

## SHIFTING ROLES OF LOCAL GOVERNMENTS IN THE UNITED KINGDOM<sup>1</sup>

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### ÖZET

Birleşik Krallık'ta, son yirmi yılda yerel yönetimlerin belirgin bir değişim süreci içinde olduğu gözlenmektedir. Söz konusu süreçte yerel yönetimlerde gözlemlenen yapısal, finansal ve yönetsel değişimlerde; doğrudan yerel kamu hizmeti verme sorumluluğunun azaldığı ve bunun yerine vatandaş odaklılığı, kaliteli hizmeti hedef alan, özel sektörü, rekabeti, iyi yönetim ilkelerini ve performans ölçümünü benimseyen politika yaklaşımlarının yaygınlaştığı görülmektedir. Bu çalışmada özellikle, yerel yönetimlerin eğitim, zorunlu rekabetçi piyasa (CCT), en iyi değer (BV), konut politikaları ve sosyal hizmetler alanlarındaki yaklaşımları, ve bu değişimlerin uygulamadaki izdüşümleri incelenmiştir.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Yerel Yönetim Reformu, Eğitim, Sosyal Hizmet, En İyi Değer, Konut, İngiltere,

### ABSTRACT

In past two decades, the local governments in the UK have been going through a profound change. Consequently, in local governments, direct provisions of services were reduced, and these were replaced instead with privatisation, more competition, and further contracting out. Moreover, quality of local government

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services acceleratedly increased through introduction of good governance principles and effective performance measurements. All these implementations cover a wide spectrum of change in local government services. Thus, in this paper an overview of a number of main policy areas, such as education, community care, compulsory competitive tendering, best value, and housing, will be presented in line with the ongoing policy changes in the local governments in the UK.

**Keywords:** Local government reform, Education, Community Care, Compulsory Competitive Tendering, Best Value, Housing, the UK,

## INTRODUCTION

Globally, the UK is considered to be at the forefront of the new public management revolution (Hood, 1991:5). The public sector reforms in this country have been diverse since 1979. The major reforms of public sector over the past decades can be defined by the ongoing neoliberal trend all over the world. In the UK, beginning with Thatcher governments the neoliberal trend accelerated towards management of local governments and their services as well. This approach towards creating effective and strong local government continued further during the Blair governments as they kept the winning policies of Conservatives and building further upon them. Moreover, the global trend towards implementation of good governance principles in public sector which were championed by international organizations such as OECD, the World Bank and others also opened the way for a new approach in public sector management through what is known as new public sector management. The impact of new public sector management in return was multi-dimensional - structural, financial and managerial, especially for the UK.

For example, the local government was restructured through the deployment of ‘managerial technologies’ designed to realise the objectives of neo-liberal programmes of government. The influence of

managerialism spread rapidly following the Conservatives' introduction of the 'New Public Management' in 1982 as part of the drive to control public expenditure. The public sector reforms such as the establishment of unelected quasi-autonomous agencies, the introduction of compulsory competitive tendering, and increasing involvement of private and voluntary agencies in service delivery transformed local institutional structures and relations. In broad terms, this understanding emphasised the decline and fragmentation of established bureaucracies in the face of a plural system involving a wide range of institutions and actors drawn from the public, private and voluntary sectors (MacKinnon, 2000:293). The flows of compulsory competitive tendering have opened the way for establishment of best value system in the UK in the 2000s by succeeding governments. Thus, the governments in the UK have been introducing wide-ranging modernisation programme to equip local authorities for leading their communities approximately through the past three decades.

Thus, in this paper, the focus is on the presentation of shifting roles of local governments in the light of above-mentioned changes that occurred in the UK in the past decades. Since this process of change covered a wide range of implementations concerning the role of local governments, the presentation has been narrowed down to an overview of some main areas, such as education, community care, compulsory competitive tendering, best value, housing to serve as exemplary fields. In this context, first, the role of local governments in the UK will be presented. Next, overview of selected main areas of implementation will be put forth. These are namely education, community care, compulsory competitive tendering and its improved form, that is best value system, and housing services. Finally, the paper will conclude with overall remarks on the existing system of local government in the UK.

