABLE 10.10
Inclusion of a time-scale

	% total cases
Time scale mentioned	21.7
Time scale not mentioned	78.2

TABLE 10.11
Decisions where time-scale is mentioned

	% OF DECISIONS WHERE TIME-SCALE WAS MENTIONED	% OF ALL DECISIONS
1. New decision, to be implemented immediately	15.0	3.2
2. New decision to be implemented within six months	58.0	12.6
3. New decision, to be implemented after six months	8.8	1.9
4. Ongoing decision – appropriate for the short-term	6.2	1.4
5. Ongoing decision – appropriate for the intermediate term	9.3	2.0
6. Ongoing decision – appropriate for the long term	2.6	0.6
Total	100.0	21.7

TABLE 10.12
Decisions where time-scale is not mentioned

	% OF DECISIONS WITH NO TIME-SCALE MENTIONED	% OF ALL DECISIONS
1. No planning	1.4	1.1
2. Impossibility of prediction	3.0	2.4
3. A new decision assumed to be acted on immediately	44.1	34.5
4. An ongoing decision assumed to be implemented while appropriate	51.4	40.2
Total	100.0	78.2

These results show that well over three quarters of the decisions did not include any time-scale for their implementation. Taken with the results of the two previous sections, this again points to the imprecise nature of the recording of review decisions.

It is perhaps not surprising to find that repeated decisions which are still ongoing have no time-scale included. What is more surprising is the number of new decisions that were recorded without any reference to timing. Most of these decisions carry the implicit assumption that they will be implemented immediately. When questionned on implementation of these decisions at least six months later, social workers were able to say that the majority had been implemented. However, this was often after six or seven months, rather than immediately after the review. If the time-scale is not made explicit when recording the decision, then it is impossible effectively to monitor or evaluate the implementation of the decision.

As with this previous classifications of decisions, we can cross-tabulate the decisions by time-scale and the impact of the decision on the child and also present the findings for area and residential reviews.

Time-scale and impact on the child.

TABLE 10.13

	% DECISIONS WITH GREAT IMPACT	% DECISIONS WITH SOME IMPACT	% DECISIONS WITH LITTLE IMPACT	% ALL DECISIONS
Time-scale mentioned	38.5	21.6	15.4	21.8
Time-scale not mentioned	61.5	78.3	84.7	78.2

From this we can see that decisions with a great impact are more likely to have some measure of the time-scale for implementation included within the decision.

<u>Time-scale and place of review</u>.   The results shown in Table 10.14 are
again in line with those in the two previous sections, that decisions
taken at residential reviews tend to be more precise or at least to be
recorded more precisely.

TABLE 10.14

	% OF AREA DECISIONS	% OF RESIDEN-TIAL DECISIONS	% OF ALL DECISIONS
Time-scale mentioned	18.9	33.5	21.8
Time-scale not mentioned	81.1	66.5	78.2

6.   <u>Focus of decision</u>

In this section and the next, attention is concentrated on the
nature of the social work task. The next section will consider the
specific social work activity that arises from the decisions. This section
is more concerned with the nature of the social work intervention - on
the aspect of the client's life the social worker hopes to have an
influence. Inevitably many decisions taken at reviews do not directly
concern social work with the client, but relate to administrative or
organisational tasks that arise from the social worker's responsibility
as an agent of a social services department, e.g. 'to retain a case on
the 'at risk' register, or from their need to co-operate or to liaise
with other agencies, e.g. 'talk to B's teacher'. In this study 35.8% of
all decisions were placed in this category by the researcher (Table 10.15).

It would be reasonable to assume that social workers have more
success in effectively implementing decisions that are orientated to
the organisation or directed at influencing the child's environment.
These are areas where one expects the social worker to have more control
over actions and hence outcomes. Intervention that aims to influence
the individual's personality or relationships is less in the control of
the social worker and hard work in this sphere may bring little
success.

TABLE 10.15

	% OF ALL DECISIONS
Client Orientated:	
Action directed to influence the individual's personality and/or attitudes	2.8
Action directed to influence the quality of relationships	15.0
Action directed to influence the client's environment	30.1
Action which is a combination of these	15.7
Action which is orientated to the organisation	35.8

Analysis of the level of success in implementation of the decisions only partially bears out these assumptions (explanation of the research method in assessing successful implementation is explained fully in Chapter 11); Table 10.16.

There is a slightly lower rate of success in implementing decisions directed at the client's personality or relationships and a higher level of decisions which are organisation orientated. However, there is also a lower level of implementation of decision related to the child's environment (27.3% 'not at all successful', compared with 20.7% overall). Most of these decisions will be related to the deployment of resources to improve the child's environment - e.g. a move to a more suitable placement or the use of nursery or 'Homestart' facilities. These were rarely decisions that were ineffective because of the non co-operation of the client; the problem was that members of the review were making decisions on the basis of assumptions about resources which proved to be inaccurate or beyond the control of the social worker. This question of resources will be raised again when we look more fully at the implementation of decisions in the next chapter.

TABLE 10.16

| IMPLEMENTATION | ALL DECISIONS | CLIENT ORIENTATED | | | | ORGANISATION ORIENTATED |
		TO INFLUENCE PERSONA-LITY	TO INFLUENCE RELATION-SHIPS	TO INFLUENCE CHILD'S ENVIRON-MENT	A COMBINATION OF THESE THREE	
Not at all successful	20.7	25.0	17.4	27.3	12.6	19.8
Partially successful	17.4	25.0	28.3	16.3	18.9	12.1
Fully successful	61.9	50.0	54.3	56.3	68.5	68.1

7. Social work activity

There have been many attempts in recent years to define more closely the elements of the social work task; the Barclay Committee being one such example. This is seen as important at several levels: in helping to formulate broad social policies; in managing the social service organisation and in controlling resources; in helping individual social workers to plan and organise their casework. The results of this study can add further to the descriptions of the activities of social workers.

Data was collected for each decision taken, showing all social work activity that was likely to arise from the implementation of that decision, and also the one most important activity.

The list of social work activities that was employed was taken directly from that developed by Goldberg and Warburton (1979). Working from the National Institute of Social Work, Goldberg and Warburton developed a computerised case review system that would provide information on 'what the social worker did'; on the clients, the nature of their problems; resources available to social workers; liaison with other agencies etc. They hoped that this information could then be used to plan and rationalise the work at the individual social worker level, the team level, and the area office level.

Goldberg and Warburton, however, also felt that their case review system, which not only asked about past activities but also future plans and aims for cases, was a valuable exercise in increasing the objectivity, the decision-making and planning capabilities of social workers. However, in comparing the data collected by Goldberg and Warburton, with that in the study reported here, we shall only use those data which relate to 'social work activities undertaken since the last review'.

Goldberg and Warburton divided their results into cases held by intake and long-term teams and by client group. Hence we can compare the recording of the activity of members of a long-term team on child care cases - 111 cases of children in long-term care and 200 cases of

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children and families with problems. These give a selection of cases
that is very comparable to our own. Goldberg and Warburton asked social
workers to record, for each case, their social work activity in the
past six months, given a check list of 10 possible activities. This is
obviously not identical to assessing the activity likely to arise from
individual review decisions as recorded in this study.

TABLE 10.17

SOCIAL WORK ACTIVITY	% DISTRIBUTION OF ACTIVITIES REPORTED BY GOLDBERG AND WARBURTON ON 311 CASES	% DISTRIBUTION OF ACTIVITY ARISING FROM 894 REVIEW DECISIONS
1. None	-	7.1
2. Exploratory/ assessment	14.0	12.8
3. Information/advice	13.4	14.2
4. Mobilising resources	11.8	11.5
5. Advocacy	4.8	2.2
6. Education in social skills	-	1.2
7. Check up/review visiting	26.5	13.4
8. Facilitating problem solving	17.9	18.9
9. Sustaining/nurturing	11.8	17.0
10.Group activities	-	1.8

While the distribution of these two sets of figures is not exactly
the same, they do follow a fairly similar pattern. Goldberg and
Warburton report a greater amount of review visiting but less 'sustaining
and nurturing' - these may often be part and parcel of the same
activity, so perhaps the difference is not as great as the figures first
suggest.

The wide range of activities arising from review decisions and their comparability to the recording of all social worker activity with children and families reported by Goldberg and Warburton suggests that all aspects of child care practice are covered by reviews. One would certainly expect the review discussion to cover all aspects of a child care case, especially given the emphasis on monitoring that has been noted. What is possibly more surprising is that the review decisions - which are the basis of this activity analysis - should also cover a broad area of activity.

CONCLUSIONS

The results presented here show that review decisions vary considerably in their character. On each of the seven dimensions assessed the whole range of categories was used, although the proportions in each category differed considerably. When this is added to the multifunctional aspect of reviews, it suggests that it may be misleading to perceive reviews as a single type of activity. Instead it may be necessary to categorise reviews into several types. This would then make it possible to vary the decision-making process according to the nature of the decisions to be made at that review.

Furthermore, against what is regarded as good decision-making practice, a high proportion of these decisions were recorded in a vague way. They contained low levels of specificity of goals, of actions and of timing. As already noted, such high levels of generality make effective monitoring of such decisions extremely difficult. Similarly, because of this lack of detail in the decisions, social workers may find reviews to be of little benefit when developing their case-work plans. Indeed, this may partly explain the observation that little use was made of reviews once they had been completed.

Once again a major conclusion from the set of results reported in this chapter is the differences between area office reviews and residential reviews.

A summary follows of the main differences between decisions taken in these different locations.

- A much greater proportion of residential decisions (30.3%) were assessed as having a great impact on the child, compared to 'area decisions', (10.7%)

- A much greater proportion of area decisions (43.5%) were assessed as having little impact on the child, compared to (17.1%) in residential decisions.

- A greater proportion of residential decisions (65.1%) were 'new'.

- A greater proportion of area decisions (32.0%) were 'repeat'.

- A greater proportion of residential decisions (37.7%) were very specific in terms of action.

- A greater proportion of area decisions (21.6%) were very general in terms of action.

- A time-scale for implementing the decision was included in 33.5% of residential decisions, and only in 18.9% of area decisions.

These results continue the pattern established in previous chapters of the very different character of residential reviews compared to area office reviews. These differences reinforce the picture of residential reviews as a more effective decision-making forum.

It was suggested in Chapter 4 that the model of 'mixed scanning' may be an appropriate one to describe the decision-making process of reviews on children in care. Does this analysis of the nature of review decisions point to this being the case? Certainly significant decisions were taken more often in residential reviews and the search for alternatives was observed more frequently on these occasions. However these important decisions tended to be more specific and minor decisions less specific in terms of defining appropriate actions or goals. One must also remember in relating decision-making models to reviews that, as we have seen, decision-making is only one,and often not the dominant one, of several functions of the review.

Taken together, these analyses of the nature of review decisions suggests that at reviews the reviewing officer is attempting to draw up a synoptic casework plan, including not only major changes,but also minor or continuing activities. This is a legitimate function for reviews to perform. However, as was noted earlier none of the reviewing officers saw reviews as the appropriate place to make detailed casework plans - the limited specificity of action in the decisions confirms this. What is happening is that review decisions cover the general areas in which the social worker will work but do not spell out detailed casework plans. More importantly they are also unlikely to spell out clearly the objectives that these social work activities aim to achieve.

CHAPTER 11

IMPLEMENTATION OF REVIEW DECISIONS

One of the major aims of this project was the assessment of the level of implementation of review decisions and it is the results of that assessment which is now reported. However before these results are considered it is important to recognise what this study is evaluating and how this has been assessed. In assessing the implementation of the review decisions we are not evaluating either the quality or the success of the casework that the social worker has undertaken. What we are assessing is the extent to which the social workers saw themselves as having implemented the decisions as recorded on the review form.

The overall choice of methodology employed on this research has already been explained. The implication of the decision to include a large number of cases in the sample of reviews was an even larger number in the sample of review decisions. The method adopted to assess this number of decisions had to be tailored therefore to the resources of the project. This eliminated the possibility of using objective or external assessments of the implementation of the decisions, or of the impact of the decision implementation on the client.

Furthermore, the analysis of the nature of the review decisions contained in the previous chapter pointed to the imprecise way in which the majority of review decisions were recorded. As we have seen the decision-making approach of many reviews is a rather unsophisticated one which produced many repetitive non-specific decisions which do not contain the critieria necessary for an evaluation of their implementation. Given this, it did not seem appropriate to develop an over elaborate approach to assessing the level of implementation of such decisions.

The method that was used to measure the extent of implementation was based on the social workers' own responses to a set of questions on each review decision. Although the social workers completed

the questionnaires, they were administered personally by the researcher. The researcher would remind the social worker of each decision that had been made during the review and the social workers would record their assessment of the level of implementation. The social workers were aware that the researcher had a good knowledge of each case from reading the case notes and from attending two consecutive reviews and would therefore be in a position to assess the accuracy of the responses. There appeared to be few attempts by the social workers to exaggerate the level of implementation. I feel that the assessment arrived at was a fair reflection on the work carried out by the social worker in response to reviews. However, from the discussion of the previous chapter it will be clear that we must be cautious in assuming that the decisions as recorded are a true reflection of the action intended or implicit when the decision was taken following the review discussion.

The assessment of the implementation of the decision had two elements:

- firstly, the extent to which the social workers performed the actions appropriate to or specified in the review decision;
- secondly, the extent to which the aims or outcomes specified or implicit in the decisions were achieved.

Social workers were asked to answer two basic questions in relation to each review decision:

(i) Did you work towards implementing this decision?

(ii) How far do you think the decision has been successfully implemented and achieved its aims?

The choice of responses to each questions was the same - not at all; partially; fully. These questionnaires were completed by the social worker at least six months after the decisions had been taken, when the next review of the case had taken place. Table 11.1 gives the distribution of responses to question (i) - we shall subsequently refer to this as 'implementation'.

TABLE 11.1

	NUMBER OF DECISIONS	% OF ALL DECISIONS
Not implemented	81	9.3
Partially implemented	104	12.0
Fully implemented	683	78.7
Total	868	100%

Table 11.2 gives the distribution of responses to question (ii) — we shall subsequently refer to this as 'successful implementation'.

