



House of Commons
Public Administration Select
Committee

**From Citizen's Charter
to Public Service
Guarantees:
Entitlements to Public
Services: Government
Response to the
Committee's Twelfth
Report of Session
2007–08**

**Twelfth Special Report of Session
2007–08**

*Ordered by The House of Commons
to be printed 11 November 2008*

HC 1147
Published on 17 November 2008
by authority of the House of Commons
London: The Stationery Office Limited
£0.00

The Public Administration Select Committee

The Public Administration Select Committee is appointed by the House of Commons to examine the reports of the Parliamentary Commissioner for Administration and the Health Service Commissioner for England, which are laid before this House, and matters in connection therewith, and to consider matters relating to the quality and standards of administration provided by civil service departments, and other matters relating to the civil service.

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Twelfth Special Report

The Public Administration Select Committee reported to the House on *From Citizen's Charter to Public Service Guarantees: Entitlements to Public Services* in its Twelfth Report of Session 2007–08, published 22 July 2008 as HC 411. The Government Response was received on 28 October 2008 and is published below as an Appendix to this Report. Also appended to this report is a letter of 11 November from the Chairman to the Minister for the Cabinet Office, commenting on the Government Response.

Appendix 1—Government Response

The Government welcomes the Committee's report.

At the core of the Government's vision for world class public services is a commitment to fairness and excellence.¹ The Government believes that everyone should have access to high quality, personalised services delivered equitably and transparently, irrespective of their background or where they live.

Standards have played a key role in the Government's approach to public service reform, setting out the levels of service delivery that every patient, parent or local resident can expect. They have been used as challenging benchmarks that drive improvement, publicise pledges and entitlements and hold service providers to account. The Government has also recognised the potential of standards to empower service users by raising expectations, prompting feedback and complaints when these are not met and encouraging involvement in the setting of new standards.

The investment and reform of the past decade has been linked to raising standards and delivering the improvements that make a genuine difference to people's lives. The Government has already made real progress. For example in the NHS, success in meeting challenging targets for reduced waiting times means that more patients receive the treatment they need more quickly. In schools, pupils' improved GCSE results enhance the opportunities available to these young people as they take their place in a skills-based economy. In Jobcentres, the right to extra help as part of the New Deal has helped millions of people to find a job or training.

The Government has made clear that the state's role should be to set national priorities and minimum standards, whilst providing support and a fair distribution of resources. A clear framework, established by the Government in conjunction with regulators and inspectorates, sets out the standards below which providers must not fall. In this context the Government remains committed to further raising standards and eradicating underperformance. For example, the new NHS Constitution will set out clearly what patients can expect from the NHS, including legal rights and patient pledges. In schools the Government is taking new steps to further improve performance, such as the National Challenge programme. And the Government has extended entitlements, for example increasing the provision made for parents to receive free childcare when their children are three and four up to 15 hours per week by 2010.

1 Cabinet Office, *Excellence and Fairness: Achieving World Class Public Services*, June 2008.

However, in order to meet rising public expectations and changing needs within our communities the Government needs to empower citizens so that they have greater control over local services. The Local Government Empowerment White Paper sets out plans to shift power, influence and responsibility away from existing centres of power into the hands of communities and individual citizens.² Within this framework it is important for individual services to have flexibility to set their own standards, appropriate to their local circumstances. The introduction of Local Area Agreements, negotiated individually with local authorities, reflects the Government's support for a tailored approach within a context of raising standards everywhere on specific priorities relevant to local communities. Within all service sectors, providers aiming to achieve the Government's new Customer Service Excellence standard must demonstrate that they consult and involve citizens on the setting, reviewing and raising of local standards. Plans for local policing pledges set out in the recent Policing Green Paper³ illustrate how working together with the local community to meet appropriate standards might work in practice.

In this next phase of reform, measures of success are more sophisticated and take account of how well services support opportunity and deliver outcomes. This is why the most recent Public Service Agreements and the new Local Performance Framework reflect the Government's aspiration to develop world class services underpinned by fairness and excellence. It is not enough that public services are in themselves equitable and fair: they have an important role to play in helping citizens achieve their potential and be the best they can.