### **ROLES OF LOCAL GOVERNMENTS IN THE UK**

There was acceleration in the number of public services provided by local governments in the UK especially during the second half of 1970s as a result of the welfare state approach, leading to an

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eventual increase in local public expenditure. As the local governments exceeded their existing capacity, they had to face a management crisis. This in return required different managerial approaches at different times on part of the British governments to remedy the local governments' difficulties to cope with existing national and international trends. If we look at the basics of the local governments in the UK, the following issues are to be highlighted before proceeding to next sections. The local governments in the UK, do not have the "general right" to intervene and bring about any local problem as long as it is not explicitly laid out in the law. Local governments can only function within the existing legal framework, and can only fulfil the tasks reserved to them in the law (Karasu, 2009:225).

The roles of local governments in the UK has been in constant flux, but the most recent restructuring and reform took place as of 2000s and this has further accelerated as of 2006. One of the significant steps in this context was the government *White Paper on Strong and Prosperous Communities* in 2006 providing the policy framework on the future of local governments in the UK. This White Paper aimed a lasting transformation of local government services in line with good governance principles. This White Paper was followed by a backing regulation entitled *Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Bill* which came into force as of 30 October 2007. The reform process, then, has further accelerated through the government White Paper entitled *Communities in control, Real people, real power* published on 9 July 2008. The aim has been to pass further power into the hands of local communities with a view to to shift power, influence and responsibility away from existing centres of power into the hands of communities and individual citizens.

The efforts of the British government to improve local governance still continues. A most recent and significant example of local government reform process has been *The Sustainable Communities (Amendment) Bill* which received Royal Assent on 8 April 2010 which is an amended version of the *Sustainable Communities Act* of 2007. The principles of this new Act and that of 2007 Act have been aligned with recent reforms of local government,

and the policy direction set out in the Policy Paper *Putting the Frontline First* in 2009. According to these new regulations and reform process results, the people have been enabled to propose changes to Government policies or national regulations if this would help their local area economically, socially, or environmentally. And this has become the main pillar of all reform process.

The past two to three decades in the UK witnessed significant shifts in the responsibilities of local governments. This has been clear for example in the withdrawal of local governments from provision of public utility services such as gas, electricity, water, etc towards providing education, transport and housing (Garnett and Lynch, 2008:223). One of the main reasons behind this shift was the developments following the neoliberal stand of British governments beginning with Thatcher such as privatization of SOEs (State-Owned Enterprises), liberalization of markets and local governance implementations, then decentralization of local governments were enhanced further with Blair governments. In this context, Table 1 below indicates an overview of the roles and responsibilities of local governments. This is followed by Table 2 which provides an overview of levelled distribution of authority and responsibilities of local governments indicating how these are shared across different local governance structures. As the relevant regulations are mentioned previously, this table has been provided only to present an outline of services provided by local governments as an overview.