TABLE 11.2

	NUMBER OF DECISIONS	% OF ALL DECISIONS
Not successfully implemented	174	20.2
Partially successful	152	17.6
Fully successful	537	62.2
Total	863	100%

The respondents appeared to fully understand the distinction between these two questions: as the questions were answered when the researcher was present if there were any doubts these could be clarified before a response was made. The options offered to the respondents in answering these questions used the terms 'implemented' and 'successfully implemented'. To be consistent, it seems appropriate to employ these terms in reporting the responses to the questions. However the similarity between the two terms means that the reader must keep these distinctions in mind when reading the results. This may be easier if one thinks of the term 'implementation' as 'working towards' and 'successful implementation' as 'achieving ones aims'.

Similarly, when analysing the reasons behind any failure to comply with the decisions the same terminology is employed throughout this chapter. Hence, 'reasons for non-implementation' are the reasons why the social worker did not carry out the appropriate work; 'reasons for lack of success in implementation' are the social workers' assessment of why the object of the decision was not fulfilled.

The figures from Tables 11.1 and 11.2 deserve some comment, even before they are broken down for more detailed analysis. The first point to note is that in less than 10% of cases has the social worker not worked in some measure towards implementation. Given that this could have occurred for several reasons (which are discussed below), this must count as a high level of decision implementation. Looking now at the second table we see that, as one would expect, the level of successful implementation is lower than the level of implementation. One-fifth of decisions were not at all successfully implemented, although more than three-fifths were successfully implemented. However these measures of implementation must be seen in relation to the nature of the decisions involved and to the rigorousness of the evaluation criteria.

As we have seen, the decisions as recorded generally were very low in their level of specificity of goals, of action and of time-scale. This therefore leaves the criteria for evaluation of implementation exceedingly loose. For example if a decision reads 'support foster family', but does not detail why, or how or when this is to be done, as little as one visit in a six-month period could qualify as 'working towards implementation'. If there were no major upheavals in the case, this could also qualify as having been 'successfully implemented and achieved its aims'. Furthermore, the majority of decisions recorded did not specify a date by which implementation could be expected. For many of these it was assumed that implementation could take place immediately. However, as the recording of the rate of implementation occurred at least six months after the decision was taken, many of these decisions which have been processed as being fully implemented disguise the degree of slippage in the intended time-scale for implementation.

REASONS FOR NON-IMPLEMENTATION

Let us now consider the reasons why the social workers failed to work towards implementing some of these decisions. Based on the pilot studies and observation of past reviews, six possible reasons for non-implementation were identified, which are listed in Table 11.3 below. Using this list, social workers were then asked 'If a decision was not fully implemented was it for any of the following reasons?' Their

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responses to this question, which relate to the 17.3% of the decisions not fully implemented are given in Table 11.3.

TABLE 11.3

REASONS FOR NON-IMPLEMENTATION	NO.	%
1. Lack of time	39	20.9
2. Did not agree with the decision	14	7.5
3. A change of circumstances	42	22.4
4. A long-term decision; no action needed	16	8.6
5. An oversight	17	9.1
6. A change of casework plans	20	10.7
7. Other	39	20.9

Under the 'other' category were included decisions where the social worker did not act because the client, friends or other agencies carried out the necessary task for themselves, e.g. 'Ask the housing department about re-housing'. Also included under this category are decisions which suggested alternative courses of action which proved unnecessary - e.g. 'if x happens then do y'; however, if x did not happen, then y and the decision as a whole was redundant.

'A change of circumstances ' refers to changes which were outside the social worker's control, e.g. if a young person reoffended or a parent failed to visit. Given that the actual time-scale for implementing many of these decisions was longer than that intended at the time the decision was taken, one could argue that there is an increased likelihood of circumstances changing. This was exactly the point being made by BASW in the quote on page 147. In this sense 'changes of circumstances may not be entirely outside the social worker's control.

The categories which point directly to a lack of social worker input are lack of time; oversight; didn't agree with the decision - these categories applied to 70 decisions, or 8% of the total decisions. This suggests a very high level of effort to implement review decisions.

REASONS FOR LACK OF SUCCESS IN IMPLEMENTATION

Let us now look at the reasons for failure to implement success-fully (i.e. failure to achieve the aim implicit in the decision), based on responses to the second question. By definition, included under

this heading will be those decisions which the social worker did not implement, and decisions which the social worker tried to implement but without success. Table 11.4 shows the distribution of the reasons for non-implementation of those decisions. (There are 385 entries, as on occasion more than one reason was cited in relation to a single decision.)

TABLE 11.4

REASONS FOR NON-SUCCESSFUL IMPLEMENTATION OF DECISIONS	NO.	%
1. The decisions was a long-term one; the time-scale was too short for implementation	34	8.8
2. Lack of resources within Social Services Department	23	6.0
3. Lack of resources other than Social Services Department	15	3.9
4. Lack of social work input	43	11.2
5. Decision became inappropriate because of changes in circumstances	63	16.4
6. Decisions became inappropriate because of changes in casework plans	23	6.0
7. Lack of co-operation of child	54	14.0
8. Lack of co-operation of child's family	65	16.9
9. Lack of co-operation of other agencies	30	7.8
10. Other	35	9.0
Total	385	100.0

This table points to two major reasons for a lack of success in social worker intervention on behalf of their client

    a)   lack of co-operation, and

    b)   lack of resources.

Lack of co-operation

The term 'lack of co-operation' is used to refer to both deliberate obstruction and also to situations where the child or the family or agency are unable to co-operate. The lack of success with these decisions demonstrates that often a social worker makes plans which involve intervention in a situation where he cannot control the outcome. This may be in relation to individual behaviour, (e.g. 'Encourage Mrs B. to visit her daughter in her foster home') or to liaise with other agencies, (e.g. 'ask the school to consider accepting this child'). In instances such as these the social worker may expend considerable time and effort but in the end the success of this effort depends on the activities of others.

Is this lack of co-operation related to lack of participation by the client in decision-making? In Chapter 3 we reported the opinion of many workers in the child care field that greater participation in reviews and all decision-making forms would increase their effectiveness. Indeed this is the philosophy behind the increasing use of 'contracts' when working with children and their families, in particular older children (Hussell, 1983). A participative style of decision-making encourages all the parties to recognise both their 'rights' and their 'duties'. Several respondents felt that the lack of participation in reviews contributed to a lack of co-operation on the part of clients. A quotation from one of our social worker respondents expresses this viewpoint clearly:

> "One reason for non-implementation of review decisions is that the clients' viewpoint is not sufficiently taken into consideration and consequently co-operation in implementing a decision is not obtained."

Lack of resources

'Lack of resources' refers to resources both within the Social Services Department and to other resources. Those within the Social Services Department referred most often to placements or to places in an I.T. group; those outside referred most often to employment opportunities but also included housing and leisure activities. A 'lack of resources' was the reason for non-implementation in 10% of decisions. Just as the last paragraph demonstrated that a social worker's ability

to implement decisions may be restricted by lack of control over others, so may it be restricted by his lack of control over resources. This situation arises when social workers make plans for children assuming or hoping that the resources will be there to meet those plans.

This, of course, does not take account of those occasions when a social worker may have preferred to make a different decision but was constrained from doing so knowing that the resources were most probably not available. Social workers were questioned about this for each case and also for each individual decision. When asked 'Are there any additional resources which, if available, would substantially alter your work on this case?' in 21.1% of cases an affirmative response was given. The question relating to individual decisions was: 'In some cases there may be constraints on making decisions based solely on professional judgement. In making this decision, how far do you feel professional judgement was constrained by other factors?' Of the responses to this question 12.4% pointed to some constraints, although only 5% of these were regarded as major. The respondents did not find these questions easy to answer. From discussions arising from this it seems that social workers' plans or even visions of how they could assist a client are very much tied to their experiences of existing resources. For example, those social workers who were dealing with very vulnerable 'at risk' children in an area with no day nursery facilities did not mention this as a constraint on their activities, although the existence of a day nursery would have had a major impact on their efforts in monitoring the case of vulnerable young children. This would suggest that a 'lack of resources' may be an even more serious constraint on effective decision-making and implementation than is shown by the results of this research.

REVIEW ORGANISATION AND IMPLEMENTATION RATES

One of the basic hypotheses of the research was that the subsequent implementation of decisions would be dependent on the structure of the decision-making unit. There were two major sources of variation in the structure of the review, (1) the difference between residential reviews and area office reviews and (2) the difference between reviews held in each area.

COMPARISON BETWEEN RESIDENTIAL AND AREA REVIEWS

Levels of Implementation

Table 11.5 shows the different rate of implementations of decisions, depending on where they were taken.

TABLE 11.5

	Not implemented	Partially implemented	Fully implemented
Decisions taken in Area Offices Reviews	8.1	11.6	80.4
Decisions taken in Residential Reviews	15.0	13.8	71.4

We can see that there is a difference in the rate of implementation between 'area' decisions and 'residential' decisions and this difference is statistically significant. There were proportionally more decisions taken in residential reviews which the social worker did not work towards implementing.

Differences in reasons for non-implementation

Are there any differences in the reasons given for non-implementation? An examination of the responses shows that a smaller proportion of non-implemented decisions taken at residential reviews was due to 'lack of time' or 'oversight', but a larger proportion fell into the category 'other'. This most often related to decisions that the social worker thought the residential staff were responsible for implementing, e.g. 'To prepare D for independent living' or 'to restrict the contact that the child has with her home'. In residential reviews, where the structure is more akin to a case conference, it is of vital importance that responsibility for implementing a decision is thoroughly discussed and understood. Difficulties can easily arise in decision-taking between field work staff and residential staff as there is no single, or clear, 'chain of command'. This situation is only overcome during the review, because both social worker and residential staff are present and are

subject to the review chairman. If the opportunity to specify
responsibility is missed at a review, the chances of the decision
being effectively implemented will be greatly lessened.

The difficulties of demarcation between field social workers
and residential staff were appreciated by the Barclay Committee.
While recognising the increasing professionalism and desire for greater
autonomy for residential workers, Barclay warns of the dangers from lack
of co-ordination.

> "decisions may be better taken by the residential social worker
> who knows the child best ... but the crucial point here is that all
> concerned need to know who carries the authority and responsibility
> and why. These matters should not be left unclear or they will
> cause tension between   the social workers to the detriment of the
> client."
>
> (Barclay, 1982)

Levels of Successful Implementation

Comparison of the different rates of successful implementation
of decisions taken in area offices with those in residential homes,
is given in Table 11.6.

TABLE 11.6

	Not at all successfully implemented	Partially successfully implemented	Fully successfully implemented
Decisions taken at area review	17.5	17.6	64.9
Decisions taken at residential review	32.5	17.5	50.0

Once again the differences are statistically significant, with
a much smaller proportion of residential decisions being successfully
implemented. Indeed only half of those decisions taken at residential
reviews were fully implemented successfully.

Differences in reasons for lack of success in implementation

The reasons given by the social workers for unsuccessful imple-
mentation of the decisions were different for residential decisions than
for decisions taken in area offices. The distribution of the responses
for the two sets of decisions varies, in particular, at four points:
'Lack of social work input' and 'lack of co-operation of the child's
family' appear much less often for residential decisions, but 'lack of
resources', both inside and outside the Social Services Department
appear much more often for residential decisions. When identifying the
lack of resources within the Social Services Department, respondents
referred most often to a shortage of suitable placements for children;
the resources which they found lacking outside the Social Services
Department were mainly housing, employment or leisure activities for
young people.

From observation of residential reviews it was clear that making
decisions which depend on resources for successful implementation was
problematic. The discussion often ranged around what would be best
for the child at that immediate point in his career, and decisions were
made accordingly – often with no clear idea whether the necessary
resources were available and rarely with any properly formulated alter-
native plan if the best option was not available, or not available at
that point in time. It also seemed that this situation was made worse by
the lack of knowledge by the participants, including even Care branch
personnel, of the nature or extent of the resources that were available,
even within the Social Services Department. Knowledge of particular
institutions etc did not seem to be gained in any systematic fashion,
but rather through chance and rumour.

As was noted earlier, all models of the decision-making process
include the need to make choices between alternatives; such choices
only being made after a search for possible alternatives. From obser-
vation of residential review discussions it would seem that such a search
was unnecessarily limited because of lack of information. The implica-

tions of this are well expressed by Parker et al:

"for a review group to be able to consider alternatives it has
to possess good information about their availability and quality,
as well as the capacity to think outside the standard range of
provisions: especially to know about the changing circumstances
of the child's family. This is not easy or inexpensive in terms
of time or commitment. Nevertheless, that is the minimal price
which has to be paid in order to forge a review system which really
serves the best interests of the child rather than one which exists
to place a routine seal of approval of the arrangements on the
moment."

<div align="right">(Parker, 1980)</div>

Part of the apparent uncertainty of Wainshire social workers over
the availability of places was due to the decision-making procedure and
the lack of a 'single line of command'. With how much authority could
a social worker or an Area Director request a place for one of their
children? How far was the Head of Home able to say who they would or
would not accept? However much the procedure may have had its own
internal logic, undoubtedly the process of allocating residential
places meant that many important review decisions were taken with either
a lack of information or authority to ensure they were successfully
implemented.

In this context, aspects of the critique by Smith and Ames of the
operation of social service teams seems relevant. These authors suggest
that an examination of the extent of decentralised decision-making could
be used to test the principle implicit in Seebohm that front line units
in social work require considerable autonomy. They conclude that:

"little purpose is served by offering teams of fieldworkers the
formal authority to make decisions without also assigning to them
the power of decision-making and ensuring that this power is
exercised."

<div align="right">(Smith and Ames, 1976)</div>

Despite these reservations about limited search processes, where
there is a genuine lack of resources a choice between alternative place-
ments may not be possible. This is not only a limitation on reviews
but has consequences for all decision-making. Many of the respondents
referred to the lack of resources, and therefore to a lack of any real
choice, as a major inhibitor of the development of long-term plans for
children in care.

COMPARISON OF THE THREE AREAS

Having compared the level of implementation of decisions taken in
residential reviews with those taken in area offices, as a whole, let
us now consider our second source of variation in the review structure,
namely, different area offices. The level of implementation for decisions
taken in each of the three social work areas is shown in Table 11.7.

