



Government response to
Getting it right and righting the wrongs



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March 2010

Department for Communities and Local Government

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Foreword



Citizens have a right to expect the best from local services. They are entitled to expect that services will be delivered right first time, and that if something goes wrong it will be put right quickly and quietly. They shouldn't have to contact numerous service providers and repeatedly explain their circumstances in order to get things done.

The key message from the *Getting it right, righting the wrongs* review led by David Cook – that councils should put customers first – is at the heart of the Government's drive to build the next generation of public services.

Building Britain's Future explained that we are moving from a system based primarily on targets and central direction to one where citizens have enforceable entitlements over the service they receive, backed up by responsive redress if things go wrong. We have already set out clear national entitlements for health and education. The service and remedy pledges recommended by the Review will help embed that concept of entitlements across other local services provided by councils and their partners.

The need to ensure that partnerships focus on the customer, also highlighted by the Review, has underpinned our work to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of local services. Over the coming months councils will need to make tough choices about how to meet the expectations of local people in the context of tighter budgets.

Our work on Total Place shows how this can be achieved by making every taxpayer's pound work harder. The Total Place pilots have shown how councils, working together with partners, and focused on the needs of customers, can eliminate unnecessary waste and duplication and make savings. Local people will not tolerate services being cut back if their authority hasn't made every effort to be as efficient as possible.

And the unique position of frontline staff, whose importance was recognised by the Review, means that they have a vital role to play in ensuring that services are customer focused, and as efficient and effective as possible.

We have also announced plans to radically open up data and public information to allow local people to challenge, compare and scrutinise data to improve public services.

But we understand that people will want to participate in their local areas in different ways, and that not everyone has the time to get directly involved in helping to improve local services. The Review is complemented by our work to strengthen local democracy by making councils and councillors the champions of local people. In particular we are giving councillors new powers to investigate and challenge other providers delivering public services and spending public money in their areas to help change policies, tackle longstanding concerns and make sure services are delivering what people really want.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank David Cook, the members of the Review team and all those who contributed to the Review. The Toolkit produced by the Review is a practical way for councils to foster the engagement with customers, frontline staff and partners necessary to bring about the service transformation we expect. We will reflect on the experience of the local authorities that are testing the Toolkit in considering how work on redress can best be taken forward as part of our work to build the next generation of public services.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Barbara". The script is cursive and elegant.

Rt Hon Barbara Follett MP

**Parliamentary Under Secretary of State
Communities and Local Government**

Introduction

The white paper *Communities in control: real people, real power*¹ announced a review into redress for citizens when their council services fail to meet agreed standards. The scope of the review was interpreted to include service provision as well as redress, to reflect the importance the review team attached to councils getting it right first time, as well as putting things right when they do go wrong.

David Cook, Chief Executive of Kettering Borough Council, chaired this independent Review with a team including representatives of local and national government, private and third sector (including not for profit) organisations. The Review considered the wealth of evidence from research in relation to customer service, complaints handling and remedy systems, and drew on the expertise of Review team members and the views of citizens. The Review report *Getting it right, and righting the wrongs*² was published on 17 June 2009.

The Review identified three areas which it felt made the biggest difference to the customers' experience of service and remedy provision:

- The service and remedy pledge: clearly setting out how the council will get it right and right any wrongs
- The importance of the frontline: understanding that good people are more important than process, and
- Customer-focused partnerships: making sure that partnerships deliver a seamless experience and an economy of effort for the customer.

The Review team felt that the customer experience across the local government sector was currently very mixed, and their main aim was to help put learning into practice. The key output of the Review was therefore a Practitioners' Toolkit³ developed by local authority practitioners, in collaboration with the Local Government Association and Improvement and Development Agency. The Toolkit builds on current good practice and provides councils with practical tools to help them improve local services. It is designed to:

- help councils work out what their customers want and how they feel about services, service areas, organisations and partnerships
- kick start thinking about how these can be more customer focused, or challenge that thinking
- provide an easy route to developing plans for improvement, and
- help councils consider whether there are other tools or standards they could use to assess and improve or recognise a particular problem or strength.

The Review team made 25 recommendations in its final report, covering central and local government, and other stakeholders. Our response to the recommendations addressed to central government is set out in this document.

