



House of Commons
Public Administration Select
Committee

**User Involvement in
Public Services:
Government Response
to the Committee's
Sixth Report of Session
2007–08**

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

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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, of 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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Contents

Report	<i>Page</i>
Eighth Special Report	1
Appendix	1
List of Reports from the Committee during the current Parliament	13

Eighth Special Report

The Public Administration Select Committee reported to the House on *User Involvement in Public Services* in its Sixth Report of Session 2007–08, published 7 May 2008 as HC 410. The Government Response was received on 15 July 2008 and is published below as an Appendix to this Report.

Appendix

The Government welcomes the report of the Public Administration Select Committee on User Involvement in Public Services.

In its recent report, “Excellence and Fairness: Achieving world class public services” the Government outlined the next phase of public service reform as a drive for excellence and fairness. In developing those plans, the Government’s priority will be to put citizens in control.

The challenges of the next decade mean services need to better reflect peoples aspirations and lifestyles and enable complex and interrelated needs to be tackled. World class public services require us to put more power in the hands of citizens, thereby driving services to become more responsive, more personalized and providing strong incentives for them to innovate and improve.

To achieve world class education, health and public safety outcomes, citizens need to work in partnership with public services to improve outcomes for themselves, their families and their communities. Good public service professionals can help to unlock citizens’ resources to contribute to these better outcomes.

There are various ways of putting more power in the hands of the user. What works will depend on the nature of the service and the users concerned. Ways that the Government is looking to empower people include: extending choice, strengthening accountability, and offering more opportunities for direct control, including for instance through the use of individual budgets.

The Government is also committed to transforming public services so they are delivered in the ways and at the times that suit the service user rather than the service provider. Government can only do this by engaging users of public services to learn what really matters to them and by acting on what is learnt.

The Government aims to establish across the public sector a culture built upon an understanding of the needs and behaviours of citizens and businesses to create services that are:

better for citizens, with simpler, more accessible and convenient services;

- better for staff, as professionals get greater satisfaction from being empowered to deliver services that are responsive to the needs of their users; and
- better for the taxpayer, by reducing costly unnecessary and duplicative contact and simplifying cumbersome and complicated processes.

Transforming services in this way is vital to the Government delivering the improved outcomes for citizens in education, health and elsewhere. Services that appear confusing and inaccessible may deter people from seeking them with the end result that citizens are denied the help that government, in its policies, seeks to offer. The key challenge for the Government is to develop and rollout these improved customer driven services at sufficient pace to make a real difference to people. This will require significant culture change.

Without greater user involvement, this transformation cannot be achieved and outcomes for citizens will not be improved. The PASC report is therefore a welcome contribution to this important issue.

Recommendation 1. We are pleased to see the Government's initiatives for improving the effectiveness of consultations and for extending their reach. We support the underlying principle that government bodies need to make systematic efforts to collate and learn from the views of citizens and people using public services. Furthermore, government bodies must do this in good faith: consultations should make plain what they are trying to do, and this understanding should be clearly communicated to the people being consulted. (Paragraph 14)

The Government welcomes and endorses the Committee's recognition of government initiatives to improve the effectiveness of consultations and to extend their reach. It also agrees that consultations should make plain what they are trying to do. The Code of Practice on Consultation aims to standardise consultation practice across government and to set a benchmark for best practice, so that all respondents would know what to expect from a national, public government consultation.

The Code is centred around key consultation criteria. This includes:

- being clear about what the proposals are, who may be affected, what questions are being asked and the timescale for responses; and
- ensuring that the consultation is clear concise and widely accessible.

Over and above this, the Prime Minister has set out the Government's determination to engage and involve people on issues that are meaningful to them in their daily lives.

Recommendation 2. We welcome the Government's support for public services that focus on service users. We believe that achieving high-quality, responsive public services require empowering and engaging with service users as much as addressing their needs. We urge the Government to foster a public service culture of working with the people that use services in order to ensure that moves toward greater personalisation result in excellent public services. (Paragraph 22)

The Government welcomes the Committee's recognition of its support for public services that focus on users. The Government has made a commitment to transform public services so they are better tailored to the needs of people and business. Government can only do this by engaging the users of public services to learn what really matters to them.