TABLE 11.7

	Decisions from AREA X	Decisions from AREA Y	Decisions from AREA Z	All decisions
Not implemented	7.8	9.5	11.6	9.3
Partially implemented	10.5	14.7	8.1	12.0
Fully implemented	81.6	75.8	80.3	78.7

Table 11.7 shows some variation in the rates of implementation of
decisions with Area Y showing the lowest rates, but these differences
are not statistically significant at the 5% level. There are, however,
differences between the areas in the reasons for non-implementation.
Area X has a greater proportion of decisions which were 'long-term;
no immediate action required'. Area Y had a much greater proportion of
decisions not implemented through 'lack of time'; Area Z had very few
of these but 'an oversight by social worker' did occur more often in
this area, as did the response 'did not agree with the decision'; this
was not once given as a reason in Area X. This is most likely due to
the way in which review decisions were formulated; in Area Z the Area
Director composed and recorded them at the review, in Area X the social
worker came with them already drafted.

The results given in Table 11.8 show statistically significant
differences between the level of successful implementation of decisions
taken in different areas. The results also show such variation as to
make simple conclusions difficult. For example Area X has the lowest

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TABLE 11.8

	Decisions from AREA X	Decisions from AREA Y	Decisions from AREA Z	All decisions
Not at all successful	17.7	19.8	25.1	20.2
Partially successful	22.5	17.8	8.8	17.6
Fully successful	59.7	62.4	66.1	62.2

proportion of fully implemented decisions and also the lowest proportion
of decisions not at all successfully implemented; Area Z has the highest
proportion of decisions not at all successfully implemented. There are
two possible explanations of this result:

(i)   the difficulties all the social workers experienced in
      distinguishing between the categories of not at all/partially
      /fully successful when assessing the implementation of a
      decision.

(ii) the decisions taken in Area Z were somehow different from those
      in other areas.

The second explanation seems to hold. Decisions taken in Area Z were more
specific in terms of both goals and action. This may therefore make it
easier for social workers in Area Z to assess whether their decisions were
not at all or partially successful. This suggests that if greater speci-
ficity was used in formulating decisions then a greater number would
be recognised as not at all successful.

To avoid the confusion over the distinction between 'not at all'
and 'partially' implemented, these two categories can be merged, giving
a basic classification of implemented/not implemented. Similarly by
merging the responses 'not at all successful implementation' and 'parti-
ally successful implementation' we have a basic classification of success-
fully implemented/not successfully implemented. When the results from
the three areas are examined in this way, we find that there are no

significant differences between the areas in terms of the rates of
successful implementation of review decisions.

FOSTER CARE AND REVIEW DECISIONS

Throughout this research the placement of children has been
categorised in four ways: fostered, in residential care, at home-on-
trial and at home. In a previous section we compared the implementation
of decisions taken in residential reviews with those taken in area
office reviews. Area Office reviews include children who are fostered,
home on trial and living at home. Those children in the later category
are not bound, by statute, to be reviewed, hence much of the emphasis
in disucssion of reviews in the child care literature has concentrated
on children who are fostered or are in residential care.

Therefore a comparison of the rates and success of implementation
of decisions on these children may be of interest. Table 11.9 shows
the level of decisions implementation in reply to question (i); Table
11.10 shows the level of successful implementation in reply to question
(ii).

These tables show that review decisions on children in foster care
are much more likely to be implemented and successfully implemented
than for children in residential care.

TABLE 11.9

	Not implemented	Partially implemented	Fully implemented
Children who are fostered	6.5	11.4	82.1
Children in residential care	15.0	13.8	71.3

The reasons given by social workers for ineffective implementation
differ for these two groups of decisions, as shown in Table 11.11.

TABLE 11.10

	Not at all successfully implemented	Partially successfully implemented	Fully successfully implemented
Children who are fostered	11.5	18.5	70.0
Children in residential care	32.5	17.5	50.0

TABLE 11.11

Reasons for unsuccessful implementation	Decisions on children who are fostered %	Decisions on children in residential care %
1. The decision was a long-term one; the time-scale was too short for implementation	16.9	9.2
2. Lack of resources within Social Services Department	2.5	10.2
3. Lack of resources other than Social Services Department	0.8	11.2
4. Lack of social work input	16.1	4.1
5. Decision became inappropriate because of changes in circumstances	19.5	16.3
6. Decisions became inappropriate because of changes in casework plans	5.9	2.0
7. Lack of co-operation of child	9.3	17.3
8. Lack of co-operation of child's family	11.9	8.2
9. Lack of co-operation of other agencies	10.2	7.2
10.Other	6.8	14.3

For children in foster care the decisions are more likely not to
be implemented because they are long-term and insufficient time had
elapsed to allow for implementation, and because of lack of social
worker's effort. For children in residential care 'lack of resources'
was more likely to be a cause of ineffective implementation, as we have
already discussed in this chapter.

THE IMPACT OF THE DECISIONS AND LEVELS OF IMPLEMENTATION

In the previous chapter we examined the nature of review decisions
along several dimensions. One of the ways in which the decisions
were classified was according to the level of the impact of the decision
on the child's life style or situation. We now want to consider whether
the rate of implementation of the decisions varied according to the
level of the impact of the decision. The figures relating to this are
shown in Table 11.12.

TABLE 11.12

Implementation	IMPACT ON THE CHILD			All decisions
	Decisions with great impact	Decisions with some impact	Decisions with little impact	
Not at all	9.9	7.6	11.5	9.4
Partially	15.7	12.2	11.2	12.3
Fully	74.4	80.2	77.3	78.2

The figures relating to 'successful implementation' are shown in
Table 11.13.

TABLE 11.13

Successful implementation	IMPACT ON THE CHILD			All decisions
	Decisions with great impact	Decisions with some impact	Decisions with little impact	
Not at all	25.6	20.9	18.0	20.5
Partially	17.4	16.6	18.6	17.5
Fully	57.0	62.5	63.4	62.0

Neither of these tables show any statistically significant relationship between the level of impact of a decision and whether or not it was implemented, or successfully implemented. This may be a reflection of the review process and the measures used in assessing the rate of implementation of the decisions. Overall a very high proportion of decisions were assessed as 'fully implemented' and a small proportion as having a 'high impact on the child'. Perhaps these results also reflect the position where, with the exception of residential reviews, the same review process is used to make a large number of decisions which vary greatly in their character and which related to a wide range of cases and circumstances.

CONCLUSIONS

The results presented in this chapter show a very high level of implementation of review decisions, and a lower, but still high, level of successful implementation of review decisions. In less than 10% of decisions did the social worker fail to work in some measure towards implementation. Overall, 62% of the decisions were successfully implemented, that is, achieved the aim implicit in the decision.

However, the complete picture is perhaps not as reassuring as these figures may at first suggest. There are two qualifications, in particular, which should be borne in mind. These are the imprecise nature of the review decisions and the much lower rate of successful implementation of decisions taken in residential reviews.

In the previous chapter the detailed description of the review decisions pointed to the significant lack of specificity in the decisions. This was true, in particular, for the goals, the action and the time-scale for implementation. There were many examples of general decisions, such as 'support the foster family', 'maintain some contact with B's siblings' or 'liaise with the school'. Because of the limited detailed requirements contained in these decisions the criteria for establishing effective implementation is also limited. For instance, is one visit in six months sufficient action for successful implementation of the decision to support the foster family? The answer to that question is not contained within the decision, neither is it possible to deny implementation.

Hence this generality of decision recording enhances the levels of decision implementation which obviously limits the impact of this research analysis. But more importantly for social work practice, it also diminishes the opportunity for effective monitoring of review decisions by members of the area social work teams.

However, the level of precision of decisions taken in residential reviews was much greater than that for decisions taken in area offices. Indeed it has been noted throughout this thesis that residential reviews differ from those conducted in area offices. Once again, in examining the extent of, and causes for, failure to implement decisions we find a significant difference. Decisions taken at residential reviews were less likely to be implemented and less likely to be successful than decisions taken in area offices. Indeed half the decisions taken in residential reviews were not successfully implemented.

From observation of residential reviews it would seem that three factors contributed to this greater failure to implement decision-making in residential decisions, despite the greater emphasis on decision-making in residential reviews. First, in situations of uncertainty decisions were made which were based on insufficient information. Second, successful implementation required access to specific resources, which was an aspect over which the review had limited control. Third, residential decisions were often more ambitious and in reference to dynamic and therefore volatile circumstances. Ambitious decision-making in such a situation has a higher chance of failure, but if successful produces very substantial rewards. In discussing the responsibilites placed on social workers when dealing with child abuse cases, Hardiker and Barker suggest that the criteria for judging social worker decision-making should not be based solely on the assumption that they will always be right:

> "working in conditions of uncertain outcome and high risk, a professional cannot be held accountable for providing correct solutions, but should be expected to use available knowledge in an ethical way. This imples a knowledge of theory and research, performance skills and an attitude of service to client needs. This is no small undertaking, but it establishes manageable criteria for good decision-making, by contrast with the assumption that social workers should always be right."

(Hardiker & Barker, 1981)

The implications of these observations for increasing the level of successful implementation of residential decisions would seem to be threefold:

1. The need for fuller preparation before a review on the resource options which are currently available.

2. The need to decentralise decision-making on resources to allow the 'review' more control over resource allocation.

3. Good decision-making practice suggests that one way to avoid failure to implement is to ensure that decisions which are new, or which carry a high risk, include within them an alternative course of action should the first option become unobtainable.

These results suggest that the senior social services manager was correct in his impression that residential review decisions were not implemented as often as one would hope or expect. What is the implication of that for overall child care practice? To answer that question one must place the results presented in this chapter on decision implementation alongside the previous discussion on the nature and purpose of reviews and on the nature of review decisions. Perhaps even more importantly the review process needs to be assessed in relation to other aspects of child care practice. This we shall consider in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 12

THE IMPORTANCE OF REVIEWS IN CHILD CARE PRACTICE.

REVIEWS AND DECISIONS

The findings from the research that have been included in this report, so far, relate specifically to the review process. However, if implications are to be accurately drawn from an evaluation of the reviews as a decision-making process, then they must be placed within the context of the overall child care decision-making and practice.

We saw in Chapter 4 that within the total casework on a child the decision-making activity and the review process overlap, but by no means coincide. How far are reviews used as a forum for making the important decisions on children in care? Obviously the most important decision – that which initially makes the child a 'reviewable case', – whether being taken into care or being put under supervision – cannot be taken at a review. It is because of the crucial importance of this first decision and the need for this to be part of a clearly defined plan, that many social workers in this sample did not see, indeed opposed the notion of reviews as a forum for planning for children in care.

Once a child becomes a reviewable case, how important are reviews in major decision-taking? A count was taken of all the major decisions that had been taken in the past year on all the cases included in the sample. (A major or important decision was defined to include changes in legal status, changes in placement, changes in parental contact.) In just over half of these cases at least one major decision had been taken, and in more than 1/7 two or more major decisions had been taken. Of all these major decisions only 21% were taken at reviews; 28% were taken at case conferences and 51% elsewhere (for example, in supervision or by the Court). Although reviews played a part in the making of major decisions on children, therefore, this was not a dominant part. This was equally true for children in residential care, despite the greater

emphasis on decision-making in residential reviews that has been noticed earlier. This result reinforces the description of review decisions contained in Chapter 10; only 14% of the decisions were described as having a major impact on the child's life.

CASE CONFERENCES

Another element affecting the total decision-making context is the case conference. Case conferences and reviews may appear, at times to be performing a similar task, especially when a child or young person has recently been received into care. This may be particularly true of reviews on children in residential care which, as we have seen, are much closer in style to a case conference format than is so for area office reviews. However, specially convened individual case conferences are not initiated for the same reasons as six monthly statutory reviews. To treat these two meetings as a single type may increase the confusion that exists among participants as to their purposes. In this respect one could dispute the opinion expressed by the Children's Legal Centre when they say:

> "We consider the terms 'reviews' and 'case conferences' to be synonymous, and mean any local authority-organised meeting at which decisions and plans about children in care are made."

(Children's Legal Centre, 1983)

If case conferences are being used for different purposes, one could assume that where they are a common part of child-care practice reviews will be regarded as less significant. In this study one child in six had been the subject of a case conference within the past year (although some of these may have been held prior to the child becoming a 'reviewable case'). We have commented earlier that many social workers would like to see area reviews develop toward the style of a case conference and review – or are the purpose of these meetings too dis- similar? This would not, in general, improve the level of participation in reviews by children and their families as case conferences, as constituted at present, rarely include the child or his family or foster family. Also in considering such a suggestion one would have to be

aware of the possibility of transferring to the reviews not only the
advantages of the case conference format, but also the disadvantages;
in particular the problem of meetings that are too large and too long
(Hallet & Stevenson, 1980).

REVIEWS AND CASE WORK PLANS

We have seen that reviews only play a limited role in the making of
major decisions. What is the role of reviews in the making of less
fundamental decisions? It is impossible to perform a similar exercise
that would take into account all child care decisions, so we asked social
workers to assess the importance of each review in translating broad
aims or objectives into implementable decisions. Table 12.1 shows their
responses for all reviews, for residential reviews and for reviews held
in each area.

TABLE 12.1

The importance of reviews in making decisions	All reviews %	Residential reviews %	Area X reviews %	Area Y reviews %	Area Z reviews %
Very important	18.9	44.1	21.4	13.8	24.1
Fairly important	28.8	29.4	34.3	28.7	22.2
Fairly unimportant	37.4	20.6	37.1	42.6	29.3
Very unimportant	14.9	5.9	7.1	14.9	26.1

The modal response was that reviews are 'fairly unimportant'
in making decisions - although the responses were spread throughout
the range. Comparisons between residential and area reviews show
that social workers felt that residential reviews were much more

important; almost three-quarters of residential reviews were assessed as being important or very important in making decisions that would help to realise case work plans.