The focus has broadened from quantitative service levels that are easy to measure and now encompass the harder to assess, qualitative outcomes. For example, the Government's commitment to increase the proportion of socially excluded adults in settled accommodation, and employment education or training⁴ is indicative of the Government's approach to creating public services that enable and empower. This cannot be easily expressed in the form of a service level guarantee but is nevertheless crucial. The 'transaction' in this instance is a complex mix of support and intervention across a range of service providers, fully involving the individual. As such it is less of a consumerist guarantee and more of a mutual agreement with the citizen.

In addition to holding public services to account for their general performance, standards are useful to individuals in defining those circumstances in which they are entitled to redress. Having encouraged the implementation of challenging standards the Government believes that access to appropriate remedy is an important element of ensuring they remain meaningful. Following consultation, the Parliamentary and Health Service Ombudsman has recently published a set of Principles for Remedy,⁵ intended to support public bodies in determining fair and proportionate redress. The principles provide a useful reference to enable departments and public bodies to determine reasonable, fair, and proportionate remedies. As part of the wider work on the

2 Communities and Local Government Empowerment White Paper, *Communities in Control: Real People, Real Power*, July 2008.

3 Home Office Policing Green Paper, *From the Neighbourhood to the National: Policing our Communities Together*, July 2008.

4 PSA 16, led by Cabinet Office.

5 Parliamentary and Health Service Ombudsman, *Principles for Remedy*, October 2007.

Empowerment White Paper, Communities and Local Government is leading a review of redress currently underway for local services. The Government will also respond in due course to the ongoing Law Commission consultation on administrative redress.⁶

There is still more to be done to create citizen-focused public services. The Government will continue to raise standards and empower citizens and communities to access entitlements and seek remedy where appropriate. Ambitious standards that measure both transactional delivery levels as well as harder to quantify outcomes remain crucial to this endeavour: it is through these new approaches that the Government expects to facilitate and empower individuals, communities and professionals to access and deliver world class public services.

The Government's response to the Committee's recommendations is set out below.

1. The Citizen's Charter has had a lasting impact on how public services are viewed in this country. The initiative's underlying principles retain their validity nearly two decades on—not least the importance of putting the interests of public service users at the heart of public service provision. We believe this cardinal principle should continue to influence public service reform, and encourage the Government to maintain the aims of the Citizen's Charter programme given their continuing relevance to public service delivery today. (Paragraph 17)

The Government welcomes the Committee's evaluation of the Citizen's Charter and recognises the important legacy of this initiative in shaping the relationship between citizens and public services.

The Government agrees that putting the interests of the citizen at the heart of public services is more essential than ever and this core principle underpins the Government's public service reform programme.

Customer Service Excellence—like Charter Mark before it—upholds and develops the aims of the Citizen's Charter programme. It sits alongside a suite of measures, tools and initiatives that are designed to support customer-focused public services reform and which complement the original purpose of the Citizen's Charter.

2. There is evidence that even without widespread public awareness or promotion, the Charter Mark has been a useful management tool. We consider there remains a need for a standard which promotes excellence in public service provision, particularly one that focuses on the interests and perspectives of service users. We consequently welcome the introduction of the new Customer Service Excellence standard. (Paragraph 28)

The Government agrees. The Government welcomed Bernard Herdan's assessment of the Charter Mark scheme as 'something of an unsung success story'⁷ and accepted his recommendation⁸ that a new customer service standard should build upon this legacy and amplify its success.

6 The Law Commission, Consultation Paper (No 187) *Administrative Redress: Public Bodies And The Citizen*, September 2008.

7 Cabinet Office, *The Customer Voice in Transforming Public Services*, June 2006.

8 Cabinet Office, *The Customer Voice in Transforming Public Services: The Government Response*, December 2006.

Customer Service Excellence, the Government's new standard, was launched in March 2008. Based on research into the key drivers of satisfaction with public services, the structure and content reflect the citizen-focused ethos that characterised its predecessors.

Additionally, however, the criteria include very robust requirements for excellence in public service provision, and set out much more sophisticated expectations about understanding of and responsiveness to customers, citizens and communities. As such Customer Service Excellence raises the bar significantly and challenges public services to ensure that the customer is 'always and everywhere' within the organisation.

3. Measures of user satisfaction can shed some light on the quality of public service provision. They should, however, be treated with care because they are subjective and are sometimes based on less important considerations than service quality. We agree with the Herdan review that a user focus is essential for any standard aimed at improving public services. We believe, however, that this should be based on measures wider than surveys of user satisfaction. More sophisticated measures—such as those that consider users' experiences of services, or outcomes for service users—are likely to be more effective at enabling organisations to improve public service provision. (Paragraph 34)

The Government agrees. The Herdan review highlighted the importance of customer satisfaction measurement for public service organisations and recommended that a new standard incorporated robust requirements on this within its criteria.