The Government also agrees that a public service culture of working with people that use services should be fostered. Designing an intervention or policy based on a clear understanding of what this means to the citizen should be the norm and information about the needs and behaviour of citizens should be highly valued. The best service providers in the public, private and third sectors start by making sure they have a real evidence based understanding of the behaviours of the people they are trying to reach, including by directly engaging with their end users. The Government's vision is that it establishes across the public sector a culture and systems which make this routine.

In response to a recommendation in Sir David Varney's Review "Service transformation: A better service for citizens and businesses a better deal for the taxpayer" (December 2006) most departments are developing customer insight functions. These functions will be structured differently according to the needs of each organisation, but the role is the same: to bring the true voice of citizens and businesses into the way in which services are designed, delivered and enhanced over time. These functions enable a department to gather (and commission where necessary) the information it needs to build a picture of what really matters to the people it is trying to reach; and to use this information to drive service transformation.

The Government also agrees that achieving high quality, responsive public services requires empowering and engaging with service users as much as addressing their needs. Only when citizens are empowered and respected as equal partners do they bring their knowledge, time and energy to solving problems. For instance, services and citizens can share responsibility for addressing problems such as ill-health. The Government's overall vision is that the state should empower citizens to shape their own lives and the services they receive. Citizens want to have greater ability to take important decisions that directly affect their own lives.

There are numerous ways of empowering people. How government does this will depend on the nature of the service and the users concerned but can include:

- giving people real choices, between and within services, such as through greater use of personal budgets;

- strengthening accountability of services both to the individual and to communities;
- improving the information available about services; and
- strengthening partnerships between users and public services professionals.

The Government will shortly be publishing a White Paper on empowerment that will set out its ambition to give communities a stronger voice in local decision making and delivery of local services.

Recommendation 3. There are many advantages claimed for user-driven public services, including strengthening citizenship and improving public services. An evaluative evidence base is starting to emerge, indicating that user-oriented services have resulted in higher satisfaction with services and better outcomes. There is little evidence as yet on their cost-effectiveness, however. We recommend that government departments overseeing public service provision put in place rigorous and coherent programmes to monitor user-driven initiatives (such as individual budgets in health and social care). These should identify both the costs and the outcomes of user-driven initiatives, in the short and the longer term. (Paragraph 38)

The Government welcomes and endorses the Committee's recognition of the advantages of user-driven services including strengthening citizenship and improving public services. Evidence is needed not just to demonstrate improved outcomes but to further improve delivery. The report gives some examples, and there are many others which form part of the emerging evidence base. Departments need to systematically evaluate the benefits of user driven services. The Government has published a toolkit to help departments improve customer experience and measure customer satisfaction:

- Promoting Customer Satisfaction explains the role of customer satisfaction in Service Transformation; and
- How to Measure Customer Satisfaction explains how to effectively measure customer satisfaction.

The Government believes that all services should be subject to rigorous monitoring and evaluation, regardless of the part which the user plays in design and delivery.

Recommendation 4. Public service provider bodies need to consider issues of cost, fairness and risk in deciding whether user-driven services are appropriate in particular instances. Where increased user involvement is being pursued, provider organisations will need to determine how they assess and handle these issues. Departments overseeing public service provision should develop guidance on cost, fairness and risk issues arising out of increased user involvement, so that public service provider bodies can make informed decisions about how best to encourage user participation. (Paragraph 49)

The Government believes that all public service provider bodies need to consider issue of cost, fairness and risk in developing and delivering all aspects of their services. This includes increasing user involvement in those services. A range of guidance on handling these issues is already available.

On the issue of risk, the report notes that user-directed services suggest that service users would take on some of the responsibility for assessing and bearing the risk of things going wrong. The Government agrees that in designing new forms of user participation public service providers will need to consider what the implications are for risk management.

