

House of Commons
Public Administration Select
Committee

**THE PUBLIC SERVICE
ETHOS**

Seventh Report of Session 2001–02

Volume I

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ETHOS**

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*Volume I:
Report and Proceedings of the Committee*

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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 Commissioners for England, Scotland and Wales and of the Parliamentary Ombudsman for Northern Ireland, 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; and the committee shall consist of eleven Members.

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Footnotes

In the footnotes of this Report, references to oral evidence are indicated by 'Q' followed by the question number. References to written evidence are indicated by the Memorandum number as in 'PSR 12'.

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SEVENTH REPORT

The Public Administration Select Committee has agreed to the following Report:

THE PUBLIC SERVICE ETHOS

SUMMARY

In this Report, the Committee examines the principles which underpin the Government's programme of public service reform, and in particular the idea of the public service ethos. This ethos, we believe, should be the fundamental reference point for everything else in the reform programme.

When someone describes him or herself as a 'public servant' it is testimony to the power of the ethos. Yet a gap seems today to be opening up between the traditional theory of public service and the reality on the ground. Sometimes public services, and those who work in them, fall short of the ideal. And the involvement of the private sector raises questions about possible threats to the ethos. The boundaries between public and private services are increasingly difficult to define, and the picture is also confused by the emergence of new types of partnerships.

We reject two rival myths about public service, one suggesting that only the public sector can properly deliver public services, the other implying that there is nothing special that distinguishes public services from private services. We conclude that, in the mixed economy of public service, it is possible for private and voluntary sector bodies and people to uphold the public service ethos, although the profit motive may put it under strain.

The public service ethos cannot be taken for granted; it needs to be renewed and strengthened to set out clearly society's aspirations for its public services. While the Government is making some welcome progress towards explaining its vision of reform, it has not yet provided a coherent framework for action.

In uncertain times for public service, a clearer and more explicit way of explaining its values is needed. The ethos needs to be nourished and cultivated. We recommend that the most important values should be set out in a Public Service Code, to be approved by Parliament and adopted by all bodies providing those services. It should include the standards to be reached in ethical behaviour, service delivery, administrative competence and democratic accountability. The Code should be included in invitations to tender and as a contract clause for public service contracts, including employment contracts. It should also be considered for inclusion in the proposed Civil Service Bill. Vigorous efforts should be made to cultivate the right values among public servants, including the establishment of a Public Service Academy.

A Public Service Code

People and organisations providing public services should commit themselves to these principles:

- Observe at all times the ethical standards expected of public servants and public service bodies, including the seven principles of public life
- Make themselves accountable through elected representatives and other means for their policies and performance, with the highest standards of openness and transparency.

- Aim to deliver public services that match in quality the best private equivalents, including standards of customer care. Where there is no private sector equivalent, best practice in the public sector should be matched.
- Treat public service workers and users fairly and equitably, and involve them as much as possible in service issues.
- Respect at all times the right of the citizen to good administration as set out in the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union, and his or her right to safe, reliable public services. Proper redress should be made where maladministration has taken place.
- Remember at all times that public service means serving the public, not serving the interests of those who provide the service, and work collaboratively with others to this end.

CHAPTER ONE: TRADITIONAL PUBLIC SERVICE VALUES

1. This Report is the first product of the Committee's continuing inquiry into the Government's programme of public service reform. It considers whether the Government has yet found a convincing vision of public service to underpin its reform programme.

2. The delivery of better public services is the central theme of this Parliament. It is the issue by which the Prime Minister has said he wants the Government to be judged. But the principles on which reform is based remain in question. We have, therefore, decided to try to clear away some of the confusion which surrounds the principles, as a preliminary to examining how they are being converted into practice. We took oral evidence from twenty-five witnesses and received forty-one submissions. We are grateful for these, and for the assistance of our specialist adviser, Mr Tony Travers.

3. One of the main themes of the Prime Minister's speeches on this subject since the last election has been the "public service ethos". However, it is not clear whether it is seen as an existing attribute of public services that deserves celebration, or a desirable attribute of reformed public services that is a goal for achievement (or a mixture of both).

Ethos as Benchmark

4. For the purposes of this Report we define an ethos as a principled framework for action, something that describes the general character of an organisation, but which, and more importantly, should also motivate those who belong to it. As such, the right sort of public service ethos is clearly essential to any effective reform of the public services. We see the ethos essentially as a benchmark, against which public service workers and institutions should continuously strive to measure themselves.

5. This also seems to be the Government's view. On 16 July 2001, the Prime Minister said that the public service ethos was the envy of many business chief executives and that the best people to make reform work were those who believed in "the values, the ethos and the potential embodied in our public services". In a speech which he planned to give to the TUC in September 2001 (but not delivered because of the terrorist attacks on the USA), the Prime Minister said that public services "are run by publicly accountable authorities and overwhelmingly delivered by public servants...we know what would be lost if we undermined the fundamental values that motivate staff, underpin those services and on which they are held accountable to the community". However, this leaves open questions about how such values might be undermined, or cultivated.

The Traditional View

6. In referring to the public service ethos, the Prime Minister acknowledges a tradition. The traditional approach to the public service ethos sees it as a long-established set of values and rules, mostly unwritten, that sets out the standards that public servants should uphold. This view suggests that, although the nature of public service might change in some respects, the principles on which it is based (in Britain these are often traced back to the Northcote-Trevelyan Report on the civil service in the mid-nineteenth century, with its stress on merit in appointment to public office, avoidance of patronage, and political impartiality) have served the nation well and should not be eroded. It involves a recognition of the distinctiveness of public service. The fact that in Britain public servants are not seen as corrupt or self-serving owes much to this tradition, and represents a huge national asset.

7. There was substantial support for this traditional view of the ethos among our witnesses. Sir Jeremy Beecham, Chair of the Local Government Association, referred to the "focus on equity, the disinterestedness of civil servants, their accountability and the

commitment which at its best means that people who probably could have an easier and better rewarded life financially elsewhere remain committed to public service”.¹

8. Serviceteam Ltd, a large private provider of public services, offered a similar definition from a very different perspective: “It is the idea that the quality of service delivery should be independent of the private motives or prejudices of the individuals or organisations delivering the service. It is about social justice, social equity, community responsibility and democratic accountability”.²

9. The GMB Union stressed the motivating power of the ethos: “It is public service ethos which motivates low paid GMB members such as care assistants and hospital ancillary workers to continue with stressful jobs in often poor conditions when they could be earning more at the local supermarket”.³

10. Reliance on the motivating power of the ethos can, however, be taken too far. For instance, we would reject any suggestion that the personal rewards offered by the ethos should be seen as a recompense for low pay and poor working conditions for public servants. The public service ethos should never be offered as an excuse for treating public service works less well than others.