The Government accepted this recommendation and as a result Customer Service Excellence recognises the valuable function of satisfaction measurement, which is addressed prominently in the standard.

The Government agrees that surveys of user satisfaction, whilst important, are not sufficient in themselves and the Customer Service Excellence standard is much broader and more nuanced to reflect this.

Specific satisfaction requirements within the standard include a strong emphasis on qualitative as well as quantitative research; reliability, accuracy and disclosure. In addition there is an expectation that the organisation will make positive changes to services as a result of analysing customer experience, including improved customer journeys.⁹

4. We believe there is strong merit in having a tool—such as the Charter Mark or the new Customer Service Excellence scheme—for improving user responsiveness and raising the quality of public services. If it is to be effective at this task, however, we believe that the emphasis should be on securing high standards of service provision. This means that considerations other than user satisfaction will need to be taken into account, including the broader user-focused measures we have already recommended, as well as the results of wider assessments by audit, regulatory and inspection bodies. (Paragraph 36)

The Government agrees. High standards of service provision are identified by customers as the most important driver of satisfaction with public services and are addressed in detail in a dedicated criterion for delivery.

This criterion sets challenging requirements for organisations, including standards of service that take account of delivering national and statutory standards and targets. This includes the results of wider assessments such as those by inspectorates such as Ofsted, the Healthcare Commission and the Audit Commission, including in due course the new joint inspectorate Comprehensive Area Assessment (CAA). Government frameworks such as Public Service Agreements (PSAs) and other standards such as Investors in People are also taken into account by CSE assessors.¹⁰

More generally with respect to excellent performance, the Customer Service Excellence standard requires organisations to involve customers in the setting, reviewing and raising of local standards; benchmark with similar or complementary organisations and identify and learn from best practice.

The Delivery criterion also sets out requirements on complaints, including processes, customer empowerment and trend identification. This is explored in more detail in the Government's response to the Committee's previous report, *When Citizens Complain*.¹¹

5. We recommend that there should be clear, precise and enforceable statements of people's entitlements to public services. These should be in the form of Public Service Guarantees, as proposed by our predecessor committee. The Guarantees should specify the minimum standard of service provision that users can expect, and set out the arrangements for redress that apply should service providers fail to meet the standard promised. (Paragraph 45)

The Government shares the Committee's commitment to raising standards and continuously improving service provision. The Government's first task in addressing public service reform was to establish, at a national level, explicit standards below which no school, hospital or other service would be allowed to fall. These national standards meant that the Government could then focus on greater diversity of supply in order to foster innovation and strengthen incentives for high performance.

This first phase of reform drove up performance whilst increasing investment: standards rose in primary schools, hospital waiting lists and crime began to fall. The next stage complemented these top-down targets and standards, with clearer incentives to improve, generated from within public services themselves rather than imposed from Whitehall. For example, the Local Policing Pledges outlined in the Policing Green Paper show how services will in future work more closely with citizens and be more accountable to local communities.

The Government's vision for the future is to create world class services that empower citizens, foster a new professionalism and provide strong strategic leadership. Standards remain at the heart of this ambition: the Government will act to end unfairness by

¹⁰ *Customer Service Excellence Standard*, op.cit. Criterion 4.

¹¹ *When Citizens Complain: Government Response to the Committee's Fifth Report of Session 2007-08* (HC 997), July 2008.

enshrining universal entitlements to basic standards and to eradicate remaining pockets of underperformance.¹²

6. We welcome the Government's existing efforts to set out people's entitlements to minimum standards of public service provision, as expressed in a number of targets and core standards. In developing a set of Public Service Guarantees, we would expect the Government to consolidate these existing commitments. (Paragraph 46)

The Government has set out its strategic approach to supporting excellence and fairness in public services. It is the Government's job to ensure that the system delivers services to deliver both existing social needs and newly emerging ones. This includes acting as a guarantor of standards and fairness, establishing the overall framework and accountability systems for the public services and then devolving extensive responsibility to the front line.

The establishment of national minimum standards have played an important role over the last decade in rebuilding public confidence:

The Government committed to ensuring that 98% of A&E patients should wait no longer than four hours before admission and discharge to/from hospital. This target was met in 2005/06, sustained in 2006/07 and narrowly missed in 2007/08. This is now an NHS performance minimum standard.