The Government has produced a set of principles that departments and other public sector organisations should follow when managing risks to the public:

- Be open and transparent about the nature of risks to the public and about how they are to be handled.
- Seek early and wide involvement of those potentially affected by risks in the decision process.
- Act proportionately in dealing with risks to the public, and take a precautionary approach where necessary.
- Base decisions on all relevant evidence.
- Allocate responsibility for managing risks to those best placed to control them.

The Government will continue to improve the guidance on risk and to ensure that it enables providers to meet all the challenges of the next phase of public service reform.

On the issue of fairness, the Government believes it is possible to involve users to create services more tailored to the users without giving rise to equity concerns, providing proper safeguards are introduced. The goal for greater user involvement is to create universal high-performing accessible public services which are tailored to the needs of citizens. This has been articulated as “fair to all, personal to each.” The recent report “Excellence and Fairness: Achieving world class public services” sets out the Government’s commitment to set the overall strategic direction within which choice operates, to ensure the objective of improving fairness is not undermined.

On the issue of cost, all major changes to public services, including making them more user driven, should be subject to a full cost benefit analysis. That analysis should consider cost, fairness and risks. The Treasury Green Book provides guidance on how this should be done.

Recommendation 5. As part of their adherence to an overall ethos of public service, we believe public service workers should give due importance to involving and engaging with service users. This is what good public servants do. The Government should actively promote principles of public service that recognise the value of involving users. It should ensure that an understanding of service user involvement is reflected in programmes designed to develop public service skills, such as Professional Skills for Government. Professional bodies also need to identify how they can promote responsiveness to public service users among their professional members, and make the necessary changes to, for example, professional training and standards. (Paragraph 57)

The Government agrees that as part of their adherence to an overall ethos of public service, public service workers should give due importance to involving and engaging with service users. The Government is actively promoting principles that highlight the value of involving citizens but it recognises that it needs to do this more effectively across the wider public sector.

In “Excellence and Fairness: Achieving world class public services” the Government recognised that the next stage of public service reform would require it to foster a new professionalism across the whole of the public service workforce. This will include increased responsiveness to users and greater investment in workforce skills.

The Government welcomes the Committee's recognition of the importance of the Professional Skills for Government (PSG) programme and agrees that it should reflect an understanding of user involvement in services. The PSG competency framework was introduced in 2005. This framework identified for the first time the set of core and leadership skills which civil servants need to develop to be effective in any role- a common language on skills which is now used across departments and nations. Using communications to put citizens at the heart of policy and operations is a core PSG skill. This requires civil servants to have an understanding and be able to use cross-departmental customer segmentation and use customer needs to influence policy and service development.

In April 2008 Government Skills, the Sector Skills Council for central government, launched the Skills Strategy. The Strategy sets out how central government employers, including those in non-departmental bodies, will step up to meet the skills challenge of the next three years. This is a strategy for all staff across the sector. It addresses the skills needs of staff in front-line posts and those managing the delivery of public services across the UK. It seeks to give them better access to learning opportunities where there is a real benefit for them and for the business. A key part of the strategy is the extension of the PSG framework, with its focus on putting citizens at the heart of policy and operations, to cover staff below middle management. In summary the strategy proposes:

- setting professional skills standards for all including operational delivery and linking them to careers; and
- strengthening professions to drive the skills standards agenda including the focus on citizens.

The Government has also produced a range of practical guidance to help public service workers develop skills to engage users more effectively. In addition, to the guidance on customer satisfaction, described under the Government's response to recommendation 3, guidance has been produced on customer journey mapping. This is the process of tracking and describing all the experiences that customers have as they encounter a service or set of services, taking into account not only what happens to them but also their responses to their experiences. The technique is widely used in the commercial world and there are some excellent examples in public services. It enables a service provider to look at each step a customer takes towards completion of a task but from the point of view of a customer. Taking this viewpoint is critical for government because it exposes those steps which lie outside the immediate horizon but which hold part of the solution to streamlining the whole journey.