The range of the overall responses, as shown in Table 12.1, could be explained either by the variation in the nature of the cases which are subject to review or by the variation in the responses of different social workers. Examination of the responses of individual social workers did show that some variation was due to a tendency for individual social workers to regard reviews in general in different ways. (As indeed we saw in the earlier chapter on the functions of reviews.) However, a more important factor in explaining the spread of responses was the diverse character of reviews reflecting the particular circumstances of each case.

REVIEWS AND SOCIAL WORK

Our discussion so far suggests that reviews are not the primary decision-making forum - but are they regarded as important in other ways? Members of the social work area teams obviously felt that they were. Using a semi-structured questionnaire, (Questionnaire 9 in the appendix) their opinion was sought on the importance of reviews in several regards. Three questions were asked in relation to area reviews and residential reviews. These were

"How would you assess the importance of reviews in regard to:
  (i)   the operation or management of the Social Services
        Department,
  (ii) the service provided for the client,
  (iii) your work in the Social Services Department."

The histograms in Figure 12.1 show the relative responses on a six point scale from extremely important to extremely unimportant, for each of these three questions.

These responses show that social services team members see reviews to be important, particularly in relation to the management of the

Figure 12.1 The Importance of Area Reviews

Legend

- ▨ In relation to management
- ■ In relation to the client
- ▧ In relation to your work

1 Extremely unimportant
2 Very unimportant
3 Fairly unimportant
4 Fairly important
5 Very important
6 Extremely important

percentage
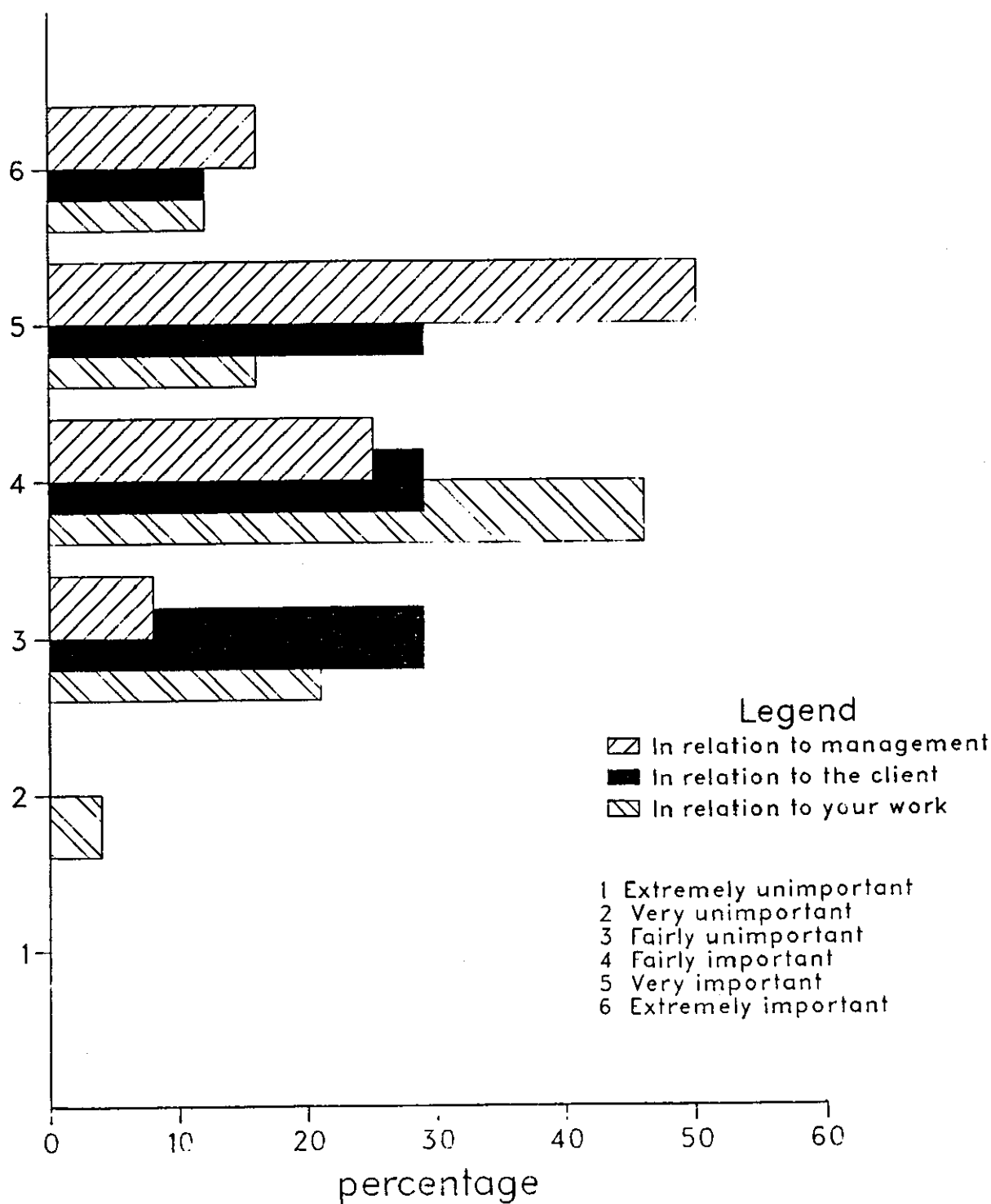
Social Services Department. Examples of the reasons given for this are:

> "They ensure that management are aware of the significant events in statutory cases, thus ensuring a degree of control."

> "They provide written proof that statutory obligations are being fulfilled, signed by the reviewing officer who has ultimate responsibility."

> "The management team may not be aware of all clients, social work inputs and lack of resources. They are a way of keeping this information up to date."

The perception that reviews are most likely to be important in terms of the management of the department reinforces the responses reported earlier that social workers most often viewed monitoring as the most important function of a review.

In general reviews are seen as less important in regard to the service provided to the client.

> Examples of the more positive responses are:

> "They provide a formal safeguard"

> "They make social workers more aware of his ultimate responsibility to the client."

> "Effectiveness is the major issue."

However, other respondents found reviews less important, in this respect, as the following response illustrates:

> "The service to the client depends largely on the goodwill and resourcefulness of the social worker, and not on the 'policing' elements of the review procedure."

A comparison of replies to the third question shows that this is the area, namely in relation to their own work, in which social workers felt reviews to be of least importance. Some of the reasons given for this were:

> "They are too infrequent, circumstances change quickly."

> "Without reviews I would envisage performing the same services for clients and keeping the same records and reports."

Other respondents did find reviews important in their work.

> "They help me identify areas of concern, to work out priorities and provide a readily available picture of planned future work."

"They give management an idea of how we spend our time."

It should be noted that the Area Directors were much more likely to see reviews as being extremely important.

Our respondents were asked the same three questions in relation to residential reviews. Their responses to these questions are shown in Figure 12.12.

The range of responses in relation to residential reviews is wider than that for area reviews; there are a greater number of responses in both the extremely important and very unimportant categories. As with area reviews the importance of the review varies in relation to different aspects. Both area and residential reviews are seen as more important in relation to management of the Social Services Department than to the service provided by the client and least important to the work carried out by the social worker.

The following replies represent most of the points made by respondents:

> "Children in residential care are subjected to more varied 'caring agents'. It is of primary importance that liaison and co-ordination are consolidated to present a consistent and 'tailor-made' environment for the particular child."

> "Life in a children's home cannot go beyond 18 years and so, if there is no family support, it is most important that long-term decisions are made at reviews."

Although social workers were likely to find more residential reviews extremely important, they also reported a greater proportion as being unimportant or very unimportant. Social workers often indicated to the researcher that they felt there was a great range in the quality of residential reviews, depending largely on which home was involved and who was chairing the review.

Overall one could say that social workers felt reviews did serve a useful purpose. Stevenson et al reported a very similar conclusions from their study of eight different social work teams.

> "For the most part, social workers tended to welcome formal reviews. They regarded them as important means of evaluating some of their caseload. Dissatisfaction was expressed when such reviews were regarded as merely administrative procedures and their professional functions were not developed."
>
> (Stevenson et al, 1978)

Figure 12.2 The Importance of Residential Reviews

Legend
- ▧ In relation to management
- ■ In relation to client
- ▨ In relation to your work

1 Extremely unimportant
2 Very unimportant
3 Fairly unimportant
4 Fairly important
5 Very important
6 Extremely important

As we saw in Chapter 2, one of the main areas of concern in child
care practice is the poor performance of the social services in planning
for children in care. What did the social workers involved in this
study feel about this? They were asked 'In general, how good is your
social service department at developing and recording long-term plans
for the children in its care or under its supervision?' Their responses
are shown in Table 12.2.

TABLE 12.2

LONG-TERM PLANNING	% OF ALL RESPONSES
Very good	4%
Good	29%
Satisfactory	46%
Poor	21%
Very poor	0

Nearly half of the respondents saw their own Social Services
Department as only 'satisfactory' in making long-term plans. The range
in responses is interesting. There was a difference in the responses
of social workers from different area offices, but it was not particu-
larly marked. Social workers in area X gave the highest rating, followed
by those in area Z and then those in area Y. There were, however,
major differences of opinion on this subject from individual social
workers, within the same area office, as the following two quotations
illustrate.

One social worker assessed the Social Services Department as 'good'
and gave the following reason:

    "Plans are always discussed and agreed upon at an early stage in the
    case and thus afford a degree of direction and focus."

Another social worker from the same area office assessed the Social
Services Department as 'poor'.

    "There is an inconsistent approach - plans change as different
    staff get involved - no overall policy is decided upon at the
    outset - everything is too fluid."

There were two recurring themes among the responses to the question of the standards of long-term planning:

a) that the situation was improving

b) that a lack of resources had an effect on the ability to plan.

The social workers' comments shown below represent these opinions:

> "It is improving, although I feel there is room for tighter requirements in respect of plans for children at an early stage of RIC rather than waiting for a review. This is beginning to happen, but perhaps it should become a requirement."

> "Longterm plans are often determined by available resources at the time rather than by careful planning."

> "Inconsistent staff ability and inadequacy of residential resources - more children's centres, more IT, more field workers and more specialisms within the latter, are required. You cannot plan successfully if you haven't got the appropriate components to choose from."

> "Resources often limit the practicality of plans and thus inhibit vision."

Having looked at long-term planning within the total work of the Social Services Department, we now need to consider it in relation to reviews. It has been suggested that reviews have the potential to play a major part in ensuring the developments of plans for all children. What picture emerges from this research of the role of reviews in planning in the research localities? Data which can help answer this were gathered in several ways. First social workers were asked, for each of their cases, 'How important was the review process in formulating plans?'. The responses are shown in Table 12.3.

TABLE 12.3

IMPORTANCE OF THE REVIEW IN FORMULATING PLANS	% OF ALL RESPONSES
Very important	20.0
Fairly important	27.0
Fairly unimportant	35.2
Very unimportant	17.8

In a majority of cases social workers feel reviews are unimportant in formulating plans although the responses are spread throughout the range.

The second source of data was the researcher's assessment of the content of the review, with regard to discussion of the long-term objectives of each case.

The distribution of the researcher's assessment is shown in Table 12.4.

TABLE 12.4

LONG-TERM OBJECTIVES	% OF ALL REVIEWS ATTENDED
Assumed and not discussed	21.3
Reaffirmed	20.6
Re-examined	31.6
None of these	26.5

This points to long-term plans being actively discussed in less than one third of all reviews. This table also shows 21.3% and 20.6% of reviews as assuming or confirming existing plans for the child. These figures should be considered against data gathered from the case records.

In examining the case records of all the children whose reviews were included in this project, the researcher looked to see how far the case notes recorded long-term objectives. Long-term objectives were recorded in less than one quarter of all case records. This is not to say that the social worker does not have a long-term plan, but that this was 'carried in the head' rather than formulated and included in the case work file. However, the clarity with which these 'carry in the head' plans are formulated must be open to question. When asked to record on Questionnaire 4 "What are your objectives in this case?" many respondents had real difficulty in thinking about this and putting it into words. Furthermore, if all those involved in a case are to

work together surely these long-term objectives must be recorded. As Robinson found in his study of interaction between field and residential workers when planning for children:

> "It is clear that there are generally differences between what the parties to care of a child, including the child, think should be happening to the child."

<div align="center">(Robinson, 1981)</div>

Awareness of such differences are more likely to emerge if the objectives of the case are not only discussed jointly, but are also recorded.

It would seem that reviews at present do not play a vital part in developing and monitoring long-term plans for children in care. From the responses to the questionnaires, backed up by informal discussion, it can be seen that many social workers are very aware of the need to improve planning and see a role for reviews in ensuring this. In particular social workers see planning as a collective exercise, where responsibility needs to be shared. If decisions were more frequently the product of collective discussion, social workers might feel less inhibited in recording such agreed decisions.

SUMMARY

What conclusions, on the importance of reviews, can we draw from the findings reported in this chapter? Firstly, although some major decisions are taken in reviews, the majority of major decisions in child care are taken outside the review process. Secondly, that there is a wide divergence, not to say confusion, expressed by individual social workers on the purpose of reviews and hence their importance in relation to different functions. Thirdly, that, in practice, the importance of reviews is seen to vary with individual cases. Fourthly, that social workers are aware of the need to improve long-term planning for children in care but are uncertain how this relates to the present review process. Fifthly, that members of social work area teams in general feel reviews are important.

CHAPTER 13

CONCLUSIONS

In the final chapter of a research report it is appropriate to reiterate the original aims of the research project and to mark the progress that has been made towards fulfilling those aims. The aims of this research were:-

1. to develop a typology of review decisions

2. to ascertain the level of subsequent implementation of review decisions and what factors contribute to this

3. to identify the functions of reviews and the way in which these are perceived by members of Social Service teams

4. to place the review within the context of the total decision-making for children in care.

From reading the results reported in this thesis one could say that the research has been successfully directed to fulfil each of these aims. The resultant typology of review decisions is contained in Chapter 9; the analysis of the level of decision implementation is in Chapter 11; the functions of reviews are explored in Chapter 8; Chapter 12 discusses the role of the review and its importance in child care practice. It is not the intention of this chapter to repeat the details of these findings: rather it is intended to draw out some of the implications from the work undertaken. However, before these implications are considered in more detail, a brief overview of the project is presented.

