

## Cutting bureaucracy for our public services

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## Foreword by Hilary Armstrong MP Minister for the Cabinet Office and Social Exclusion

We know that front-line public sector workers complain about unnecessary bureaucracy. Departments are trying to tackle this, but we need to do more. This strategy sets out how the Government is going to free the front-line from red tape.

Government targets and performance management systems have been important in delivering change which benefits the public. For example, targets to reduce waiting times have saved people time which would otherwise have been spent waiting in pain and uncertainty for surgery. Rigorous Ofsted inspections have highlighted schools doing well and those that need to raise their game.



So targets and inspections have a critical role to play. But as we move into the next phase of public sector reform, it makes sense to look to see what unnecessary bureaucracy there might be and what more we can do to empower the front-line to respond to the wishes of the public. This is already happening. For example, the Department for Communities and Local Government has pledged to cut 800 Local Government targets to 200. Ofsted has reduced the length of its inspections from one week to two days. The Department of Health has already reduced the amount of data it collects by 28 per cent and set up a dedicated team to review all information requirements.

However, this progress is not widely recognised and is not always felt on the ground. We need to do more, and we need to tackle things differently. It is to no-one's benefit if valuable time that could be spent delivering public services is spent on unnecessary bureaucracy. This strategy takes, for the first time, a properly cross-government approach to this issue and sets out concrete actions to deal with them.

We know we are beginning to deliver for the private sector, and Departments need to accelerate their efforts for the public sector. But this cannot be done without the help of those at the front-line. A central theme of this strategy is Government listening to their views, something which we must do to make sure we make a difference where it matters.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'Hilary Armstrong'.

**Hilary Armstrong MP**

*Minister for the Cabinet Office  
and Social Exclusion*

## Executive summary

The UK is recognised as a world leader in regulatory reform. We have measured the burden of administering regulation on businesses and charities and set a target to reduce these burdens by 25 per cent by 2010. We are making significant improvements to the delivery and enforcement of regulation.

Building on this approach the time is now right to take a comprehensive look at the public sector administrative burden and see what might be done to reduce it.

In the public sector internal control processes play an important role in accountability for the use of public funds and in delivering improvements to services. These controls can include, amongst other things, regulation, guidance, inspection, targets and budget controls.

But we know that the public sector front-line is keen to improve services and sometimes has concerns about time spent on unnecessary bureaucracy. Many Departments are making real efforts to improve the situation and, as the examples in this document show, there is already good practice.

More needs to be done. This strategy represents cross-government agreement to making the way public services are administered more transparent, and a pragmatic approach to ensuring a tangible and permanent reduction in unnecessary bureaucracy by ensuring:

- **Fewer and better co-ordinated requests for data from the frontline** – Departments will identify what data they are asking the front-line to provide. Targets for reduction will be set later this year.

- **A reduction in the stock of unnecessary bureaucracy in the areas the front-line cares most about** – Departments will work with the frontline to identify major irritants, and set out plans for tackling these issues.
- **Better engagement with front-line workers to identify and remove bureaucracy** – Through stakeholder groups, surveys, and a website to allow anyone to put forward ideas for simplification.
- **Better regulation that is understood and mirrored through the public service delivery chain** – Working with intermediate bodies to spread best practice and Better Regulation principles.

Delivery cannot happen without the help of those at the front-line. We need to hear their views in order to make a difference where it matters. By working together we can find ways that the government can do things differently to make it easier for the frontline to comply with necessary management requirements. That is why we are encouraging public sector staff to send us their suggestions for reducing bureaucracy to [www.betterregulation.gov.uk](http://www.betterregulation.gov.uk).

All suggestions submitted will be considered and those approved will be fed into departmental plans to simplify bureaucracy. Ideas will receive a response within 90 days and those taken forward will be put in place by 2010.

Departments already publish annual Simplification Plans setting out their progress against the 25 per cent target for reducing burdens on business and charities. This autumn's Simplification Plans will include progress reports on tackling burdens on the Public Sector. Departments will publish the lists of data they require the front-line to provide and the major irritants they have identified, along with plans for addressing these issues.