Recommendation 6. We conclude that successful user involvement is more likely where people can see the relevance of getting involved to the quality of their lives. In some cases people will not actually want, or be able, to take a larger role in influencing or directing the public services they receive. If this is the case, people should not be penalised (e.g. by access to lower quality services) for not wanting to engage. Where people do want to take on a greater role in service design and delivery, they should receive the necessary support, advice and guidance from service provider organisations to do so. This means that public service providers and their overseeing departments should ensure that:

- professional staff working in those services are able to provide the support that service users will need;
- there is regular monitoring of each user's ability to manage their own service provision, in case their ability or desire to do so deteriorates;
- where necessary, personal advisers are available to support individual users, along the lines of Jobcentre Plus personal advisers and parent support advisers in education;
- the development of peer networks of service users is encouraged;
- there is clear communication to service users about what is expected of them, and, equally, of what they can expect from service provider organisations. (Paragraph 65)

The Government recognises that in terms of involvement in public services, people's interest and motivation will vary and they will want to participate in different ways. The primary driver for many users will be the provision of good quality services rather than involvement for its own sake. The Government believes that user involvement or involvement by their representative in some form is vital to service transformation and the delivery of good quality services. Opportunities to influence and be involved in services should be available to all but some groups may need more support.

The Government agrees that people wanting to take on a greater role in service design and delivery should receive help and guidance from service provider organisations to do so. In some areas, as the report demonstrates, such support is already available:

- The expert patients programme both enables patients with long-term chronic conditions to gain the skills needed to manage their conditions better on a day to day basis and expert patients are also able to provide peer support.
- Community care navigators are health service staff trained to engage with patients in community settings and offer help and advice.

The report outlines a range of ways in which such support to citizens can be provided. The Government will consider these and other forms of support as part of work to consider how best to provide assistance to users in different circumstances. Support is particularly crucial for those groups that are most disadvantaged. It needs to ensure that their voice, both that of individuals and their representative groups, are strengthened. Careful design of voice mechanisms can ensure that:

- people who lack the confidence and skills to articulate their views can be supported by, for instance, building support networks at local level. Community development workers often play a large part in setting up groups, supporting forums and networks and open doors between community groups and public services.
- disadvantaged users are provided with good information through such mechanisms as choice advisers. For instance, the Government is piloting information provision with the Charters for Independent Living, which were proposed in *Independence and Opportunity: Our Strategy for Supporting people* published in June 2007.
- new technologies offer new ways of engaging with wider range of people. As set out in a recent Strategy Unit paper “internet blogs, on-line forums, networks and more accessible sources of information are now approaching the critical mass required to have a profound impact on political and civic debate.” Citizens debate public services in a variety of different ways on a variety of different sites. In line with the principles set out in the *Power of Information Report*, the Government should join in these debates. The Government has recently published guidance for Civil Servants enabling this to happen.

The Government also agrees that users need to be clear about what they can reasonably expect from services and what they are required to do in return.

Recommendation 7. The Government needs to ensure that it is setting the right framework for service provider bodies to adapt to user-driven services. In particular, it needs to be careful that other policies or targets (such as requirements for efficiency savings) do not work against service providers and their staff having the freedom and flexibility to develop responsive, user-driven services. (Paragraph 71)

The Government agrees that the right framework needs to be in place to enable service providers to adapt to user driven services. The Government also accepts that it must ensure that there are no barriers preventing public services from developing user driven services.

In “*Excellence and Fairness: Achieving world class public services*” the Government recognised that the next stage of public service reform would involve unlocking the creativity and ambition of public sector workers. The report acknowledged that “services are unlikely to be highly responsive and innovative without the commitment

and enterprise of the workforce who deliver them. They are unlikely to truly empower citizens unless front-line staff feel pride, enthusiasm and commitment in doing so.” The new professionalism, which the Government will foster across the whole of the public service workforce, will combine consistent quality in day to day practices with higher levels of autonomy from central government where those at the front line show ambition and capacity to excel. Higher performers both excellent organisations and frontline staff will have the freedom and flexibilities to respond to the needs of those who use the service, thereby driving innovation and higher standards. In some areas this is already happening, modern matrons are already showing how strengthened professionalism can improve standards in hospital wards.

