Improving the Effectiveness of Social Services -
the challenge for public administration
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Abstract

Social services involve interactions with people that can be fraught and complex, are often based on partial knowledge of conditions, and may involve many partners and inadequate responses. The quality of social services delivery is a vital and undervalued consideration in the selection of social policy choices. A series of recent reviews not only repeat what is now well known about the low standard and underuse of well accepted evaluation methods³ but also point to systemic underuse of basic management practices including continuous improvement and operations research. Politicians encourage citizens to have an idealised view of what is achievable and this discourages the public sector from evaluation, continuous improvement and review that might suggest otherwise. Free and frank advice is generally seen as referring to policy, but this paper suggest that until operational practices are subject to more open review and challenge, that improvements in policy analysis and design will be hampered by delivery failings. The social investment approach is based on embedding in public administration practices which recognise the breadth of evidence that could be drawn on to provide an objective basis for citizens to have confidence in service delivery, and a constructive basis for come-at-ability⁴. Alignment of processes in the social services necessitates greater co-ordination within agencies as well as between them. Where public services are activities of last resort, such as child protection and incarceration, we need to be open about the likelihood of having only a limited ability to effect change, with sufficient independent oversight to ensure that system inadequacies cannot damage people more when they are vulnerable.

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² Presented at the Family & Relationship Services Australia conference; "Measuring Success in the Family & Relationship Services Sector", Canberra, 1 December 2016
³ Sir Peter Gluckman, September 2013: The role of evidence in policy formation and implementation A report from the Prime Minister’s Chief Science Advisor
⁴ Come-at-ability: A term used by Anthony King (The British Constitution) to describe the accountability of government to the public through a clear line of sight to someone responsible
Introduction

A series of reviews and initiatives including the focus on the social investment model has opened reflection on the social services system to an extent that we have not seen for several decades. As an attempt to describe or explain social investment, this paper first looks at what we have learned about the effectiveness of social services from a wide set of reviews. This suggests that we might have a need to reassess our basic understanding of how social services engage with people, and what they can achieve. As well as identifying opportunities to drive innovation and improvement in how social services are delivered, the experiences point to concerns about how the broader framework of public administration has come to be applied.

Social investment itself remains loosely defined as a policy position, and although it can be characterised as being a way of thinking, there is also a concise conceptual or ideological framework that is beginning to set the shape of some social programmes. At a Ministerial level, some distinct characteristics have been highlighted. The openness about the way social investment is being developed has created an opportunity that extends across the social services sector to critique and challenge many aspects of existing received wisdom.

Social services have to adapt to the changing makeup of New Zealand society, which may be changing more quickly than in earlier decades, not only in the way that wealth is accumulated and the changing expectations, opportunities and constraints that this brings, but also in the cultural diversity and structural shifts in the age mix that result from increased life expectancy, urban concentration and past periods of very strong immigration.

In this context, the existing arrangements for social services cannot keep meeting expectations for continually providing effective social services to a New Zealand society that has become more complex, and where families and communities are less and less homogeneous in their nature. The ways that citizens can hold government to account for the social services they receive are quite limited compared to health, policing or education. The performance management regime for public administration that has evolved has had mixed effects for the social services. This may reflect a strong degree of risk aversion at administrative and political levels of social services. This will stifle innovation compared to those sectors that have clear means for citizens to hold government to account. A genuine recognition of the complexity of citizens and of the uncertain effectiveness of most service provision of any sort should result in ensuring that performance failures are monitored and influence continuous improvement. This rarely happens now. Commissioning agencies have concentrated on low-trust, short-term contracting with high compliance costs, yet such contracting is often expected to enable contracted partner organisations to develop high trust long term relationships with vulnerable people and continued up skilling of staff. Performance is measured by transactions rather than transformation, yet it is this which organisations need to be enabled to do.

We do not know a lot about what we do now. Insufficient priority is given to capturing the knowledge gained by practitioners in the field, either in public services or NGOs. Successive governments have not found long-term solutions or contained trends of concern in family and child protection, youth mental health, violence, and housing. The term “wicked” has become a favourite label of policy experts and social scientists for issues which defy the analytical tools of the time.

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The Treasury website. “Social Investment is about improving the lives of New Zealanders by applying rigorous and evidence-based investment practices to social services.”
Social programmes are rarely evaluated on a regular basis in New Zealand. For many services, we are not able to determine the true level of demand. Without regular evidence, the effectiveness and efficacy of any social services programme should never be assumed to be very high across the whole population that it refers to. An incomplete framing of problems (e.g. family violence, child abuse, poverty) can lead to excessive trust in partial solutions. There is a bias towards the short term, and forgetting our past.

There are many ways to gather information through relatively low-cost processes\(^6\) that are not regularly adopted, perhaps because of an aversion to having to explain service deficiencies or insufficient quantitative skills. Usually any information that provides valuable evidence is not strong on all these aspects. Without such awareness, there is a risk that new data sources will be privileged to an extent that they constrain defining questions and the framing of social problems to fit the particular solutions relevant to where the new data brings richness to the analytical base. In order to adapt to the changes in our makeup and needs, we will never have sufficient or complete information to shape not only the nature of programmes and how they are assessed and monitored, but also the form of the wider social services system, and the way that the roles of policy advisor, standard setter, funder, service platform manager and direct provider fit together. All sources of evidence will be limited in their generalisability by the natural variation of citizens in the characteristics which are not measured. Individual variability cannot be removed by any process, and needs to be accounted for in models of all forms. Although we know little about the effectiveness of most programmes, that uncertainty is rarely acknowledged in how they are implemented, including in the rules staff are expected to follow or the autonomy they have to ensure that they always can do the right thing.

We cannot foresee all the important consequences of policy initiatives, yet a growing range of social services provision involve frequent long-term interactions with the same people. This requires a deeper foundation in evidence and more adaptive organisational forms than those that coped with the baby boomer generation and their families. Parts of the social services have become complex networked systems but they are not overtly led as such. Recent learning about social services, stimulated by the work of the Productivity Commission\(^7\), firstly brings the recognition that making service delivery effective needs to be an integral part of policy setting. Secondly, that solutions controlled from the centre cannot manage the diversity of need and circumstance of the society we have become, yet often reducing the autonomy of frontline staff has been the first response to cases that have gone wrong.

Existing single-agency focused solutions are less able to ensure the delivery of the social services needed now in New Zealand. Joined-up government necessitates greater co-ordination within agencies as well as between them. There is a growing range of social services provision involving frequent long-term interactions with the same people, which are often poorly managed. Even where such services are comprehensive and demonstrably effective, single agency responses are less likely to meet the long-term needs of vulnerable people and tend to put the short-term performance of the agency, rather than the interests of the child, its family and whānau as the focus for decision-making. There is insufficient use of evidence about what works and what doesn’t to improve outcomes as much as we need to. The lack of evidence creates uncertainty about the long-term effectiveness of programmes


\(^7\) NZ Productivity Commission 2015 “More Effective Social Services”
as well as ignorance of risks from how they are delivered. There is also much potential for uncoordinated services to simply be substitutes for existing services.

Enhanced access and richer analysis of existing administrative data is significantly increasing our understanding of individuals’ experiences within the public services of New Zealand, and those contracted to them, although limitations of coverage, classification, quality and comprehensiveness can remain. It is important to recognise that for any source of information we need to have some understanding of its representativeness, the comprehensiveness of the coverage, and the realism with which people’s characteristics are captured. The greatest increase in knowledge that these new analyses provide is to deepen our understanding of how the social services system has worked in the past, and the opportunity cost born by individuals of its failings.