A target for 90% of admitted (and 95% of non-admitted) patients to be seen within 18 weeks of referral, has been set to be achieved by December 2008. This is currently on track to be delivered and will then become an NHS performance standard.

Pupils achieving five higher grade GCSEs, including English and mathematics, is now regarded as the minimum standard. Schools with under 30% of pupils attaining this level receive government support under the National Challenge programme. The Government is committed to ensuring all secondary schools reach this benchmark by 2011 at the latest.

To take us on to the next stage the Government has refreshed existing performance frameworks so that accountability is maintained, incentives are in place and power is devolved locally. The reform of the Government's performance management framework at the Comprehensive Spending Review 2007 resulted in a streamlined set of 30 Public Service Agreements (PSAs) representing the top priorities of government. The PSAs are firmly focused on achieving better outcomes for citizens. Each PSA is supported by a handful of outcome-focused indicators, which the Government is committed to achieve. As indicators are achieved, the most appropriate will become minimum standards and innovation and flexibility at local level will be the drivers for further improvements nationally.

However, public services need to be accountable at a local level as well as centrally. The Local Government White Paper set out proposals for a single performance framework covering all outcomes delivered by local government alone or in partnership. Local Area Agreements (LAAs) are at its heart: these form the basis for the next steps in reform of locally-based services—in health, education, economic development, the environment

12 Cabinet Office, *Excellence and Fairness*: op.cit.

and beyond. It reflects the new and complex challenges which require joined-up responses on tough cross-cutting issues, like community cohesion or child obesity.

7. We envisage the creation of a set of Public Service Guarantees that could be put in the hands of public service users. This would, in effect, form a citizen's handbook of entitlements. The set of guarantees would be a progressively evolving document that is able to adapt to changing needs and attitudes about entitlement to public services. (Paragraph 47)

The Government agrees that it is important that standards are accessible to citizens and straightforward to understand. Minimum standards that complement the delivery priorities set out in their PSAs and LAAs are in many cases already in place within specific sectors and expressed in a single published document. For example, in the NHS work is already underway on a new NHS Constitution which will outline patient rights and pledges; the Policing Pledge represents a minimum standard of service; and the DWP Customer Charter will set out in one document the 'promise' for service users.

The proposed NHS Constitution, marking 60 years of the NHS, is a potential model for developing this approach. It reaffirms patients' rights to NHS services, free of charge and with equal access for all, as well as to drugs and treatments recommended by National Institute of Clinical Excellence's (NICE) technology appraisals. A patient's right to make choices about their NHS care is enshrined as a new right.

Patients already have considerable legal rights in relation to the NHS, but these are scattered between different legal instruments and policies. This is the first time that they are summarised in one place. The Handbook to the NHS Constitution sets out in detail how each right and pledge will take effect and the means for redress.

Legal rights set a minimum standard, which must be complied with; failure to comply may result in litigation or other forms of legal enforcement against the NHS. Patient Pledges, however, respond to what patients and the public told the Government matters to them and ensure that the NHS continues to be ambitious, while seeking to ensure that the Government maintains clarity about what constitutes a legal right.

An example is the pledge that the NHS will strive to provide convenient, easy to access services within the waiting times set out in the Handbook to the NHS Constitution. There are various performance standards operating within the NHS which make services easier to access, such as the 18-week maximum wait from referral to treatment. However, there is not a general obligation in law for the NHS always to achieve such a standard, because there will always be circumstances where it is inappropriate – if, for example, someone chooses to go away rather than attend a hospital appointment, this will delay treatment times. Nonetheless, the NHS should always strive to provide easily accessible and convenient services for every patient. The Handbook to the NHS Constitution also contains further details of how the NHS will ensure that the pledges are met through the application of the NHS performance and regulatory regime.

However, in view of the need to include such complex content in order to make it meaningful to service users, the Government believes that it is more appropriate for handbooks to cover a finite scope, rather than all public services. This would best serve the objectives of accessibility, clarity and comprehensiveness.

8. The point of minimum national standards is not to bring about uniformity of service provision, but to set the minimum acceptable level and quality of public service provision that should apply to all. We believe that minimum standards are therefore an appropriate basis on which to formulate Public Service Guarantees. (Paragraph 54)

The Government welcomes the Committee's recognition that minimum standards should not aim to bring about uniformity of public service provision. The Government believes that service quality is influenced by a number of factors, where minimum standards are one tool within a range of levers and controls.