# 1. A better regulation strategy for the public sector

## Background

- 1 A recent report commissioned by Senator Charles E. Schumer and New York City Mayor Michael R. Bloomberg<sup>1</sup> stated that the 'UK is preferred across many regulatory dimensions but is most distinguished in cost and simplicity of regulations'. Strong progress has been made over the last eighteen months on delivering the better regulation agenda. We have learnt from experience how such initiatives can make a real difference, by reducing the amount of time and resource spent on administration. The Government is introducing a set of practical actions that will identify and remove unnecessary burdens on frontline workers and start to embed a culture of better regulation in public service delivery.

## The public sector burden

- 2 Front-line public sector workers frequently complain that they are hampered in the delivery of public services by unnecessary bureaucracy which is imposed on them by central Government. Much of the most high profile progress on better regulation has been directed towards the private sector. We need to make similar progress for the public sector frontline in order for them to feel the same benefits, and to support the wider public services reform agenda.

## A programme for change

- 3 This strategy is designed to ensure that policy, operational and corporate services elements

of the public services work together to deliver a tangible and permanent reduction in unnecessary bureaucracy that affects public service delivery.

- 4 In order to make a difference that is felt, and given longevity by cultural change, we will gather and consider evidence on operational practice and policy to ensure that unnecessary bureaucracy, and not necessary management controls, are tackled. We will work in partnership with the front-line – an effort is required at all levels of the delivery chain to identify where government can make a real difference by freeing up staff time to spend on delivery of high quality public services. The strategy will be implemented flexibly to take account of existing best practice in Departments – there is much good work underway already, which reflects departmental structures and working arrangements, and we must allow that to continue – but Departments will need outcomes to reflect the central elements of what is set out in this strategy.

## The public sector

- 5 The strategy is designed to tackle burdens on public sector front-line workers – those who are delivering public services direct to customers. There is no single definition of the front-line, but those falling into scope are likely to have some or all of the following characteristics:
  - Providing a service direct to the public through a staff-to-customer transaction

<sup>1</sup> Senator Charles E. Schumer and New York City Mayor Michael R. Bloomberg – Sustaining New York's and the US' Global Financial Services Leadership

- Subject to independent inspection by bodies other than the NAO
- Recognised as an Arms-Length Body
- Public Body, Executive Agency or local public sector body

This list is not exhaustive, and it will be for Departments to make the final judgement about which organisations should fall within scope. They will work with representative organisations to get a front-line perspective and the Better Regulation Executive to provide consistency.

## The wider picture

- 6 The strategy has links with other government initiatives, specifically the wider better regulation agenda which seeks to reduce burdens on the private and third sectors, public service reform, the Comprehensive Spending Review, and Departments' work on meeting Value for Money targets.

## 2. Fewer and better co-ordinated requests for data from the front-line

- 7 It is important that Government collects data from the front-line to provide accountability to the public for money spent and the quality of services provided. However, we know from front-line feedback that multiple targets and the collection of a high volume of information can place a significant burden on public services. Fewer and better coordinated requests for data from central government would help to reduce this burden.
- 8 This issue is widely acknowledged and cross-Government work has already started to tackle it in some areas. Delivering a smaller set of corporate Public Service Agreements through the Comprehensive Spending Review, with a prioritised set of performance indicators, will be an important first step, as there is a positive correlation between performance indicators and data burdens. And having national targets in the next Spending Review period only where they can be proven to drive delivery will help to reduce the range of associated targets. The Local Government White Paper commitment to one set of performance indicators for Local Government and its partners should make a significant difference to the burdens Local Government faces from the centre. But data burdens go wider than those related to performance reporting and all such burdens should be addressed.

### Data stream reduction exercise

- 9 To meet this objective each Department will undertake to identify all of the data streams it requires public sector organisations to provide, either to the Department or to a third party such as a member of the public.

This exercise will mean that for the first time government will have a complete picture of the number of times it asks the front-line to provide information, and of what it is asking for.