Table 1. Overview of Local Governments' Roles and Responsibilities in the UK

FIELD OF ACTIVITY	SERVICES	FIELD OF ACTIVITY	SERVICES
<b>Education</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Schools (preschool, primary and secondary schools, special schools)</li> <li>- Adult, community and family education, student support</li> </ul>	<b>Culture</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Culture and natural heritage (museums, galleries, archives, sports and tourism)</li> <li>- Recreation areas (national and local parks)</li> <li>- Library and information services</li> </ul>
<b>Transport</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Highways, street lighting</li> <li>-Traffic lights</li> <li>- Public Transport</li> <li>- Airports and harbours</li> </ul>	<b>Planning and development</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Environmental protection plans</li> <li>- Building inspections</li> <li>- Economic development</li> </ul>
<b>Social Services</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Child and family services</li> <li>-Youth services (accommodation and social facilities)</li> <li>- Services for the elderly (health, accommodation and social facilities)</li> <li>- Supporting Employment</li> <li>- Services for the homeless</li> </ul>	<b>Environment</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Consumer rights</li> <li>- Protection for coastlines</li> <li>- Cemetery and burial services</li> <li>-Environmental health (food, air pollution, building standards)</li> <li>- Agricultural services and Fisheries</li> <li>- Solid waste and street cleaning</li> </ul>
<b>Housing</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Community buildings</li> <li>- Building renewal</li> <li>- Services for the homeless</li> </ul>	<b>Administrative functions</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Collecting local taxes</li> <li>-Registry for newly born and the deceased</li> <li>- Local elections</li> <li>- Registry for voters</li> <li>- Emergency planning</li> </ul>
<b>Security and protection services</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Police services</li> <li>- Fire department and Rescue services</li> <li>- Court services</li> </ul>	-	-

Kaynak: The DCLG, Local Government, 2008:15

Table 2. Levelled Distribution of Authority and Responsibilities of Local Governments

	METROPOLITAN AREAS		LOCAL GOVERNMENTS				LONDON		
	SPD	CtC	OLC	CC	CtC	SPD	Sub Councils	Metropolitan Council	OLC
Number of units	20	36	47	34	238	55	32	1	4
Education		✓	✓	✓			✓		
Highways		✓	✓	✓			✓	✓	
Transport plans		✓	✓	✓			✓	✓	
Passenger Transport	✓		✓	✓				✓	
Social services		✓	✓	✓				✓	
Housing		✓	✓		✓		✓		
Libraries		✓	✓	✓			✓		
Entertainment and recreation		✓	✓		✓		✓		
Environmental health		✓	✓		✓		✓		
Garbage Collection		✓	✓		✓		✓		
Planning implementations		✓	✓		✓		✓		
Strategic planning		✓	✓	✓			✓	✓	
Police	✓					✓		✓	
Fire Department		✓		✓		✓		✓	
Collection of local taxes	✓		✓		✓		✓		

SPD: Single Purpose Departments / CC: City Councils / CtC: County Council / OLC: One Level Councils

Kaynak: DCLG, Local Government, 2008:15

Table 3 below indicates the most recent available data on capital expenditure overview on local government services covering the period Afyon Kocatepe Üniversitesi, İ.İ.B.F. Dergisi (C.XII,SI, 2010

2008-2009. The contents of this table present a more detailed understanding of the scope of the services undertaken by the local governments in the UK.

*Table 3. Capital Expenditure Overview of Local Government Services 2008-2009*

						£ million	
	Total expenditure on fixed & intangible assets	Grants		Loans & other financial assistance	Acquisition of share & loan capital	Total capital expenditure	
Education	4.402	131		9	0	4.542	
Highways & transport	3.277	602		857	0	4.735	
Social services	269	27		5	0	300	
Housing	3.694	1.169	(a)	38	0	4.901	
Agriculture & fisheries	80	1		2	0	82	
Libraries, culture & heritage	345	11		1	0	356	
Sport & recreation	475	18		3	1	496	
Police	793	0		0	0	794	(b)
Fire	165	2		0	0	167	
Magistrates' courts	0	0		0	0	0	
Other	3.095	273		24	35	3.427	
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>16.593</b>	<b>2.233</b>		<b>939</b>	<b>36</b>	<b>19.801</b>	
(a) Includes Salford's £483 million payment to an RSL for transfer of housing stock							
(b) Includes a one-off acquisition of land and existing buildings by Metropolitan Police in 2008-09							

*Source: Local government statistics, the UK, 8 April 2010.*

## **OVERVIEW OF MAIN AREAS OF ROLE CHANGE IN BRITISH LOCAL GOVERNMENT SERVICES**

Local government in the UK is principally responsible for education, personal social services, public housing, town planning, environmental health, trading standards, road construction and maintenance, libraries and arts. This section will provide a brief overview of some of the main focus areas of change in local government services in the UK, since the overall services exceed the purposes of the present paper. These are namely; education, community care, compulsory competitive tendering, best value, and housing,

