



House of Commons

Committee of Public Accounts

**Improving service
quality: Action in
response to the
Inherited SERPS
problem**

**Thirty-sixth Report of
Session 2002–03**



House of Commons
Committee of Public Accounts

Improving service quality: Action in response to the Inherited SERPS problem

Thirty-sixth Report of
Session 2002–03

*Report, together with formal minutes,
oral and written evidence*

*Ordered by The House of Commons
to be printed 30 June 2003*

HC 616
Published on 17 July 2003
by authority of the House of Commons
London: The Stationery Office Limited
£0.00

The Committee of Public Accounts

The Committee of Public Accounts is appointed by the House of Commons to examine “the accounts showing the appropriation of the sums granted by Parliament to meet the public expenditure, and of such other accounts laid before Parliament as the committee may think fit” (Standing Order No 148).

Current membership

Mr Edward Leigh MP (*Conservative, Gainsborough*) (Chairman)
Mr Richard Bacon MP (*Conservative, South Norfolk*)
Mr Ian Davidson MP (*Labour, Glasgow Pollock*)
Geraint Davies MP (*Labour, Croydon Central*)
Rt Hon Frank Field MP (*Labour, Birkenhead*)
Mr Nick Gibb MP (*Conservative, Bognor Regis and Littlehampton*)
Mr George Howarth MP (*Labour, Knowsley North and Sefton East*)
Mr Brian Jenkins MP (*Labour, Tamworth*)
Mr Nigel Jones MP (*Liberal Democrat, Cheltenham*)
Ms Ruth Kelly MP (*Labour, Bolton West*)
Mr George Osborne MP (*Conservative, Tatton*)
Mr David Rendel MP (*Liberal Democrat, Newbury*)
Mr Siôn Simon MP (*Labour, Birmingham Erdington*)
Mr Gerry Steinberg MP (*Labour, City of Durham*)
Jon Trickett MP (*Labour, Hemsworth*)
Rt Hon Alan Williams MP (*Labour, Swansea West*)

Powers

Powers of the Committee of Public Accounts are set out in House of Commons Standing Orders, principally in SO No 148. These are available on the Internet via www.parliament.uk.

Publications

The Reports and evidence of the Committee are published by The Stationery Office by Order of the House. All publications of the Committee (including press notices) are on the Internet at http://www.parliament.uk/parliamentary_committees/committee_of_public_accounts.cfm. A list of Reports of the Committee in the present Session is at the back of this volume.

Committee staff

The current staff of the Committee is Nick Wright (Clerk), Christine Randall (Committee Assistant), Leslie Young (Committee Assistant), and Ronnie Jefferson (Secretary).

Contacts

All correspondence should be addressed to the Clerk, Committee of Public Accounts, House of Commons, 7 Millbank, London SW1P 3JA. The telephone number for general enquiries is 020 7219 5708; the Committee’s email address is pubaccom@parliament.uk.

Contents

Report	<i>Page</i>
Summary	3
1 Informing the public about the new regulations	5
2 Ensuring those eligible receive compensation	8
3 Improving the quality of customer records	9
4 Improving customer service	10
Conclusions and recommendations	13
Formal minutes	14
Witnesses	15
List of written evidence	15
List of Reports from the Committee of Public Accounts Session 2002–03	16

Summary

In 2000, the Committee of Public Accounts reported¹ on the failure by the then Department of Social Security to inform the public about a change in inheritance arrangements for the State Earnings-Related Pension Scheme (SERPS). This change—due to come into effect in October 2000—would have reduced from 100 to 50% the amount of a deceased person’s SERPS pension that could be inherited by a surviving spouse.