¹ *Communities in control: real people, real power*, Communities and Local Government, July 2008.
<http://www.communities.gov.uk/publications/communities/communitiesincontrol>

² *Getting it right, and righting the wrongs*, Communities and Local Government, June 2009.
<http://www.communities.gov.uk/publications/communities/gettingitrightreport>

³ *Getting it right, and righting the wrongs, Practitioners' Toolkit*, Communities and Local Government, June 2009.
<http://www.communities.gov.uk/publications/communities/gettingitrighttoolkit>

The Government's response to the recommendations

The Review recommended that Communities and Local Government:

- run a series of Trailblazer Pilots whereby authorities and partnerships test and develop the Practitioners' Toolkit
- ensure that one of the Trailblazers looks at the area of partners joining up to better deliver services and remedy for those recently made redundant. In particular, that local authorities work with other partners, including HM Revenue and Customs, Jobcentre Plus, and the Learning and Skills Council, to map and reduce the number of repeat visits and duplicated information needed for someone out of work in each locality
- funds a programme of regional learning events to highlight the messages of the Review and help local service providers understand the Toolkit and Trailblazer opportunities
- ensures that the Trailblazer programme includes an element of sharing and encouraging learning from pilot areas; participants should help identify what is useful and what is not, and should also act as mentors and champions within their region or theme area.

The Government was pleased to accept the recommendation that it should run a series of pilots for authorities and their partners to test and develop the Practitioners' Toolkit when it was presented with the findings of the Review.

Communities and Local Government is funding nine local authorities to test the Toolkit, one in each region:

- Blackburn with Darwen Borough Council
- Craven District Council
- Kettering Borough Council
- London Borough of Lewisham
- Northumberland County Council
- Plymouth City Council
- Slough Borough Council
- Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council
- St Albans District Council

Each pilot is testing one or more elements of the Toolkit – service and remedy pledges, the importance of the frontline and customer focused partnerships – in different

services, service areas and partnerships. These range from benefit services, housing, planning, waste and children's services to a countywide anti-social behaviour partnership. They are testing the Toolkit with customers, staff, partners and other stakeholders, including councillors – to enable them to feed in what their constituents are saying about services, give them an opportunity to shape improvements, and provide a link to scrutiny mechanisms.

In line with the Review's recommendation, the pilot in Blackburn is testing how the Toolkit can help improve service provision to people who have been made redundant. Blackburn is working with a wide variety of partners including Citizens Advice Bureau, Job Centre Plus, Age Concern, Twin Valley Homes (the registered social landlord established through stock transfer), the NHS and Blackburn College as well as different parts of the council.

In addition to testing the Toolkit on the Solihull Partnership, which covers policing, health and housing services across the borough, Solihull, which is a joint Total Place pilot with Coventry City Council and Warwickshire County Council, is also considering the links between the Toolkit and the Total Place approach.

As well as testing the Toolkit on services and service areas including parking, cashiers and customer services and complaints, Plymouth is also considering the links between the Toolkit and the Government's Customer Service Excellence (CSE)⁴ standard so that we can identify how these two initiatives work together.

In response to the recommendations of the Review, the pilot programme is encouraging sharing and disseminating learning both between pilot areas and beyond. The pilots are disseminating learning from using the Toolkit both within their own organisations and amongst their partners. They are also acting as regional champions, engaging with other local authorities to spread learning and ensure good practice becomes common practice, including through regional events.

The pilots will be reporting to CLG shortly on their experience of using the Toolkit and the improvements that they will be making to local services and partnerships as a result. However, the benefits of the Toolkit are already being felt in many of the pilot areas.

For example, Lewisham has already introduced changes to its benefits system as a result of input from staff and customers. These have included replacing their claim form with an assisted claims process, introducing appointments to reduce waiting times, providing access to benefits services near to where people live, and putting benefit assessment offers on the frontline to resolve queries.

This has led to a number of new claims being completed during the customers first contact with the council, where previously customers needed to contact the council an average of 4.5 times to complete a claim. The number of complaints has decreased and customer satisfaction has increased.

⁴ <http://www.cse.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/aboutTheStandardCSE.do>

In Kettering, the Toolkit is fostering a strengthened relationship between the council, police and other agencies dealing with anti-social behaviour. This is expected to lead to better integration of services, with partners planning co-location, shared staff, joint training and better co-ordination, enabling a more seamless service to be provided to those experiencing anti-social behaviour, as well as efficiency gains.

Solihull believes that the Toolkit can usefully be used as part of a Total Place approach, as a practical way of engaging both customers and staff to improve services and maintain customer focus. They also report that it should be helpful to use LEAN techniques alongside the Toolkit to help with mapping and redesigning processes.

We will reflect on the experience of the pilots in considering how work on service provision and redress can best be taken forward in the context of public service transformation.

