

## A CHARTER FOR JOBSEEKERS

The Employment Service has an extensive network of local offices. Its main purpose is to give positive help to unemployed people to assist them back to work, and pay benefits and allowances promptly and accurately to those who are entitled to them. The Citizen's Charter will reinforce the Employment Service's aim of giving unemployed people, and others who use its services such as employees and those changing jobs, the individual approach that they need:

- details of all services offered will be displayed in each local office;
- national targets for service delivery will be published each year. Performance against these targets will be published in the Employment Service's **Annual Report**;
- local targets for the level of service to clients will be displayed in all Jobcentres for clients to see. These will include:
  - how quickly the telephone will be answered;
  - standards for promptness and accuracy in benefit payments;
  - information relevant to the local labour market on **performance** against targets will be displayed in Jobcentres for clients to see;
  - the local office network is being integrated to offer a **'one-stop shop'** in each area, bringing employment and benefit services together under one roof;
  - the new integrated network will offer **pleasant, well-designed office interiors** where claimants can discuss their needs face to face with Employment Service advisers;
  - **comprehensive information** on the services provided by the Employment Service is set out in a series of widely available **leaflets**, including the new *Just the Job*



**leaflet** – a comprehensive account of the wide range of services available to unemployed clients;

- some local offices offer **freephone services for jobseekers** who visit them;
- whenever possible, people coming to Jobcentres for **advisory interviews** will see the same person on each occasion;



- all full-time Jobcentres are to be open for a minimum of 36 hours a week, but local managers can decide which opening hours are most suitable for their clients, eg in some market towns **opening hours** are extended on market days;
- **annual national customer surveys** will continue to be undertaken to test views on the quality of service being provided and show where improvements are needed. They will be supplemented by **customer surveys at local level**;
- all offices will have easy to use **complaints** arrangements. The name of the local manager and of the area manager to whom they are responsible, will always be displayed.

**The Employment Service will publish its own charter later this year, which will set out the standards of service which unemployed people are entitled to expect.**

## THE CHARTER AND SOCIAL SERVICES

The Government has launched a new deal for adults' and children's social care. It gives individuals a central place in the delivery of services.

The NIS and Community Care Act introduces new community care arrangements for adults which create duties on local authorities to assess individual need. The Children Act 1989, which applies in England and Wales, has refocused services on the interests, wishes and feelings of individual children.

It requires authorities to work in partnership with parents. The Government expects local authorities to use their new powers to improve the quality of service.

For the individual needing care there will be:

- **more reliable information** on available services, how to get them and how long the process can be expected to take;
- **an individual care plan** reflecting the individual's wishes as far as possible, saying what services will be available, and naming the person responsible for them;

- the assurance that **nationally promulgated quality standards** are available as a benchmark or, where suitable, are legally enforceable;
- the assurance that services will be **inspected** for quality and effectiveness **independently** of their providers;
- **independent representation** or advocacy where necessary and a new avenue for **complainants** to pursue problems, if dissatisfied.

For residential care:

- the health departments have identified and promulgated clear **standards** covering, for example, **privacy, quality of life and respect** for individuality in residential homes;
- in **children's homes**, individual rights – like access to family, personal mail and independent help or advice – are clearly prescribed by law.

## THE SOCIAL SECURITY BENEFITS AGENCY

The Social Security Benefits Agency, launched in April, provides social security services including pensions, child benefit, income support, family credit, disability benefits and the social fund.