However, in March 2000, having accepted that adequate publicity had not been given, the Government announced that the change would be postponed, and following consultation, published new proposals in November 2000. These changes—which are likely to cost an estimated £12 billion by 2050—were designed to give full protection to all existing SERPS pensioners, give younger people adequate notice of the change in inheritance arrangements, and provide transitional arrangements for those approaching retirement age. Between February 2001 and October 2002, the Department wrote to, or targeted advertising at, more than 20 million people to advise them of the new arrangements. The Social Security (Inherited SERPS) Regulations came into force in October 2002.

The Inherited SERPS problem exposed serious weaknesses in the ways in which the Department dealt with its customers. These included weak arrangements for ensuring that leaflets and other information products were accurate; limitations in the information available to staff; and a lack of robust arrangements for ensuring that staff provided accurate information to customers, and for monitoring complaints. To address the recommendations made by the Committee of Public Accounts to deal with these weaknesses, in 2001 the Department introduced the Accuracy of Information project. The aims included to ensure that the information provided to its customers was accurate and met their needs. The project was closed in March 2002 and the initiatives are now being further developed as part of the Department’s mainstream business.

On the basis of a Report by the Comptroller and Auditor General,² we examined the action taken by the Department for Work and Pensions in response to recommendations made by the Committee on the Inherited SERPS problem itself,³ and on the proposals for remedying it.⁴ The Committee benefited from taking evidence not only from the current Accounting Officer, Sir Richard Mottram, but also Rachel Lomax, the Accounting Officer at the time many of the decisions on tackling the Inherited SERPS problem were made.

We draw the following main conclusions from our examination:

- The Department invested considerable resources in publicising the changes to the inheritance arrangements for SERPS to more than 20 million people before the

1 34th Report from the Committee of Public Accounts, *State Earnings-Related Pension Scheme: The failure to inform the public about reduced pension rights for widows and widowers* (HC 401, Session 1999–2000)

2 C&AG’s Report, *Improving service quality: Action in response to the Inherited SERPS problem* (HC 497, Session 2002–03)

3 34th Report from the Committee of Public Accounts, *State Earnings-Related Pension Scheme: The failure to inform the public about reduced pension rights for widows and widowers* (HC 401, Session 1999–2000)

4 5th Report from the Committee of Public Accounts, *The Draft Social Security (Inherited SERPS) Regulations* (HC 243, Session 2000–01)

Regulations came into effect in October 2002. This was a major undertaking, but many of those affected were not advised until less than six months before the Regulations were due to come into force, limiting the amount of time available to some to make alternative financial provision.

- The quality of the address records held by the Department remains poor, both for those resident in the United Kingdom and abroad. There is no legal requirement for people who do not claim benefits to inform the Department of their address, but having accurate customer records is essential if the Department is to inform customers about developments which affect them or to communicate messages effectively. As well as data matching already under way, the Department should work to improve systematically the quality of the address records it holds, for example through advertising the importance of ensuring address records are kept up to date, using web-sites accessed by customers living overseas to encourage them to update their address records, and encouraging customers to notify the Department of their e-mail address.
- The Department has used the Committee's previous recommendations on the Inherited SERPS problem as the basis for introducing a number of important changes in the organisation of the Department, and in the way staff deal with customers. These include more systematic quality assurance arrangements for ensuring leaflets are accurate and routine checking of the adequacy of oral and written communications with the public. This good practice now needs to be extended quickly throughout the Department.

1 Informing the public about the new regulations

1. The Inherited SERPS problem arose from the failure to inform the public about a change in social security legislation which would have reduced from 100 to 50% of a deceased person's entitlement the maximum amount of SERPS pension that could be inherited by their surviving spouse. Publicity for the change was necessary to ensure that people had the chance to decide whether or not to make additional provision, such as increasing the amount they saved or taking out an additional annuity. However, in March 2000, the Department accepted that it had not provided adequate information over a period of more than 10 years, and postponed the change, which was due to come into force in October 2000.⁵

2. Following consideration of alternatives, in November 2000 the Government announced new regulations,⁶ which were approved by Parliament, to come into effect in October 2002. These introduced transitional arrangements for inheritance of SERPS for those approaching state pension age (**Figure 1**).