The broader context for this research project was established in the early chapters. In particular, Chapter 3 contained an examination of other studies relating to the review process. The picture that emerged from these was not an encouraging one. They demonstrated that many reviews were not carried out within the regulation time limits, that many were brief and limited in membership and that many were little more than an administrative procedure.

Against this generally low standard for the country as a whole, the results of this research show that Wainshire Social Services Department organised their review process in an efficient and orderly fashion. Overall, 84% of reviews included in the sample were conducted within six months of the previous review, and a total of 96% were conducted within eight months. It should also be noted that this Authority adopted a very broad definition of 'reviewable cases'. Thus, as well as all children in care, all children who were under supervision to the authority or whose names were included on the 'at risk' register were included in the review process. The findings highlight the differences in the character of area office reviews and residential reviews in almost all aspects. The multifunctional nature of reviews and the confusion surrounding the purpose of reviews was also apparent.

The research programme not only established four broad aims, it also set out to test two general and several specific hypotheses (see page 57). The general hypotheses were:-

- the rate of implementation of review decisions would be related to the way in which the decisions were made

- the rate of implementation of review decisions would be related to the nature of the decisions.

In broad terms, both these hypotheses were upheld; the implication from this, however, needs to be made more explicit.

The first hypothesis suggested a differential ratio of decision implementation depending on the place of the review. Comparisons were made between the review process in each of three social work area offices and in residential establishments within one Local Authority. Although there were some differences in the style and organisation and in the outputs from the reviews in each of the three areas, these differences were minor in comparison to the marked differences between all the reviews conducted in area offices and those conducted in Children's Homes. In comparison to area offices, reviews conducted in Children's Homes in Wainshire were likely to last longer, to include a

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larger number of people, to occasionally include the child (which never happened in area reviews), to adopt a more explicit decision-making approach, to make decisions which were more specific and which had a greater impact on the child. However, residential decisions were also less likely to be implemented and less likely to be successfully implemented.

Investigation of the causes of this non-implementation suggests that it is related to the nature of the decisions; 'residential' decisions were more likely to be important and significantly to affect the child's life and were more likely to have resource consequences.

The level of decision implementation was related to the nature of the decisions in another way, in that a pertinent characteristic of the decisions was their generality in terms of their goals, actions and time-scale. This greatly reduced the criteria for effective evaluation and contributed to the high level of decision implementation.

The specific hypothesis that the research hoped to test were related to the level of decision implementation. However, because of the very high level of decision implementation the results of any detailed partial analysis of the relationship between this factor and the range of other variables proved less interesting than other implications from the research findings.

What are the implications to be drawn from this research? As we have seen, there was in Wainshire a review process that was administratively efficient. But this begs the question: administratively efficient to what purpose? The conducting of reviews, especially where a high proportion of the total area case load is included, entails a high opportunity cost for all those involved. There is, therefore, a need to ensure that the resultant outputs from the review process are of sufficient value to offset these costs. Any consideration of how these costs and outputs can be balanced raises many more questions than the initial one - 'are reviews conducted within the regulations?'. The results of this research raise four such issues. These are: the purposes or functions of reviews; the quality of social work recording; the place of long-term planning for children in care; and participation by

children and their families in the making of decisions which affect
them. Although all of these issues are closely interrelated, each one
is now discussed separately.

THE PURPOSES OF REVIEWS

An examination of the writings related to reviews reveals that the
purposes of reviews are often assumed but that there exists no concise
or official statement which establishes these purposes explicitly.
Empirical evidence was therefore sought on how reviews were being used
in practice, and on how members of the review perceived the functions
being fulfilled at each individual review. The results from this
confirmed that reviews were serving several purposes and, furthermore that
the particular combination of functions fulfilled varied with indi-
vidual reviews.

Not only are reviews multifunctional, there is also a diversity of
opinion among social workers as to the functions which reviews should
perform and a degree of real confusion among many social workers on this
issue. This confusion is most apparent when reviews conducted in area
offices are compared with those in residential establishments. The
organisation and character of these meetings are so different that they
must be considered as distinctive types of discussion or decision-
making mechanisms. Yet the statutory requirement which initiates each
is basically the same.

Despite this uncertainty over the explicit purposes of reviews, it
is worth noting that none of the social workers included in this sample
believed that reviews should be abandoned. Although some social workers
undoubtedly saw the outcome of reviews as having little significance,
while still demanding of their time, there was nonetheless a strong
residual sense that reviews perform a valuable function. Perhaps this
belief mirrors that of social work activity as a whole, in that, while
doubts may exist about its purpose, few serious commentators believe it
does not have a real value.

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Nonetheless it would seem that if the full potential of reviews is to be realised, those participating in the exercise must have a clearer understanding of why they are doing so. It is only when this has been accomplished that it is possible effectively to monitor how successfully these purposes or objectives have been achieved. In this respect, we are reminded of the relevance of the conclusions reached by Martin, Fox and Murray on the Scottish Children's Hearings, (see page 30).

> "If those who had designed the system had made an unambiguous
> statement of its central objectives, it might have been possible
> to assess empirically with what degree of success this objective
> had been attained."

Furthermore it is only after a clear understanding of the purposes or functions has been reached that it is possible to consider the most effective mechanism for achieving those purposes. The functions of reviews and their organisation are necessarily and intimately linked. From this it follows that before the Secretary of State considers how best to implement Section 3, para 7 (1) of the 1975 Children Act by introducing regulations on the conduct of reviews he should first make clear the objectives or purposes of the review process. Specific suggestions on this are noted later.

THE QUALITY OF SOCIAL WORK RECORDING

As is apparent, this study did not set out to examine in detail the methods or quality of social work recording. However, during the course of the study it was necessary to read the case files on all the children included in the sample and in particular to read the completed review forms. Recording in social work is a topic which raises strong comment from workers. Indeed it was this feeling of dissatisfaction with case recording that prompted the members of BASW to press for the establishment, in 1983, of a working party to examine the topic. That working party concluded:

> "We consider, then, that a radical reappraisal of the role and
> organisation of record systems in social work is needed."
>
> (BASW, 1983)

The present study offers only limited 'evidence' for such a debate; nonetheless the quality of recording in general and of reviews in

particular does influence the review process and therefore impinges
on the research findings. The variety and on occasion the complexity
of forms used at reviews in local authorities throughout the country
was examined by McDonnell and Aldgate:

> "The length of forms varied enormously, ranging from one to twenty
> sides of A4. Some included detailed questions and headings - in
> one example totalling 57. At the other extreme there were forms
> with the simple heading 'review of progress'".

<div align="right">(McDonnell and Aldgate, 1984)</div>

There were two respects in particular in which case recording was a
significant factor in the research reported here: the inclusion in case
records of the objectives or plans for each child, and the quality of
the recording of review decisions.

While it was by no means true for all cases, the general picture
gathered from reading case records and attending reviews was of a lack
of clearly stated case objectives. Case objectives may well have been
raised between the senior and the social worker in supervision sessions,
but more often than not the discussion in a review was not related to
any such formulated or recorded statement of objectives. The need for
such a statement of objectives has long been recognised and indeed has
been taken a step further in the concept of 'contracts', or written
agreements. The term 'contract' is most often associated with special
fostering for teenagers and as the survey by Shaw & Hipgrave (1983)
shows a high proportion (86%) of all special fostering schemes use
some form of written contract . The word contract presupposes some
form of voluntary agreement between parties who are equally free to
negotiate and accept the terms of the agreement. This is rarely the case
in child care, so written agreements or understandings may be a more
appropriate terminology. As we noted in Chapter 3, BASW certainly
believe that all placements of children in care should be based on
written agreements between all the parties involved. Similarly,
those who believe in the 'philosophy of permanence' see written agree-
ments as an essential part of the relationship between the social services
agency and the family. In this way the social services department can

be honest with the family while at the same time bringing them into the decision-making arena. In explaining the use of written agreements White goes on to point out that:

> "U]timately the most important justification for this approach tc work, however, must be the fact that such research as has been done suggests that parents working within the clear guide-lines of a document such as I have described are more successful in continuing to care for their child or in having the child restored to them."
>
> (White, 1983)

Examples of the application of this type of approach in the London Borough of Lambeth were presented by Chris Hussell (1983). He suggests that any written agreement or understanding should contain the following statements:

> "1. What the problems are in terms of the welfare of the child.
> 2. What it is intended to achieve.
> 3. What social services can do to help.
> 4. What the client will do or is expected to do.
> 5. What the consequences of success or failure are likely to be."
>
> (Hussell, 1983)

Compared with examples of practice like this from other authorities the limited emphasis to be found in Wainshire on the recording of case objectives is striking. The inclusion in a case record, or on a review form of a statement of objectives provides the necessary basis for a review effectively to evaluate work to date and to plan future work. The lack of recorded objectives encourages reviews to follow a narrow or retrospective time-scale and to engage in information exchange, or low level monitoring rather than evaluative reassessments.

A second aspect of recording, already noted above, is the lack of precision with which many of the review decisions were recorded. Details of the findings generated by the application of a typology of review decisions, and the implications of these, have already been discussed. However, in assessing the value of the review system the quality of recording is a point worthy of serious consideration. As with the recording of case objectives, a lack of precision in recording

a review decision means there is not a sufficiently sound base for
evaluating the implementation of that decision, which must therefore
reduce the potential value of subsequent reviews. Furthermore,
imprecise decision making and recording may lead to a blurring of the
intentions implicit in the decisions and thus reduce any sense of urgency
in implementation. In this context one is reminded once again of the
warning included in 'Foster Care: A Guide to Practice':

> "Unless reviews decide 'what, how and who' plans tend to remain
> written hopes on case records."
>
> (DHSS, 1976)

LONG-TERM PLANNING

Although the major characteristic of the current debate on child
care policy is the disagreements that have been expressed over the
role and powers of the local authority, there is concurrently a large
measure of consensus over the need to improve the planning of social
work with or on behalf of children and their families.

Much of the rationale for the formulation of such plans has already
been rehearsed in this chapter in the section dealing with the recording
of case objectives. In some cases very specific plans may be appropriate,
in others less detailed yet clearly stated aims or objectives may be
sufficient, or all that is possible. While recognising these diffi-
culties, the Select Committee emphasised the importance of planning,

> "It is of central importance to children in care that positive
> planning for their future be undertaken and followed through.
> ... To talk of plans when it is impossible to forsee, or do much to
> affect, what will happen to families and children over a spread of
> months or years may be misleading. Clear decisions have however to
> be made, and positive plans as to how to give effect to such
> decisions."
>
> (Short Report, 1984)

Although the end product of such planning may vary in its level of
specificity, the making of a plan enables the social worker to adopt ·a
more decisive approach to casework and therefore to reduce the amount
of crisis orientated, reactive decision making. The research findings

that have been presented in this thesis arose from three different approaches to the topic of long-term planning. These were:

- social workers' opinions on the importance of long-term planning and their satisfaction with the performance of their own department in this respect;

- the evidence derived from the observation of review discussions as to the existence of such plans;

- the appropriateness of the development of long-term plans as a function of statutory reviews.

In practice, some attempt at long-term planning was by no means universal in the cases included in this study. Furthermore, social work staff, while aware of a general need to improve planning, displayed a considerable diversity of views over the form and the methods of achieving this.

Some social worker respondents explained this ambivalence towards long-term planning as deriving from practical considerations, rather than from concern over any diminution of clients' rights. These practical considerations had two dimensions. One was the highly volatile nature of many cases, leading to constant and unpredictable changes of circumstances. The other factor which was perceived as a practical limitation on effective long-term planning was the lack of appropriate resources whereby the making and implementation of individually tailored plans could become a reality. Other results suggest that this opinion, especially in relation to residential reviews, is justified by experience.

In summary it can be said that the review system as conducted in Wainshire did not play a large part in the formulation of long-term plans, nor was there any consensus that this was an appropriate function for the reviews to fulfil; yet there was an expression of both the need and desire to improve this aspect of practice. To specifically charge the statutory review with the task of monitoring, or reassessing, plans for each child might not only give an emphasis to an early formulation of plans, it might also establish the necessary framework for a positive approach to casework with the child and his family.

Both the submissions to the House of Commons Select Committee and those sections of the Committee's Report which relate to the formulation and implementation of regulations on the conduct of reviews lay great stress on the need to involve children in the review process in order to fulfil the duty placed upon Local Authorities to ascertain the wishes and feelings of children in their care. The findings of the research show that children were only very occasionally included in reviews in Wainshire; natural parents and foster parents were included even less often. The pattern in Wainshire is therefore one of minimal participation by children and young people in the decision-making process. However, one must consider whether a statutory obligation to include children or young people in their reviews is necessarily the best way of ensuring that they are actually involved in the decision-making process. There are a number of reasons for adopting a cautious attitude.

First, simply to invite a child at attend a case conference style of review, which is the usual format for children in residential care, may not in fact involve him in decision-making. As a result of experimenting with a new review system to include children, the Jensons point to the need for small intimate reviews, rather than the usual large case conference. Their reasons for this are:

> "To expose a child to such a group, which is normally a fairly formal situation, would be to expose the child to a threatening experience. Most children under such circumstances would be inhibited from offering a proper contribution."

(Jenson & Jenson, 1978)

However, participation or involvement in reviews can take place in other ways than by simply allowing children to attend and expecting them to contribute to the discussion. Involvement may be through the nomination of a friendly spokesperson, or through prepared statements or notes. In writing of experiments in a Church of England Children's Home,

Pamela Skinner notes that:

"Of the methods of involvement which were suggested, by far
the most successful in terms of enabling the children to express
feelings, was in the use of a form or questionnaire. They were
able to write things that they could not verbalise directly to
people."

(Skinner, 1980)

It is certainly reasonable to assume that opening the review
process to children and their families would stimulate the need to question
afresh many of the assumptions held about the purposes, organisation and
outcomes of reviews. There is, however, another aspect to the question
of how best to ascertain the wishes and feelings of children in relation
to decisions which affect them. If it is hoped that this obligation
will be fulfilled by including children in reviews, this is to ignore
those decision-making instances that occur outside the review process.
This study has demonstrated that reviews are only one forum for making
decisions and certainly not the most important one: - less than one-
quarter of all the important decisions taken in these cases were taken
in reviews. Consequently the inclusion of children in reviews would not
in itself fulfil the obligation to involve them fully in decision-
making. Mechanisms to include children in reviews may appear to be a
relatively simple exercise; to include them in all decision-making
occasions will require other consultative devices. The issue of parti-
cipation in statutory reviews ought not to detract from the wider
problem of meaningful involvement in all forms of decision making.