11. Another aspect of this approach is the idea that those who provide public services have to be trusted by the community. As Lord Plant, who gave evidence to us, has written “those who administer, manage and deliver services have to be trusted to do so and to reflect in their behaviour the values which the organisation was set up to serve”.⁴ In the light of this, Lord Plant questions the extent to which a system of contracts can help individuals and organisations uphold the public service ethos, a point to which we return below (Chapter 3).

Common Threads of Public Service

12. It is clear from this that the traditional public service ethos contains a number of common threads, in terms of obligations that public servants should meet. These appear to us to include such characteristics as:

- Impartiality
- Accountability
- Trust
- Equity
- Probity
- Service

These characteristics, often associated with the use of public money, are generally seen as the traditional ingredients of the public service ethos.

The Gap between Theory and Practice

13. However, a gap seems to be opening up between this traditional theory and the modern reality of public service. A number of factors, including the real and perceived shortcomings of public sector organisations and public services generally, may be playing a part in creating this gap. In this context, we have also had to examine the question of private sector involvement in public services, and whether, as some of our witnesses

¹ HC 263-vii, Q 697

² HC 263-II, PSR 28

³ Ibid, PSR 24

⁴ Raymond Plant ‘A Public Service Ethic’ University of Southampton 2001 p 5

suggested, the public service ethos is threatened by such involvement. There is, too, the wider issue of professional values, and the extent to which they can (at best) act as the most reliable guarantor of standards and service and (at worst) as the narrow defender of sectional interests.⁵ This changing climate for public services is the main theme of the next Chapter.

⁵ 'Making Government Work' Seventh Report 2000-01 HC 94

CHAPTER TWO: THE CHANGING CLIMATE OF PUBLIC SERVICES

14. The public services are changing, and rapidly. It has become increasingly difficult to define what the “public sector” is, and what a “public service” is. Boundary lines are shifting, and are often confusing. For instance, gas and electricity have moved from being public to private sector services within the past fifteen years. The same is largely true of residential care, although heavily financed by public money. Some private provision, notably in the utility sector, is regularly described as a “public service”. Many public services face direct competition from private providers, while many private services have tight public interest regulation. A recent opinion survey shows great public confusion about the location of a dividing line: although people said that they regarded public finance as a key criterion for a public service, they also thought of some privately-provided services, such as electricity supply, as public. “Meeting society’s basic needs” was generally seen as a core purpose for public services, but only two-thirds thought they relied on public services to provide what they needed.⁶

15. To add to the confusion, the scope of public-private partnerships of assorted kinds has been considerably extended in recent years across a range of public services (although, as the Institute for Public Policy Research and others have pointed out, such projects are still heavily outweighed by projects with conventional public-sector financing). Treasury rules have for many years encouraged various forms of public-private partnership, which can be regarded as being “off the balance sheet” of public expenditure. John Edmonds of the GMB union called this “fudging the figures”.⁷ We are concerned that such considerations should not have undue influence: we believe that private involvement in public services should be motivated by the need for excellence in provision, not by narrow accounting conventions.

The Other Side of the Ethos: Failing Public Services?

16. A major motivation behind such changes has been the perception, and the reality, of serious failings in public services, particularly where they have been delivered by monopoly public providers. The fact that users cannot go elsewhere may often produce a lack of attention to their needs. Public sector provision can be ineffective, expensive and wasteful. The interests of service providers can be confused with the public interest. There are also claims (for instance from Sir Jeremy Beecham)⁸ that public sector organisations can be defensive and paternalistic. The law firm Nabarro Nathanson told us that “Public service ethos is not different or superior to the private or voluntary sector ethos” and that suggesting that it might be shows “an implied arrogance”.⁹ The secrecy said to be endemic in government departments, reflected in official resistance to freedom of information legislation, has also contributed to a perception that the culture of many public sector organisations is patronising and exclusive. These are issues to which we shall return. However, the funding issue is also a crucial part of the context. Under-funding will produce poor public services, and no invocation of a public service ethos will compensate for that.

A Cautionary Tale: The Case of Compulsory Competitive Tendering

17. One attempt to remedy some of these failings, particularly public sector waste and inefficiency, was the introduction of the regime of Compulsory Competitive Tendering (CCT) which was prevalent during the 1980s and 1990s. There are those who argue that it was a necessary driver for efficiency in public services.

⁶ Jane Steele ‘Defining Public’ *The Stakeholder*, July/August 2001, p 25

⁷ HC 263-i, Q 14

⁸ HC 263-II, PSR 35

⁹ *Ibid*, PSR 9

18. During that period, parts of public provision—including most local authority and NHS manual services, many catering and ancillary operations in schools and bus services—were subjected to tendering processes. Much of the evidence received by the Committee (including from representatives of both the public and private sectors) suggested that the contracts entered into as a result of these tendering processes were too heavily driven by considerations of cost-reduction, with inadequate attention paid to quality of service. In addition, many employees found themselves with worse conditions of employment and lower wages as companies sought to recoup their investment.

19. The influence of CCT on the current debate about public service provision is still considerable. A number of our witnesses, both those favouring and those against greater private sector involvement in public service provision, believed that CCT had concentrated too much on cost-cutting. It was repeatedly cited as the exemplar of how not to reform public services. The Local Government Information Unit told us of the “adversarial” relationships between private and public sectors which developed under CCT,¹⁰ and that was also the word used by Capita, one of the main commercial providers of public services.¹¹ The Director-General of the CBI, Digby Jones, accepted that CCT “scarred people” and “did not actually deliver”.¹² Under CCT, companies providing tendered services often used to cut the terms and conditions of staff as a way of reducing costs. The impact of worsening employment terms demotivated such staff, leading to longer-term service quality problems. It is significant that not one of our witnesses saw 1980s-style CCT as an acceptable way of involving the private sector in public services. The current debate about the best way to avoid a “two-tier” workforce in privately-provided public services shows how long-lasting and pervasive the effects of CCT have been.