Figure 1: Transitional arrangements for inheritance of SERPS for those approaching state pension age

Date contributor reaches state pension age	Maximum SERPS pension entitlement for surviving spouse
Before 6 October 2002	100%
Between 6 October 2002 and 5 October 2004	90%
Between 6 October 2004 and 5 October 2006	80%
Between 6 October 2006 and 5 October 2008	70%
Between 6 October 2008 and 5 October 2010	60%
After 5 October 2010	50%

Source: Department for Work and Pensions

3. In its previous reports,⁷ the Committee stressed the importance of informing people about the changes. The Department categorised those they needed to inform—some 20 million in all—into five groups (**Figure 2**) according to how they might be affected. Having written in November 2000 to the 20,000 people who had contacted them, the Department wrote to those they believed would be most concerned they might lose the 100% entitlement to SERPS. These were the 10 million people over state pension age (Group A) and the 1.1 million who would reach this age by 6 October 2002 (Group B). This was to reassure them that they were unaffected by the new Regulations. However, the Department received nearly 600,000 responses, which indicated to them that they needed to handle communications with the remaining groups carefully.⁸

5 C&AG's Report, paras 1.1–1.4

6 The Social Security (Inherited SERPS) Regulations 2001

7 34th Report from the Committee of Public Accounts, *State earnings-Related Pension Scheme: The failure to inform the public about reduced pension rights for widows and widowers* (HC 401, Session 1999–2000); 5th Report from the Committee of Public Accounts, *The Draft Social Security (Inherited SERPS) Regulations* (HC 243, Session 2000–01)

8 Qq 2, 115–121

4. The mail-shots to Groups A and B went out between February and August 2001.⁹ A more complex letter to those (Group C) who would reach pension age between October 2002 and October 2010 (and who might need to make alternative provision) was sent out between March and July 2002. This was 12 months later than originally intended, and gave some people quite limited time to make alternative arrangements.¹⁰

Figure 2: SERPS contributors grouped by how they were affected by the new Regulations¹¹

Group	Number targeted by letter and advertising (a)	Number targeted by advertising (a)	Date letters sent	Number of responses received
A) People already over state pension age	10.1	-	February and March 2001	590,000
B) People who were not pensioners but would become so before 6 October 2002	1.1	-	August 2001	56,000
C) People expected to reach state pension age between 6 October 2002 and 5 October 2010, who would be subject to sliding scale provisions	5.1(b)	1.6	March to July 2002	2,000,000
D) The remainder of the working age population	-	34	-	8,000
E) People living overseas, who would otherwise have fallen into any of Groups A to D	-	1	-	3,600

Source: Department for Work and Pensions

Notes:

(a) Advertising includes a variety of channels of communication, including advertising on web-sites.

(b) In addition, as part of a pilot, the Department wrote to more than 5,000 people in Group C in November 2001.

5. The letter to those who would reach pension age between October 2002 and October 2010 offered the chance to request a personalised SERPS estimate showing the amount of pension a spouse would inherit. The estimate letter, sent out in response to more than 1 million requests, was quality assured, using the independent Social Security Advisory Committee and others. A pilot exercise indicated that 87% of customers were satisfied that the letter was clear and easy to understand.

6. However, soon after it started to go out, the Department received around 400 queries about the impact on their SERPS pension of contracting out of the scheme. It had protracted contact with one member of the public—Mr Chance—who believed that the letter was inaccurate.¹² Following the Ombudsman's decision on Mr Chance's case in September 2002 that the wording of the letter was potentially misleading to those who had contracted out of SERPS, the Department decided to write a further, clarifying letter to the 530,000 customers with contracted-out deductions, at a cost of £1.8 million. The