A third factor which arises from any proposal to enlarge the
composition of the review is the organisational implications, parti-
cularly for reviews which are conducted as were the area office reviews
in this study. The impact of such a change as this on the work of Area
Y has already been speculated upon (see page 106). In the present
resource climate it may only be possible to enlarge the membership or
to conduct reviews more thoroughly by first categorising them and then
establishing a system of priorities. This would mean that all cases
would be subject to at least a basic form of review (which may be all
that is happening at present) but priority cases would be accorded
greater attention and fuller participation.

Given the findings from this research and the implications that have been drawn from these, what is the way forward for reviews. In order to answer that question it is necessary first to answer a series of interrelated questions: - what is the purpose or purposes of reviews?; what are the organisational regulations that will enable reviews to best fulfil these purposes?; should reviews be prioritised to allow for broader and more detailed discussions when necessary? What follows are suggestions for answering these questions.

The fact that the standards of organisation and conduct of reviews in Wainshire compares favourably with the generally unsatisfactory national picture, serves to underline the need to establish more effective national guidelines together with effective monitoring to ensure that standards can be raised for all authorities. This can probably best be achieved through the implementation of the Children Act 1975, relating to the regulation of reviews. However, if regulation of the conduct of reviews is to be used constructively, then there is a need for much greater clarity about the primary functions of reviews. As the functions and the processes of reviews are intimately related, developments in the conduct of reviews must be in relation to their primary functions. What then are the main options available to decision-makers who - at local or national level - wish to improve the quality of reviews and to increase their relevance to child care practice?

There would seem to be five possible directions for development, relating to perceptions of the primary function of reviews. The principal functions are as follows.

1. Reviews can be the main source of managerial information
   - the route of communication between field-workers and management and between fieldworkers and residential staff and management.

2. Reviews can play a key part in supervision, in the monitoring of casework as a whole.

3. Reviews can be used to monitor the making of decisions to ensure that effective plans are developed for children in care.

4. Reviews can be used to monitor the <u>implementation of decisions</u>.

5. Reviews can be used as the <u>primary route for participation</u> by children and their families in the making and monitoring of decisions which affect or determine their lives.

Although reviews may be capable of fulfilling more than one function at a time, there is a real danger in letting them remain 'as all things to all men', as is the case at present. The development of statutory reviews will only be beneficial to child care practice if there is greater clarity about both the purposes they are aiming to fulfil and their link with other aspects of continuing practice. Therefore there needs to be some measure of selectivity so that priority can be given to the development of reviews in certain ways. Which of these five possible functions should be given most emphasis?

The traditional role of reviews has been broadly managerial. A recent emphasis has been on increasing the participation of clients in decision-making, including reviews. If participation is to increase this is likely to lead to a style of review more akin to a case conference. However, the defining characteristic of reviews is that they are scheduled at fixed intervals throughout the career of the child in care, whereas participative involvement would be more appropriate at points of crisis and decision-making and these would not necessarily coincide with the review timetable. Therefore, it may be more appropriate to retain reviews as an explicitly managerial device, while advocating an increased use of informal discussions and case conferences to increase participation by children and their families when important decisions are to be made. However, to ensure that an increased level of participation in decision-making actually occurred it may be necessary to make one of the explicit tasks allocated to reviews that of monitoring the extent to which clients had been involved in decision-making and the discussion of casework objectives and strategies.

This work and that of others quoted in the literature suggests that two of the greatest weaknesses in present child care practice are the limited emphasis on long-term planning for children in care and the failure to make appropriate and implementable decisions. Using reviews primarily for decision-making would not necessarily improve

this. First, by definition, reviews cannot be used to plan a reception
into care; second, reviews are conducted at set intervals and are not
intended as a mechanism for reaching to problems.   Rather than
expecting reviews to be a primary forum for decision-making, they
could make a greater contribution by monitoring the nature and quality
of all child care decision-making and by monitoring the implementation
of these decisions.   There would therefore seem to be very good
reasons for issuing regulations which would clearly place these functions
at the centre of the review process. Such regulations would need to be
designed to ensure that the reviewing officer was in no doubt that, at
the end of each review, he or she should have satisfactory answers to
a set of key questions on each case. The following four questions are
an illustration of the direction these would need to take.

1. Has a long-term plan or set of objectives been clearly stated
    for the child?

2. Has the decision-making process been appropriate to the nature
    of the case? For example, have the child and his family been
    appropriately consulted and involved; has adequate consultation
    and discussion taken place within and across agency boundaries?

3. Have the objectives been specified appropriately and trans-
    lated into decisions in such a manner that their implementation
    can be systematically monitored? For example, does the social
    worker and his/her supervisor have a clear understanding of
    how these objectives are to be pursued?   Have the decisions
    been specified sufficiently precisely? Has the expected time-
    scale for implementation of each decision been recorded?

4. Has marked progress towards implementation of the decisions
    been achieved since the last review? Is there good reason to
    believe, for example, that the decisions can be implemented
    successfully and the objectives achieved? Have alternative
    objectives and decisions been formulated, should the first
    option become unobtainable?

In this way the purpose of reviews would become clearly specified. Moreover, by placing these key questions at the centre of the review process we would move towards a position in which both decision-making and managerial supervision were monitored.

Prioritising reviews

If reviews followed this form, it may be considered appropriate that the Reviewing Officer should not be part of the social work area team. An alternative could be the use of a specialist child care officer, or group, responsible at authority level for 'planning for children in care'. However, the use of such an officer or group may not be thought appropriate or necessary for all reviews, which returns us to an earlier point about the need to prioritise reviews.

If reviews were reorientated in the way suggested above - concentrating the focus on the nature and quality of decision-making - most reviews could proceed much as at present without entailing any substantial changes in their organisation. However, in a proportion of cases the adoption of this more rigorous review would require a more detailed approach and would require an increase in the time and effort expended. It is for this reason that one needs to prioritise reviews and carefully to select those situations where greater expenditure of time and effort is thought necessary. Guidelines on this may suggest that a more rigorous review is necessary, for instance, in the following situations: shortly after reception into care; following the breakdown of a placement; before a court hearing or change in legal status; before a child moves or leaves shcool; before any planned change in parental contact.

Statutory reviews have the potential to encourage high standards of child care practice. This potential is not being realised at present because of a lack of clarity about the purpose of reviews. It is suggested, therefore, that the primary focus of reviews should be the monitoring of the nature and quality of decision-making for children in care, together with the implementation of decisions. In this way the

review can bring together the monitoring of decision-making and managerial supervision in all cases and offer a more stringent check on developments in selected situations.

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APPENDIX

DATA FROM CASE RECORDS:

BASE DATE: _____:_____:_____

DATE OF BIRTH: _____:_____:_____   AGE:

NAME OF CHILD: _____   SEX:

PRESENT LEGAL STATUS: _____

ADMISSION	DATE RECEIVED	LEGAL STATUS	DATE DISCHARGED	LENGTH OF STAY

TIME UNDER STATUTORY REVIEW: [___.___] yrs.

TOTAL NUMBER OF ADMISSIONS: [___.___]

TOTAL TIME IN CARE: [___.___] yrs.

[___.___] mnths.

DATE OF PLACEMENT	FOSTER HOME	FOSTER HOME RELATIONS	RESIDENTIAL HOME	RES. EMPLOYMENT OR LODGING	AT HOME	RETURNED TO HOME

TOTAL NUMBER OF PLACEMENTS: [___.___]

TOTAL NUMBER OF RETURNS HOME: [___.___]

CURRENT PLACEMENT: [___]

DATE OF COMMENCEMENT: _____:_____:_____   LENGTH OF STAY: [___.___] yrs.

[___.___] mnths.

NAME OF CHILD'S SOCIAL WORKER: _____   [___.___]

NUMBER OF CHANGES IN SOCIAL WORKER: _____   [___]

RESOURCES/AGENCIES INVOLVED IN THIS CASE:

PLAY GROUP	☐
NURSERY	☐
HOME HELP	☐
HOME START	☐
VOLUNTEER VISITOR	☐
YOUTH CLUB	☐
I.T.	☐
MOTHERS GROUP	☐
CHILD GUIDANCE	☐
E.W.	☐
HEALTH VISITOR	☐
F.S.U.	☐
PROBATION	☐

CONTACT BETWEEN CHILD AND NATURAL PATENTS:

	NATURAL MOTHER	NATURAL FATHER	STEPMOTHER COHABITEE	STEPFATHER COHABITEE
Child living at home with:	1	1	1	1
Very frequently	2	2	2	2
Frequently	3	3	3	3
Never	4	4	4	4
Parents dead	5	5	5	5
Not applicable	6	6	6	6
Present whereabouts unknown	7	7	7	7

DATE OF LAST REVIEW: _____:_____:_____

CARRIED OUT BY: _____

PRESENT: _____

HAS THERE BEEN A CASE CONFERENCE IN THE LAST YEAR?   Yes/No   (if yes tick box)   ☐

If Yes: date: _____:_____:_____   place: _____

HAVE THERE BEEN ANY CHANGES IN THE CHILD'S SITUATION SINCE THE LAST REVIEW?   Major   1

_____   Minor   2

_____   No   3

_____

_____

PRIOR TO THE REVIEW, DO THE CASENOTES RECORD:

Long-term objectives?	☐
General objectives of casework?	☐
Specific decisions?	☐
Time limited tasks?	☐
None of these?	☐

IF THE CHILD HAS BEEN IN CARE LESS THAN ONE YEAR
WHAT WAS THE ORIGINAL ASSESSMENT OF THE CHILD'S NEEDS?

_____

_____

IS THIS DIFFERENT NOW?   Yes/No   (if yes, tick box)   ☐

If yes, why? _____

_____

WHERE WERE THE DECISIONS TO CHANGE THE PLAN TAKEN?

At a case conference?	1
At a review?	2
By senior and/or social worker?	3
By client?	4

DATA FROM REVIEW

2

1. CHILD'S NAME: _____   2. DATE OF BIRTH: _____:_____:_____

3. DATE OF REVIEW: _____:_____:_____   4. DATE OF LAST REVIEW: _____:_____:_____

Interval: months ☐

5. CHAIRMAN: _____

6. PRESENT:

Area Director	01	Child	07	School Representative	13
Senior Social Worker	02	Child's Foster Parent(s)	08	Health Visitor	14
Field Social Worker	03	Child's Natural Parent(s)	09	Police	15
Residential Officer in Charge	04	Care Branch Representative	10	Res. Staff	16
Residential Staff 2	05	Residential Staff 4	11	Other	17
Residential Staff 3	06	Fostering and Adoption Officer	12		

7.   TOTAL NUMBER PRESENT ☐

8. TIME REVIEW STARTED: _____   TIME FINISHED: _____   LENGTH OF REVIEW (minutes) ☐

9. DID THE REVIEW DEAL WITH CASEWORK ON:

the child alone   1
the child and siblings   2
the child and family   3

10. DID THE CONSULTANT SYSTEMATICALLY ASK ABOUT DEVELOPMENTS IN THE FOLLOWING AREAS? (If yes, tick box.)

medicals

present placement

behaviour

progress/school

family relations

finance

social work contact

11. WERE THE OVERALL LONG-TERM OBJECTIVES OF THE CASE:

assumed and not discussed again   1
re-affirmed   2
re-examined   3
modified   4
none of these   5

12. WERE THE GENERAL OBJECTIVES DISCUSSED IN TERMS OF SUB-GOALS?

no   1
yes, generally   2
yes, task-centred   3

13. AS A DECISION TAKING EXERCISE IS THIS BEST DESCRIBED AS:

	Discussion	Decisions
a holding operation because of expected changes	1	1
development of long term plans without specific decisions about means	2	2
development of long term including short-term goals	3	3
short term tasks with no reference to long-term goals	4	4
maintenance of the status quo	5	5

14. HOW WERE DECISIONS TAKEN FROM THE <u>LAST REVIEW</u> DEALT WITH IN THIS REVIEW DISCUSSION?

Decision Number

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
No longer appropriate	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
Not mentioned	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2
Generally	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3
Specifically	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4
Still appropriate maintenance of status quo assumed	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5

15. HOW MUCH AGREEMENT WAS THERE OVER THE DECISIONS?

Decision Number

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Total	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
Partial	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2
None	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3

16. WERE WAYS TO IMPLEMENT THE DECISION DISCUSSED?

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Yes, generally	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
Yes, specifically	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2
No	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3

17. WERE WAYS TO IMPLEMENT THE DECISIONS RECORDED?

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Yes	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
No	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2

18. DOES THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE DECISION REQUIRE COLLABORATION WITH OTHER AGENCIES?

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Yes	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
No	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2

19. WAS RESPONSIBILITY FOR IMPLEMENTING THE DECISION DISCUSSED?

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Assumed to be social worker	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
No	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2
Yes	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3

20. WAS DELEGATED RESPONSIBILITY RECORDED?

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Assumed to be social worker	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
No	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2
Yes	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3

21. WAS LACK OF RESOURCES DISCUSSED AS A CONSTRAINT ON DECISION MAKING?

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Major constraint	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
Minor constraint	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2
Not at all	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3

22. IF LACK OF RESOURCES WAS SEEN AS A CONSTRAINT, WERE ALTERNATIVES DISCUSSED?

No	1
Vaguely	2
Fully	3

23. HOW FAR DID THE REVIEW APPEAR TO BE CARRYING OUT THE FOLLOWING FUNCTIONS:

		Fully	Partially	Not at all
1.	Administrative check e.g. on case records.	1	2	3
2.	Monitor implementation of earlier decisions.	1	2	3
3.	Supervisory - check on work input of social worker.	1	2	3
4.	Make new decisions.	1	2	3
5.	Informational (i) - to inform A.D. and senior of work input and problems and hence safeguard s.w.	1	2	3
6.	Informational (ii) - to co-ordinate information on case/ resources from different personnel.	1	2	3
7.	To make earlier decisions more specific and to identify sub-goals.	1	2	3
8.	Staff training/development.	1	2	3
9.	To systematically reassess appropriateness of earlier decisions.	1	2	3
10.	To develop and record a long-term case plan.	1	2	3

24. TICK THOSE PHRASES WHICH, IN GENERAL TERMS, DESCRIBES THE CONSULTANT'S STYLE.

Systematic ☐

Has prior knowledge of details of case ☐

Acts largely as chairman ☐

Explores new approaches ☐

Asks about child's wishes ☐

Probes social worker input ☐

Accepting of the status quo ☐

Reflects policy down ☐

Emphasises accountability ☐

Accepts s.w. assessment ☐

Accepting of resource constraints ☐

Explore new resource alternatives ☐

NAME OF RESPONDENT: _____

☐ ☐ ☐ 3

PLEASE CIRCLE NUMBER AS APPROPRIATE

Senior social worker	1
Qualified social worker	2
Unqualified social worker	3
Social work assistant	4
Other	5

PLEASE WRITE IN BOX YEARS OF SOCIAL WORK EXPERIENCE

☐

CONSIDER THE FOLLOWING LIST OF POSSIBLE FUNCTIONS OF A REVIEW. PUT A TICK IN THE BOX AGAINST ANY FUNCTION YOU THINK REVIEW OUGHT TO FULFIL.