The Government has already gone much further in setting out its aspirations for world class public services. This vision recognises that outputs and transactions are not the only important measures and that quality and outcome are also crucial. For example, the new PSA set is more sophisticated in its scope and measures of success: it is intended that in due course some of these may become minimum standards.

9. If Public Service Guarantees are to be credible they must reflect the reality that there are limits to the resources available for public service provision. This means that discussions about the nature of entitlements to public services must explicitly take into account the resources available to fulfil those entitlements. It also suggests that people need to be aware of the responsibilities arising out of their use of public services, as a concomitant of their rights to publicly provided services. (Paragraph 61)

The Government believes that strong, reformed public services that deliver personal opportunities and secure communities requires a new set of relationships: between empowered citizens and professionals; between professionals and government; and between citizens and the state. Rights and responsibilities are at the heart of this discussion, with improved accountability and transparency within public services mirrored by greater emphasis on the participation of individuals and mutual agreements rather than consumerist guarantees.

The Government also agrees that prioritisation is important in setting standards. In local government, for instance, the Government has reduced the number of performance indicators from around 1200 to 196. From April 2008, the National Indicator Set is the only set of indicators on which central Government will performance monitor local government. The set covers all the national priority outcomes which local authorities will be responsible for delivering and will form the basis of individually negotiated Local Area Agreements (LAAs). Ensuring outcomes are delivered, and swift action is taken where risks are identified, is a priority.

The new Comprehensive Area Assessment (CAA) will assess annually the risks to delivery and prospects for improvement against local outcomes. Reporting to citizens, local delivery partners and central government it will trigger more detailed improvement support, inspection or intervention where necessary. LAAs will be at the heart of the CAA but it will also look across the whole indicator set. CAA will be a more proportionate assessment framework, taking more account of citizen experiences and perspectives and targeting the inspectorates' efforts on those areas and services where it can have the greatest impact or where the risks of failure are most significant.

10. It is a useful discipline to require public service decision makers to think about what is most important to their service users, and to build entitlements and commitments to service levels around these views. We believe that the process for setting Public Service Guarantees must genuinely involve service users if the Guarantees are to reflect accurately what users want from public services. (Paragraph 65)

The Government agrees that genuine engagement and a real understanding of the views of service users is an essential element of the new relationship between public services and the citizen. Developing customer insight—a profound understanding of the needs, preferences and behaviour of service users—is an important discipline with potential to support the development of truly customer-focused services. Customer insight is already being used to transform services, with a more sophisticated understanding leading to projects such as Tell Us Once.¹³

For example, the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) has a strategic objective to become an effective exemplar of effective service delivery to individuals and employers. This is supported by a strategy to transform services, an operating model to describe them and the DWP Customer Charter to articulate the promise to the customer. A dedicated Customer Insight team is now established and drives a wide range of practical activity. The DWP Customer Charter is being developed using research amongst customers and intermediary organisations to understand exactly what it is that contributes to customer satisfaction. The four key drivers identified—treatment, right outcome, timely response and ease of access—will provide the starting point from which all DWP business and staff will frame their relationships with customers.

As well as establishing DWP customers' drivers of satisfaction, initial work has also clarified what features of the Charter customers regard as important. For example, they believe that it should be a simple starting point for their relationship with the department; that it shouldn't be a contract or rule book; and that it should record the two-way 'deal' between Department and customer.

11. Introducing entitlements to public services in the form of Public Service Guarantees would be a powerful addition to the measures the Government has already outlined for empowering the people that use public services. (Paragraph 67)

As recognised by the Committee, the Government has recently set out its overall approach to achieving world class public services¹⁴ and has identified empowering citizens as one of the key paths to improvement. In particular the Community Empowerment White Paper seeks to transfer power from government to citizens and communities, creating more opportunities and easier ways for people to influence local decisions and drive up local standards.

Furthermore, high standards within public services play an important part in supporting empowerment and enabling people to achieve their full potential. This is illustrated by the five PSAs led by the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) that are focused on continued and accelerated improvement in the Government's priority outcomes. These are ambitious, with the potential to transform

¹³ Cabinet Office, *Transformational Government Annual Report*, July 2008.

