Question 1: What are the most important social, economic and demographic trends that will change the social service landscape in New Zealand?

Aging population, widening gap between rich and poor, selling off of state housing making the housing issues even worse, pressure on parents to be in paid employment, mandatory registration of social workers.

Question 8: Why are private for-profit providers significantly involved in providing some types of social services and not others?

There is still a "what's in it for me" mentality, and if the cause isn't attractive or does not have clearly defined success criteria, this also keeps private funders away.

Question 18: How could the views of clients and their families be better included in the design and delivery of social services?

Results Based Accountability provides a place for client voices to be included. Forums and focus groups could be offered in the communities where the clients and families live. Social service organisations could be funded to do this work.

Question 25: What are the opportunities for and the barriers to using information technology and data to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of social service delivery?

Huge opportunity for data analysis, resource allocation and communication to clients. The biggest barrier is cost, both to implement and then the ongoing cost to maintain/upgrade. There seems to be many IT/CMS options, but MSD does not seem to be providing direction in this area. The social service organisations that do have IT systems presumably used government funds, so these systems should then be provided to other social service organisations, instead of each organisation using government funding to develop something. Maintaining and upgrading also needs to be funded, and if each government funded social service organisation needs IT support, then this could be something that MSD bulk funds, rather than each organisation spending a premium for IT support.

Question 35: Are there examples where the transition to a new provider was not well handled? What were the main factors that contributed to the poor handover?

Clients not fully aware of the referral or did not want the referral. Social workers too busy to pick up the referral promptly. This is a systems problem, as clients will be referred to a new agency when they have used up their "time" (funding) with the current agency. The referral/transition is funding driven rather than client-needs driven.

Question 37: How well do government agencies take account of the decision-making processes of different cultures when working with providers?

Very poorly. If English is a second language, volunteers or children have been used to translate. Also, with Housing NZ moving away from face-to-face contact, coupled with English being a second language, the result is less understanding and more challenges for the client.

Question 41: Which types of services have outcomes that are practical to observe and can be reliably attributed to the service?

The Strengthening Families process.

Question 43: What is the best way to specify, measure and manage the performance of services where outcomes are not easy to observe or to attribute?

Firstly, recognise that some outcomes may not be observed for 2-20 years, especially work that is about breaking inter-generational cycles.

Let families measure their own success, and listen to and get feedback from the professionals working closest with the families.

Question 46: Is there sufficient learning within the social services system? Is the information gathered reliable and correctly interpreted? Are the resulting changes timely and appropriate?

Smaller organisations are nimble and therefore can respond to changes in their communities quicker.

Question 47: Does the commissioning and purchasing system encourage bottom-up experimentation? Does the system reinforce successful approaches and encourage reform of less successful ones?

No. Worried about meeting prescriptive contracting requirements. With an increased focus on outcomes, families will be "cherry-picked" so that families who may benefit the most but will also require the most work won't get accepted by organisations.

Question 50: What are the benefits, costs and risks associated with using data to inform the development of social service programs? How could the risks be managed?

If it is web-based, security risks.

Make sure that what is being measured is what should be measured, and not what is easy to measure.

Recognise that long-term problems take a time to change.

Some people are interested in numbers, some people are interested in people. This is a people business, so make sure the people people have the most say, not the numbers people.

Question 55: Are there important issues for the effective commissioning and contracting of social services that will be missed as a result of the Commission's selection of case studies?

Know that there has been no cost of living increase for five years. Needs to be fully funded, rather than contributory funded.

Question 56: Are you willing to meet with the Commission?

Yes