20. This particular shift from traditional public service provision to private contracting therefore had the effect of undermining the quality of service and weakening the public service ethos. However, the damage to the ethos may have resulted more from poor contracting than from any intrinsic link to the private provision of services. CCT was an example of cost-driven private involvement in public services. But lessons may be learned from that experience which can inform a more sensible use of private expertise. As we shall argue below (Chapter 3) different kinds of contracts could have delivered a different, and better, outcome.

21. The introduction in recent years of a Best Value regime—as a replacement for CCT—has shifted the balance back towards service quality. The present Government still expects public services to be subjected to challenge and, sometimes, competition from other providers (private or public). Although Best Value is currently under review, the idea and subsequent developments suggest, at least tentatively, that it might in principle be possible to retain a public service ethos even where services are delivered by private sector providers.

Public Service Myths

22. The controversy generated by CCT and the other changes in public services has greatly reinforced the influence of two polar positions, which, because they are superficially plausible, often hamper sensible debate about public services. We consider these rival myths in turn.

¹⁰ HC 263-II, PSR 15 para 25

¹¹ HC 263-iv, Q 273

¹² HC 263-iii, Q 236

Myth One: The Public Sector as Public Service

23. It is sometimes suggested that the public sector is the unique repository of the virtues of selflessness, service and caring. On this view, only public sector monopoly organisations can properly deliver public services with the right ethos. Mr John Edmonds, General Secretary of the GMB Union, made a plausible case that the pressures to maximise profit can lead to a cutting of corners. He contrasted the approach of a publicly-employed hospital cleaner who would be regarded as “part of the team”, talking to patients and helping out in a number of ways, with the behaviour of his or her privately-employed counterpart, who would be obliged to work to “a particular specification and nothing more”.¹³ In other words, considerations of profit can hamper good service.

24. However, the argument is weakened when monopoly public sector organisations fail to meet the needs of the public. Poor management, combined in some cases with underfunding, has handicapped parts of the public sector for years, hindering necessary reforms. In the words of Martin Taylor, a leading businessman as well as an adviser to Government, “purity of motive would not compensate for poor public services”.¹⁴ We agree with Mr Taylor about this misuse of the idea of “public service ethos” as ideological cover for those who might wish to evade crucial questions about the quality of public services. ‘Public sector’ and ‘public service’ are not identical. Nor is it possible to sustain the view that public sector workers always display a service ethos, or that private sector workers do not. Stereotypes do not help deliver good public services.

Myth Two: The Fantasy of Public Service

25. At the other pole are those who suggest that there is nothing intrinsically special about public services and the processes by which they are provided. There is something of this in the view of Martin Taylor, who said “If I am a consumer of public services, I do not much mind what drives the supplier to supply them, I want them to be good”.¹⁵ It is also suggested by some that without constant injections of private sector skills and attitudes there can be no efficient public services. Doubting that public sector workers were unusually selfless or dedicated, Sir Steve Robson, a former Treasury official, vividly described the public sector ethos to us as “a bit of a fantasy, it is rather like middle-aged men, who fantasise that beautiful, young women find them very attractive”.¹⁶

26. It would be easy to conclude from this that public services are in no essential or intrinsic way different from other services that are supplied by the market. Because it is increasingly difficult to define public services, it may seem easier simply to put them in the same category as commercial services and ask no questions about the process by which they are delivered. On this view, “what matters is what works”, a phrase used frequently by the Government when it describes its attitude to the provision of public services.

¹³ HC 263-i, Q 6

¹⁴ HC 263-iii, Q 130

¹⁵ Ibid

¹⁶ HC 263-v, Q 369

27. We reject this view as inadequate. It does matter what a public service is, and what matters is that it works as a public service. Whatever the shortcomings of the public sector as it is, there is something necessary, special and distinctive about those services which are provided as public services. They carry with them intrinsic assumptions about equity, access and accountability. In the end, as the Government discovered in the case of Railtrack and NATS, the accountability of public bodies for public services is very difficult to evade. There is something that links many of these services indissolubly to public bodies and public decision-making. The public realm, of collectively provided services and functions, needs to be recognised for what it is—an essential component of a good society. This is why these services need to work well.

Misplaced Ideology and the Mixed Economy of Public Service

28. The polar views outlined above are clearly inadequate. But, in terms of an ethos of public service, what is the appropriate approach to private sector involvement? Most of our witnesses were careful to state that they were not ideologically opposed to private sector provision of public services or, alternatively, that not all public services would be appropriate for private involvement. In principle, most individuals and organisations were open to a mixed economy of provision. But it is hard not to conclude that, beneath the surface, and perhaps encouraged by the painful history of CCT, positions remain in many cases driven by ideology rather than practicality.

29. Such ideology is misplaced. It is sometimes difficult to draw a firm line between the “public” and “private” parts of service provision in Britain. This leads us to conclude that a public service ethos can exist whether a particular service is delivered by a public or private agency. It is perfectly possible, in the mixed economy of service provision, for an individual to carry an ethos with them from one institution to another (for example, from a public to private care home, or vice versa), whether in the public sector or not. Equally, another individual may lack such an ethos, whatever the circumstances. The culture of the organisation is the crucial factor.

30. There are also other, more practical considerations. In judging the acceptability of profit-making companies providing public services it is essential to balance the quality and cost implications of contracting out. If the profits paid to a private sector provider are outweighed by the value of management improvements and service benefits, without other disadvantages, there is clearly a good case for allowing the private sector to provide the service. On the other hand, if profits and other private costs are greater than benefits to public service quality, there can be no case for a transfer of provision. The need for proper assessment, in a way that is transparent and open to scrutiny and challenge, is fundamental.

31. The growing role of the voluntary and not-for-profit sector in the provision of public services also demonstrates that simple ideological dividing lines are unhelpful. These kinds of bodies can contribute their own distinctive approach, based on their right to act independently of government when appropriate, and on their long experience of providing social and other services. Although they operate on a more restricted terrain, and have a narrower set of accountabilities, than public services as a whole, they play an important part in the overall picture.¹⁷

32. We conclude, therefore, that it is possible for private and voluntary sector organisations and people to uphold the public service ethos, although the ethos may be put under strain by the profit motive. The ethos needs protecting and, where necessary, reinforcing in these circumstances. The private sector can be a useful servant for public services, if properly supervised; what it can never be is their master.