¹⁴ Cabinet Office, *Excellence and Fairness*: op.cit.

lives—narrowing the gap in educational achievement (PSA 11) and improving the wellbeing and health of children and young people (PSA 12) for instance. These challenging outcomes are not easily expressed as minimum standards and the rationalised use of outcomes leaves more space for local target setting.

In policing, minimum standards of service are appropriate in some important areas, such as response times, but other equally important areas of performance can't be expressed as a simple guarantee. The Government believes that here, as elsewhere, more innovative and sophisticated mechanisms are required in order to deliver the standards of service expected of world class public services.

For example, Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnerships operate to minimum standards designed to ensure that there is genuine empowerment within communities. Amongst these are requirements to consult local communities about priorities prior to developing a strategic assessment. In addition, Local Crime Information Projects are making consistent crime data available on a monthly basis. This is underpinned by minimum standards, such as the requirement that information should be precise enough to offer meaningful detail at a local level and that postcode and map search facilities are available to help people easily find their own neighbourhood, that all Police Forces will be expected to meet by the end of 2008.

12. Many minimum standards for public service provision exist already, but public awareness of these standards appears to be very low. We recommend that, across all public services, the Government should make a systematic effort to publicise and communicate these standards as an initial step towards enabling people to claim their entitlements to minimum standards of service provision. Public Service Guarantees, if introduced, would also need to be publicised widely. (Paragraph 69)

The Government agrees that it is important that public service users understand their rights and responsibilities. Individual departments already publicise their services, and this generally includes agreed minimum standards. For example, the Identity and Passport Service has a series of commitments that are prominently displayed on their website, literature and public offices.¹⁵

Research into the key drivers of satisfaction¹⁶ confirms that accurate and detailed information is vital to public service customers. The Government's Customer Service Excellence standard reflects this and Information and Access are integral to its comprehensive requirements. For example, to meet the standard an organisation must show it not only sets standards but also publishes its performance against these and communicates effectively.¹⁷

The Government has developed cross-departmental communications expertise via the Government Communication Network (GCN). This supports communications professionals within departments to develop a sophisticated approach to reaching intended audiences in targeted ways, so that the message is heard by those for whom it is intended. The Government believes that this approach, underpinned by principles of

15 Identity and Passport Service website: <http://www.ips.gov.uk/passport/about-us-service.asp>

16 Cabinet Office, MORI Research Study on The Drivers of Satisfaction with Public Services, May 2004

17 The Customer Service Excellence standard, op.cit. Criterion 3 and Criterion 4.

customer insight, is more effective in helping service users to recognise their entitlements than generic campaigns.

13. There would need to be a body dedicated to enforcing Public Service Guarantees so that, in practice, public service users were able to secure their entitlements. We believe that this would logically fall within the Ombudsman's remit, since the failure to meet promised minimum standards would result in complaints about 'maladministration' on the part of public service providers. The Ombudsman would also be well-placed to enforce Public Service Guarantees because of her wide-ranging remit over all public services and considerable experience in securing redress for those that have suffered from poor administration. (Paragraph 74)

The Government believes that the Ombudsman makes a valuable contribution to the improvement of public services. The lessons learned from her work investigating and resolving complaints help to improve the way that public services are provided. The Government worked closely with the Ombudsman to develop the recently published *Principles of Good Administration*¹⁸ and *Principles for Remedy*.¹⁹ This set of principles provide a useful tool to help departments, and other public bodies to deliver good quality administration and public service.

14. For entitlements to minimum standards of public services to be effective, there must be robust enforcement and redress arrangements in place. Measures to remedy any failure to meet promised standards should be spelled out clearly in the form of the Public Service Guarantees themselves. Redress should be made in a fashion appropriate to the circumstances of the particular entitlement, and should aim to restore individuals to the position they would have been in had the standard been achieved in the first place. (Paragraph 77)

When things go wrong, the vast majority of complaints can be resolved at a local level using published complaints procedures, and poor service rectified satisfactorily. This will include ensuring that any disadvantage suffered by the service user as a result of mistakes is put right where possible. The Government believes that this is the quickest and most flexible way of delivering appropriate redress in majority of cases.

In the small number of cases where local-level complaint resolution is not possible, citizens have other clearly signposted avenues to pursue the complaint further. The Government's response to the Committee's previous report, *When Citizens Complain* explores this in more detail.²⁰

The Treasury publication *Managing Public Money*²¹ sets out detailed guidance for departments on the provision of remedies, including issues to consider in designing appropriate compensation schemes. The guidance incorporates the Ombudsman's *Principles for Remedy*.²²

18 Parliamentary and Health Service Ombudsman, *Principles of Good Administration*, March 2007.

19 Parliamentary and Health Service Ombudsman, *Principles for Remedy*, op. cit.

20 *When Citizens Complain: Government Response*, op.cit.