⁹ C&AG's Report, Figure 2

¹⁰ *ibid*, paras 2.10–2.14; Q5

¹¹ C&AG's Report, Figure 2

¹² Ev 22–25

Department suggested that despite its efforts, the problem with the letter may have arisen because it had tried to communicate with people in too many categories. It had been aware of the point raised by Mr Chance but had tried to keep the letter simple.¹³

7. Because it did not have the addresses for everyone, the Department had to communicate with some people, particularly those abroad, through advertising. Advertising was placed in UK national newspapers (which also have a daily circulation of around 1 million overseas), and on banner advertisements on websites known to be used by expatriates. With the latter, the Department has evidence that the percentage of people who responded by seeking further information was in line with industry averages for online advertising. Whilst it could not guarantee that it had communicated with everyone, the Department said it had no evidence that people were late in discovering the details of the changes. Anecdotal evidence suggests that, amongst those who had contacted the Department, very few had taken or decided not to take action and had lost out as a result.¹⁴

13 C&AG's Report, paras 2.16–2.17; Qq 10–12, 152–158

14 C&AG's Report, paras 2.20–2.22; Qq 19–25; Ev 19, 21 (Ref Qq 78–80, 189–191)

2 Ensuring those eligible receive compensation

8. In its previous reports, the Committee highlighted the importance of making compensation available where appropriate. References to compensation were included in the letters to the 20,000 people who had previously been in contact with the Department about the Inherited SERPS problem, even though most of them were over state pension age and, therefore, fully protected under the Regulations. Thereafter, the Department did not refer to compensation when writing to people. This was a deliberate decision. The Department drew a distinction between giving targeted information on departmental procedures for claiming compensation for what it considered was a small number of people who might be eligible, and making reference to compensation in communications with millions of people, most of whom were unlikely to be eligible. It considered that if it had included a reference to compensation in all the letters sent out, it would have unduly raised expectations and prompted an unmanageable number of unwarranted or bogus claims.¹⁵

9. The Department explained that the scheme introduced under the 2001 Regulations was designed to remove the need for most people to seek compensation, unlike the earlier proposals for a preserved rights scheme which had been considered and dropped in 2000. The arrangements did not require people to assert that they had lost out and seek compensation. Instead, the scheme gave people more time to order their affairs to take account of the change of inheritance rules. The Department said that those who felt they had suffered could still claim using the normal procedures for redress for maladministration and information on this could be found, for example, through welfare advisers or from the Department's website.¹⁶

10. By April 2003, the Department had received 617 claims for compensation (up from 250 by August 2002), of which 379 had been processed. Some £850,000 had been paid out from a contingency fund of £8 million that the Department had set aside. There were 215 successful claims between the start of 2001 and March 2003. Claims are still coming in, but the Department was confident that there was not a large number of people who have been disadvantaged and not compensated.¹⁷ The Department has no plans to undertake a survey to determine the level of those who might be eligible for compensation and did not consider it would be a good use of public money.¹⁸

15 C&AG's Report, paras 2.27–2.31; Qq 6–9

16 Qq 9, 73

17 Qq 8, 75, 105, 108–112; Ev 20 (Ref Qq 110–112)

18 Qq 77–79, 95–96; Ev 19 (Ref Qq 78–80)

3 Improving the quality of customer records

11. Having accurate and complete customer address records is important if the Department is to be able to inform properly all customers about initiatives and developments that benefit or otherwise affect them such as notifications about Pension Credit or encouragements to make provision for the future. However, there is no legal requirement for people who do not claim benefits to inform the Department of their address or of a change in address.¹⁹

12. The Department estimates it does not have correct address records for between 20% and 30% of people of working age. This situation influenced the Department's strategy for communicating the changes in the Regulations. Initially, they took the records they had and then matched the names with other records with addresses. It is also influencing the strategy the Department is using for spreading information about the new Pension Credit.²⁰