The Agency was set up to improve radically the delivery of social security benefits. It aims to treat its clients courteously, to provide information about the benefits available to them, and to handle their business promptly and efficiently. The Agency will publish a **Social Security Benefits Agency customer charter** in the autumn which will translate these principles into practice. This will mean:

- **published national targets** for the main benefit services;
- **equivalent published targets for each district.** These targets will be displayed in plain language in each office, together with the name of the person in charge. They will include standard times within which callers will be seen;
- a **published annual report**, available in each office for clients to see, which will set out how the Agency met its targets. Information on local office performance will be displayed prominently in every office;
- **clear procedures** for handling customer enquiries and difficulties, and a **customer service manager** in each office to ensure they are acted on;

- a **programme to improve service** by telephone as well as by post and in person;
- customers will normally be dealt with by **staff who can be identified by name.** Wherever it is the best way of meeting customer's requirements, a single contact point will handle each customer's business with the Agency;
- a **clean office environment.** Privacy and a reasonable level of comfort will be provided as resources allow. People do not want or expect luxurious surroundings, but visiting benefit offices should never be a daunting or demoralising experience;
- **development of more flexible opening hours**, where necessary, to meet the needs of the local community.

### Information

Good information is often the key to getting the best from a service quickly. As part of the Charter programme, the Benefits Agency is investing a great deal in making sure that customers know what they are entitled to and what to do to get it. Some examples are:

- the **telephone Freeline**, which provides general information in five languages about benefits;
- **specialist helplines on family credit and disability benefits:** a call to the latter will enable a precompleted claim form to be



produced by computer and posted to the customer for signature;

- the new *Have Your Say* leaflet which invites customers to feed back their comments (positive or negative) on the service they have received.

#### Consulting customers

In early 1992 the Benefits Agency will publish the results of a national, independently conducted, customer survey covering, among other things, timeliness, courtesy of staff, and response to written and telephone enquiries. The exercise will be repeated annually so that customers' views can be taken into account and improvements can be measured and achieved.

#### Contributions Agency

The Social Security Contributions Agency was set up in April this year to collect employers' and employees' National Insurance contributions.

The Agency:

- holds an annual conference to consult its customers;
- will shortly publish an independent survey of its services;
- provides a Freephone advice service for employers.

It will publish two charters – a contributors' charter and an employers' charter – this summer.

#### Benefits and the Post Office

*Social Security benefits are paid through the Post Office, banks and building societies, and the Government is anxious to ensure that customers receive a quality service at this point in the system.*

*An important element is customer choice: dissatisfied customers can transfer their business from one Post Office outlet, or one bank or building society, to another. The Government intends to widen this choice by extending the option of automated payment into a bank or building society account to benefits where this service is not yet available.*

*In addition, specific service standards are being introduced for the first time for benefit customers being served by the Post Office. The Post Office plans to publicise these standards in its branches, initially on a pilot basis in a number of outlets, and then later in all post offices.*

*These standards will also be incorporated in the Benefits Agency customer charter.*

## THE POST OFFICE

Our major proposals for the Post Office include a reduction in the letter monopoly from the present level of £1 to a level much closer to the cost of a first class stamp; creation of an independent regulator and new powers for the Secretary of State to set service standards and targets and to approve redress schemes. These proposals are outlined in the section on 'delivering quality'.

#### Publicising local and national targets

The Post Office will in future give much greater publicity to both national and local service targets and to current performance against them. A record improvement in the reliability of first class letter deliveries nationwide was achieved last year and an even more exacting target is being set for this year.

In future, Royal Mail will provide greater local accountability by setting delivery reliability targets for its 120 postcode areas rather than its current 63 districts. And it will give greater publicity in local offices to both targets and performance achieved in each area. It will display at post offices and elsewhere guidance about the latest posting times to secure delivery within the performance specification. In addition, the Post Office will display information about the maximum time that people can reasonably be expected to wait for service at post office counters.

## REVENUE DEPARTMENTS

A new **taxpayer's charter** will be published later this summer. Taxpayers should expect to be treated fairly and efficiently. The Inland Revenue and Customs and Excise work closely in partnership with taxpayers to ensure that they fully understand their rights and obligations under tax law and, in particular, what to do if they feel unfairly treated. Customs and Excise will be following up with separate specific charters for VAT and Excise Duty payers and a new traveller's charter. These will appear in the autumn.

The Inland Revenue will set and publish standards for replying to taxpayers' letters. Customs and Excise will also be expanding the use of quality of service indicators and reporting on their achievement.