The Productivity Commission report, various Superu studies, and the reports of the Prime Minister’s Chief Science Adviser have contributed to a change in the nature and importance of evidence for social service delivery. In particular, we now have:

- The beginnings of a rethink of what is evidence and how to value it
- Recognition of the special need for evidence in service delivery
- Identification of evaluation and continuous improvement as a vital element of free-and-frank advice in public administration
- Some recognition that there is a slippery path from ineffectiveness to dysfunction in public services that involve custody and protection
- The appearance of shifts in public sentiment such as attitudes to violence and abuse that bring a need to reframe how evidence can inform these social concerns and inform policy change
- A richer framework about social services delivery that can accumulate the evidence from the many reviews that can get quickly shelved
- A recognition of the importance of separating single operational incidents in social services from the findings that trigger systemic concerns in order to have more effective political discourse.

**NZ is Changing**

New Zealand’s prominence as a welfare state was founded on legislation put in place between the 1890s and the 1938 Social Security Act. An updated version of this Act was replaced by the Department of Social Welfare Act 1971. Social Development became the focus of this Act from 2001, and now it is the turn of Social Investment. These past changes have been reflected in shifts in fundamental elements of social policy, most particularly from universal to targeted services and benefits, cash instead of direct provision, and part, rather than full, funding as well as loans rather than grants. A strong base in tight contracting has matched the expansion of the NGO sector. Continually evolving has been the nature of families and communities that make up New Zealand, with public policy having to react to respond to the shifting vulnerability of an economy strongly dependent on international commodity trade, foreign investment and immigration, with the associated variability that brings. Recent reviews⁸ suggest that the legacy we have after a quarter century of trying to

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adapt is not impressive. One exception is Whānau Ora, where Māori are now leading the way with trust-based devolved provision, although the essential element of these integrated services continues to be limited by contracting with fragmented funding sources.

Loosely defined, social investment has a long history in New Zealand, as seen in a somewhat eclectic sample of earlier programmes. Although only ever achieved for most of the population, some might summarise the consistent, wider myth over the past century prior to the 1980s as having families as places where adults and children live and develop well regardless of their economic circumstance, health and history. Underpinning this was the assumption that good earnings from publicly stimulated employment and selected universal programmes would support families through stages of the life course. Whānau were not recognised as different from families. In fact, over the past century, most universal programmes have involved some selectivity in who or how people were included.

New Zealand has experienced a nearly constant level of births every decade since 1950, averaging some 600,000 births per decade. This is projected to continue until around 2050. We are unusual among OECD countries that although the overall fertility rate is little over half of that of fifty years ago, the number of births to New Zealand families continues. Were we to have taken full advantage of the options we have to care for and develop children, we may well have provided a consistent level of health care and education access to all these babies, an increasing share of whom are Māori and Pacific. By missing out on such an opportunity, the significant demographic advantages New Zealand has among the OECD countries go untapped.

For a far larger share of each new generation of babies to have good health and educational outcomes, they need better protection than earlier generations. We do not have a social

“Care and management for prisoners considered to be at risk of suicide and self-harm: observations and findings from OPCAT inspectors”
capital balance sheet to record changes in the avoidance of the depreciation of this human capital asset.

New Frontiers for Social Services

Applying and developing enriched information resources and technological capabilities

Information technology now enables a degree of operational cohesiveness across multiple partners to be a system attribute rather than a service speciality. Another dominant but not essential element is the belief that the data that is now becoming available along with analytical methods might enable the lifetime connection with social services of any individual to be predicted with sufficient reliability that changes over time in these estimates can be regarded as measures of the success or failure of targeted interventions. Whether prediction on an individual basis can be done reliably without excessive intrusion does not diminish the value at a group level of the understanding of pathways, transitions and concentrations that people have experienced.

Information technologies are a key resource in the transformation of the social services system in New Zealand. When a system wide, long-term lens is placed over many agency-managed programmes we will have a need to reframe existing outcomes and rethink performance measures that are just agency based, and recognise the greater need for modelling and data analysis. This is already apparent in family violence and child protection, as well as youth mental health. Such measures need to have as a major goal facilitating the accumulation of knowledge gained from the connections of delivery organisations with citizens. The experiences of citizens themselves are likely to be more telling and influential in shaping the way service networks function, given that it is citizens who to date have borne the costs of the current poor connections across agencies with related dealings with the same citizens. Continuous improvement is one means by which data analysis need to be complemented by comprehensive consumer validation of processes.

Social media and web-based systems are already changing the capacity to inform, connect and screen young people who have concerns and vulnerabilities in a variety of areas, particularly youth mental health and wellbeing. Having more channels to connect is likely to increase the reporting rate in situations of harm, and reduce the lag between abuse and reporting. Integrating such screening processes into a spectrum of responses by the social services system is being tested in several places. Unresolved confidentiality and privacy issues – need to distinguish between anonymised databases used for policy analysis and design, and confidential exchange of trustworthy confidential information among those involved in some community of practice. There is a lot yet to resolve before we can ensure that we are not on an unprotected pathway that could lead to a population register of those who come to the attention of social services.

Estimation of the likely long term fiscal liability of individuals

Central to the focus up to now of the social investment approach is that it is possible to model the experience of later groups of children from the information held within the state that has been used to monitor children of earlier periods whose care had become the responsibility of the state. These records have recorded the history of the engagement of earlier generations of people with like characteristics, as seen through the eyes of the state. What the state records reflects the operation at the time of the administrative processes and the statutes that agencies are accountable for, rather than the experiences of citizens with these processes, of which the state may be quite unaware. Misdeeds will be rarely admitted to in formal records even when responded to properly. One clear inference that results from
the Expert Panel Final Report: Investing in New Zealand's Children and their Families (Expert Panel Final Report) is that the purpose of the recording keeping was clearly not to bring about better outcomes or improve practice through any process of continuous improvement.

The Expert Panel Final Report introduced a range of invaluable analyses about the system for the care and protection of children in New Zealand by connecting the experiences at each stage of engagement from first being recorded as coming to the notice of Child Youth and Family (CYFS) through to engagement with the youth justice system. The analyses detail the many stages of lost opportunity, but what is not obvious is how much is due to truncated aspirations, disconnected processes and ineffective or substandard systems, and how much the likelihood that these children were already lost to society. We will never know, but we can be sure that fewer opportunities would have been lost if some sense of purpose, some firm oversight of process and practice, and some consistent effort to build rather than break the spirit of these children had been made. We cannot assume that the experiences of the children monitored by the state will represent those who we expect to experience an environment with very different aspirations, commitment and oversight.

It is possible to now understand what had been the likelihood of further engagement with social services by groups of individuals through analysing the information of their experiences held within government agency records. Applying the results of such analyses is conditional on assumptions about commonality of characteristics across generations, the capacity of information recorded by the state to adequately describe the influences on prospective behaviours, and similarity of administrative practice over time. Given that the analyses themselves have brought about a fundamental rethink of the system of care and
protection for children, testing assumptions must be a vital prerequisite for applying these past relationships in a prediction model.

The quality of estimates of the aggregate long term fiscal liability of individuals in the system will be limited by a poor understanding the current demand for social services. Unmet demand is not measured, nor are take up rates. Operating fixed annual budgets in the face of volatile demand brought year on year variability in the quality of service, and coverage for child protection and probably other services with similar characteristics.

**Meeting economic tests of effectiveness based on social return**

Social investment places importance on applying economic reasoning to social services operations even where no commercial markets exist. Where citizen experiences lead to unexpected preferences for alternative service lines, and analysis excludes or is not able to recognise the costs and risks faced by citizens, economic tests focused on just fiscal outcomes need to be complemented by other information. We have generally been poor at this, and therefore undervalued the potential of economic analysis that does. The prospect of having metrics that compare the long run value for money of interventions would greatly challenge decision-making about current services that remain unevaluated after inception. Rethinking the discount rate applied to the future estimated cost of social programmes has be a necessary component of this.

**Integrated Data Infrastructure**

The IDI provides rich opportunities to see the historical transition pathways of targeted groups, and where there have been concentrations of people with experiences that could be better supported with this new knowledge. Of course, the lives of citizens are much more variable than can ever be captured by the information gathered in research models or in administrative data collections. This limits to an unknown and unknowable extent the applicability of model parameters, predictions, rules and estimates of the likelihood of conditions and attributes, yet both operational rules and analytical models generally fail to take this uncertainty and potential for bias into account.