- 10 Departments will publish the list of data requirements they have identified within their 2007 Simplification Plans.
- 11 Targets for reduction of the number of information requests made by Government will be set later this year. As yet there is no presumption of what the target for reduction should be – it will be determined by the evidence generated during this exercise. Departments' targets on improving value for money were set at 2.5 per cent and the target for reducing the administrative burden of regulation on business is 25 per cent. In this case it might be appropriate for different Departments to have different targets, depending on their level of interaction with front-line workers and the work they have already done to identify and reduce burdens. The targets will assume that Departments will find compensatory reductions for all future burdens; that is to say, the targets will be net (as are administrative burden reduction targets).
- 12 Better coordination, consolidation, data sharing between Departments and removal of data requirements would help eliminate duplication, reduce the irritant of frequent information requests, and help to meet targets for reducing the number of information requests made.

### Higher Education Concordat

Sometimes the multiple data requests faced by Higher Education institutions can seem overly bureaucratic and duplicative to those carrying them out. To tackle this, the Higher Education Regulation Review Group launched a better regulation Concordat, in May 2006, based on the principle that data should be collected once and used many times, and signatories should assess quality and standards in a co-ordinated and appropriate manner. Intervention from external agencies should be clearly risk-based. Sixteen organisations signed up to the HE Concordat, with more joining since.

The Concordat commits signatories to practical plans for working together on a less burdensome, more proportionate approach. This has started to make a real difference for Higher Education institutions:

- The Quality Assurance Agency has overhauled its Quality Assurance Framework, and is co-ordinated with OFSTED.
- Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) has moved to a web-based system of data collection, and is implementing the Higher Education Database for Institutions (HEIDI).
- The Training and Development Agency has streamlined its data collection requirement, aligned collection dates with HESA, and brought its financial memorandum into line with other funding bodies.

### Police Annual Data Return

The Annual Data Requirement (ADR) is a list of all routine requests for data made to all police forces in England and Wales. The aim of the ADR process is to reduce bureaucracy on frontline officers and to ensure that the value of the data collected out weighs the cost. The ADR brings all requests for police data across central government together, reducing uncoordinated or duplicate requests for information in slightly different formats.

The ADR process continues to be a robust process of consultation of new or existing requests proposed by Home Office policy units. The ADR process has evolved to a process which not only considers proposals for new data requirements but also challenges existing data items to ensure that the information requested from forces remains necessary and continues to be of use to the Home Office.



### 3. A voice for front-line workers in decisions about bureaucracy

- 13 It is important that front-line workers are able to input into decisions as they will be able to identify which issues cause them the biggest burdens, and how such problems can be eliminated without reducing service quality.
- 14 Many Departments are already very effective at bringing the views of front-line workers into the policy making process. A number of Departments already have dedicated groups which monitor the stock and flow of bureaucracy. This best practice should be spread across Departments.

#### More consistent involvement

- 15 'Insight' or 'gateway' groups in Departments that include or sponsor front-line workers are to be established or given revised terms of reference so that they consider public sector burdens. These groups will tackle the stock of existing regulation, and offer advice on how to minimise the flow of new regulation. The model is flexible. The groups may look at stock, or flow, or both. They will be a mixture of front-line staff, their representatives and officials, though the mix will vary and not each of the three will necessarily be represented. Departments may establish groups for each front-line sector, or they may establish cross-cutting groups, or it may make sense for them to put better regulation terms of reference into the remits of existing groups with a wider role.
- 16 But this flexibility for Departments will still result in common outcomes. Each front-line sector will have a clear voice at the heart of policy making, Departments will tackle the stock and flow of burdens, and Departments

will be able to give a high level assessment of the effects of flow on the overall departmental burden. Departmental efforts will fit together to form a single identifiable insight framework across government, which will be described in simplification plans.

- 17 Departments will also give the front-line more scope to manage change by:
- Sharing their forward plans for new requirements for the year ahead;
  - Providing extended notice of changes to operational delivery frameworks; and
  - Working with the front-line on proposals for simplification.