13. The quality of records for contributors living abroad is even poorer than for United Kingdom residents, as many have little or no contact with the Department except in relation to pensions.²¹ The Department therefore decided it would be most cost-effective to advertise in magazines, newspapers and on internet websites known to be read by people living abroad. The Department do not consider that it might be cost-effective in the longer term to try to seek out their addresses now so that the information could be used later, as it would be very difficult to keep details up to date.²²

14. Email could be a way of communicating in future. The Department has email addresses for some people, although does not collect them routinely. There could be value in asking people if they would be prepared to provide an email address, and storing it for future use. Because of data protection concerns, the Department do not wish to use insecure email channels to receive confidential information from their customers. Nevertheless, the Department is developing its IT infrastructure to allow customers to send in electronic claims, pass on changes of circumstances and communicate with it securely.²³

15. To help improve the quality of address records, from May 2003 the Department and the Inland Revenue are piloting additional software routines that check NIRS2 computer system supplied addresses with the Post Office Address Data file. From May 2003 they are also piloting a check with the Electoral Roll electronic data file to look at the age of the supplied address. From October 2003, all private address updates received by the Inland Revenue PAYE system will automatically transmit to the National Insurance Recording System to gradually update its records.²⁴

19 C&AG's Report, para 2.18; Qq 187, 193–197

20 Qq 25, 185

21 C&AG's Report, paras 2.20–2.21; Qq 80–81

22 Qq 82–89; Ev 19 (Ref Qq 85–89)

23 Qq 90–92; Ev 19 (Ref Qq 90–94)

24 Ev 21 (Ref Q 197), Ev 25–26

4 Improving customer service

16. In his 2000 Report, the Comptroller and Auditor General described a series of organisational weaknesses that were exposed by the Inherited SERPS problem. **Figure 3** summarises these and actions taken in response. The Department assured the Committee that as a result of the Inherited SERPS experience and other factors, the whole organisation and its processes and culture were being fundamentally changed to give more of a customer focus and to ensure that those making policy and those implementing it did so in a co-ordinated way,²⁵ though there was still some way to go.

Figure 3: Action taken by DWP against weaknesses identified by the Committee of Public Accounts

Weakness identified	Action taken
Lack of end-to-end-responsibility for ensuring that everything that needed to be done as a result of the Social Security Act 1986 was done.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Creation of The Pension Service in April 2002 to be responsible for services for current and future pensioners. • Reorganisation of Department to focus on key customer groups. • Appointment of a Senior Responsible Officer to ensure each project meets its objectives.
Poor information available to staff about changes affecting their work.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Roll-out of computers with intranet access for staff. • Development of a content management system to allow all publications and information products to be held on one database.
Weaknesses in arrangements for ensuring that leaflets and other information products are up to date and that information provided to the public is accurate	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Introduction of improved procedures for producing new leaflets and reviewing existing ones. • Involvement of the independent Social Security Advisory Committee to scrutinise departmental information products. • Development of mystery shopping programme in Jobcentre Plus and being piloted in The Pension Service.
Lack of adequate systems for ensuring that warnings raised in correspondence are recognised, and for ensuring that complaints are handled and monitored	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Introduction of computerised complaints handling system within the former Benefits Agency in 2000–01, with the same information now generated by The Pensions Service. • Child Support Agency introduced complaints improvement programme in 2002, and Jobcentre Plus is its reviewing complaints handling in 2003–04.
Inadequate attention given to managing the risks involved in the change of inheritance arrangements	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • New risk management methodology introduced across the Department in July 2001. • Training for staff took place throughout 2001–02 and the DWP Internal Assurance Service has reviewed risk management arrangements to assess compliance.