We have privileged some forms of information, and consequently ignore important evidence on many occasions. Of the individual characteristics that genuinely influence the life course only a few will be included in any modelling system. Administrative data sources contain a biased sample of those attributes – they are the ones generally needed to administer a specific statute. The information in the IDI is about citizens through the lens of the state, with very little about observing the actions of the state through the lens of the citizen. Where the sample on which the analysis is based is from administrative records, the modelling needs to have a strong validation process, to ensure that the variation in the individualised estimates that are based on aggregate measures is recognised and able to be considered when individual pathways are extrapolated. Most especially, correlation however strong is not an assurance of causation.

The former Social Investment Agency and the Social Investment Unit before it have focused on information sources and analytical methods. We need to ensure that methods have comparable relevance to Māori. The IDI provides rich opportunities to see the historical transition pathways of previously targeted groups, and identifies where there have been concentrations of people whose situation could have been better supported had this knowledge been available while they were undergoing these experiences.
Central Elements of Social Investment

The current social investment approach is driven by opportunities from new information sources and analysis, and is a Minister-led response to a concern about social services, that is based on identifying some key elements behind rethinking how government engages in social services. These include;

1. the balance between agency and citizen focus on performance
2. weaknesses in the gathering, accumulation and use of evidence,
3. the unrealised potential of data resources
4. concern about inability to have an effective contest for resourcing need, care and support that has the most long-term benefit.

The State and its citizens/people

Because the state is responsible for providing the very means by which it is held to account, without good, independent oversight we can only speculate whether we are doing as well as we can, and whether what is done is better than any alternative. Unlike a family of any form, the state cannot be held accountable as a family would be for how those in its care fare. Protecting vulnerable children is possibly one of the hardest jobs the government can take on for its citizens – to act in lieu of the family, to provide care and protection, to aim for all children to flourish. Given the difficulty of the task, the child protection system must be able to own up boldly to its own limitations. To succeed in this difficult task, those involved need to be held to account in a way which reflects the significance of its actions on the future potential of the child, and the knowledge we continue to gain about how we can avoid doing this badly.

Narrowed view of risk and accountability

The consumers of social services have minimal consumer power (come-at-ability), and their withdrawal of engagement is generally unlikely to have any influence on improved treatment of future consumers. Consequently, the often-belated connection of service components has been left to citizens, who must incur high transaction costs, which are rarely if ever considered when developing policy. Government agencies often have a strong focus on their agencies’ performance and accountability for process efficiency, without validating their performance by monitoring the experiences of the client. It can also involve developing innovative funding solutions that extend beyond the narrow form of contracts that have long shaped funding. Where there are multiple service providers connected to a single person, family or whānau, then the experiences of that person, family or whānau need to be the central focus of responsibility and accountability for such a group of providers. This requires commissioning and funding models and investment processes to be focused on the experiences of consumers and populations, and their wellbeing. The Children’s teams are an example of this, as are the Integrated Services pilots for Family Violence, in Christchurch and the Waikato. The nature of the trust between the citizen and providers is key to the effectiveness of the services. Accountability needs a central focus on the quality of the consumer experience; a strong proxy for this is the continuing relevance, responsiveness and comprehensiveness of services, and their affinity to the people that they serve. Assuring coherence in the mix of services for people with complex needs is more complicated and demanding than agent co-ordination, as is the multiplicity of ways that in practice they can
end up becoming involved with the service. Those involved in the Family Violence pilots report an increased level of satisfaction working in this way.

A tight rule based approach does not fit with providing services of any complexity. Statutory services through their codification of responses have a risk of obliging people to meet predetermined characteristics and are unlikely to provide staff with the autonomy to detect and respond to conditions that are unlikely to be anticipated in service design. High trust services are needed in family violence, child protection and youth mental health. There is a need to have a demonstrable strengthened capacity for a high degree of effectiveness in the connectedness of services that may not be achievable by a statutory process, where personal or anecdotes of experience will shape attitudes and determine trust. In some areas of high need including domestic violence and sexual abuse, victims often believe that they cannot trust others with their experiences. In providing services in areas where we do not have a strong evidence base for what is happening such as these, there is a need to have the capacity to draw on all experiences to build up information which gives otherwise unavailable insights into the operation of the system. Not all information of importance is obtainable by the codification of information gathered through rules based processes.

Screening methods can be influenced by differences in the aspirations for different groups that are implicit in policy, or in the expectations of those that deliver social services programmes. Māori have had different experiences from the same system because of this, and sometimes aspirations are constrained by those who are consumers themselves of the social services system. Evaluation can highlight where this occurs.

We have long known that the Māori population has different demographic characteristics, is spread differently around New Zealand and has different family and community structures through whānau and hapū. Māori still experience outcomes in health, education and employment that are outside the norm of those systems that deliver services. Experience has been to apply solutions that placed little importance on long term remedies relevant to the position of Māori or their place in the determination and application of services. The practices of service delivery and evaluation need to be aligned to the characteristics of the populations involved, to avoid systemic biases. Many of our approaches reinforce deficits for Māori and ignore the strengths and opportunities that exist within whānau and hapū to create change for themselves.

In the absence of good evidence, policy has a greater tendency to rely on rules and sanctions, with risks of consequent gatekeeping biases and unintended consequences. In our rather punitive society we have almost no knowledge of the impact of sanctions and penalties. In many areas, penalties have become significant tools (such as institutionalising children and adults) and there is only anecdotal and small study information on the effects, but all point to perverse effects that may have end results far worse than the original event which led to the sanction. There is a significant risk of perverse effects in all targeting mechanisms if targeting does not operate in an information intensive system, and agents are not subject to tests of “the right thing to do”. Māori have been placed in secure institutions at rates that can be 5 to 7 times the rest of the population, whether it be children’s institutions or prisons⁹, and borne the brunt when these have been doubtfully managed. Where targeting is based on loosely managed screening processes, the access to services can reflect the

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⁹ Waitangi Tribunal and Māori (April 2017) “In 2014, the Department declined an Official Information Act request from Mr Hemopo seeking to understand how the claimed reductions in reoffending affected Māori in particular. It declined the request on the basis that as ‘The Department does not calculate Better Public Services targets reductions in re-offending results separately by ethnicity . . . the documents alleged to contain the information requested does not exist’.”
capacity to game the system rather than demonstrated fit with the population that the eligibility and entitlement criteria were intended to match.

The public-sector reforms of the 1980s provided a much-needed lift in the integrity of the public finance system and the management of public assets, made it possible to define more explicitly (and often limit) the role of the public service agencies, and required Ministers to be explicit about their expectations. The reforms were aimed at significantly lifting the contest for scarce resources. The reforms also engineered opportunity for innovation and flexibility in practice although after just one decade this was increasingly followed by a heightened political aversion to risk taking in operational matters. The introduction into the Cabinet Manual\textsuperscript{10} of the so-called “no surprises” principle encapsulated this unfortunate shift well. In the social services sector where there are so many transactions to oversee, and many which will fail to meet expectations, this has resulted in Ministers and their departments putting in place internal limits on departmental transaction risk and down playing the external risks and costs faced by citizens, forbidding of advocacy by funded community organisations, limiting autonomy at an operations level, and minimising forms of evaluation likely to reach the public domain. Consequently, when independent reviews such as the recent expert review of child protection services take place, the findings inevitably reflect poorly on management practices that ought to have evolved with experience and feedback, and might have if it had been sought. Unlike the Police, Taxation and other parts of the state services that have statutory authority over some activity of citizens, in the social services and Corrections there is no institutionalised system of judicial review for citizens about their individual cases, and on some matters judicial review has been prevented by statute. The recent successful court prosecution by WorkSafe of the Ministry of Social Development after the murder of two staff in its Ashburton office led the Judge\textsuperscript{11} to decide that greater protection of staff was needed in these sorts of offices. This brought to the fore the difficulties in such service organisations in balancing the safety of staff and the quality of interaction between staff and beneficiaries. The court case highlighted how these can be weighed up differently by politicians, the judiciary, and public servants, generally to the detriment of citizens.