#### A forum for ideas

- 18 Not every public sector worker can be part of an insight group, but everyone has the opportunity to suggest ideas for reducing burdens, including those on the public sector, through the [www.betterregulation.gov.uk](http://www.betterregulation.gov.uk) website. Government needs to hear the views of people facing these issues in order to make a difference where it matters. We are encouraging public sector staff and private sector workers who deliver public services to send us their suggestions for reducing bureaucracy, and will respond to ideas or suggestions within 90 days, outlining whether they have been taken forward and explaining why a particular decision has been made.

#### Monitoring progress

- 19 We will regularly carry out opinion research to understand how the front-line feels about the changes we are making.

### DfES Implementation Review Unit

To achieve the desired outcomes, policy must be relevant to and deliverable by leaders and staff working at the front-line. Talking to their representatives is important. Talking to people doing the job day to day is equally vital.

That is why the DfES set up the Implementation Review Unit. This is a group of experienced and successful school practitioners – primary, secondary and special school head teachers, teachers and bursars. The IRU's remit is to challenge and support DfES policy aspirations by bringing a first hand perspective of the reality on the ground.

The economic and social context in which young people grow up today means the expectations Government places on schools are challenging. The robust perspective the IRU offer the Department, its national agencies and local authorities, is ensuring that the burdens and bureaucracy associated with those expectations are kept to the absolute minimum.

### Lifting the Burdens Task Force

The Lifting the Burdens Task Force was announced in July 2006 by the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government. The Task Force is an independent practitioner body that has been set up to review the bureaucratic and performance management burdens that exist as a consequence of the current relationship between central and Local Government. The Task Force will identify which requirements cause the most difficulty on the ground and which add the least value and agree packages of burden reduction with Government.

The Department for Communities and Local Government has recently responded to the first report of the Lifting the Burden Task Force<sup>2</sup> by removing nine Best Value Performance Indicators for the 2007-08 reporting year. This means that Local Authorities no longer have to collect information on, amongst other things, the number of conservation areas in the authority, and the number of those areas that have published management proposals.

<sup>2</sup> Lifting the Burden Task Force – 13 Steps to Reduce Performance Management Burdens  
<http://www.lga.gov.uk/Documents/Publication/LBTfhousingplanning.pdf>

## 4. A reduction in the stock of unnecessary bureaucracy the front-line cares most about

20 Government imposes requirements on the front-line that go wider than the collection of information. Many of Government's key policy priorities are delivered by front-line workers and this exercise is being carried out to identify ways that Government can do things differently, in order to make it easier for the front-line to deliver on those priorities. It is not about making life easier for Central Government, though Central Government will also feel the benefits of change.

### Identification of key irritants

21 Over the coming months Departments will work closely with stakeholder groups to identify the most significant irritants that they impose on the public sector. These irritants will be the issues that frontline workers recognise as key concerns, not necessarily the requirements that are most costly or difficult to comply with.

22 Departments will publish details of their most significant front-line irritants in their 2007 Simplification Plans, along with ideas on how each of these issues should be addressed. This could involve removing a requirement; reducing the burden of meeting a requirement; or in some circumstances improving the way the requirement is explained to those affected by it as the front-line may believe something is unnecessary because no one has explained that it contributes to a wider initiative.

23 Ideas submitted through the better regulation website could be tackled under this part of the strategy.

### Department of Health External Gateway

The Department of Health is committed to ensuring delivery of its priorities through better regulation and has a long tradition of seeking to reduce the burden of bureaucracy on the NHS and adult social care. For example, since its creation in 2003, the Department's external Gateway, working closely with policy teams has significantly reduced the total number of new plan requirements, targets, collections and directions, being issued to the service, with over 1,100 stopped to date.

### Reducing targets on Local Government

Against a backdrop of improving local authority performance the Local Government White Paper "Strong and Prosperous Communities" set out proposals for a new performance framework for local government. The new framework will reduce central controls and give local people and partners more involvement in the way local services are provided.