Source: National Audit Office

17. The Accuracy of Information Project, established to implement these wider changes, was completed in March 2002. The initiatives are now being taken forward in the mainstream business of the Department's agencies.²⁶ The Comptroller and Auditor General's Report showed that the rate of progress in implementing the changes varied across the different agencies. For example, use varies of the independent Social Security Advisory Committee to examine leaflets before publication, despite the benefits of this external scrutiny, and complaints handling arrangements in the different agencies are at different stages of development.²⁷

18. The Committee's initial hearing identified that organisational weaknesses were a significant factor in the causes of the Inherited SERPS problem. Different parts of the Department had failed to communicate effectively with others, or to pass on information. Since then, the Department has been reorganised with the creation in 2002 of The Pension Service and Jobcentre Plus, in place of the Benefits Agency.²⁸ The new arrangements have brought policy and operations more closely together and were focused on specific client groups, rather than, as the Benefits Agency had been, covering all customers. In the Department's view, this means there is much more interaction between policy staff and The Pension Service, including at a senior level. In addition, Senior Responsible Officers are now appointed to ensure that each project meets its objectives.²⁹

19. In 2000, a major concern expressed by the Committee was the lack of easy access to IT for staff, which made it difficult to communicate with them, and ensure they had up to date information. The Department has been working on modernisation of the computer systems in its offices through two programmes—one inherited from the Employment Service, and the Early Office Infrastructure project which was equipping former Department of Social Security offices.³⁰ All staff now either have a computer with access to the Department's intranet on their desk-top or access to one, depending on the nature of their job. The vast majority of staff who advise or interact with the public have their own desktop or laptop computer. The Department described the project as the biggest IT change programme in Europe.³¹ The hardware and software costs for the roll out of more than 100,000 workstations under the Early Office Infrastructure project were £157 million to November 2002, with installation costs an additional £59 million.³²

20. The Department has also been developing systems to manage and control the information available on its intranet. Better arrangements are in place for ensuring that all leaflets and information products are available on the intranet, where they could be easily updated. Some 90% of the guidance on benefits is now accessible through the intranet, whilst other material is being rewritten. The Department aims to have all guidance available on the intranet by 2005.³³

26 C&AG's Report, Appendix A; Q 18

27 Qq 71–72; C&AG's Report, paras 3.9, 3.14, 3.21, 3.29–3.31, 3.34–3.36

28 C&AG's Report, para 3.3; Qq 13–14

29 C&AG's Report, para 3.4; Qq 59–69

30 C&AG's Report, para 3.6; Q33

31 Qq 33–36, 46; Ev 18 (Ref Qq 34–36)

32 Qq 145–151; Ev 20 (Ref Qq 145–151)

33 C&AG's Report 3.7–3.9; Qq 37–46

21. The quality of communications with members of the public remains an issue. In 1999, Ministers expressed concerns about the standard of letters, many of which were considered overly bureaucratic and unclear. A project was established to achieve improvements, and a standards guide has been issued and improvements made to the design and layout of letters generated by computer. Although the quality of letters sent has improved, the Department agree that more needs to be done—by giving attention to staff training and education—to ensure that letters were clear. The Department’s Internal Assurance Service has reviewed the preparation, accuracy and quality of published information, with results of these reviews to be reported to management on a quarterly basis. The conclusion of these reviews and management response to any recommendations will be reported at the end of 2003.³⁴

22. In October 2001, the Department introduced new procedures for producing new leaflets and revising existing ones. These allocated responsibility to specific individuals for signing off products as accurate and new regular reviews have been instigated to help maintain and improve the quality of products. The independent Social Security Advisory Committee now scrutinises information products. During 2003 the Department is undertaking a major review of leaflets for people of working age. It has also introduced new arrangements which prevent staff or outside organisations ordering out of date leaflets.³⁵

23. The quality of communications and customer service with the public is also scrutinised by management and through ‘mystery shopping’ inspections. Checks are designed to ensure that staff communicate effectively by telephone. Jobcentre Plus has used mystery shopping and The Pension Service is piloting this approach at four Pension Centres to check performance against set quality standards in areas such as telephone greetings and the availability of leaflets.³⁶ In addition, mandatory telephone checks were introduced in The Pension Service on 1 April 2003, and the 25 pension centres and the Pension Credit Application Line sites record all incoming and outgoing calls with the public. Records are retained for 14 months. The Pensions Direct, Retirement Teleclaims and Forecasting specialist lines also have facilities to store and record calls.³⁷