Practicalities of policy making and political accountability

Although not peculiar to New Zealand, the nature of political decision-making here reflects a strong capacity for decisiveness that is not necessarily matched by a comparable capacity or even appetite for deliberation appropriate to the risk, costs and impacts. Policy presentation can overshadow validation of performance, as seen in slogan based policies typified by the quick-fire compromises needed for coalition forming after each general election. Social services by their nature will always operate in this broad context. In New Zealand, the introduction of social investment is perhaps the most important acknowledgement by Ministers that the evolving political and public-sector response to the reforms of public administration of some 25 years ago, has failed citizens in several critical ways that have brought unwanted long-term consequences. We have been very slow to learn this. Most particularly, in a time when social problems have become more complex and demanding, we have failed to lift our capacity to know how effective current policy is and why. This will have hindered the thoughtful selection and expansion of areas and means that create ways to improve expected outcomes through innovation and continuous improvement. Furthermore,

\textsuperscript{10} Cabinet Manual section 3.16: The style of the relationship and frequency of contact between Minister and department will develop according to the Minister’s personal preference. The following guidance may be helpful – (a) In their relationship with Ministers, officials should be guided by a “no surprises” principle. They should inform Ministers promptly of matters of significance within their portfolio responsibilities, particularly where these matters may be controversial or may become the subject of public debate

\textsuperscript{11} CRI-2015-085-002309 [2016] NZDC 12808 Reserved judgment or Chief Judge Jan-Marie Doogue
while they have significant implications for services involving several agencies, the key elements of concern affect all services including those involving just one provider.

The last minute political party election specials we have experienced include interest free student loans and the removal of NZ Superannuation surcharges. Some economic analysts have observed that where the investment must be continued over an extended period to deliver an adequate rate of return, or where it involves a significant initial outlay of political capital or it is readily reversible, the risk of policy instability could discourage desirable policy change. Where existing policies are presumed to have special political significance, expenditure commitments will usually continue long into the future. New Zealand's mix of retirement arrangements including New Zealand Superannuation provide an example of this inertia.

In our rather punitive society we have almost no knowledge of the impact of sanctions and penalties. In many areas, penalties have become significant tools (such as institutionalising children and adults) and there is only anecdotal and small study information on the effects, but all\textsuperscript{12} point to perverse\textsuperscript{13} effects that may have end results far worse than the original event which led to the sanction. Sanctions and penalties are a poor and possibly counterproductive substitute for well-designed accountability processes.

The tight control of contacts, limited autonomy of front line staff, and the curtailing of evaluation are both a political and administrative response to managing the potential risk of failure. One result is to limit innovation in the social sector. Other sectors of public administration have developed more effective mechanisms, of the sort that the social services sector has sought to withdraw from, to respond to failures that involve activities of high risk. The Independent Police Conduct Authority, the Health and Disability Commissioner and the Independent Taxation Review Authority are all independent bodies who operate in a semi judicial capacity to judge complaints about actions of the Police, Health Sector and Tax authorities respectively. They provide a highly trusted second authoritative opinion on matters of deep concern to citizens. The Children’s Commissioner Act does not enable the Commissioner to be an appeal authority as with the others cited above. There is no comparable authority in the social services operated by government, and therefore the social services system has missed the opportunity that a periodic forensic external review of its processes provides when triggered by events of sufficient public concern.

Policy presentation can overshadow validation of performance, as seen in slogan based policies typified by “Three strikes and you’re out”, or the compromises needed for coalition forming immediately after each general election.

A system view

A system is an arrangement by which collective goals can be structured into a cohesive mix of component activities and processes carried out by different people in different places, and where the achievement of the higher-level purpose is enabled by adoption by all of common practices, standards and commitment to integrity of the end result. A system is more amoebic rather than mechanistic, in that through the trust that develops from shared learning and valuing feedback, the system will collectively adapt what it does as the context changes. The effectiveness of a system will depend on, among other things, the ability to relate the

\textsuperscript{12} Elizabeth Stanley, 2016: The Road to Hell: State Violence against Children in Post-war New Zealand

\textsuperscript{13} Three strikes and you’re out – seven years for pinching prison officer’s bottom
outcomes sought by the funder to the scope, form and quality of inputs that those closer to the action are able to deliver, while being committed to contributing their part in achieving the outcomes.

In terms of the volume and variety of transactions, the social services is probably the most complex area of public administration, and is strongly influenced by the structure, accountabilities, risk management and cultures of the public service. The level and nature of these transactions changed as targeting became more pervasive throughout the 1980s and 1990s. In retrospect, the shifting from universal programmes to increasingly intensive targeting during the last half of the 1980s could not have taken place at a more challenging time. Greater population diversity, multiple languages, an increased range of service options, increased prevalence\textsuperscript{14} of disorders that require intensive support, greater longevity and larger numbers of the infirm aged, the consequences of synthetic drug addiction, heightened family formation and dissolution, greater recognition and responsibility for child abuse and family violence as well as community treatment rather than institutionalisation of those with complex mental health conditions have all since required a degree of sensitivity to individual circumstance compared to the expectations of the universalist system that served the generations before the post war baby boomers.

\textit{Systems knowledge and leadership weak}

There are some common themes in almost all reviews of social services that have prevailed despite reforms and endeavours of many kinds, one of which has been the lack of oversight of the connections between and within agencies at many of the important transition points experienced by people. Joined up government approaches need to emphasise greater coordination within agencies as well as between them. Collaboration among and within public agencies has ended up as a weak element in New Zealand’s public sector, and contracting with community organisations has had a dominant emphasis on short term cost management, with the unintended consequence that continuous improvement and innovation in social services based on provider experience and knowledge has been undervalued. Although critical connections between services need to be tightly managed because of the likelihood of failure or unnecessary cost to citizens, they often are not, even when they are in the same agency. Sector level leadership has been seriously lacking. Assessment and exchange of experience and information have not been systematised at all levels, so that sharing of systems, practices and operational processes across agencies has only been achievable in piecemeal ways. Compliance with the Privacy Act 1993 has at times become the excuse. Without effective sector leadership of the natural tension between the various roles the public service has had, these roles have become muddled in ways which have generally minimised public sector and Ministerial accountability, especially in the areas of standard setting and network platform management. Public and community sector providers have had their roles narrowed (“not our core business”), exacerbating difficulties in adapting to the increased complexities in social service needs. This muddling of the management of the social services sector has tended to transfer parliamentary accountability away from the responsible lead departments on to delivery partners, while gradually reducing the means of citizen redress.

The Productivity Commission in its report “More Effective Social Services”\textsuperscript{15} highlighted just how complex the social services system is and how far it is made up of a wide range of

\textsuperscript{14} The number of children diagnosed with autism or related disorders has grown at what many call an alarming rate. In the 1970s and 1980s, about one out of every 2,000 children had autism. Today, the CDC estimates that one in 150 8-year-olds in the U.S. has an autism spectrum disorder, or ASD.

\textsuperscript{15} NZ Productivity Commission 2015 “More Effective Social Services”
participants inside and outside government (e.g. clients, families and whānau, funders, providers, community) linked together by formal and informal rules as well as various relationships. Their review infers that the sector agencies remain ill prepared for delivering solutions that can deliver better long-term outcomes, because they have often not adapted well to the changing nature of what is needed. Many agencies and those contracted by them have only needed to see the part of the system they deal with closely to meet performance obligations. They often have little history of seeing themselves as part of a whole in which everyone is responsible for improved outcomes. This includes taking actions that support working within networked systems and as sharing information and working co-operatively. Effectively networked systems generate self-correcting mechanisms that would otherwise be left to the resolution of consumers unless continuous improvement is strong.

