

The Labour Government has brought a change of political direction in some respects, and has continued the Conservative Government's approach in others. It has been much more concerned to reduce poverty; to recognise cultural diversity; to support people in difficulty; to promote opportunities, especially for work; and to reduce social exclusion. The Government is strongly committed

# Government, public service and criminal justice

David Faulkner reviews the achievements of the Labour government.

to modernisation, to constitutional reform, and to achieving a transformation both in social conditions and relationships, and in the quality of public services. But it has continued the Conservative Government's emphasis on individual enterprise, its commercially oriented approach to public management, and many of its penal policies.

The Government's overall objectives, as stated in the White Paper *Public Services for the Future: Modernisation, Reform, Accountability*, are to

- increase sustainable growth and employment;
- promote fairness and opportunity; and
- deliver efficient and modern public services.

Other publications refer to principles or values such as equal worth, responsibility, community, social inclusion, democracy, tolerance and decency.

## Joining up Government

The means of achieving the three overall objectives include a series of Public Service Agreements (PSAs), both for individual departments (such as the Home Office, the Lord Chancellor's Department and the Law Officers' Department) and for "cross cutting areas" such as criminal justice. The Agreements include Aims and

Objectives and Key Performance Targets, and the emphasis throughout is on social and economic outcomes, as well as on processes and outputs. There is a strong emphasis on joint strategic planning and inter-agency cooperation, on subjecting policy proposals to rigorous appraisal and consultation, and on monitoring and evaluation.

The subsequent White Paper *Modernising Government* takes forward the Government's thinking on public service reform. It deals with the responsiveness of public services to their users and to citizens; the use of information technology; policy making that is "joined-up and strategic"; and measures to increase the numbers of women and of members of ethnic minorities and disabled people, especially in senior positions. Government is to be "inclusive and integrated", and to be "more forward - and outward - looking". Services are to "reflect real lives", with programmes that are "citizen-focused", "group-focused" and "area-based". There is to be more movement of staff and personnel within and between the public service and other sectors, and greater racial and cultural diversity within them.

## Active citizenship

A third significant text is the Home Secretary's Constitution Unit Annual Lecture, given on 27 October 1999. He spoke of a new relationship between the citizen and the state, to be created by the Government's programme of constitutional reform. That relationship is to be founded upon a formalisation of rights, through the Human Rights Act, and the enforcement of responsibilities through measures such as the Crime and Disorder Act. Policies are to give practical expression to pluralist, democratic and inclusive values. People are to be thought of as citizens rather than subjects, and as citizens they should be actively involved in their communities, especially by voting in elections. Power and authority are being systematically devolved from central government to local authorities and local services such as the police.

## The way ahead

The two White Papers and the Home Secretary's lecture provide a wholesome basis on which it is possible to construct a more responsive, more "effective" and more "modern" approach to criminal justice, and a radical

programme for penal reform. Features of that programme might include

- continued development of the Government's policies on community safety and youth justice, with rigorous monitoring and evaluation, especially of the dynamics and relationships involved at local level and of their effects on minority groups;
- investment in new skills and expertise, including skills in communication and consultation, and in training for leadership, throughout the criminal justice system;
- the formation of a criminal justice college, comparable with the Government's new Centre for Management and Policy Studies, for those purposes and to provide a forum for the exchange and development of ideas;
- rigorous action to "join up" criminal justice policy at national and local levels, and especially to "join up" sentencing with investment in prisons and in custodial and community-based programmes for offenders, involving among others the Criminal Justice Consultative Council, area committees and the new Sentencing Advisory Panel;
- development of the probation service as an agency to promote effective forms of social intervention in local communities, as well as to enforce court orders;
- decentralisation in the Prison Service and greater involvement with local communities.
- mechanisms to enable statutory services to be effectively accountable, and responsive, to their local communities as well as to central government.
- application of the values indicated in the second paragraph to all those who may be involved in the criminal justice process, including victims and offenders, and especially those who are vulnerable, disadvantaged or members of minority groups.

It would be good to see these features in the Government's plans for its expected second term.

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