### **Overview of Ongoing Education Reform in Practice**

Education, taken as a whole, is one of the most important services of the local governments in the UK in cooperation with the central government as well as the most costly one. The basic responsibilities of the local governments in the field of education were laid down in the *Education Acts* of 1944 and 1996, respectively. These were namely; to provide, without charge, adequate primary (including nursery) and secondary education in the UK. This implied the provision and staffing of schools, the enforcement of regular school attendance, the provision of transport and maintenance and clothing grants for the children. Other welfare services include the supply of milk, meals, and child guidance services, as well as special arrangements for the education of disabled or special needs children at home, in hospital or in school.

In the schools, the board of governors carry the responsibility for managing the schools including the management of budget and the staff. Some schools are funded directly by the central government according to a formula while the others are managed by local authorities. The core curriculum is determined by the Department for Education and monitored closely by an agency of the department (Flynn and Strehl; 1996:60)

There is considerable competition among the schools since funds are allocated as a proportion of pupils. This means some schools

will grow and others will go out of operation. And since there is a monopsony purchaser with the power to fix the price and determine the quality of service purchased; naturally competition will prevail among suppliers, but it is not necessarily a price competition per se, and contracts will be formally annual but implicitly long term.

A further and most recent reform of local government services in the field of education in the UK encourages involvement of parents in the education of their children and emphasizes equality in education, prevention of racism and takes cohesion among the community members as the leading principle. To this end, there have been currently two progress reports published by the government in 2008 and 2009 respectively. These are entitled *The Children's Plan – One Year On* and *The Children's Plan – Two Years On*. The Government recognises the parents as an important factor in shaping a child's achievements and prospects, thus encourages family-school partnerships. *The Children's Plan - One Year On* report, published in December 2008 sets a new strategic approach to parental engagement which aims at mainstream support for parents' engagement in their child's education throughout the early years and schools systems.

### **Community Care under Reform: Principles and Initial Implementations**

At the core of the reforms concerning community care were two principles; that care in the community was to be preferred to care in institutions; and that prevention was better social work than rescuing social casualties. This meant that public support should not take place in institutions such as children's homes, special schools and communities, or in residential and nursing homes and longstay hospitals, but whenever possible, care should be encouraged in people's own homes, or in foster homes, and that support should be family and community based (Baldock, 1999:310).

With the implementation of these reforms in the UK, local authorities became a purchaser of services i.e. for their elderly residents, people with physical disabilities and learning difficulties, and services for children. Local governments have been required to

produce annual Community Care Plans, evaluating how effectively the resources of various organizations and sectors are being used in meeting diverse needs of local people (Wilson and Game, 1998:93). The local authority should be able to show that it has formally consulted users and taken their views into account in drawing up the plan (Baldock, 1999:310).

In local governments social services departments made assessments of people's needs, and arranged purchase of services for them. These services were purchased from private and voluntary sectors, through contracts depending on their nature. In this case, if public sector provision was more expensive, then the work would be given to the private sector. In social services, the government pursued a policy of a 'mixed economy of care' which in effect meant a large increase in private sector provision. One immediate result was an increase in the number of people in the community who would formerly have been in care. In the case of social services, the role of local government in community care for the elderly increased, with some changes also in respect to children. These changes were naturally a result of the reflection of the neoliberalism trend. In a competitive market context, the best service was provided for the lowest cost. The crucial issue here for local authorities would be the need for care that should be carefully assessed by the managers.