¹⁷ One example is Glas Cymru, a company limited by guarantee, which provides water for Wales and has a majority of independent members with no shareholders.

Good Contracts, Bad Contracts

33. Lord Plant of Highfield argued that there were certain essential state activities that could not be provided on contract by the private sector. He told us that he saw the “ability to incarcerate people” for instance as “perhaps the most fundamental and far-reaching power of the state”. He therefore doubted whether contracted private providers could undertake such functions.¹⁸ However, the former Chief Inspector of Prisons, Sir David Ramsbotham, told us that he had concluded that contracts could improve delivery, even in the most sensitive and “core” of public services:

“I believe the contract—because it is a document which actually specifies what is expected of the organisation and actually spells out what it is they are required to deliver, and it is then measured by independent outsiders such as the Chief Inspector or whoever, so it is subject to that—is in fact a very useful tool. ...I believe that if all the public sector prisons were directed in exactly the same way, with a very clearly laid down list of requirements on them, it would make the running of the prisons a) easier and b) better”.¹⁹

It is also commonplace for social care to be provided by the private sector, with appropriate regulation. We conclude that it is quite possible for contractors to uphold the public service ethos. But the ethos must be soundly built into the contracting process. Public services delivered in this way must be provided by reputable contractors, given the right contracts by properly accountable public bodies.

34. The examples of private prisons and social care might seem to demonstrate that, in certain circumstances and with the right contract terms (and effective ways of enforcing them, with independent inspection in appropriate cases), private providers can maintain the public service ethos, even when the services concerned are essential or sensitive. However, it is important to safeguard against the danger of fragmented responsibility that may come with contracting. A public service ethos should have the notion of seamless service (‘doing more than the job’) at its centre. It is also essential that private providers of public services should meet acceptable criteria. These examples further demonstrate that both public and private sector providers can succeed and fail, suggesting that the quality of management—whether public or private—is the crucial factor, with a decisive impact on the ethos of an organisation.

Mixing the Messages

35. The Government has not so far produced a consistent and coherent policy for the involvement of the private sector in public services. It is not clear whether the private sector is seen as a remedy for particular cases of public sector failure, or as a routine ingredient of public service provision. The extent of, and justification for, private sector involvement varies widely within and between departments. There is still force in the IPPR Commission’s judgement of June 2001 that the Government has a “scatter-gun approach” to partnership with the private sector which “appears inchoate and opportunistic rather than coherent and principled”.²⁰ In their evidence to us both private providers and trade unions stressed the need for a firmer set of rules to ensure greater accountability and transparency in partnerships.

¹⁸ HC 263-ii, Q 118

¹⁹ HC 263-vi, Q 497

²⁰ ‘Building Better Partnerships’ IPPR Commission on PPPs June 2001 p 49

36. The Government has recently gone some way to remedy this deficiency in its response, in March 2002, to the Report by Lord Sharman entitled “Holding to Account”.²¹ The Government’s acceptance of most of the Sharman proposals means that public standards of audit and accountability will now be extended to a substantial number of bodies, whether private or public, which play important public roles. This is the beginning of a more consistent approach, which is to be welcomed, but more still needs to be done.

37. The problem of consistency has also been apparent in the Government’s difficulties in arriving at an agreed code to govern the terms and conditions of employees transferred to private contractors, and the pensions provisions for these and new staff. More generally, Government in one voice suggests that the existing ethos of the public services represents a blockage to reform, while in another voice it says that this ethos represents an asset to be built on. Such mixed messages are clearly unhelpful in building and communicating an understanding of the Government’s reform programme.

Motivating Public Service Workers

38. There are also questions to be asked about the likely effect of public service reform on the motivation of public service workers. Given that the vast majority of those providing public services will continue to be in public sector organisations, these are clearly important issues. The recent tendency towards rising public sector salaries—especially for senior jobs—may assist with recruitment, but also might have an effect on attitudes to public service values. Similar questions arise in relation to external recruitment for senior posts, and to secondments. In addition, informal networks within organisations can be very influential in deciding whether reforms succeed or fail, either spreading the word that change is good or harming motivation and morale by highlighting the risks.

39. All this is a reminder that reform may founder if it seems not to take sufficient account of the needs and behaviour of public servants themselves. Good public services clearly require well motivated public servants. This certainly does not mean that a necessary process of reform and change should not be engaged in. Public service is about serving the public, not protecting the interests of public sector employees. However, it does mean that those who work in public services need to feel fully engaged in the process of reform if it is to be successful. It also means that public service workers in the new climate need the tools to do the job. This should include, for instance, a significant increase in training. A meagre one-and-a-half days is apparently now the average for local government employees.²² Public servants deserve better support and encouragement if they are to give reform the support it needs.

40. For example, the recent report on Civil Service Reform noted that there had been an 88 per cent increase in Senior Civil Service jobs subjected to open competition since December 1999.²³ The Prospect trade union gave us evidence of a significant decrease in morale among Civil Service members which seems to be associated with the opening up of more posts to competition.²⁴ We will be seeking to discover at some point in our inquiry whether the effect on morale—and perhaps on the ethos of the Service—is detrimental or not.

41. However, this does not mean that the motivations of private sector workers are inferior to those of public sector workers. Private companies are increasingly expected to

²¹ ‘Audit and Accountability for Government: The Government’s Response to Lord Sharman’s Report ‘Holding to Account’’ Cm 5456, 2002

²² HC 263-iv, Q 314

²³ ‘Civil Service Reform: Making a difference’ Dec 2001 p 3

²⁴ HC 263-II, PSR 29

demonstrate social responsibility and to take account of the world beyond the balance sheet. Again, stereotypes are not helpful. Yet the particular environment experienced by public service workers, and the nature of the demands on them, does have to be properly recognised.

42. We do know, for instance, that the structural changes and funding constraints of the past twenty years have increased the pressures on individual public servants in a wide variety of ways. The demand for higher service quality has been added to the requirement to be a cost-effective and efficient manager of resources and people. The demands of public accountability, performance measurement and the “Nolan” principles of ethical behaviour are another set of issues which have to be handled. The public service worker, unlike many of those providing purely “private sector” services, is faced with a testing range of demands which are intrinsic and special to public service.