1. Administrative check, e.g. on case records

2. To monitor implementation of earlier decisions.

3. Supervisory - check on work input of s.w.

4. To make new decisions

5. Informational (i) to inform A.D. and senior of work input and problems and hence safeguard s.w.

6. Informational (ii) to co-ordinate information on case/resources from different personnel

7. To make earlier decisions more specific and to identify sub-goals

8. Staff training/development

9. To systematically reassess appropriateness of earlier decisions

10. To develop and record a long term case plan

PLEASE LIST BELOW ANY OTHER FUNCTIONS YOU FEEL A REVIEW OUGHT TO FULFIL.

_____

_____

_____

_____

☐

HOW SATISFIED ARE YOU WITH THE REVIEW PROCEDURE, IN GENERAL?

Very satisfied	1
Fairly satisfied	2
Fairly unsatisfied	3
Very unsatisfied	4

HOW SATISFIED ARE YOU WITH THE REVIEW PROCEDURE IN RELATION TO THOSE FUNCTIONS WHICH YOU HAVE TICKED ABOVE?

	not ticked	very satisfied	fairly satisfied	fairly unsatisfied	very unsatisfied
1. Administrative check, e.g. on case records	1	2	3	4	5
2. Monitor implementation of earlier decisions	1	2	3	4	5
3. Supervisory - check on work input of s.w.	1	2	3	4	5
4. To make new decisions	1	2	3	4	5
5. Informational (i) to inform A.D. and senior of work input and problems and hence safeguard s.w.	1	2	3	4	5
6. Informational (ii) to co-ordinate information on case/resources from different personnel	1	2	3	4	5
7. To make earlier decisions more specific and to identify sub-goals	1	2	3	4	5
8. Staff training/development	1	2	3	4	5
9. To systematically reassess appropriateness of earlier decisions	1	2	3	4	5
10. To develop and record a long term case plan.	1	2	3	4	5

ARE THERE ANY CHANGES YOU WOULD LIKE TO SEE IN THE REVIEW PROCEDURE?   Yes   1

                                                                          No   2

CAN YOU LIST THESE CHANGES?

_____

_____

_____

_____

HOW SATISFIED ARE YOU WITH THE REVIEW FORM (A) FOR INFORMAL REVIEWS, (B) FOR RESIDENTIAL REVIEWS.

	(a)	(b)
Very satisfied	1	1
Fairly satisfied	2	2
Fairly unsatisfied	3	3
Very unsatisfied	4	4

ARE THERE ANY CHANGES YOU WOULD LIKE TO SEE IN THE REVIEW FORM(S):

	(a)	(b)
Yes	1	1
No	2	2

CAN YOU LIST THESE CHANGES?

_____

_____

_____

_____

AT PRESENT THERE ARE NO STATUTORY REGULATIONS ON REVIEW PROCEDURES, RESULTING IN GREAT DIVERSITY OF PRACTICE IN DIFFERENT SOCIAL SERVICE AREAS. IN GENERAL, DO YOU FEEL THE INTRODUCTION OF STATUTORY REGULATIONS -

is essential	1
would be helpful	2
would be of some use	3
would make little difference	4
would be detrimental	5
is totally unnecessary	6

CAN YOU GIVE A BRIEF INDICATION OF THE THEORETICAL OR KNOWLEDGE BASE THAT YOU USE TO GUIDE YOU IN MAKING YOUR DECISIONS ON CHILDREN IN CARE:

_____

_____

_____

_____

WHICH OF THE FOLLOWING PHRASES BEST DESCRIBES YOUR OVERALL OPINION OF THE PART PLAYED, IN PRACTICE, BY THE STATUTORY REVIEW IN RELATION TO THE LONG TERM PLANNING FOR CHILDREN IN CARE:

- they put on record what the social worker has already decided

- they are a good opportunity to plan for the long term

- most of the important decisions are taken outside the review

- the overall ends may be decided but not the means to get there

- they are unnecessary

- the decisions sound good, but are soon forgotten or overtaken by events

- we often discuss the details of casework, without relating it to long term aims

- they are an effective way of determining both the objectives of the case and the means to achieve them

- they are the only time we check to see if we are doing what we said we should do

QUESTIONS TO SOCIAL WORKER ON EACH CHILD ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ 4

1. NAME OF SOCIAL WORKER: _____

2. NAME OF CHILD: _____

3. HOW LONG HAVE YOU BEEN THIS CHILD'S SOCIAL WORKER?   years ☐

    months ☐

4. HOW OFTEN, APPROXIMATELY, HAVE YOU SEEN THIS CHILD IN THE LAST SIX MONTHS? ☐

5. WHAT DO YOU SEE AS YOUR AIMS IN THIS CASE? _____

    _____

    _____

    _____

6. HAVE PLANS BEEN FORMULATED TOWARDS ACHIEVING THESE AIMS?   Yes   1

    No   2

7. ARE THESE PLANS RECORDED?   Yes   1

    No   2

8. IF PLANS HAVE BEEN MADE, HOW IMPORTANT WAS THE REVIEW PROCESS IN (A) FORMULATING THESE PLANS, (B) MAKING DECISIONS TO IMPLEMENT THESE PLANS?

	(A)	(B)
Very important	1	1
Fairly important	2	2
Fairly unimportant	3	3
Very unimportant	4	4

9. IN GENERAL HOW WOULD YOU DESCRIBE THE OVERALL CHILDHOOD EXPERIENCE OF THIS CHILD?

Very disturbed	1
Fairly disturbed	2
Fairly settled	3
Very settled	4

10. HOW WOULD YOU ASSESS THE POSITION OF THE CHILD AT PRESENT?

Very settled	1
Fairly settled	2
Fairly unsettled	3
Very unsettled	4

11. HOW WOULD YOU ASSESS THE SOCIAL WORK INPUT ON THIS CASE?

Very demanding	1
Moderate	2
Routine, but time consuming	3
Undemanding	4
Variable	5

12. LOOKING AGAIN AT THE LIST OF POSSIBLE FUNCTIONS OF A REVIEW, WHICH FUNCTIONS (A) SHOULD HAVE BEEN THE MAIN CONCERN OF THIS REVIEW, (B) WERE THE MAIN CONCERN OF THIS REVIEW (please tick up to a maximum of 5 different functions).

		(A)	(B)
1.	Administrative check, e.g. on case records	☐	☐
2.	Monitor implementation of earlier decisions	☐	☐
3.	Supervisory - check on work input of s.w.	☐	☐
4.	To make new decisions	☐	☐
5.	Informational (i) to inform A.D. and senior of work input and problems and hence safeguard s.w.	☐	☐
6.	Informational (ii) to co-ordinate information on case/resources from different personnel	☐	☐
7.	To make earlier decisions more specific and to identify sub-goals	☐	☐
8.	Staff training/development	☐	☐
9.	To systematically reassess appropriateness of earlier decisions	☐	☐
10.	To develop and record a long term case plan.	☐	☐

13. DID YOU UNDERTAKE ANY OF THE FOLLOWING SPECIFICALLY AS A PREPARATION FOR THIS REVIEW?

Updating of case records

Discussions with the child

Discussions with the child's family

Contact with the child's school

Contact with the child's doctor/health visitor

Discussions with foster parent(s)

Discussions with residential staff

Discussions with colleagues, including senior

14. DO YOU THINK THE PRESENT PLACEMENT IS THE MOST APPROPRIATE FOR THIS CHILD?

Yes, in the long run	1
Yes, in the short run	2
No	3
Don't know	4

IF NO, OR DON'T KNOW, PLEASE GIVE REASONS: _____

_____

_____

15. CAN YOU INDICATE ANY MAJOR DECISIONS THAT HAVE BEEN TAKEN BY THE SSD ON THIS CASE IN THE LAST YEAR, AND INDICATE WHERE THEY WERE TAKEN.

	Taken at review	Taken at case conference	Taken else-where
_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____

16. WERE ANY OF THE FOLLOWING INFORMED THAT A REVIEW WAS TAKING PLACE?

The child?

Natural parents?

Foster parents?

17. ARE THERE ANY ADDITIONAL RESOURCES WHICH, IF AVAILABLE, WOULD SUBSTANTIALLY ALTER YOUR WORK ON THIS CASE?

Yes	1
No	2

IF YES, PLEASE LIST RESOURCES BELOW:

_____

_____

_____

18. WHAT WAS THE EXTENT OF YOUR AGREEMENT WITH THE DECISIONS TAKEN AT THIS REVIEW?

Decision Number

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
total agreement	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
partial agreement	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2
no agreement	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3

19. IN SOME CASES THERE MAY BE CONSTRAINTS ON MAKING DECISIONS BASED SOLELY ON PROFESSIONAL JUDGEMENT. IN MAKING THESE DECISIONS, HOW FAR DO YOU FEEL PROFESSIONAL JUDGEMENT WAS CONSTRAINED BY OTHER FACTORS?

not at all	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
to some degree	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2
to a large degree	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3

IF THERE WERE CONSTRAINING FACTORS OPERATING CAN YOU LIST THESE BELOW?

Decision
Number   Constraints

_____   _____

_____   _____

_____   _____

_____   _____

_____   _____

_____   _____

20. LOOKING AT THE DECISION TAKEN AT THE REVIEW PREVIOUS TO THIS ONE, HOW WOULD YOU ASSESS THE EXTENT OF THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THESE DECISIONS?

Decision Number

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
fully implemented	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
partially implemented	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2
not implemented	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3
no longer appropriate	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4

IF THE DECISION IS STILL APPROPRIATE, BUT HAS NOT BEEN IMPLEMENTED, WHAT DO YOU SEE AS THE MAIN REASON FOR NON-IMPLEMENTATION?

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

GENERAL QUESTIONNAIRE TO RESIDENTIAL STAFF

1. NAME OF RESPONDENT: _____   ☐ ☐ 5

2. NAME OF ESTABLISHMENT: _____

3. POSITION WITHIN ESTABLISHMENT: _____

4. CONSIDER THE FOLLOWING LIST OF POSSIBLE FUNCTIONS OF A REVIEW. PUT A TICK IN THE BOX AGAINST ANY FUNCTION YOU THINK REVIEW OUGHT TO FULFIL.

1. Administrative check, e.g. on case records

2. To monitor implementation of earlier decisions

3. Supervisory - check on work input of s.w.

4. To make new decisions

5. Informational (i) to inform A.D. and senior of work input and problems and hence safeguard s.w.

6. Informational (ii) to co-ordinate information on case/resources from different personnel

7. To make earlier decisions more specific and to identify sub-goals

8. Staff training/development

9. To systematically reassess appropriateness of earlier decisions

10. To develop and record a long term case plan

PLEASE LIST BELOW ANY OTHER FUNCTIONS YOU FEEL A REVIEW OUGHT TO FULFIL

_____

_____

_____   ☐

_____

5. HOW SATISFIED ARE YOU WITH THE REVIEW PROCEDURE, IN GENERAL?
(please circle appropriate number)

Very satisfied	1
Fairly satisfied	2
Fairly unsatisfied	3
Very unsatisfied	4

6. HOW SATISFIED ARE YOU WITH THE REVIEW PROCEDURE IN RELATION TO THOSE FUNCTIONS WHICH YOU HAVE TICKED ABOVE?
(please circle appropriate number on each line)

	not ticked	very satisfied	fairly satisfied	fairly unsatisfied	very unsatisfied
1. Administrative check, e.g. on case records	1	2	3	4	5
2. Monitor implementation of earlier decisions	1	2	3	4	5
3. Supervisory - check on work input of s.w.	1	2	3	4	5
4. To make new decisions	1	2	3	4	5
5. Informational (i) to inform A.D. and senior of work input and problems and hence safeguard s.w.	1	2	3	4	5
6. Informational (ii) to co-ordinate information on case/resources from different personnel	1	2	3	4	5
7. To make earlier decisions more specific and to identify sub-goals	1	2	3	4	5
8. Staff training/development	1	2	3	4	5
9. To systematically reassess appropriateness of earlier decisions	1	2	3	4	5
10. To develop and record a long term case plan	1	2	3	4	5

7. ARE THERE ANY CHANGES YOU WOULD LIKE TO SEE IN THE REVIEW PROCEDURE?   Yes 1

                                                                                             No   2

    CAN YOU LIST THESE CHANGES?

    _____

    _____

    _____

    _____

8. HOW SATISFIED ARE YOU WITH THE REVIEW FORM FOR RESIDENTIAL REVIEWS

                                                            Very satisfied   1

                                                            Fairly satisfied   2

                                                            Fairly unsatisfied   3

                                                            Very unsatisfied   4

9. ARE THERE ANY CHANGES YOU WOULD LIKE TO SEE IN THE REVIEW FORM:

                                                            Yes   1

                                                            No   2

    CAN YOU LIST THESE CHANGES?