The Government has been working with frontline professionals, the public and external experts to review the performance management framework for the coming years. The Comprehensive Spending Review 2007 announced the culmination of that work and saw the launch of a new performance management framework for central and local government. By defining success in terms of outcomes for the citizen, departments should be building their activities and services around those requirements. In general, there has also been a move to having fewer national targets and performance measures and more flexibility for local authorities and frontline services whilst strengthening the accountability of local services so that people can influence their priorities. Helping organisations to move away from top-down accountability to more direct accountability to users is a priority.

The thirty new Public Service Agreements (PSAs), at the heart of the performance framework, set the priority outcomes the Government want to achieve over the next three years. The Government wide commitment to build services around the needs of citizens and businesses will be critical to the achievement of the PSA outcomes.

Recommendation 8. Government bodies need to ensure that proper evaluation mechanisms are in place to monitor and assess the performance of user-driven public services. For departments that oversee public services, the relevant Departmental Capability Reviews should contain questions to test whether departments are creating the right environment for user-driven services to flourish. Inspection bodies should institute evaluation frameworks for user-driven services that ensure standards of public service provision are safeguarded, and which allow for direct input from service users into evaluation.

The Government agrees that a proper evaluation mechanism should be in place to monitor and assess the performance of user driven services. The Government welcomes the report's recognition of the benefits to be derived from the new Comprehensive Area Assessment (CAA). This will provide the first independent assessment of the prospects for local areas and the quality of life for people living there. It will be much more dependent on the views and experience of citizens, people who use services and local taxpayers in reaching judgements about how well they are served by local public services, including a focus on those whose circumstances make them vulnerable or marginalised.

The Government agrees that assessment and inspection bodies should institute evaluation frameworks for user driven services that ensure standards of public service provision are safeguarded, and which allow for direct input from service users into evaluation. For instance, the CAA is being developed and delivered jointly by all inspectorates responsible for assessing the relevant organisations and services. They are: the Audit Commission, Commission for Social Care Inspection, Healthcare Commission, HM Inspectorate of Constabulary, HM Inspectorate of Probation and Ofsted. The inspectorates are involving panels of citizens and service users in the development of the CAA in order to maximise its relevance to them.

The Government welcomes the report's recognition of the importance of Department Capability Reviews to civil service reform. The Capability Review Programme is part of the wider Civil Service reform agenda. It will lead to a Civil Service which is better at delivering public services. The aims of the reviews are to:

- improve the capability of the Civil Service to meet today's delivery objectives and be ready for the challenges of tomorrow;
- assure the public and ministers that the Civil Service leadership is equipped to develop and deliver departmental strategies; and
- help departments act on long term key development areas and therefore provide assurance on future delivery.

The reviews provide an assessment of capability for departments, identify key areas for improvement and set out key actions. As the Government response to recommendation seven explained, redesigning public services around the needs of citizens is a key priority for the next three years and critical to the delivery of PSAs. Assessing departments' capability to create the right environment for user-driven services will form part, therefore, of the ongoing Capability Review process.

Recommendation 9. Involving people in public services—at least in the deeper sense which we have been considering in this Report—is still in its early days. It is as yet unclear whether user driven public services offer better value for money or improved outcomes for all or most service users. What is clear is that stronger variants of user participation and control would have far-reaching effects on the shape of some of our public services. In particular, there would be fundamental implications for the role of public service professionals, their relationship with service users, and the way that public services are organised and assessed. (Paragraph 77)

The Government agrees that the process of involving people in public services in a way that enables them to be redesigned around the needs of the citizens is still in its early days. The Government has set out an ambitious programme to improve outcomes for people in a range of areas over the next few years. Delivery of these outcomes will require services to be redesigned around the citizen. The key challenge for the Government is to develop and rollout these improved customer driven services at sufficient pace to make a real difference to people quickly.