43. This essential complexity of public service decision-making is well demonstrated by the example put to us by the Council of the London Borough of Hammersmith and Fulham.²⁵ The Council’s submission gives a vivid description of the many pressures on a Housing Benefit officer processing a complex claim: he or she has to decide “whether to spend an extra 15 minutes resolving a given problem, or to set the file aside and move on to the next. For the public sector employee, the factors influencing and motivating his or her judgements and decisions will be various—the daily pressures to get the job done, the expectations of his/her line manager, targets for the section to deliver. But there will also be countervailing pressures against rushing the task, which may include an awareness that the council will be at risk of a maladministration claim if the calculations are not done correctly, a sense of accountability to a ward councillor [who] will have an unhappy tenant on his doorstep, and ultimately an innate sense that as a public servant the over-riding goal of a day’s work is to deliver the “right” outcome, in terms of social equity as well as arithmetical accuracy, even though this may take a little longer”. Working out the best way to serve the public interest (or interests) in this situation will never be easy.

44. There is also the question of the effect of an externally-imposed measurement culture on the ethos of public service. There is a danger that such a culture can erode trust and damage the values of professionalism. It is crucial to get the balance right here, involving an approach to accountability that understands the importance of professionalism and an approach to professionalism that understands the requirements of accountability. We intend to explore this measurement culture and its effects in a future report.

45. Because of these increasing pressures, **we believe that there would be benefit in a systematic survey of the attitudes of public servants, possibly under the aegis of the Office for Public Services Reform** (a similar survey, for civil servants only, was recommended by our predecessor Committee in 1994, but there was successful resistance from the then Government.²⁶

46. The principles behind reform, then, need to be properly explained, if it is not, like CCT, to be counter-productive. We believe that a new approach to the public service ethos has an important role to play in that, and in the next Chapter we suggest what such an approach might consist of.

²⁵ HC 264-II, PSR 21

²⁶ ‘A Civil Service for the Twenty-first Century’ Treasury and Civil Service Committee Fifth Report 1993-94 HC 27

CHAPTER THREE : DEFINING THE ETHOS

47. In the new and challenging climate, the public service ethos cannot be taken for granted. To be credible, it needs to be renewed and strengthened so that it sets out clearly the aspirations society now has for its public services. It needs to be built into the new structures that are being developed for public services, and it must be actively cultivated and promoted in the institutions and individuals, both private and public sector, which provide those services. In this Chapter, therefore, we consider the possible components of a restated and updated public service ethos. We start with some of the principles set out by the Government.

The Government's Approach

48. The Government has made some progress in giving more substance to the brief references to the ethos of public service made in Prime Ministerial speeches on reform. Charles Clarke MP, Minister without Portfolio, paid tribute to the continuing force of the ethos in a Foreword to a New Local Government Network pamphlet in May 2002, declaring that "Reform must always respect the powerful public service ethos and it must acknowledge the contribution and skills of those who now work in the public sector. The ethos of public service is as intrinsic to public service as the practice itself, helping to create and manage the expectations and aspirations of all stakeholders".²⁷ In a pamphlet of March 2002 aimed at public service workers, "Reforming our Public Services: Principles into Practice", the Government refers to a "partnership approach based on a shared ethos of service".²⁸ It also mentions the "significant ways in which the private sector can learn from the public sector, not least the ethos of trust that has been developed between many teachers and parents or between doctors, nurses and patients, as well as the importance of treating staff fairly".²⁹ The reference to the importance of "trust" recalls one of the most prominent parts of the traditional ethos that we identified in Chapter One.

Accountability and the Government: Unresolved Issues

49. On the other hand, when it turns to another essential part of the ethos, the accountability of public services, the Government's pamphlet is rather less clear. This suggests that there are unresolved issues within Government:

"There is an important debate to be had about how to reconcile the organisational need for services to be more devolved and flexibly delivered, against the importance of political accountability. Devolving or even delegating power to a more local level may seem sensible, but is not easy in circumstances where individual Ministers have been held responsible for very detailed matters of service delivery. At the same time, public services cannot simply be made accountable to their customers when their democratic accountability is to Parliament, or to the local town hall. Yet giving front-line workers greater responsibility to shape responsive local services is essential to securing high standards for all".³⁰

50. We agree with the Government's recognition that services should be democratically accountable as well as user-focused, and acknowledge the problems faced by Ministers who find it hard to "let go" when the media attack them for every detailed failing—real or perceived—in public services everywhere. But we believe that the role of local and regional representatives is far more important than the pamphlet suggests (a view reflected in the

²⁷ 'Advancing a new public service ethos' New Local Government Network May 2002

²⁸ 'Reforming our Public Services: Principles into Practice' OPSR March 2002 p 28

²⁹ Ibid, p 26

³⁰ Ibid, p 9

recent White Papers on local government and regional government, which stress the importance of active local and regional democratic institutions).

51. The Government is making welcome progress towards explaining its vision of public service, but it has not yet provided a coherent framework for action.

Making the Ethos Clearer

52. It is time for more clarity. It is also time to move from the unwritten traditional ethos to a clearer and more explicit way of explaining public service values, one that may be more suited to times of rapid change. We believe it is possible to preserve the best features of the traditional ethos while taking full and proper account of the new environment. The new public service approach should include all aspects of the traditional version discussed in Chapter One, but it should now also take account of the need to uphold that ethos in the public service activities of private, profit-making companies and voluntary and third sector organisations as well as in public bodies.

53. Michael Jacobs, General Secretary of the Fabian Society, advocated the development of a public service ethos which he described as a “code of conduct or similar which set out exactly what the community expects of public services, and how public servants should behave”.³¹ We see merit in this suggestion.

54. We believe that the Government should state more clearly the principles underlying public service and its reform programme, and put them in a Public Service Code. This should be a summary of its approach, its own version of the public service ethos, relevant to changing circumstances and the intensified demand for excellence in services, but robust in upholding the intrinsic nature of a public service and its traditional values. The Code should be short, simple and aspirational. Its components should include the standards to be reached in ethical behaviour, in service delivery, in administrative competence and in democratic accountability. The six principles we suggest at paragraph 74 below seem to us to include the most important points of such a Code, although they are undoubtedly capable of further refinement.

55. The Code should be subject to Parliamentary approval, and then should be adopted by all bodies, public, private and voluntary sector, which provide public services.