Where responsibilities are not well co-ordinated, there are potential risks for clients if the system doesn’t work effectively, and in some situations, such as protection from family violence, this can be tragic. The challenges facing our most vulnerable children and families are multi-faceted and cross many agencies so singular solutions deliver only partial solutions, and not meet outcomes. This point was made quite strongly by the expert review of child protection. For example, while the loss of documents by agencies is a key concern of those that use social services, the largest social services provider, MSD, does not keep records\(^\text{16}\) that enable the monitoring of this and hence initiate actions that might reduce the frustrations and stress it causes. Similarly, the Ombudsman inquiry\(^\text{17,18}\) into prisoners at risk of suicide found no proper record keeping of treatments, judging that this “amounted to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment for the purpose of Article 16 of the Convention against Torture”. The 2017 review of the Children’s Commissioner into secure institutions operated now by the Ministry for Vulnerable Children found that the seven institutions had even now little in the way of any common strategy for improvement, with limited commitment to improve practices and an absence of system leadership.

**A need to understand networks**

Behind most social services are delivery organisations that are usually loosely bound, generally with insufficient means of bringing a cohesive service platform to the networks to ensure their overall performance. In the absence of recognising such a system-wide need, we can anticipate organisations with sufficient scale might develop capability to have an advantage when services are put out to tender, undervaluing the expertise and experience of smaller, localised providers. How well network platform facilitation is understood, managed and resourced will determine the capacity of the social services system to meet the needs of an increasingly complex society and to collect and use the information we need.

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16 Of Request: “Can I have a summary that shows the number of times a beneficiary has to return to MSD because their documents or any part of them has been lost by MSD when servicing the request. Information for the last five years if available please.” Response 30/3/2017 from MSD “The information you have requested is held in notes on individual case files. In order to provide you with this information Ministry staff would have to manually review thousands of files.”

17 Ombudsman 1 March 2017: ‘Care and management for prisoners considered to be at risk of suicide and self-harm: observations and findings from OPCAT inspectors’

18 In April 2016, I requested the following information on tie-down beds from Corrections National Office:

1. Which sites have tie-down beds?
2. Which sites have used the tie-down beds between 1 April 2013 and 12 April 2016?
3. On how many occasions have they been used?
4. What was the duration of each tie-down episode?
5. How many prisoners have been secured on tie-down beds during this period?

The Department informed me that there is no central recording system for documenting tie-down bed use and that individual prisons do not record the information in logbooks.
to change long term outcomes in key areas of social concern. The public sector is particularly weak in this regard, and may have more to learn from the NGO sector what it has to offer. The Whānau Ora commissioning bodies could not draw on an available body of knowledge to inform their initiatives, and the mixed experiences of the health sector point to the importance of strong leadership at the network centre. The enablers that are needed for a network platform include legislation, cross-sector governance, accountability and funding, a range of standards and decision-making tools, as well as relevant data exchange and analysis. When we have only part information, or apply part solutions or have only part of the connections needed and are only partly trusted in this, then system leadership will make or break a service.

The reports referred to earlier all highlight difficult-to-resolve tensions associated with the agency-specific focus of public sector performance assessment and public sector contractual agreements. This has intensified existing concerns about the way the current public service agency management model has been applied to social services. Among the serious impacts of this have been that outcomes have been developed from a dominant single-agency perspective. This has then determined how responsibility for supporting people is delineated, information is gathered, and how the connections among involved bodies are managed and monitored, if at all. While we must expect that there will be many cases where programmes act as substitutes rather than increase the range or scope of effective services, this is rarely tested.

When network facilitation is provided collectively, the commissioning process is less likely to privilege the contract management investment afforded by large nation-wide organisations, hence increasing contestability and innovation as well as the adaptability to changed demands. Participants in the system need the capability to operate in new ways, using evidence in their decision-making. There needs to be knowledge of how the system is performing. Poor network facilitation comes with a high opportunity cost. Shifting the focus of accountability on to the experiences of consumers rather than self-referencing measures of agency performance is a critical shift.

The connection between government and NGOs

We know far less than we need to about how to effectively engage the non-government sector, and Māori, in the design and delivery of services, nor are we highly experienced in the key system wide elements that should underpin decision support for all participants in the social services. We have a strong basis for concern that the delivery of well-established social services poses both fiscal risks, and generates significant costs to the very citizens that are being supported. In practice, we have fallen short of such an ideal view of the world for many reasons, many of which will always be with us.

To make improvements by contrasting what is being done now with knowledge of “what works” from evaluation studies. The lion’s share of social services has either never been effectively evaluated, or have had no evaluation done in recent years. As such it is not possible to confirm the continuing validity of the fundamental assumptions behind either the policy or its delivery, or determine the potential for its improvement. The Ministry that has central responsibility for the integrity of the social services system, MSD, has not been active in making public much of its evaluation of its own work. Knowing that policy and investment decisions have translated into effective action is critical for trust and holding government to account. Service delivery partners need to be supported in their need to build long term relationships based on trust. This requires appropriate commissioning and contracting models that support devolved decision-making and integrated services as needed. The contribution of all partners to the knowledge base and enabling of continuous improvement needs to become an integral part of commissioning. A strong focus on effective implementation is essential. The diverse range of capable providers involved in social
services need to be effectively connected. The nature of relationships with the NGO sector needs to move away from a low trust high accountability cost regime, which will require a deeper understanding by commissioning agencies of what value NGOs add and the longer-term impact.

Performance assessment has been based on low trust contracts focusing on short term transactions and distant goals

There is a need in high-trust services to be able to sustain long-term funding but the current approach to contract management cannot provide assurance. We have an increasing body of evidence to draw on in assessing the capability of an NGO that can change commissioning practice.

Contractual obligations to report have often generated monitoring requirements that undermine rather than reinforce what is needed for continuous improvement. This has reduced the autonomy that organisations must have to lead improvements in their own performance, and to contribute to the improved performance of the field of endeavour that they are a part of.

The nature of the contest for resources adds to the difficulty in making communities of practice work effectively:

- Accountability for fiscal outcomes overwhelms obtaining information for quality improvement, innovation and improved system knowledge.
- System assessment of performance in aggregate is not built up from (or coherent with) the highly granular signs or elements of progress that dominate practice on the ground.
- Undervaluing of capacity of NGOs to establish sustainable long-term relationships based on trust needed for the retention of client/service connection (for example family violence, rape crisis).
- Social services need a diverse range of providers. To successfully meet the needs of our diverse populations we will need a diverse range of providers. This raises questions as to how we best support this and retain the diversity we need.
- Limited use of the potential in NGOs to add to knowledge of social services system
- There needs to be much more sense of what is happening outside government used in government decision-making.

The Nature and Place of Evidence

It is of vital importance that we pay more attention to implementation of programmes. To achieve improved outcomes, we need effective implementation as well as effective policies and programmes. Over the years we’ve amassed a lot of research knowledge and practitioner know-how about what works in social services but outcomes for clients haven’t necessarily improved in line with these advances in knowledge.

The analysis of historical data is only rarely associated with deep reflection on the past performance of policies which may have contributed to where we are now, such as high rates of institutionalisation and imprisonment, and of Māori, and the extent of historical abuse. We may continue to be limited in how we frame our thinking without the capacity for such reflection. The State’s record of events is incomplete but brings huge value to what we now know.
Knowledge is always incomplete

In an ideal world, evidence-based policy would be based on an understanding of the lives and characteristics of citizens and what influences them with sufficient certainty that we will know what can prevent or reverse deficiencies, or offer advantages that would be otherwise unavailable. Ideally, we would have sufficient evidence to design services, instruments and rules which through testing and modelling we anticipate with some certainty could achieve these goals, and the systems, processes and institutions put in place to manage such services will do so without fault.

There is now a rich array of data now able to be assembled about the interaction of citizens and the state. Most importantly, the data analyses summarise well what happened in the past. Through this, we now highlight the opportunities that have been lost at each stage of the care and protection system. For all processes, we need to test and understand whether what actually happened on the ground has matched what was intended. The new data analyses also point to where future research could more effectively inform might be done in response.