Currently, the government in UK is further looking for optimal provision of services in community care, and encourages involvement of residents of local governments to join their efforts with NGOs and as well as local businesses in this context. The government published, for example, several reports and statistics concerning assessments of involvement of NGOs in community care.<sup>2</sup>

### **Introduction of Compulsory Competitive Tendering in the UK and its Aftermath**

Compulsory competitive tendering (CCT) was introduced in the *1980 Local Government (Planning and Land) Act* and further extended in the *1988 Local Government Act*. Local authorities were

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<sup>2</sup> See further on the topic <http://www.communities.gov.uk>  
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introduced compulsory competitive tendering for a wide range of services in the last two decades. It covers housing, street cleaning, gardening, catering and professional services such as accountancy, architecture and financial services. In this process, service provider and service purchaser were differentiated. Local authority defined the work to be done and has it done through the in-house team or a firm. Besides, the authority organized the competition, let the contract, and monitored the process of the work.

CCT has had some advantages such as getting the best possible work done for the lowest possible cost and in an efficient way. The impact of CCT was initially great, significant increases in productivity and reductions in staffing, extensive changes were seen in pay and conditions (Stewarts and Walsh, 1992). However, there was widespread objection to CCT as well, not least on the grounds of the transaction costs associated with it and the fact that it has disproportionately affected poorly paid workers and particularly female workers (CPS, 1995). It was also argued that CCT undermined local democracy. It compelled councils to follow particular policies contrary to their wishes. There were concerns that policy initiatives in fields such as equal opportunities, industrial relations and anti-poverty were being compromised by the process. Small group of councillors and officers are involved in the secretive bidding process with minimal public involvement. Also, by emphasising accountability through the market, CCT is argued to have undermined the wider community basis of local government (Midwinter and McGarvey, 2000:87). Consequently, if competition is an effective way of improving performance, then it should be given a chance. If competition is only a device for reducing the pay conditions of people who provide services, it would not bring about a sustained improvement in services because it devalues them.

### **The Best Value System: Setting New Policy Agenda**

Best Value system has been effectively introduced in 2000 in the UK. It is basically a duty placed on all councils to deliver services to clear standards, covering cost and quality, and to deliver services by the most effective and economic means possible (DETR, 1999a). The term of 'Best Value' can be taken to refer to the level of performance

achieved by councils in the provision of services. The dimensions of performance covered by what have come to be known as the 'three Es': economy, efficiency and effectiveness (Waine and Cutler, 1994). In an introductory work on performance measurement in local government, for example, the Audit Commission gave the following definitions of these terms, which later was to be the basis of further reforms to come in local government in the UK:

“*Economy*...means ensuring that the assets of the authority, and the services purchased, are procured and maintained at the lowest possible cost consistent with a specified quality and quantity. *Efficiency* means providing a specified volume and quality of services with the lowest level of resources capable of meeting that specification. *Effectiveness* means providing the right services to enable the local authority to implement its policies and objectives” (Audit Commission 1983:8).

The Government’s intention to impose a new duty of Best Value onto councils was set out in the *White Paper Modern Local Government-In Touch with the People* (DETR, 1998). The subsequent *Local Government Act* of 1999 placed on all local authorities a general duty to implement Best Value system in relation to all services. The Act required councils to review and reform the way they deliver services. The important point was that Best Value is not optional and could not be ignored. The purpose of introduction of Best Value system was to make a real and positive difference to the services people receive from the local authorities. It is about ensuring that public services are responsive to citizens’ needs (DETR, 1999b). On the other hand the Government vision for public services into the next century has been clearly described in the *White Paper on Modernising Government*, the main themes of which are particularly relevant to Best Value. The aim is to ensure that public services are responsive to the needs of citizens, not solely to the convenience of service providers. This entails ensuring that public services are efficient, high quality; and that policymaking is more strategic, forward looking and is not simply reactive to short-term pressures (Demirkaya, 2004).

Best value, an essential part of the government's modernisation agenda, is a relatively new approach. The aim is to provide a continuous improvement in council services and to give local people more say in the services they receive. The best value approach requires local authorities to review all their services over a period of five years and, if need be, demands a radical reassessment of services offered as well as the outcomes achieved.