Components of the Public Service Code

56. We believe that the new Code should have a number of key components. Below we suggest what these might be:

(i) Ethical Behaviour

57. The Seven Principles of Public Life developed by the Committee on Standards in Public Life have now been widely incorporated into the rules governing public bodies. They should be the ethical cornerstone of the new approach. We also observe that the success of the Seven Principles, which are part of the code of conduct for many public bodies in the UK and abroad, demonstrates the value of a simple statement of the foundations of public service standards. We believe that the Code should build on them.

³¹ HC 263-II, PSR 37

(ii) Holding Providers to Account

58. We are now seeing the emergence of the outlines of a more considered approach to the issues of accountability raised by private involvement in public services. The IPPR Commission on Public Private Partnerships proposed a series of measures to make partnerships more accountable. These included calls for:

- more explicit statements in partnership contracts of the responsibility of each partner;
- contracts which set out clearly the actions that public purchasers can take to enforce agreed terms against private providers;
- greater clarity about the status and areas of competence of partnership boards and other decision-making bodies set up under PPP arrangements.³²

59. This demand for stronger democratic accountability was echoed by many of our witnesses. The Local Government Information Unit (LGIU) called for local government scrutiny committees to be involved in the whole process of local PFIs and PPPs. This scrutiny would extend from the beginning of the process through outline business cases to implementation and monitoring. They recommend that the tests of accountability devised by Democratic Audit for quangos should be applied to partnership bodies. This would mean that they would be required to hold a public Annual General Meeting, produce an annual report, and give the public access to meetings.³³

60. The LGIU also argued that it was difficult to ensure accountability by means of contracts, especially when companies involved in long-term PFIs were taken over or merged with other firms. This seems to us to be an issue that needs very careful consideration, especially when contracts are set for up to 30 years. However, if such long-term contracting becomes the norm, we believe that there are strong arguments for using the precision and relative certainty of contracts to enshrine the values of public service.

61. The possibilities of innovative forms of contract are demonstrated by one of the most interesting recent developments in local government—the introduction of flexible framework agreements, which operate over a long period and have short-term contracts within them. These allow for long-term planning but do not tie the authorities to detailed contractual terms over 20 or 30 years. It is too early to say how these will turn out, but they have the potential to combine the public service ethos with private sector efficiency.

62. Capita, one of the main commercial public service providers, gave us some examples of mechanisms which have been established to hold public-private partnerships to account. Among these were “partnership boards” in which they were jointly involved with local authorities in Blackburn with Darwen and in Norfolk.³⁴ We were not able to judge from this evidence whether these partnership boards adequately guarantee propriety and democratic accountability. The quality of governance provided by these relatively informal bodies should be scrutinised carefully by local authorities and by central government.

63. However, Capita also recognised the need to strengthen the national framework of accountability, calling on the private sector and government jointly to: “Develop new forms of governance and accountability models for public-private partnerships, which strengthen

³² ‘Building Better Partnerships’ IPPR Commission on PPPs June 2001 Chapter 10

³³ HC 263-II, PSR 15

³⁴ Ibid, PSR 14

democratic accountability and stakeholder accountability whilst protecting commercial accountability”.³⁵

64. The FDA civil service union recommended that “PPP or similar vehicles must be developed within a framework of greater transparency and accountability”. In its view “all too often private provision appears to be being used by politicians to shield themselves from responsibility for service delivery”.³⁶ As recent events on the railways and elsewhere have demonstrated, such “shields” are of course illusory.

65. There are, we believe, a number of powerful arguments in favour of the development of new forms of accountability in public services of this kind, which recognise and even encourage diversity of provision while helping to ensure propriety, fairness and traditional public service standards. Too much, or inappropriate, accountability can be oppressive, and disproportionate attention to process over product can damage the purpose of an organisation; but there has to be enough accountability to meet the requirements of a public service. Without it, public services can become dangerously separated from the electorate and their representatives, either by long contracts that cannot be altered, or by arm’s length bodies that have no democratic mandate. The risk, then, is that voting may eventually come to appear futile.

(iii) Being Open with the Public

66. Transparency is another theme that comes through strongly. The FDA criticised government on this score: “All too often, [PPP or similar] proposals and detailed contracts are shrouded by a catch-all of “commercial in confidence” which appears to be being deliberately used by ministers to prevent scrutiny”. They continue: “We see no reason whatsoever why contracts awarded to the private sector for the delivery of public services should not as a matter of policy be open to public scrutiny”.³⁷

67. The IPPR Commission recommended a range of measures to improve transparency of public-private arrangements. These included public availability of partnerships’ performance data, more mandatory disclosure of PFI information, and greater statutory powers for the National Audit Office to access information on private providers where they hold substantial public sector contracts. The Local Government Information Unit supported these proposals, advocating also the public declaration of interests by contractors. They urged “equivalent standards of probity for contractors providing public services as those that apply in central and local government”.³⁸ We consider that transparency should be integral to the provision of public services, whoever the provider.

(iv) Commitment to Quality Services

68. Many of the approaches we have been examining have been concerned solely with ethical or professional standards. They are necessary, but not sufficient. They do not emphasise enough the need for quality in services. The Prime Minister, on the other hand, is at his most eloquent on this issue. Martin Taylor was highly critical of present performance in contracting for services, and many of our witnesses said that CCT could not ensure quality provision. It is also worth remembering in this context that the Northcote-Trevelyan reforms to the Civil Service in the 19th century were not just about the ending of patronage and cronyism but about improving performance. As Baroness Prashar, the First Civil Service Commissioner, put it to us: “...it is no good having an impartial Civil

³⁵ HC 263-II, PSR 8

³⁶ Ibid, PSR 13

³⁷ Ibid

³⁸ Ibid, PSR 15

Service which is incompetent”.³⁹ In other words, public service values should always have service quality at their centre.

69. We believe that there should be, as part of the new Code, a simple form of words which expresses the need for high quality public services. But we also believe that generalities may not be effective enough, and that more detailed and practical benchmarks are needed. One way forward may be to use other services as the benchmark.