By themselves, the data analyses may enable outcomes to be predicted for different groups in the community. What the state has recorded has reflected the operation of the administrative processes and the statutes that agencies were accountable for, rather than the experiences of citizens with these processes, of which the state may be quite unaware. We know that for some groups including Māori their experiences may have been different at each stage. Misdeeds will be rarely admitted to in formal records even when responded to properly. To predict the future of others from these experiences, it is a little like navigating a car in fog, or even through the rear vision mirror, less unsafe when the road is straight, and when we already know what we pass before we need to turn left or right.

Lot of unknowns about how we do things

The experience of Superu in the evaluation of youth mental health programmes, family violence initiatives and other areas suggests that the ex post evaluation of how a multiplicity of individual initiatives that have themselves been variously evaluated is quite resource consuming. Given the vital importance of evaluation for the effectiveness of social services, having an effective continuous improvement strategy as a complement to more comprehensive evaluation initiatives is quite resource consuming. Given the vital importance of evaluation for the social services model, having an effective continuous improvement strategy as a complement to more comprehensive evaluation initiatives is an urgent requirement across the social services, for which leadership is currently lacking. Continuous improvement can be initiated independently at any time. Across the public sector, this need for a system wide strategy for continuous improvement has been recognised by the SSC leadership of “Continuous improvement for the State Service” but so far it is unclear how those agencies with a longstanding involvement in continuous improvement which are not part of the social services system will influence similar commitment in the social services sector.

Increasing the amount of ex post evaluation of a multiplicity of individual initiatives that have themselves been variously evaluated is going to be quite resource consuming. Given the vital importance of evaluation for the social services model, having an effective continuous improvement strategy as a complement to more comprehensive evaluation initiatives is an urgent requirement across the social services. The agencies that need to lead this are not well prepared for this. Furthermore, a past culture of limited evaluation and weak modelling makes a focus on “what works” more difficult as information on existing practice is not in a form that is readily accessible to those to whom it is most relevant.

Reporting of incidents is incomplete for many problems including violence and abuse, and system responses are variable, while concepts of efficacy and effectiveness are difficult to apply without the support of on the ground experience and case studies that are usually
poorly captured. To improve efficiency and equity we have a strong imperative to adopt and apply whatever reasonable means to gather evidence about the social services system for its continual adaptation. With a major shift in the evidence base, particularly from the IDI and Growing Up in New Zealand, we need to learn how to make best use of such additional sources, and what gaps remain in the knowledge base.

A weak commitment to evaluation

To make good choices, decision-makers need to understand the nature of the problems they are trying to solve and the long-term shift in outcomes they are trying to achieve, for whom, and how. Using information about what works for whom, when and where (e.g. in what part of the system; at what stage in the life-course) and at what cost would enable decisions to be made about whether there are appropriate solutions, and where to invest. Independent monitoring and evaluation of choices could ensure that they continue to be effective. Methods need to have comparable relevance to Māori in both the integrity of policy analysis and ensuring operational effectiveness.

A past culture of limited evaluation and weak modelling makes strengthening the focus on “what works” more difficult, as past information on practice has not often published or has not been in a form that is readily accessible to those to whom it is most relevant. Deficiencies in operations management can be the result of poor recording and analysis of the effectiveness of components of services, as well as not using relevant metrics for reporting impacts or from the weak sharing of experiences within and among public sector and community organisations. In general, the policies which determine the fundamental design of the social services system and its elements are assessed at irregular intervals, with little consistency in the issues which trigger review. For many policies, we know little about their effectiveness, yet that uncertainty is rarely acknowledged in how they are implemented. Nor can we foresee all the significant consequences of programmes.

A long-term view

There is recognition that insufficient analysis has generally been undertaken using the available observational studies, and this has been associated with a quite poor interaction between academic experts and public-sector policy analysts. The introduction of departmental scientists under the Prime Minister’s Chief Science Advisor is one response to this. An incomplete framing of problems (such as for family violence, child abuse and poverty) can lead to excessive trust in partial solutions. The recognition of social change can be tardy. The recent review of the Department of Children and Young Persons indicated a strong need to uplift the general level of competence in quantitative analysis, and a risk that complex modelling might be a black box.

Social investment is driven by long-term outcomes. It aims to direct resources where action now is known to bring measurably better results in the future. It is an evidence based challenge to a bias towards short term in policy choices

This requires a good understanding of when and how government needs to invest in a person’s life to make a difference to their outcomes in the longer-term. To intervene early requires information on effectiveness and efficacy. A variety of models will be needed for this.
Social investment requires an ability to predict lifetime connection with social services, and compare benefits and costs whenever they arise.

A delayed recognition of social change impacts on fundamental assumptions critical to policy. Many consequences of policies are unintended and may take some time to appear.
Child protection, family violence and imprisonment rates in New Zealand are difficult to forecast, as we have insufficient understanding of the drivers from available research, and it is only in recent decades that family violence and child abuse have become matters that have been near the forefront of policy development.

The world view of the times (or the way issues are framed) prevails not only on the form of public policy government adopted about wellbeing, but also what we have considered we need to know about. This influences the commitment to relevant research, official statistics and administrative reporting, not only in scope and form, but also analytical depth and accessibility. This has led to unchallenged myth, anecdote and un-validated theory playing a significant part in public policy in New Zealand that has been intended to enhance well-being. It has consequently resulted in occasional visionary change, perhaps only later validated by analysis, where relevant research has not initially existed to inform policy implementation.

In family violence, central to public policy for several decades has been taking police action against perpetrators, but with a residual strong obligation on victims to look after themselves. Harm has been measured in terms of physical violence, and periods of incarceration the key response. Insights we now have because of recent reviews and the work of the Family Violence Death Review Committee have inspired a comprehensive reframing of family violence policy, with implications for rethinking the form of harms, who is involved, and the place of family violence in the broader context of New Zealand’s high levels of violence generally and child abuse. Such thinking leads to a very strong focus on need to have much greater commonality of expectations on men and women as parents, as well as elevating the importance of safety of children, and recognise limits to capacity.

Taking opportunities to learn and deepen thinking

A focus on the long-term requires the ability to understand when causality is sufficiently strong that it could determine the form and justify the introduction of social service programmes. In providing a synthesis of what has been observed in the past, models can help understanding of the future, to a varying and sometimes unknown extent. There are considerable opportunities for a more systematic and rigorous application of analytical methods that will often be quite simple. Statistical models (population, life course, human capital modelling et alia) can establish relationships and identify the existence and extent of causality between conditions. They can draw on the knowledge and know-how within the social sector to inform prospective policy options and improve practice, as well as anticipate the impact of trends in the dynamics of population change and emerging age and ethnic mixes, on current and alternative policy options. We need to understand our past well, but the means19 of doing this, such as evaluation, can appear to undermine confidence in current programmes. The cessation of policies, as well as their introduction, involves assessing the impact on fiscal outcomes and aspects of citizen wellbeing, including potential harms.

19 Includes forensic analyses such as the Family Violence Death Review, Inquiry into institutional Child Abuse, special reviews such as the Expert Review of Child Protection, Coroners reports
The power of any model lies not only in its conceptual strength, but in the soundness of the methods, the quality of how they are applied, and the transparency of the values which underpin their selection and application. Through exploitation of both new and existing information sources there is considerable potential now to extend the analytical capability applied to understanding the wider social services system. Improving the quality of social services challenges the design of the whole social services system and necessitates a rethink of the commitment to longitudinal sources, broader assessments of the lifetime accumulation of capital by individuals and its variability in different phases of the life course. There is a preference to intervene early, which needs to be analytically based. Social investment is a currently preferred approach that aims to direct resources where action now is known to bring measurably better results in the future. This requires a good understanding of when and how in any person’s lifespan government might invest to make a difference to their outcomes in the longer-term. A variety of models have the potential to inform this. Life course studies are some of what can be done here. These techniques exist, are well tested and need to be applied.