Reducing bureaucracy is a key element of the proposals. Under the new framework the number of indicators against which areas must report to local government will be radically reduced to 200 national indicators (down from an estimated 600-1200 indicators in the current system). There will also no longer be the requirement for Local Authorities to prepare annual best value performance plans and conduct best value reviews.

Local Area Agreements will become the mechanism for agreeing shared delivery of the priorities expressed in the indicators. The LAA will contain a set of about 35 priority targets for improvement (plus 18 DfES statutory targets) that will be agreed between Central and Local Government.

By providing clear national outcomes and priorities for delivery this new set of outcomes, indicators and targets will help to create more space for LAAs to meet the needs of local citizens and communities, and provide clearer accountability for Central Government, Local Government and other service providers.

## 5. Better regulation that is understood and mirrored through the delivery chain resulting in cultural change

- 24 The public service delivery chain does not solely consist of government and those working with the public face to face. There are intermediate bodies such as Strategic Health Authorities and Local Education Authorities who also play a key role in managing the delivery of local services.
- 25 We expect that when engaging with stakeholders to identify burdens, instances of burdens from intermediate bodies whose day to day running is not controlled by central Government will be found. It is important that intermediate bodies follow the lead of the centre and pressure from the front-line to cut unnecessary bureaucracy.

### How government will spread the message

- 26 Clear communication with the front-line will be needed to reinforce success. We plan that:
- Practical examples of change will be shared with the front-line
  - BRE will lead an outreach programme in consultation with Departments
  - Departments will use existing mechanisms for communication such as stakeholder groups and front-line staff magazines
- 27 A targeted effort with 'intermediate' bodies is also required to encourage change at all levels. This will involve:
- Identification of the 'intermediate' tier as responsible for a proportion of the burden
  - A clear lead from Central Government to engage with the better regulation agenda

### Project Lantern

As John Reid said in his speech to the Police Federation in May 2007, "Bureaucracy is information gone wrong, caused by bad processes and bad information management." This is why initiatives such as Project Lantern are so vital, harnessing technology to make front-line delivery more effective and faster.

The Lantern Project delivers a mobile hand-held electronic fingerprint identity check which will speed up the process of establishing a person's identity. This will allow officers to make better informed decisions, by knowing whether an individual is wanted or dangerous.

The Lantern device works by electronically scanning a subject's index fingers, and transmitting the information to the national fingerprint collection for search. Any possible matches are identified and returned to an officer in a target time of less than five minutes.

Using the existing information in this way will cut time spent on pursuing false identities, avoid frequent unnecessary returns of officers to their station, and reduce the number of unnecessary arrests.

## 6. Public commitments to change and clear leadership

28 The work on better regulation for the private sector shows that delivery requires openness about change and strong direction. Published commitments allow everyone to understand the pace of change, and to hold Departments to account. Proper leadership maintains the pace of change and tackles issues with delivery before they become problems.

### Simplification plans

29 Nineteen Departments and Regulators published Simplification Plans last year. These plans detailed how changes in regulation would be made to reduce the burden, particularly for the private sector. The reductions in administrative burdens alone ran to £2 billion.

30 This year's plans, to be published in the autumn, will also cover the progress being made against this strategy. They will describe the measures being put in place by Departments to engage the frontline, identify the priority burdens and the plans to deal with them, and set out details of the data streams identified by Departments and the targets for reduction.

31 This will be a published plan of practical actions both completed and planned to reduce unnecessary bureaucracy in the public sector. The plans will be updated annually.

32 Departments will keep their plans under review in two important ways:

- Each plan is an action plan. Departments will be following the objectives and milestones which each sets out; and
- The public sector simplification agenda will develop over time. Departments will continue to seek out new opportunities for simplification.

### Leadership

33 The commitment to better regulation in the public sector will be led from the very top. Responsibility for delivery of the strategy will be overseen by the Cabinet Committee system. This work will be supported by the network of Better Regulation Ministers.

34 This commitment is matched at senior official level. Each Department has a board level champion, which will ensure that better regulation for the public sector is considered a key factor in the decisions taken by top management teams right across government.



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