70. Michael Jacobs recommended that the Code containing the ethos should be added to public sector contracts with private and voluntary organisations, to ensure that they adhered not just to the letter but to the spirit of the contracts.⁴⁰ We consider that the inclusion of the new code in tender documents and contracts, as well as in public services generally, would and should have a real effect on the way public services are delivered. It could offer those with an interest in upholding the ideals of public service a way of ensuring, in the courts if necessary, that public bodies and their private contractors are acting properly and in accordance with the public interest. Contracts between accountable public providers and private companies would also have to be written in such a way as to allow individuals to uphold the public service ethos. Directly or indirectly, the Code could apply to the work of all who are involved in public services, enshrining their obligations as providers. It would help to prevent the fragmentation of an integrated ideal of public service that some see as a risk of a contract culture. In this way, contracts could ensure that the public service ethos was effectively embodied in all that public services do. **Therefore we recommend that the Public Service Code be included in invitations to tender and as a contract clause for public service contracts, including employment contracts.** We also believe that public service workers, especially front-line staff, have a crucial role in bringing forward suggestions for the improvement of service efficiency and performance, and **recommend that all public services should be required to have in place effective mechanisms to involve staff in service issues.**

(v) Fairness to Staff and Users

71. Fairness to staff should be an axiom of public services, just as should fairness to users. The question of the treatment of staff transferred from the public to the private sectors, and of those who join those private firms later, has been the subject of considerable debate. There has been much criticism of the idea of a two-tier or even three-tier workforce in which there are radically different terms and conditions for workers who are doing the same job. We believe that it is impossible for the public service ethos, with its underlying principles of impartiality and fairness, to be upheld when there are such arbitrary distinctions between workers. It is not good management for companies to profit from such a flouting of basic principles. More flexible working arrangements are one thing; but eroding basic rights is quite another. The recent announcement by the DTLR, and an agreement between the Department of Health and UNISON allowing for secondment rather than wholesale transfer of NHS staff, represents substantial progress in this front, but the Public Service Code should also underline the importance of the wider principle. There are a number of possible applications; the Government has long pledged to bring forward a Civil Service Bill, although this is an area where delivery has not yet matched the promise. That would be a useful further vehicle for the Public Service Code. **We recommend that the Public Service Code should be considered for inclusion in the proposed Civil Service Bill.**

³⁹ ‘Public Appointments and Patronage’ Minutes of Evidence 2001-02 HC 686-vi, Q618

⁴⁰ HC 263-II, PSR 37

(vi) Good Administration, Reliability and Safety

72. As part of the new approach, we consider there should be a statement of the obligation on public servants to achieve the highest standards of administration. There is a precedent from the European Union that might well be worth following. In 2001 the European Parliament approved a Code of Good Administrative Behaviour which applies to all European institutions. It is included among the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union announced at the Nice Summit in December 2000.⁴¹ Among other things, this Code, drafted by the European Ombudsman, states that “Every person has the right to have his or her affairs handled impartially, fairly and within a reasonable time by the institutions and bodies of the Union”. The right includes “the right of every person to be heard, before any individual measure which would affect him or her adversely is taken” and “the obligation of the administration to give reasons for its decisions”. We see great value in such a statement of good administrative practice, as a clear standard for public servants as well as for those they serve. Such a statement would also introduce a notion of redress for maladministration in public services which should command respect from private and voluntary sector as well as public sector providers (though the legal and contractual implications of such a notion would need to be carefully considered).

73. Similar considerations apply to reliability and safety. While a commercial service can be withdrawn when profitability demands it, those who provide public services have to provide them whenever they are required, to anybody who wants them. Failures in private services mean that customers may choose to move their custom: failures in public services can mean lives disrupted, and even lost. Reliability and safety have to be integral to any new public service ethos.

74. Bearing in mind these requirements, we set out below our recommendations for a new Public Service Code, and make some suggestions about its implementation.

⁴¹ ‘Article 41 Charter of Fundamental Rights of the EU’ Official Journal of the European Communities 2000 364/1

A Public Service Code

75. People and organisations providing public services should commit themselves to these principles:

- Observe at all times the ethical standards expected of public servants and public service bodies, including the Seven Principles of Public Life
- Make themselves accountable through elected representatives and other means for their policies and performance, with the highest standards of openness and transparency.
- Aim to deliver public services that match in quality the best private equivalents, including standards of customer care. Where there is no private sector equivalent, best practice in the public sector should be matched.
- Treat public service workers and users fairly and equitably, and involve them as much as possible in service issues.
- Respect at all times the right of the citizen to good administration as set out in the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union, and his or her right to safe, reliable public services. Proper redress should be made where maladministration has taken place.
- Remember at all times that public service means serving the public, not serving the interests of those who provide the service, and work collaboratively with others to this end.

CHAPTER FOUR: PROMOTING THE CODE

76. There is little point in merely stating principles unless they are cultivated and implemented with vigour and imagination. In itself, the Code cannot of course be a panacea for the maladies of public service. We have earlier noted the importance of improving motivation and tackling issues of morale. How can governments achieve this?

77. There is an instructive overseas example that has come to our attention. The Canadian Government has a well-developed programme for discussing with Federal public servants issues of values and ethics, aimed at trying to ensure that they are clear about their roles and the standards of behaviour and performance that are expected of them. Like the Public Service Code set out above, it recognises the importance of maintaining democratic accountability as well as high ethical standards and excellent performance. The core values include “democratic values” (including belief in responsible government and respect for the authority of elected office holders), “traditional” professional values (such as neutrality and speaking truth unto power), “new professional values” (like quality, innovation and creativity), “ethical” values like honesty and “people” values (including fairness and decency).⁴²

78. Of course these are just words. However, the Canadian Government clearly recognises that simple assertion will not achieve good performance. In July 2001 the Treasury Board of Canada set out a comprehensive programme of training and discussion, which is intended to explore how these demanding but important values can work in practice. One seminal report called for “an honest dialogue with employees”. The aim was to make “the public service an employer of choice”. As the public services in Britain continue their efforts to overcome staff shortages, there may be lessons to learn from this.