Best value offers another opportunity to build on the relationship between government and the voluntary sector. It opens a range of possibilities for local government to work in partnership with other public bodies, including voluntary organisations. Voluntary organisations are important partners in dealing with the needs of a specific area. Some voluntary organisations represent communities and client groups. Others deliver services for local people. Some do both. Consultation is at the heart of best value, because best value is a duty owed to local people. This is an area in which the voluntary sector is well placed to contribute.

The best value has a potential for achieving significant improvements in quality and reductions in costs in provision of public services. However, it presents a considerable challenge to all those involved. It requires a major cultural, managerial and technical change for local government. Voluntary organisations also have to prepare if they want to ensure that their voices, and crucially the voices of the people they support, are heard when decisions are being made and that they continue to participate in the delivery of local services. Voluntary organisations are, by their nature, essential partners in realizing the best value vision. (Rhodes, 2000).

Councils have been given a power to promote the well being of their areas. The best value enabled local authorities to join other agencies, as well as private and voluntary sectors, to draw up community plans and agree strategies for tackling serious problems.

In the past decades, many council services were delivered in accordance with compulsory competitive tendering. CCT moved many local services away from direct council control to the private and voluntary sectors. The problem with CCT, however, was that the

primary focus of service delivery was on the lowest price and low cost does not necessarily translate into the best quality all the time. Local authorities, the private sector, and the voluntary sector have been calling for a new approach to service delivery, an approach to take greater account of the wishes of service users, and the quality of local services.

There are some distinctive differences between these old and new regimes: the CCT and Best Value. Many commentators identify the similarities and differences between these two policies and a brief overview of these arguments can be presented as follows. First, Best Value applies to all council activities and not just to certain defined services (Demirkaya, 2004:44). Therefore, the new legislation cannot be applied to only a relatively small part of council's work. In contrast to CCT, Best Value is a comprehensive policy and requires corporate management to cover every single council service. Secondly, both CCT and Best Value require local authorities to compete, but unlike CCT, under Best Value, competition is a voluntary element. However, Blair pointed out in support of this policy at the time:

“There can be no monopoly of services delivery by councils; the 1970s will not be re-visited. Delivering quality services means that councils must develop partnerships with communities, agencies and the private sector. The Best Value programme will replace the crude dogma of CCT. But there will be zero tolerance of failure: there is no room for poor performance” (Blair, 3 Nov. 1997).

Other similarities are the performance review and reporting processes, which are common elements of both regimes. These started under CCT, and have now become major element of Best Value.

A good indicator of best value system implementations in the UK in the recent years has been national and local best value surveys. The most recent *Best Value User Satisfaction Surveys 2006-07* compiled by the central government provides citizen's view of the existing system and presents an overview of implementation results as presented in Table 4 below:

Table 4. Best Value User Satisfaction Surveys 2006-07

<b>% satisfied</b>	<b>2000-01</b>	<b>2003-04</b>	<b>Change 2000-01 to 2003-04</b>	<b>2006-07</b>	<b>Change 2003-04 to 2006-07</b>
National average	65	55	-10	54	-1
Number of councils reporting indicator	370	385	–	387	–
County Councils	62	54	-8	50	-4
Unitary Authorities	62	52	-10	50	-2
Metropolitan Boroughs	62	54	-8	52	-2
London Boroughs	55	52	-3	54	+2
District Councils	68	56	-12	55	-1
East	67	55	-12	54	-1
East Midlands	65	53	-12	54	+1
North East	66	55	-11	53	-2
North West	64	53	-11	50	-3
South East	68	58	-10	55	-3
South West	66	55	-11	54	-1
West Midlands	66	55	-11	54	-1
Yorkshire & Humber	63	56	-7	51	-5
London	55	52	-3	54	+2
25th percentile	60	50	-10	49	-1
50th percentile	66	55	-11	53	-2
75th percentile	71	60	-11	58	-2