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20 Actuarial models that focus on future government spending have earlier been given prominence that may privilege them compared to other models that enable us to predict impacts of investments on the long-term outcomes of individuals (e.g. good physical and mental health). For example, the life expectancy measures that are used in lifetime estimates are subject to regular revision, and measures of the differential life expectancy of key population groups are incomplete and imprecise.
Understanding Outcomes

Social investment is driven by long term outcomes. It aims to direct resources where action now is known to bring measurably better results in the future. This requires a good understanding of when and how government needs to invest in a person's life to make a difference to their outcomes in the longer-term. A variety of models will be needed for this. Actuarial models that focus on future government spending are one part of the picture. Other models that enable us to predict impacts of investments on the long-term outcomes of individuals (e.g. good physical and mental health) are also needed. These techniques exist, are well tested and need to be applied. We understand that the Social Investment Unit (SIU) is doing work on this. In any such work we need to ensure that methods have comparable relevance to Māori.

Outcome failures persist

Child protection, family violence and imprisonment rates in New Zealand are difficult to forecast, as we have insufficient understanding of the drivers from available research, and it is only in recent decades that family violence and child abuse have become matters that have been near the forefront of policy development. We have yet to understand the connections between the two, and the influence of New Zealand's high levels of violence generally. The new data analyses we are getting takes us closer to understanding the opportunities lost from how systems have operated in the past. Where system wide collaboration exists in any form, as with recent initiatives in family violence, this requires strong leadership at very high levels for such collaboration to be sustained. Government departments rarely recognise the significance of what families, communities and NGOs provide. Only rarely does social policy recognise that a family and household contribution is always there and needs to be valued and protected, rather than hindered by more rules and prohibitions. The leadership by the Ministers of Justice and Social Development of family violence initiatives exemplifies what needs to be done if there are to be significant shifts in operational integration.
Māori are disproportionately represented in the client base of services that target and aim to help those at risk of poor outcomes. Many of our approaches reinforce deficits for Māori and ignore the strengths and opportunities that exist within whānau and hapū to create change for themselves. Furthermore, the understanding of where and why the NGO sector can deliver services with a higher effectiveness and efficacy is poor, as performance requirements of public agencies that they are contracted to are almost universally focused on overly comprehensive requirements for fiscal accountability, leading to their disinterest in and often the crowding out in NGOs of measures which would continuously improve delivery or bring new knowledge about the overall system. We have yet to see the social services system recognise the knowledge being gained from Whānau Ora as a trail blazer for improving social services effectiveness. Only rarely does social policy recognise that a family or whānau and household contribution is always there and needs to be valued and protected, as does that of the community generally.

**Importance of framing**

The analysis of historical data is only rarely associated with deep reflection on the past performance of policies which may have contributed to where we are now, such as high rates of institutionalisation and imprisonment, and of Māori, and the extent of historical abuse. We may continue to be limited in how we frame our thinking without the capacity for such reflection. How evidence is organised determines how we frame thinking, whether it be about evidence gathering, policy analysis or implementation.

The world view of the times (or the way issues are framed) prevails not only on the form of public policy government adopted about wellbeing, but also what we have considered we need to know about. This influences the commitment to relevant research, official statistics and administrative reporting, not only in scope and form, but also analytical depth and accessibility. This has led to unchallenged myth, anecdote and un-validated theory playing a significant part in public policy in New Zealand that has been intended to enhance wellbeing. It has consequently resulted in occasional visionary change, perhaps only later validated by analysis, where relevant research has not initially existed to inform policy implementation.

In family violence, central to public policy for several decades has been taking police action against perpetrators, but with a residual strong obligation on victims to look after themselves. Harm has been measured in terms of physical violence, and periods of incarceration the key response. Insights we now have because of recent reviews and the work of the Family Violence Death Review Committee have inspired a comprehensive reframing of family violence policy, with implications for rethinking the form of harms, who is involved, and the place of family violence in the broader context of New Zealand’s high levels of violence generally and child abuse. Such thinking leads to a very strong focus on need to have much greater commonality of expectations on men and women as parents, as well as elevating the importance of safety of children, and recognise limits to capacity of non-violent partner to manage protection. Long term resolution will not come from resolving unrelated incidents of family violence without deep understanding of patterns of behaviour and what drives them. Broader solutions involve trauma exposure responses, promoting responsible fatherhood, perpetrator accountability and change including community and government, corrections, courts and law enforcement. Appendix 2 presents the Family Violence Death Review Committee Brief for action as an excellent example of how complex issues need to be regularly reassessed for determining what is the right thing to do.

Providers of public services face many challenges. They need to be fiscally prudent, meet the many compliance obligations placed on them, and meet consumer’s demands. We understand the right thing to do in terms of efficiency and how a providers’ performance is
assessed will not necessarily be the right thing to do for citizens. How they relate is rarely tested unless a catastrophe occurs like the Havelock North water supply, where oversight of the town water supply was not up to the requirements of such a critical contributor to public health. Town water management cannot be managed as just another form of water reticulation, just as family violence cannot be managed as a reaction to independent incidents.

**Ideas of social investment have long been part of social policy in NZ**

Examples of social investment from New Zealand’s past include;

1. The Old Age Pensions Act 1898 which introduced a pension for the “worthy poor” was justified by the Seddon Government at the time as recognition of the contribution that those eligible had earlier made to the development of New Zealand.
2. The central elements of the Social Security Act 1938 focused on public provision of remedies for specific areas of deprivation (housing, health, education) and associated employment policies including the protection of the purchasing power of the “working man’s wage” as the basis of family welfare. Taxpayers were all levied a separately identified tax of 1/6 in the pound or 7.5 per cent of income, although there was never a separate fund.
3. From 1958 the family benefit could be capitalised by married couples to form a deposit on a house, with access to mortgage funds at 3 per cent interest.
4. In a 2013 deal aimed at saving 800 jobs in the southernmost town of Bluff after New Zealand Aluminium Smelters threatened to move offshore, a lengthy standoff was ended with a $30 million Government subsidy which now gives the smelter electricity at about ¼ the rate households pay.
5. The options we have for the sustainability of New Zealand’s retirement provision are just three, all of which involve investment preferences:
   a. reduce the absorption of resources of the elderly by their increased labour force participation, or lowered pension entitlements (lower entitlement or later age of eligibility);
   b. increase the command over resources of the economy by greater national savings, public or private;
   c. increase the productive capacity of the economy by continuing growth in productivity.

The concept of the “worthy poor” of 1898 continues to shadow much social policy in New Zealand. We retain a punitive edge which we obscure through perpetuating myths we have about ourselves. As well, we remain a comparatively violent society with sanctions as a normal policy option.

The current re-direction in policy includes a renewed emphasis on mixed models of delivery, risk assessment of individuals rather than groups and tightened eligibility tests. This will challenge much of the received wisdom about the quality of connection between departmental performance and the experiences of citizens, and will necessitate a major commitment to evaluation in its various forms. While some of the characteristics of social investment can be connected to views on the place of the market compared to government, they do not explicitly define social investment. There are already well articulated criticisms of some of characteristics, including social bonds.
Longer Term Opportunities for Social Services Advancement

It is essential to strengthen the focus on current operational integrity, and continuous improvement will be central to that, with the support of methods that have been long embedded outside the social services agencies, especially Inland Revenue, Customs and Statistics New Zealand.

Emphasis need to be placed on strengthening the coherence between large scale system goals and high granularity of operational achievements. There is a need to connect system outcomes to on the ground achievement, or “proper sowing.”

The alignment that is needed both within and among within organisations can be initiated through the focus on consumers. Customer centred approaches will need to give more attention to human rights.