79. Whichever approach is taken, we conclude that there should be effective means by which the principles and practice of the public service ethos can be actively promoted. **We therefore recommend that the Government and other public bodies should consider the creation of a Public Service Academy which would allow public servants of all kinds and at all levels to discuss and develop the practical application of public service principles for their own work. It should also embrace those providing public services from the private, voluntary and not-for-profit sectors. An Academy of the kind we envisage (and its exact form clearly needs further discussion) could be a beacon for developing and disseminating public service values, perhaps including a certificate in public service that everyone working in public services could aim to achieve.** This would obviously go well beyond the work of the current Civil Service College, and beyond the leadership centres being established for such groups as headteachers and police officers. It would involve thinking in a unified way about all public services, and about the needs of all those people who work in them. **The Government should also consider more systematically (probably through the Office of Public Services Reform), how all public servants should be given the chance to strengthen their appreciation of all aspects of the public service ethos as expressed in the Public Service Code. This might take as its model the Canadian programme of promoting public service values among federal employees. We do not see the Code merely as a piece of paper that sits on a wall or even in the pocket or handbag, but as something that provides a principled framework for action.**

⁴² Report of the Auditor General of Canada, October 2000, Chapter 12 p 22

CONCLUSION

80. An ethos is about culture. As such, it is fundamental to any organisation, and to how the people who work in it feel and behave. It can be a priceless asset (or, if negative, a fatal curse). Although the main focus of public service reform is on new structural and financial arrangements of various kinds, the question of ethos must never be lost sight of. Indeed, it should be the reference point for everything else.

81. Here the public services have a considerable and intrinsic advantage. When someone describes him or herself as a 'public servant', it is testimony to the power of an ethos. People do not describe themselves as 'private servants'. In the wake of a tragedy or catastrophe, the qualities of service displayed by public service workers are routinely remarked upon. Yet this ethos of service is (or should be) only the most striking expression of a wider public service culture.

82. Yet this is not always so. Sometimes public services, and those who work in them, fall short of what a public service ethos should properly consist of. Rhetoric can conceal reality. That is why we see such an ethos as both intrinsic to the idea of public services but also as an aspiration that has to be realised in practice. A public service ethos is only as good as the service it delivers. It is not enough to celebrate it in the abstract; it has to be given concrete expression in the way public services work for the citizens who use them and depend upon them.

83. That is why our emphasis here has been on the need to nourish and cultivate the ethos of public service. This becomes even more important as public services are delivered in new ways by new providers. It is imperative that the public service ethos, as we have described it here, is concretely built in to the evolving shape of public service provision. We have suggested some ways in which this might be done. The public service ethos should not be seen as an echo from the past, but as an indispensable ingredient of any public service deserving of the name.

LIST OF CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Motivating Public Service Workers

- (a) **We believe that there would be benefit in a systematic survey of the attitudes of public servants, possibly under the aegis of the Office for Public Services Reform (paragraph 45).**

Making the Ethos Clearer

- (b) **We believe that the Government should state more clearly the principles underlying public service and its reform programme, and put them in a Public Service Code. This should be a summary of its approach, its own version of the public service ethos, relevant to changing circumstances and the intensified demand for excellence in services, but robust in upholding the intrinsic nature of a public service and its traditional values. The Code should be short, simple and aspirational. Its components should include the standards to be reached in ethical behaviour, in service delivery, in administrative competence and in democratic accountability. The six principles we suggest at paragraph 74 below seem to us to include the most important points of such a Code, although they are undoubtedly capable of further refinement (paragraph 54).**

Commitment to Quality Services

- (c) **We recommend that the Public Service Code be included in invitations to tender and as a contract clause for public service contracts, including employment contracts (paragraph 70).**
- (d) **We recommend that all public services should be required to have in place effective mechanisms to involve staff in service issues (paragraph 70).**

Fairness to Staff and Users

- (e) **We recommend that the Public Service Code should be considered for inclusion in the proposed Civil Service Bill (paragraph 71).**

Promoting the Code

- (f) **We therefore recommend that the Government and other public bodies should consider the creation of a Public Service Academy which would allow public servants of all kinds and at all levels to discuss and develop the practical application of public service principles for their own work. It should also embrace those providing public services from the private, voluntary and not-for-profit sectors. An Academy of the kind we envisage (and its exact form clearly needs further discussion) could be a beacon for developing and disseminating public service values, perhaps including a certificate in public service that everyone working in public services could aim to achieve (paragraph 79).**

- (g) **The Government should also consider more systematically (probably through the Office of Public Services Reform), how all public servants should be given the chance to strengthen their appreciation of all aspects of the public service ethos as expressed in the Public Service Code . This might take as its model the Canadian programme of promoting public service values among federal employees. We do not see the Code merely as a piece of paper that sits on a wall or even in the pocket or handbag, but as something that provides a principled framework for action (paragraph 79).**

PROCEEDINGS OF THE COMMITTEE RELATING TO THE REPORT

Thursday 13 June 2002

Members present:

Tony Wright, in the Chair

Kevin Brennan	Mr Ian Liddell-Grainger
Annette Brooke	Mr Gordon Prentice
Sir Sydney Chapman	Mr Brian White
David Heyes	Mr Anthony D Wright

The Committee deliberated.

Draft Report [The Public Service Ethos], proposed by the Chairman, brought up and read.

Ordered, That the draft Report be read a second time, paragraph by paragraph.—(*The Chairman.*)

Paragraphs 1 to 78 read and agreed to.

Paragraph 79 read.

Amendment proposed, to leave out Paragraph 79 —(*Mr Brian White.*)

Question put, That the Amendment be made.

The Committee divided.

Ayes, 1
Mr Brian White

Noes, 6
Mr Kevin Brennan
Annette Brooke
Mr David Heyes
Mr Ian Liddell-Grainger
Mr Gordon Prentice
Mr Anthony D Wright

Paragraph agreed to.

Paragraphs 80 to 83 agreed to.

Resolved, That the Report be the Seventh Report of the Committee to the House.—(*The Chairman.*)

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.

Several Papers were ordered to be appended to the Minutes of Evidence.

Ordered, That the Appendices to the Minutes of Evidence be reported to the House.

[Adjourned till Thursday 20 June at a quarter to Ten o'clock.]

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Additional memoranda have been received from the following and have been reported to the House, but to save printing costs they have not been printed and copies have been placed in the House of Commons Library where they may be inspected by Members. Other copies are in the Record Office, House of Lords, and are available to the public for inspection. Requests for inspection should be addressed to the Record Office, House of Lords, London SW1A 0PW. (Tel 020 7219 3074). Hours of inspection are from 9.30 am to 5.30 pm on Mondays to Fridays.

1. Torfaen County Borough (PSR 1)
2. Des McConaghy (PSR 30)

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Government Response: Third Special Report, Session 1997-98 (HC 723)

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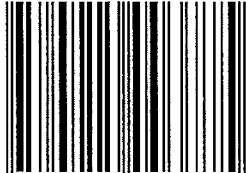
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