    _____

    _____

    _____

    _____

10. WHICH OF THE FOLLOWING PHRASES BEST DESCRIBES YOUR OVERALL OPINION OF THE PART PLAYED, IN PRACTICE, BY THE
    STATUTORY REVIEW IN RELATION TO THE LONG TERM PLANNING FOR CHILDREN IN CARE:

    - they put on record what the social worker has already decided

    - they are a good opportunity to plan for the long term

    - most of the important decisions are taken outside the review

    - the overall ends may be decided but not the means to get there

    - they are unnecessary

    - the decisions sound good, but are soon forgotten or overtaken by events

    - we often discuss the details of casework, without relating it to long term aims

    - they are an effective way of determining both the objectives of the case and the means to achieve them

    - they are the only time we check to see if we are doing what we said we should do

QUESTIONS TO RESIDENTIAL STAFF ON A PARTICULAR REVIEW

☐ ☐·☐ ☐·☐ ☐ 6

1. NAME OF RESPONDANT: _____

2. NAME OF CHILD: _____

3. HOW LONG HAVE YOU KNOWN THIS CHILD?   years ☐·☐

                                                          months ☐·☐

4. WHAT DO YOU SEE AS THE AIMS OF THE SSD IN THIS CASE? _____

    _____

    _____

    _____

5. TO WHAT EXTENT IS THERE AGREEMENT BETWEEN YOURSELF AND THE FIELD SOCIAL WORK STAFF ON THE AIMS FOR THIS CHILD?

                                              Total agreement   1
                                              Partial agreement   2
                                              Lack of agreement   3

6. HOW IMPORTANT IS THE REVIEW IN GUIDING YOUR MANAGEMENT OF THIS CHILD?   Very important   1
                                                        Fairly important   2
                                                        Fairly unimportant   3
                                                        Very unimportant   4

7. LOOKING AGAIN AT THE LIST OF POSSIBLE FUNCTIONS OF A REVIEW, WHICH FUNCTIONS (A) SHOULD HAVE BEEN THE MAIN CONCERN OF THIS REVIEW, (B) WERE THE MAIN CONCERN OF THIS REVIEW? (Please tick up to a maximum of 5 different functions.)

                                                                        (A)   (B)

    1. Administrative check, e.g. on case records

    2. Monitor implementation of earlier decisions

    3. Supervisory - check on work input of s.w.

    4. To make new decisions

    5. Informational (i) to inform A.D. and senior of work input and problems and hence safeguard s.w.

    6. Informational (ii) to co-ordinate information on case/resources from different personnel

    7. To make earlier decisions more specific and to identify sub-goals

    8. Staff training/development

    9. To systematically reassess appropriateness of earlier decisions

    10. To develop a long term case plan

8. DID YOU UNDERTAKE ANY OF THE FOLLOWING SPECIFICALLY AS A PREPARATION FOR THIS REVIEW?

    Updating of case records

    Discussions with the child

    Discussions with the child's family

    Contact with the child's school

    Contact with the child's doctor/health visitor

    Discussions with County Hall staff

    Discussions with social worker

    Discussions with colleagues

9. DO YOU THINK THE PRESENT PLACEMENT IS THE MOST APPROPRIATE FOR THIS CHILD?

Yes, in the long run	1
Yes, in the short run	2
No	3
Don't know	4

IF NO, OR DON'T KNOW, PLEASE GIVE REASONS: _____

_____

_____

10. WAS THE CHILD TOLD THAT THE REVIEW WAS DUE TO TAKE PLACE?

Yes	1
No	2

11. DO YOU INTEND TO DISCUSS THIS REVIEW AND ITS CONCLUSIONS WITH THE CHILD?

Yes	1
No	2

12. WHAT WAS THE EXTENT OF YOUR AGREEMENT WITH THE DECISIONS TAKEN AT THIS REVIEW?

Decision Number

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Total agreement	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
Partial agreement	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2
No agreement	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3

13. IN SOME CASES THERE MAY BE CONSTRAINTS ON MAKING DECISIONS BASED SOLELY ON PROFESSIONAL JUDGEMENT. IN MAKING THESE DECISIONS, HOW FAR DO YOU FEEL PROFESSIONAL JUDGEMENT WAS CONSTRAINED BY OTHER FACTORS?

Not at all	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
To some degree	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2
To a large degree	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3

IF THERE WERE CONSTRAINING FACTORS OPERATING CAN YOU LIST THESE BELOW?

Decision Number	Constraints
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____

14. LOOKING AT THE DECISION TAKEN AT THE REVIEW PREVIOUS TO THIS ONE, HOW WOULD YOU ASSESS THE EXTENT OF THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THESE DECISIONS?

Decision Number

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Fully implemented	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
Partially implemented	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2
Not implemented	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3
No longer appropriate	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4

IF THE DECISION IS STILL APPROPRIATE, BUT HAS NOT BEEN IMPLEMENTED, WHAT DO YOU SEE AS THE MAIN REASON FOR NON-IMPLEMENTATION?

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

CHILD'S NAME: .... [ ][ ][ ][ ][ ][ ][ ] [7]

1.   Is the child still in care or subject to statutory review?   YES / NO

2.   If <u>no</u>, what is the reason for the change? ....

     ....

3.   If the child is still in care has there been a change in any of the following:

     (a)   legal status   YES / NO

           from .... to ....

           What was the reason for the change? ....

           ....

           Who was the prime initiator of the change? ....

           ....

     (b)   child's placement   YES / NO

           from .... to ....

           Reason for change? ....

           ....

           Prime initiator of change? ....

           ....

     (c)   child's social worker   YES / NO

           from .... to ....

           Reason for change? ....

           ....

     (d)   amount of parental contact   YES / NO

           from .... to ....

           Reason for change? ....

           ....

           Prime initiator of change? ....

           ....

     (e)   resources/agencies involved   YES / NO

           from .... to ....

           Reason for change? ....

           ....

           Prime initiator of the change? ....

           ....

4.   How are the changes in the child's circumstances since the last review best summarized:

                                                                   major   [ ]
                                                             substantial   [ ]
                                                                   minor   [ ]
                                                                    none   [ ]

5.   Has there been a case conference since the last review?   YES / NO

6.   Has a court report been prepared since the last review?   YES / NO

						8

CHILD: ....

SOCIAL WORKER: ....

These questions are concerned with implementation of the decisions taken at the last review. Implementation can be viewed in two ways: I Implementation in terms of social work action to try to fulfil the decisions, regardless of the outcome; II Implementation in terms of the success in achieving the aims of the decisions.

I

(a) Consider each of the decisions taken at the last review in turn; did you work towards implementing them?

DECISION NUMBER

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
not at all	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
partially implemented	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2
fully implemented	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3

(b) How much social work effort was expended on each decision?

DECISION NUMBER

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
heavy social work input	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
moderate social work input	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2
limited social work input	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3
none at all	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4

(c) If the decision was not fully implemented was it for any of the following reasons?

DECISION NUMBER

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
lack of time	1							
social worker didn't agree with decision	2							
changes in circumstances	3							
the decision was a long-term one, no immediate action was required	4							
an oversight by the social worker	5							
changes in case work plans	6							
others (please specify)	7							

....

II

(a) How far do you think that each decision has been <u>successfully</u> implemented and achieved its aims?

DECISION NUMBER

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
not at all	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
partially implemented	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2
fully implemented	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3

(b) If the decision has not been fully implemented and successfully achieved its aims, was it for any of the following reasons?

	DECISION NUMBER							
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
The decision was a long-term one; the timescale was too short for implementation. (1)								
Lack of resources within SSD. (2)								
Lack of resources other than SSD. (3)								
Lack of social work input. (4)								
Decision became inappropriate because of changes in circumstances. (5)								
Decisions became inappropriate because of changes in casework plans. (6)								
Lack of co-operation of child. (7)								
Lack of co-operation of child's family. (8)								
Lack of co-operation of other agencies (please list). .... (9)								
Other (please specify) .... (10)								

III

(a) What do you see as your aims in this case? ....
....
....

(b) Do these differ from the aims of six months ago?

not significantly different [1]
noticeably different [2]
greatly different [3]

(c) If your aims are different is this primarily because:

the previous aims have been achieved; [1]
the previous aims were short run, and are no longer appropriate; [2]
changes in case work plans. [3]

(d) If there have been changes in the casework plans, do these changes relate primarily to actions initiated by:

the child [1]
the child's family [2]
the foster parents [3]
the SSD [4]
other agencies [5]
none of these [6]

(e) If changes were initiated by the SSD how were the changes in case work plans made?

By social worker alone. [1]
By social worker in consultation with senior. [2]
In supervision session. [3]
In case conference. [4]
Other .... [5]

1   These first questions refer to reviews held in the <u>area office.</u>

(a)   How would you assess the importance of the area reviews in regard to the operation or management of the
      social services departments?

extremely important	1
very important	2
fairly important	3
fairly unimportant	4
very unimportant	5
extremely unimportant	6

Why? ....

....

....

....

....

(b)   How would you assess the importance of the area reviews in regard to the service provided for the client(s)?

extremely important	1
very important	2
fairly important	3
fairly unimportant	4
very unimportant	5
extremely unimportant	6

Why? ....

....

....

....

....

(c)   How would you assess the importance of the area reviews in regard to your work in the social services
      department?

extremely important	1
very important	2
fairly important	3
fairly unimportant	4
very unimportant	5
extremely unimportant	6

Why? ....

....

....

....

....

(d)   Do you think there are any generalized causes for non-implementation of decisions taken at area reviews?

....

....

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....

....

2 Residential Reviews

(a) How would you assess the importance of the reviews on children in residential care?

extremely important	1
very important	2
fairly important	3
fairly unimportant	4
very unimportant	5
extremely unimportant	6

Why? ....

....

....

....

....

(b) How would you assess the importance of residential reviews in regard to the service provided for the client(s)?

extremely important	1
very important	2
fairly important	3
fairly unimportant	4
very unimportant	5
extremely unimportant	6

Why? ....

....

....

....

....

(c) How would you assess the importance of the residential reviews in regard to your work in the social services department?

extremely important	1
very important	2
fairly important	3
fairly unimportant	4
very unimportant	5
extremely unimportant	6

Why? ....

....

....

....

....

(d) Do you think there are any generalized causes for non-implementation of decisions taken at residential reviews?

....

....

....

....

....

....

3   Have you experience of reviews in another S.S.D. area?

                              Yes   1
                              No   2

   If yes, can you list the main advantages and disadvantages of the present system to others you have experienced.

   ....
   ....
   ....
   ....
   ....

4   In general terms, how good is your S.S.D. at developing and recording long-term plans for the children in
   its care or under its supervision?

                              very good   1
                              good   2
                              satisfactory   3
                              poor   4
                              very poor   5

   Why? ....
   ....
   ....
   ....
   ....

5   What do you see as the relationship between reviews, supervision, general casework plans and long-term
   planning?

   ....
   ....
   ....
   ....
   ....

6   On the last questionnaire I asked you to list possible functions of a review. Can you look again at this
   list and tick which you feel is the one most important function (a) for reviews within the area office and
   (b) in residential reviews?

                                                                                        (A)   (B)

   1. Administrative check, e.g. on case records.
   2. Monitor implementation of earlier decisions.
   3. Supervisory - check on work input of s.w.
   4. To make new decisions.
   5. Informational (i) to inform A.D. and senior of work input and problems and hence safeguard s.w.
   6. Informational (ii) to co-ordinate information on case/resources from different personnel.
   7. To make earlier decisions more specific and to identify sub-goals.
   8. Staff training/development.
   9. To systematically reassess appropriateness of earlier decisions.
   10. To develop and record a long-term case plan.

   Why did you choose this one? ....
   ....
   ....
   ....
   ....
   ....

CODING SHEET FOR DECISIONS

1. Area x   Melton and Rutland
          y   Area 3
          z   North Charnwood

2. Social worker number

3. Child's number

4. Placement

5. Review A - 1, B - 2, C - 3, D - 4

6. Decision number

7. Type of decision:

    1 - a new decision, because of change in circumstances
    2 - a new decision: changes in casework policy
    3 - a modified decision: made more specific
    4 - a modified decision, because of changes in circumstances
    5 - a repeat decision, but still appropriate
    6 - a repeat decision: still to be implemented
    7 - confirmation of a previous implicit decision

8. Specificity of goals:

    1 - very general
    2 - general
    3 - fairly specific
    4 - very specific
    5 - not applicable

9. Specificity of action:

    1 - very general
    2 - general
    3 - fairly specific
    4 - very specific
    5 - not applicable

10. Time scale:

   (a) If a time scale is mentioned:

   11 - if a new decision, is the decision likely to be implemented
        immediately
   12 - if a new decision, is the decision likely to be implemented
        within 6 months
   13 - if a new decision, is the decision likely to be implemented
        after 6 months
   14 - if an ongoing decision, will it remain appropriate for a short-
        term
   15 - if an ongoing decision, will it remain appropriate for inter-
        mediate
   16 - if an ongoing decision, will it remain appropriate for a long-term

   (b) If a time scale is not mentioned - is this because of:

   21 - no apparent planning
   22 - impossibility of prediction
   23 - a new decision assumed to be acted on immediately
   24 - an ongoing decision assumed to be implemented while still
        appropriate.

11. Prime focus on content:

   client oriented :   1 - to influence/manipulate individuals personality
                       2 - to influence/manipulate relationships
                       3 - to influence/manipulate the environment
                       4 - combination
                       5 - organisation oriented

12. Social worker activity (tick any which apply):

    1 - none
    2 - exploratory/(re) assessment activity
    3 - information/advice
    4 - mobilising resources
    5 - advocacy
    6 - education in social skills
    7 - check up review visiting
    8 - facilitating problem solving
    9 - sustaining/nurturing
   10 - group activities

13. Single most important activity of those above.

14. 1 - a decision with great impact on the child's life or circumstances
    2 - a decision with some impact on the child's life or circumstances
    3 - a decision with little or no impact on the child's life or
        circumstances

15. 1 - a decision with great impact on S.W activity/relations
    2 - a decision with some impact on S.W. activity/relations
    3 - a decision with little or no impact on S.W. activity/relations