Source: Department for Communities and Local Government, *Best Value User Satisfaction Surveys, General Survey National Report, May 2007*

### **Housing in Perspective**

In the UK responses to the housing problems involved a significant role for the state. Council housing has been important in the general improvement of housing conditions and had a market impact on cities and towns. The government's intention was to encourage local government to improve the quality of these services. Some housing associations have been formed by former council staff. In this context, it is possible to observe the council's role has been reduced from provision to 'enabling'. Local authorities, having a considerable history of charging low rents for council housing, believe in collective responsibility for the finance of public housing. They also understand that tenants are likely to vote for the party sustaining low rents.

Difficult to let, difficult to manage and difficult to live in estates have been the subject of important reform initiatives. In the UK, the most recent reform developments on the role of local governments in housing can be identified through a set of regulations and guidance policy papers which came into force between 2000 and 2008. Especially, the government policy paper on *The Strategic Housing Role of Local Authorities: Powers and Duties* dated 2008 presents the overall strategy for good practices and guidance in housing for local authorities (Department of Communities and Local Governments, 2008). The main steps towards the current strategy was prepared through the *Local Government Act of 2000* and through *Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act* of 2007 respectively, supported by several other secondary regulations and action plans. Moreover, the *Housing Green Paper* of the UK government in 2007 identified five strategic key issues covering also local governments:

- assess and plan for the current and future housing needs of the local population across all tenures
- make the best use of the existing housing stock
- plan and facilitate new supply
- plan and commission housing support services which link homes and housing support services

- work in partnership to secure effective housing and neighbourhood management on an on-going basis (Department of Communities and Local Government, 2007).

Housing, thus, is one of the crucial areas in the overall local government reform and future strategy due to acceleration of decentralization as well as because the overall goal of achieving social, economic and environmental objectives that shape a community and create ‘a sense of place’ as laid out in *Local Government White Paper on Strong and Prosperous Communities* published back in October 2006. And the reform efforts still continue.

### CONCLUSION

The article presented the main contours of recent reform movement in a number of main local government services in the UK. The presentation covered a wide range of reforms in local governments covering the effects of global neoliberal trends and subsequent moves for reform during succeeding UK governments. For example, compulsory competitive tendering was one of the initiatives taken in Thatcher era whereas best value system following that signifies the period of Blair governments as well as the present one. Conservative governments created internal markets, implemented different privatisation methods, and required local authorities to contract out services through the mechanism of competitive tendering. In this regard, quality and efficiency elements became more apparent in imposing the internal market and competition for local authorities (Demirkaya, 2004:45). New Labour, and Blair for that matter, in return, did not reject everything from the Thatcher era, being confident to accept workable aspects of Thatcherism, which they believed had merit. This is an unusual breakpoint in British politics in terms of the left-right relationship. This transformation also deeply affected New Labour local government policy (Demirkaya, 2004:47).

Local government and its role in the UK experienced a great deal of change. A series of legislation, a wholesale reorganization of its structure and the far-reaching impact of developments in the social and economic environment have contributed to a feeling for many in

local government of being involved in a continuous revolution especially since the second half of 1990s. (Stoker, 1997). While the role of local government was previously a provider, it has eventually become a mediator after the implementation of the new public management approach.

Consequently, in the UK, as discussed above, changes in the local government have been not only on policy and the philosophy behind it but also service delivery. Targets have been service quality, customer/citizen choice, standard services, and best value in service providing and delivering. The mechanisms to reach these targets have been privatization, more competition, further contracting out and performance measurement. These are strongly supported by also including good governance principles such as accountability, transparency and others into implementation processes. Accountability is especially the current strong dictum in provision of public services, and special periodic assessments of it are regularly published by the central government. Thus the reforms in the UK point to a profound change in the role of local governments and this trend is more and more observed in other Western European countries as well.

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