The Review recommended that Communities and Local Government:

- invite the Local Government Improvement Board and/or IDeA to become partners in the implementation of the Toolkit and the approach it recommends.

Both the Local Government Association and the Improvement and Development Agency were on the Practitioners Group that developed the Toolkit. We will work with them to share the learning from the pilots and consider how work on redress and service provision can best be taken forward in the context of public service transformation.

The Review recommended that Communities and Local Government:

- focuses on sponsoring awards that promote the aims of this review, concentrating on the customer experience of services rather than only on improvements in behind the scenes process and efficiencies (such as large scale IT projects).

The Government agrees that awards can be a valuable way of promoting and inspiring good practice in putting customers first.

The Government's new Local Innovation Awards (LIA) scheme covers many of the principles identified by the Review. It has been designed to identify the really innovative and exemplar practices that exist within local government. The scheme seeks to recognise, celebrate and reward partnerships that have made a real impact on the lives of communities and demonstrate innovative services, ideas and ways of working that bring real benefits to customers. Learning will be documented and transferred, ensuring that innovative and exemplar practices can be shared quickly and more effectively, raising standards and improving services.

This first year of the scheme has been a transitional one as the LIA seeks to establish itself. We are continuing to look for opportunities to bring a customer focus to the scheme. We have approached the Youth Parliament, National Voice and the National Consumer Council to gauge their interest in participating in the evaluation of applications. We are currently considering the feasibility of having presentations to groups of citizens as part of the assessment process in future rounds, really bringing customers to the heart of the scheme.

Applications were invited under six themes in the inaugural year of the scheme, all linked to, and developed from, the top twenty Local Area Agreement (LAA) priorities, including "Community safety – policing our communities together" and "Achieving more through partnerships". Running across all six themes were the 'Bright Ideas' awards, aimed at front line teams who had an innovative idea which they believed had the potential to make a real difference in the quality of customer care.

The Review recommended that central Government:

- identify national (legislative and other) barriers to closer partnership working and investigate whether these should and can be removed
- consolidate existing advice to different partners and agencies about what can and can not be done in terms of data sharing in a single digest for public services.

The Government believes that the best way to identify barriers to partnership working is to ask those delivering services in partnership on the ground.

The Total Place pilots have identified a number of national changes to improve collaboration between partners and deliver improved outcomes for customers at less cost. The Government announced a series of measures as part of Budget 2010 that build on the commitments in *Putting the Frontline First: Smarter Government* to increase local flexibility over resources, reduce the burdens on the frontline and let local areas set priorities. These include:

- significant de-ringfencing of £1.3 billion of non-schools funding to local authorities from 2011–12;
- streamlining funding streams from 110 to 94 – a decrease of 15 per cent by 2012–13;
- publishing guidance on the effective use of pooled and aligned budget arrangements at a local level;
- streamlining the area and organisational assessment elements of Comprehensive Area Assessment to ensure a stronger focus on value for money and area outcomes;
- taking action to more strongly align performance frameworks across government;
- a reduction in the national indicator set by 10% from April 2010, with a more substantial reduction from 2011

These greater freedoms and flexibilities will support a new relationship between Government and places which will enable the Total Place approach to be rolled out across England.

High performing local authorities with a strong track record will be encouraged to negotiate with central government for more far reaching freedoms under a "single offer" in return for agreeing significant savings targets over and above those required for all local authorities and other public sector organisations. These freedoms could include further significant reduction of ringfences, agreeing a smaller number of targets with assessment and reporting focussed on these, and lighter touch and less frequent inspection.

Many more areas that are strong in delivery of particular services but that may not qualify for a “single offer” will be able to reach agreements for freedoms through devolved responsibility in particular themes under an “innovative policy offer”. These areas could take advantage of greater freedoms for particular issues, for example drugs and alcohol misuse, in return for improvements for service users as well as taxpayers.

Another issue around closer partnership working that was identified by the Review, and that has been highlighted by both the Total Place and Redress Review pilots, is concerns around sharing personal data. The ability and willingness for partners to share data can lead to better outcomes for customers as well as lower costs. At the same time it is important that we protect personal data. Government will identify an evidence base of data sharing obstacles and examples of best practice, and explore legislative and non-legislative solutions to sharing personal data, and will produce an initial report by 2010, working towards common standards and definitions. This will build on actions in *Putting the Frontline First: Smarter Government* to establish common protocols, review the legal framework and produce effective data sharing guidance.