24. The Department has also focused on the procedures for dealing with incoming letters, handling complaints, and monitoring. Nevertheless, the National Audit Office reported that managers made limited use of management information on complaints to identify staff weaknesses or the need for training. Whilst former Benefit Agency offices had a computerised complaints system, former Employment Service offices used a manual system. This currently makes it hard for Jobcentre Plus to generate management information on the number and types of complaints for the whole organisation. However by August 2003, Jobcentre Plus should have a revised approach.³⁸

34 C&AG’s Report, para 3.19; Qq 48–51, 164–165; Ev 18 (Ref Q 51)

35 C&AG’s Report, paras 3.10–3.18, Qq 52–56; Ev 18 (Ref Q 55)

36 C&AG’s Report, paras 3.29–3.31; Qq 159–163; Ev 18 (Ref Q 55)

37 Ev 18 (Ref Qq 55–56)

38 C&AG’s Report, paras 3.34–3.36; Qq 167–169

Conclusions and recommendations

1. Despite concerns expressed by some members of public that the pensions estimate letter was ambiguous, it was only after the Ombudsman's decision that the Department decided to send a further letter of explanation to more than half a million people at a cost of £1.8 million. This case underlines again that the Department should test all information products on a broad sample of customers before releasing them widely.
2. While the new arrangements under the Social Security (Inherited SERPS) Regulations 2001 were intended to give people more time to take account of the changes, the Committee was keen that those who might still have been disadvantaged should be made aware that compensation was available. The Department's decision in February 2001 not to alert people, other than the 20,000 who had previously written in, to the availability of compensation may have cut the bureaucratic burden, but may also mean that people with potentially valid claims have not exercised them.
3. To ensure that recent improvements are embedded in every part of the Department, all agencies should monitor routinely written and oral communications with customers, and have effective arrangements in place for logging complaints and learning lessons from them. The Department's Internal Assurance Service should examine and report annually on progress across the agencies in implementing the Committee's recommendations fully.
4. The Department produces more than 100 million letters each year. Many deal with complex and important issues affecting the well being of members of the public. In 1999, Ministers expressed concerns about the quality of letters but this remains a problem despite the attention given to introducing new standards. The Department should act on the evidence from the on-going reviews by its own Internal Assurance Service in working to revise confusing and overly bureaucratic letters.
5. There has been progress in making IT available for staff, particularly those who deal with customers. But three years after the Committee's recommendations, some parts of the Department still rely on guidance issued in paper form. The Department should ensure that it meets the target of having all guidance available to staff on the intranet by 2005.

Formal minutes

Monday 30 June 2003

Members present:

Mr Edward Leigh, in the Chair

Mr Ian Davidson

Geraint Davies

Mr Nick Gibb

Mr Brian Jenkins

Mr George Osborne

Mr David Rendel

Jon Trickett

Mr Alan Williams

The Committee deliberated.

Draft Report (Improving service quality: Action in response to the Inherited SERPS problem), proposed by the Chairman, brought up and read.

Ordered, That the Chairman's draft Report be read a second time, paragraph by paragraph.

Paragraphs 1 to 24 read and agreed to.

Conclusions and recommendations read and agreed to.

Summary read and agreed to.

Resolved, That the Report be the Thirty-sixth Report of the Committee to the House.

Ordered, That the Chairman do make the Report to the House.

Ordered, That the provisions of Standing Order No. 134 (Select Committees (Reports)) be applied to the Report.