Recognise “What works” as mix of options rather than master-plan for all

Widen base of intellectual capacity and wisdom for rethinking how issues are framed (FVDRC). Sort out issues where operational pragmatism has allowed deferral of deeper thinking, including:

1. Making more visible the nature and various forms of violence and harm we do to each other, and the options for recovery.
2. Understanding the extent to which incarceration and institutionalisation damage the long-term capacity to participate fully as citizens.
3. Developing the means of overseeing institutions that have the role of placing people in secure environments or have them in their custody.
4. Determining the circumstances when a child should be removed from its family and whānau
5. Clarifying how the rights of sex offenders that return to the community are balanced with the rights of children to be free in their communities
6. Enabling penalties on families to be assessed on their impact on the most vulnerable family members
7. Reassessing when private harms become concerns of the state and community, and in what way.
8. Recognition of how much society has been transformed by and benefited from the recognition of the human rights of many communities over the past 3-4 decades.

Strengthen political recognition of the limitations of partial knowledge on the system design, operation and monitoring.

Lifting the prospects for an evidence-informed and information driven social services system

There are considerable opportunities for a more systematic and rigorous application of simple analytical methods to improve social services through wider and deeper awareness of the context for policy, more effective use of knowledge already held somewhere in services design, and enabling real time monitoring of service delivery outcomes and continuous improvement.

Social services could be more effectively information-driven, both in real time and in historical analysis. The scale needed for both represents significant change for the sector and the agencies within it. It requires a markedly increased use of evidence and evaluation
by people throughout the system. There is limited capability within the system (both within and outside government) to do this. Being information-driven is based on:

1. knowledge of our populations, the outcomes we’re trying to improve and what works to achieve this. There are gaps in this knowledge and evidence
2. a capacity for analysis and modelling that is up to the greater access to information now available
3. a strong focus on long term outcomes, both what they are and how to specify them in the short and long term, and the need for greater system level understanding of the connection between different stages of the life course among different agencies who have had limited responses to their interdependence up to now
4. client-centric data based on administrative and other sources and the ability to share this as required
5. good evaluative evidence and investment methodologies
6. effective summarising of existing evidence that is shared with those who can use it so that resources allocated to evaluation do not get reproduced again and again
7. the capacity to develop insights which challenge received wisdom.

The social services need the underpinning of a well-focused strong analytical capacity to enable alternative future pathways and prospects to be reliably projected and foreseen for the design of future programmes and their implications for the social services system itself. This will necessitate:

1. Strengthening the monitoring of the continued relevance of key assumptions and insights behind policies. This might enable policy obsolescence or programme stress to be foreseen, and would increase the chances of a well-managed transition to new systems, statutes or institutions where that was signalled.
2. Providing a synthesis of what has been observed in the past. Models can help understanding of trends, dependencies and causal links, to a varying and sometimes unknown extent. Causal links can show where there are opportunities to bring forward actions and increase policy options;
3. Where major shifts in the characteristics, habits or place of the population are identified in any programme, there is an opportunity to foresee the consequential impacts that will arise to a varying extent across the social services system. Contemporary issues include changes in family form, the prevalence of mental health risk factors, the spread of drug use, and greater understanding of the limitations in policies for family and child protection.
4. Sharing more widely across the public sector and among all partners to the social services system experiences in continuous improvement.

For the priorities of a national research programme, we can identify where we have a strong need to enrich our understanding. Some obvious examples are:

1. Developing each generation to its fullest potential is vital for productivity and social cohesion, and a special challenge for New Zealand as Māori and Pacific are becoming increasing shares of the next generation workforce. This will stimulate the need for policy change, which could be focused by awareness of thinking at the forefront of social science (J Heckman) and its application to NZ.
2. Poverty measurements based on income relativities need to be alongside specific studies of causality (e.g. rheumatic fever) to assess the efficacy of programmes and inform the balance of universal and targeted responses that continue to evolve.
3. Life course studies would enable comparisons of the health, welfare and development of each birth cohort to be monitored, and the potential impact of alternative policy action (or inaction) assessed where research findings have relevance. Such studies could also pinpoint areas of emerging need for research and policy.
4. Understanding the impact on increased longevity at a population level varies with ethnicity, gender and economic position, and the consequences for the changing health and disability position over the life course.

5. Developing analytical models that identify and explain where connections exist between child abuse, family violence, mental health and New Zealand's high level of violence compared to other countries.

6. Understanding the impact on services of the prevalence of drug taking, and other areas of people's lives that are changing around us.

7. Evaluating the impact of sanctions and penalties. In many areas, penalties have become significant tools and there is only anecdotal and small study information on the effects, but all point to perverse effects that may have end results far worse than the original event which led to the sanction.

Conclusion

Improving the effectiveness of social services has to take account of the fact even with the current enrichment of information sources, we will never have sufficient information to have certainty about interventions and outcomes in social services, or even to know how uncertain we might be. Enhanced access and richer analysis of existing administrative data and research sources will add to our understanding of individuals at risk and is part of the rationale for the social investment model. The effectiveness and efficacy of social services programmes should never be assumed to be very high across the whole population they refer to, and indeed is rarely evaluated in New Zealand.

There is a weak connection between policy development and operational practice, at least partly explained by the limited culture of evaluation, over-reliance on self-regulation and poor understanding of network facilitation. Also, contributing to this disconnect is a general failure in public administration to recognise the value of knowledge obtained by NGOs or held by families and communities. There is very limited follow up or understanding when there are poor take up rates for programmes.

There are a range of highly significant means by which the performance of social services can be improved, and the mix of perspectives on the concept of social investment have made these more visible. The potential for innovation and continuous improvement is very high, and the likely gains from an uplift in quantitative competence among both policy and operational parts of the social services are high. The management of risk needs to be revisited so that connectedness and integration can be the norm for critical services. The come-at-ability of social services must be improved through ways which consider also the practicalities of political risk, as exist in other sectors of government. Wider understanding of how to assess what works, and what is happening now are key foundations of the change we are now undergoing in lifting the way evidence is used in socials services.

How much this will change will depend on the willingness to accept uncertainty and risk in political discourse, especially in services that involve people engaging with systems that operate with incomplete information, serving constantly changing populations and involving electors have high expectations about the services that they judge that they will most likely need. At the same time we have to recognise that we have a society that experiences high levels of violence and abuse, where the economic base is concentrating income, and social structures have varying stability.
### APPENDIX 1: FAMILY VIOLENCE DEATH REVIEW COMMITTEE’S POSITION BRIEF

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>FVDRC BRIEF</th>
<th>Implications for policy (L Cook personal summary)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1) Intergenerational violence requires an intergenerational response</td>
<td>1. Framing of issue as harm, involving whole family, whānau</td>
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<td>2. Dilute forces for harm by Public attitudes, System responses and working with perpetrators</td>
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<td></td>
<td>3. Recognise the place and value of all forms of evidence, in an area where highly structured studies are difficult.</td>
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<td>4. Family/whānau as key to response and support</td>
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<td>2) The decision to abuse a child’s parent is a harmful, unsafe parenting decision</td>
<td>5. Set high standards for men as parents</td>
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<td>6. Recognise both children and parent harmed by parental abuse</td>
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<td>3) ‘Failure to protect’ approaches fail to respond to both child and adult victims’ safety needs</td>
<td>7. Complexity of protection needed usually well beyond the adult victim.</td>
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<td>8. Recognise that trauma and disruption last past the threat.</td>
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<td>9. Need to have rich understanding by assessment by staff in protection services of nature of whānau and hapū in contrast to nuclear family forms if Māori resource base is to be recognised effectively.</td>
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<td>11. Adult victim usually critical to child protection.</td>
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<td>12. Separation does not remove threats completely</td>
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<td>5) To prevent family violence, we must work with the people using violence</td>
<td>13. Changing perpetrator behaviour is essential – recognise perpetrator behaviour rather than victim actions the central focus of concern.</td>
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<td>14. Look at patterns of behaviour rather than just events</td>
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<td>6) Victims’ safety is a collective responsibility: it cannot be achieved by individuals or individual agencies acting alone</td>
<td>15. Protecting victim of harm needs societal responses as well as communities in support of individuals and agencies.</td>
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<td>16. Balance of statutory responses and high trust relationships</td>
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<td>17. Need to identify in advance forms of evidence that pinpoint limits of protection system and the failure to limit harm.</td>
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