The Government is also committed to opening up public data and information to citizens. Improving the quantity and quality of data in the public domain will not only increase transparency and accountability but also help improve efficiency and secure better value for money in public services by enabling challenge, comparison and scrutiny by local people. So, for example, online crime maps that went live in October 2009 mean that for the first time everyone in the country can search, by postcode, for facts about crime in their area and what is being done by the police and courts to deal with it. This is at the heart of our drive to make public data public.

CLG is driving the local government and community dimension of the agenda. We are supporting the Local Public Data Panel, an independent panel led by professor Nigel Shadbolt, set up to oversee the release of local public data agenda and ensure that it is effectively linked across local authorities, the Local Government Association, Government departments and agencies.

As part of this we are also improving the accessibility of Local Spending Reports, which provide information about how public money is spent in local areas and what it has delivered. We will publish data forming the first (April 2009) report and subsequent Local Spending Reports on CLG’s Places database.⁵ This will provide intuitive, user-friendly tools to explore, compare and contrast data via interactive maps, charts and tables. These on-line tools will be freely and publicly available, ensuring that local spending data is available not only to local authorities and their strategic partners but also to citizens in a consistent form.

We will consider how any further barriers to partnership working highlighted by the Review pilots might be removed as part of our consideration of how work on service provision and redress can best be taken forward.

⁵ The Places database is available at www.places.communities.gov.uk

The Review recommended that central Government:

- **revise the wording of the NI 14 Avoidable Contact indicator.**

National Indicator 14 – which measures contact between local authorities and citizens which could have been avoided - will be removed from the national indicator set from April 2010 in line with commitments in *Putting the Frontline First: Smarter Government* to reduce the number of indicators. A more significant evolution of the indicator set and other aspects of the performance framework will follow as part of the next Spending Review.

The indicator recognises that citizens should not have to pay the price of system failure by repeatedly contacting an authority, for example to report or claim something, provide the same information again, or chase progress. Data relating to avoidable contact will still be collected on a voluntary basis by the Electronic Service Delivery Toolkit, which enables local authorities to record the progress of their public facing services against a comprehensive list of services, processes and interactions relating to implementing electronic government and modernisation.

The Review recommended that the Empowering the Frontline Task Force:

- **considers the findings of this Review in determining what empowering staff means in practical terms, including the role of Leaders and Chief Executives, and how to ensure that the customer benefits from this.**

The Empowering the Frontline Task Force was intended to consider the role of the local public service workforce in empowering customers and residents and how they can, in turn, respond to a more empowered public – focussing particularly on their relationships with vulnerable groups. However, CLG decided not to proceed with the Task Force given the need to ensure best possible value for money for the taxpayer and that other projects are currently taking forward similar objectives. These include:

- the local authorities piloting the Toolkit, a number of which are testing the importance of the frontline and customer focussed partnerships elements, and are involving councillors and senior management in this
- work by the Homes and Communities Agency Academy on defining community empowerment skills and disseminating them across frontline occupations
- the Empowerment Fund, which supports third sector organisations to work towards helping build more, cohesive, empowered and active communities. Organisations receiving funding are expected to report on how their work has impacted on vulnerable groups. One of the themes of the Fund is improving communication between citizens and councillors. This should help councillors feed into discussions about how frontline staff can empower their constituents and best respond to them
- *Listening to the Frontline*, the Government's response to the independent study commissioned from the Sunningdale Institute, which looks at how policy makers can engage better with frontline public service staff to enhance their understanding of the delivery chain and help them develop policy grounded in evidence and experience. The Sunningdale Institute's

recommendations are being tested in three demonstration areas which are assessing different ways of engaging with the frontline and bringing their expertise and experience to bear in decision making and policy development. One of these three demonstration areas is Lewisham, which is also one of the local authorities testing the part of the Toolkit on the importance of the frontline. The demonstration areas will be reporting in summer 2010.

The Review recommended that the Audit Commission:

- develops the guidance to CAA assessors to include an emphasis on the qualitative points above [*described in the report*] as the basis of their investigations into the customer experience.

The Audit Commission welcomes the recommendation that in developing its guidance to staff engaged on CAA assessments it includes an emphasis on the qualitative points described in the report, as the basis of investigations into the customer experience. This guidance will support staff working on inspections of specific services, such as benefits services, as well as their broader joint assessments of council effectiveness i.e. the managing performance theme of the organisational assessment in CAA. Given the reduced volume of direct inspection now undertaken, their emphasis will be on seeking evidence that the qualitative points described in the report are reflected in the working practices and performance monitoring arrangements of the council.

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