Adjourned until Wednesday 2 July at 3.30 pm

Witnesses

Wednesday 2 April 2003

Page

Sir Richard Mottram KCB, Department for Work and Pensions, and **Ms Rachel Lomax**, Department of Transport

Ev 1

List of written evidence

1	Department for Work and Pensions	Ev 18
2	Letter from the National Audit Office to Mr George Howarth MP	Ev 21
3	Correspondence from Mr Michael Chance to the Committee	Ev 22
4	Department for Work and Pensions	Ev 25

List of Reports from the Committee of Public Accounts Session 2002–03

First Report	Collecting the television licence fee	HC 118 (<i>Cm 5770</i>)
Second Report	Dealing with pollution from ships	HC 119 (<i>Cm 5770</i>)
Third Report	Tobacco Smuggling	HC 143 (<i>Cm 5770</i>)
Fourth Report	Private Finance Initiative: redevelopment of MOD Main Building	HC 298 (<i>Cm 5789</i>)
Fifth Report	The 2001 outbreak of Foot and Mouth Disease	HC 487 (<i>Cm 5801</i>)
Sixth Report	Ministry of Defence: Exercise Saif Sareea II	HC 502 (<i>Cm 5801</i>)
Seventh Report	Excess Votes 2001–02	HC 503 (<i>N/A</i>)
Eighth Report	Excess Votes (Northern Ireland) 2001–02	HC 504 (<i>N/A</i>)
Ninth Report	The Office for National Statistics: outsourcing the 2001 Census	HC 543 (<i>Cm 5801</i>)
Tenth Report	Individual Learning Accounts	HC 544 (<i>Cm 5802</i>)
Eleventh Report	Facing the challenge: NHS emergency planning in England	HC 545 (<i>Cm 5802</i>)
Twelfth Report	Tackling pensioner poverty: encouraging take-up of entitlements	HC 565 (<i>Cm 5802</i>)
Thirteenth Report	Ministry of Defence: progress in reducing stocks	HC 566 (<i>Cm 5849</i>)
Fourteenth Report	Royal Mint Trading Fund 2001–02 Accounts	HC 588 (<i>Cm 5802</i>)
Fifteenth Report	Opra: tackling the risks to pension scheme members	HC 589 (<i>Cm 5802</i>)
Sixteenth Report	Improving public services through innovation: the Invest to Save Budget	HC 170
Seventeenth Report	Helping victims and witnesses: the work of Victim Support	HC 635
Eighteenth Report	Reaping the rewards of agricultural research	HC 414
Nineteenth Report	The PFI contract for the redevelopment of West Middlesex University Hospital	HC 155
Twentieth Report	Better public services through call centres	HC 373
Twenty-first Report	The operations of HM Customs and Excise in 2001–02	HC 398
Twenty-second Report	PFI refinancing update	HC 203
Twenty-third Report	Innovation in the NHS—the acquisition of the Heart Hospital	HC 299
Twenty-fourth Report	Community Legal Service: the introduction of contracting	HC 185
Twenty-fifth Report	Protecting the public from waste	HC 352
Twenty-sixth Report	Safety, quality, efficacy: regulating medicines in the UK	HC 505

The reference number of the Treasury Minute to each Report is printed in brackets after the HC printing number

Twenty-seventh Report	The management of substitution cover for teachers	HC 473
Twenty-eighth Report	Delivering better value for money from the Private Finance Initiative	HC 764
Twenty-ninth Report	Inland Revenue: Tax Credits and tax debt management	HC 332
Thirtieth Report	Department for International Development: maximising impact in the water sector	HC 446
Thirty-first Report	Tackling Benefit Fraud	HC 488
Thirty-second Report	The Highways Agency: Maintaining England's motorways and trunk roads	HC 556
Thirty-third Report	Ensuring the effective discharge of older patients from NHS acute hospitals	HC 459
Thirty-fourth Report	The Office of Fair Trading: progress in protecting consumers' interests	HC 546
Thirty-fifth Report	PFI: Construction performance	HC 567
Thirty-sixth Report	Improving service quality: Action in response to the Inherited SERPS problem	HC 616

The reference number of the Treasury Minute to each Report is printed in brackets after the HC printing number