21 HM Treasury, *Managing Public Money*, April 2008, Annex 4.14

22 Parliamentary and Health Service Ombudsman, *Principles for Remedy*, op. cit.

15. We believe there is a very strong case to institute Public Service Guarantees that empower users by allowing them to claim their rights to public services. Setting out clear entitlements to public services empowers people and strengthens their attachment to publicly provided services. As the Government clarifies the future direction of public service reform, introducing Public Service Guarantees would be a clear indication that, in the provision of public services, it genuinely intends to put people first. (Paragraph 79)

The Government agrees that clear and challenging standards are essential to delivering high quality public services that empower citizens and communities.

Standards should be clearly communicated and widely available so that users can understand the levels of service that they can expect. This has been an important element of the Government's approach to public service reform over the past decade, contributing to improved levels of service in all key delivery areas as illustrated elsewhere in this response. The Government is committed to building upon this success, maintaining and raising minimum standards where appropriate.

The Government agrees that for some types of services a minimum standard that sets out a basic level of delivery works well, and these already exist within many public services. For example, early education and day care services must meet statutory minimum standards which are assessed by Ofsted; there is guaranteed access to a primary care health professional within 24 hours and to a primary care doctor within 48 hours.

The next phase of reform will focus on improving quality of service, which is less easy to measure and harder to express as a right or guarantee. New Public Service Agreements and Local Area Agreements will help shape a new generation of standards, and tools such as Customer Service Excellence can support this. Further work on this issue is ongoing: the Government is committed to this ambitious programme for transforming public services and driving up standards of delivery in all areas.

Appendix 2—Letter from the Chairman of the Committee to the Minister for the Cabinet Office

The Committee is grateful for the Government response to our report, *From Citizen's Charter to Public Service Guarantees: Entitlements to Public Services*. There is a great deal of information in the response about the Government's commitment to improving public services, which the Committee welcomes. We would, however, like to clarify the Government's position on the proposals contained in our original report, as the wording of the response is somewhat opaque in relation to some of our recommendations. In particular, the response does not directly address our central contention that there should be clear and precise statements of people's entitlements to public services in the form of Public Service Guarantees.

To this end, we would appreciate clarification of the response to our main recommendation (number 5) about the need for clear statements of people's entitlements to public services. The Government response states that: "...the Government will act to end unfairness by enshrining universal entitlements to basic standards and to eradicate remaining pockets of underperformance". This appears to accept the principle that people's entitlements to certain standards of public service provision should be recognised and articulated. It would be helpful to have more definite details about how the Government intends to implement this commitment and, specifically, if it will be through the adoption of the type of Public Service Guarantees that we recommend in our report. We would also like to know if the "universal entitlements" will be to precise standards or levels of provision, and whether they will contain details of enforceability and redress should standards of service delivery not be met.

The more general point we would make is that the Government response tends to focus on the aspect of our recommendations concerned with determining minimum standards for public services, rather than on the importance of setting out people's entitlements to public services. Clearly, defining and raising standards is an important part of any discussion of public service provision. Equally important, in our view, is for people to be made aware of and empowered to claim the public services they are entitled to. A central aim of our report was to urge the Government to spell out public service entitlements as a way of strengthening people's attachment to public services and encouraging them to take a more active role in claiming their rights to good public services. Any further light you could shed on the Government's position on promoting people's entitlements to public services—and what more it intends to do to express and communicate those entitlements—would be very much appreciated.

November 2008

List of Reports from the Committee during the current Parliament

The reference number of the Government's response to each Report is printed in brackets after the HC printing number.

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Eighth Report	The Pensions Bill and the FAS: An Update, Including the Government Response to the Fifth Report of Session 2006–07	HC 922 (<i>HC 1048</i>)
Ninth Report	Skills for Government	HC 93 (<i>HC 89</i>)
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Fourth Report	Propriety and Honours: Interim Findings	HC 1119 (<i>Cm 7374</i>)
Fifth Report	Whitehall Confidential? The Publication of Political Memoirs	HC 689 (<i>HC 91, Session 2007–08</i>)