The Government's response to recommendation 3 demonstrated that user driven services are likely to deliver both improved services to customers and provide better value for money, although rigorous evaluation of all changes will be required. However, the Government agrees that wider customer participation will have a far reaching impact on the shape, role and organization of public services and the role of public sector employees and their relationships with customers. In its recent report on the next phase of public service reform, the Government recognised that the relationship between professionals and citizens will need to be redefined.¹ Professionals will no longer be simply accountable to their managers or to government. Users of public services and citizens will have the primary role, empowered to demand service improvements where performance fall below expectations and bring more of their own time and energy to solving problems collaboratively with professionals. The Government's hope is that the greater involvement of customers, combined with greater empowerment, will lead to services being truly transformed.

Recommendation 10. In the absence of firm empirical evidence about the effectiveness of user-driven public services, we have not attempted to be prescriptive about the ideal level and form of user involvement in public services. In any event, this will depend on the circumstances of each individual case: people should be involved in service design and delivery only to the extent that they want to be. Where deeper user involvement is both feasible and desirable, however, we believe that the Government should provide the necessary support to enable people to participate effectively in public services. This will help ensure the right conditions for user-driven public services—and the people using them—to flourish. (Paragraph 78)

The Government agrees that it does not make sense to be prescriptive about the ideal level and form of user involvement in public services. The Government agrees this will depend on the service and citizens concerned. It also agrees that support needs to be in place to enable people to participate effectively. The Government's response to recommendation 6 set out some of the mechanisms already being put in place to provide such support particularly to the most disadvantaged groups. During the early stages of developing a service's direct engagement with the citizen government will seek to understand their needs through research and service delivery information.

1 *Excellence and Fairness: Achieving world class public services 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.

Session 2007–08

First Report	Machinery of Government Changes: A follow-up Report	HC 160 (<i>HC 514</i>)
Second Report	Propriety and Peerages	HC 153 (<i>Cm 7374</i>)
Third Report	Parliament and public appointments: Pre-appointment hearings by select committees	HC 152 (<i>HC 515</i>)
Fourth Report	Work of the Committee in 2007	HC 236 (<i>HC 458</i>)
Fifth Report	When Citizens Complain	HC 409 (<i>HC 997</i>)
Sixth Report	User Involvement in Public Services	HC 410 (<i>HC 998</i>)
Seventh Report	Investigating the Conduct of Ministers	HC 381
Eighth Report	Machinery of Government Changes: Further Report	HC 514
Ninth Report	Parliamentary Commissions of Inquiry	HC 473
Tenth Report	Constitutional Renewal: Draft Bill and White Paper	HC 499
Eleventh Report	Public Services and the Third Sector: Rhetoric and Reality	HC 112
Twelfth Report	From Citizen's Charter to Public Service Guarantees: Entitlement to Public Services	HC 411
Thirteenth Report	Selection of a new Chair of the House of Lords Appointments Commission	HC 985

Session 2006–07

First Report	The Work of the Committee in 2005–06	HC 258
Second Report	Governing the Future	HC 123 (<i>Cm 7154</i>)
Third Report	Politics and Administration: Ministers and Civil Servants	HC 122
Fourth Report	Ethics and Standards: The Regulation of Conduct in Public Life	HC 121 (<i>HC 88 Session 2007–08</i>)
Fifth Report	Pensions Bill: Government Undertakings relating to the Financial Assistance Scheme	HC 523 (<i>HC 922</i>)
Sixth Report	The Business Appointment Rules	HC 651 (<i>HC 1087</i>)
Seventh Report	Machinery of Government Changes	HC 672 (<i>HC 90 Session 2007–08</i>)
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>)
First Special Report	The Governance of Britain	HC 901

Session 2005–06

First Report	A Debt of Honour	HC 735 (Cm 1020)
Second Report	Tax Credits: putting things right	HC 577 (HC 1076)
Third Report	Legislative and Regulatory Reform Bill	HC 1033 (HC 1205)
Fourth Report	Propriety and Honours: Interim Findings	HC 1119 (Cm 7374)
Fifth Report	Whitehall Confidential? The Publication of Political Memoirs	HC 689 (HC 91, Session 2007–08)