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Delivering social welfare: Governance & Service provision in the UK, by Derek Birrell and Ann Marie Gray, Bristol, Policy Press, 2017, 291 pp., £21.99 (Paperback), ISBN 978-1-4473-1018-4

In *Delivering Social Welfare: Governance & Service Provision in the UK*, Birrell and Gray have provided an engaging and well-written contribution to the literature concerning contemporary social policy. When considered in the light of the current swirling discourses surrounding the delivery and governance of welfare in the UK, the work might also be considered timely. The book tackles the extremely complex area of welfare governance across all countries of the UK and in doing so neatly encapsulates various paradigm shifts up to and including the current the shift towards devolution. While the subject area is undoubtedly dense and intensely factual, the book manages to remain accessible and well organised, allowing it to be to read cover to cover whilst simultaneously functioning as an excellent reference book.

The layout of the book is straightforward and sensible. An introductory chapter sets the parameters by discussing the dominant trends and their accompanying discourses in the general area of welfare governance in the UK. Chapter two focuses on the role of devolution in the administration of welfare services across the UK. From here, the authors move on to examine the structure and function of various government departments. They usefully distinguish between a range of departments such as ministerial, non-ministerial and executive agencies. Considerable detail of the major policy reforms that have shaped and influenced the structure and function of the current central administration is also given here. Chapters four and five focus on the role and structure of local government as a traditional deliverer of welfare services and examines changes here, such as the move away from direct service provision in favour of commissioning and partnership. Chapter six examines the role of quasi autonomous non-governmental organisations or ‘quangos’. It identifies different types and

considers the growth of quangos as a method of governance as well as the more recent push to reduce their number. Chapter seven explores the role of partnerships and describes the reasons for the proliferation of partnerships as a method of governance in the areas health and social care, particularly at local authority level. Closely related to this, chapter eight examines the role of outsourcing and privatisation in the governance and delivery of welfare services, focusing particularly on recent developments. Chapter nine moves on to explore the user and public participation paradigms which are by now firmly entrenched, at least at legislative and policy level, across jurisdictions in the UK. The real effectiveness of these models is examined. Chapter ten then concludes by assessing the principles underpinning the changes in the delivery and governance of welfare and examining the key trends underpinning the modernisation agenda.

Considering the complexity of the subject, as well as the breadth and scope of the task undertaken, Birrel and Gray have managed to produce an excellent contribution here. A particular strength of the book is the continuous and helpful definitions of relevant terms throughout. This allows the reader to understand the areas under discussion without having to seek answers elsewhere and will be particularly beneficial to the student reader or those who are new to this particular area of study. The painstaking level of detail provided throughout the book leaves no doubt as to the mammoth task undertaken by the authors. Despite this, the work remains fluid. This book can certainly be viewed as the new authority in the area social welfare governance in the UK and, as such, is deservedly destined to become a fixture on reading lists across the UK and beyond. It can certainly be strongly recommended to anyone currently studying or with an interest in social policy, social administration or other relevant disciplines.

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References: NA