Both the Inland Revenue and Customs and Excise are re-designing some of their main forms and other literature to make them easier for people to understand. A new series of leaflets will tell particular groups of people (for example small business people, pensioners and school-leavers) what kind of help and level of service each can expect from the Inland Revenue. Selected Tax Enquiry Centres will experiment with more flexible opening hours to test public demand.

The Inland Revenue will seek people's views about the service they receive. A new series of leaflets will invite comments and explain how to complain to the customer service manager if they are dissatisfied. Customs and Excise is reviewing its complaints system and will publish improved procedures this autumn.



## THE POLICE

Public confidence is essential to the success of policing. The Government has encouraged community policing and the valuable extension of Neighbourhood Watch schemes. It regrets the opposition of some councils to these schemes. The 1990s will see a major initiative on quality of service. All police forces should deliver standards of service which go as far as possible to meet the expectations of the public. We want to see police forces

publishing targets and indicators of performance locally.

The police service's new national statement of purpose and values sets out the general standards and quality of service the public is entitled to expect. It requires police managers to be clear about their priorities, to have measurable standards and to agree objectives with their local community. It also reinforces to all police officers the importance of a prompt, fair and courteous response to **all** members of the public.

We favour the idea of police officers being readily identifiable by name.

**Response times**

The public need to feel confident in the availability of the police to deal with emergencies and their speed of response.

**We will expect all police forces to set and publish target times for answering telephone calls, and arriving at the scene of incidents which require rapid reaction** – such as public disorder, burglaries where an intruder is present, or where there is any threat to life.

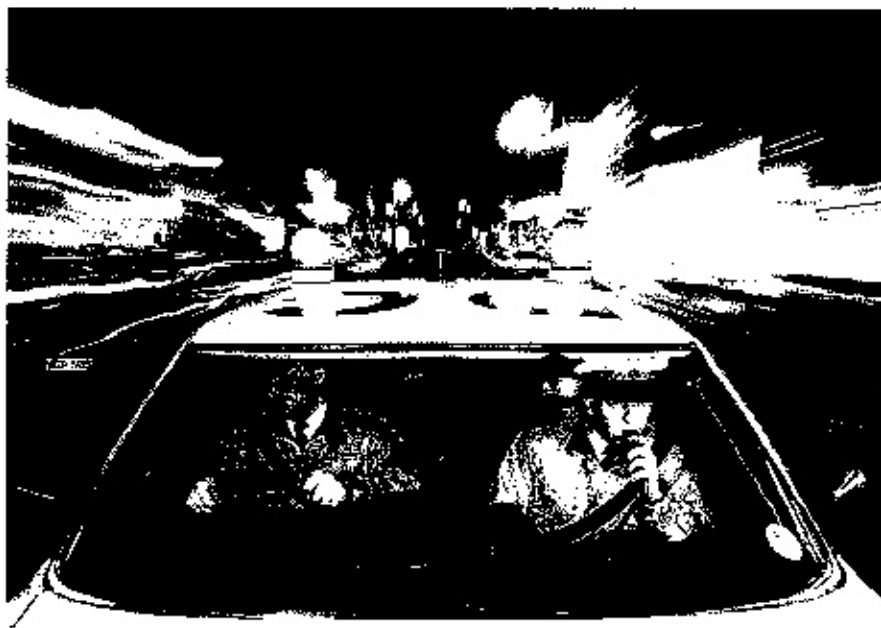
Call-out times are just one means of indicating the quality of police

service. Just as important as response time is that the service should be helpful, sympathetic, and effective in all its dealings with the public. Information will be published on results of police action, as well as response times.

From this year, systematic information on quality of performance will be gathered in a number of other areas, including fair practice in cautioning and stops and searches; speed of help to victims of crime; analysis of complaints; and a range of contacts between police and their local communities. Police effectiveness will be tested in the annual round of inspection.

## CRIMINAL JUSTICE AND COURTS

The Criminal Justice system provides a service to the public at large. It has many different customers: those whose interest is simply the maintenance of law and order, and those who come across the system in a particular context – witnesses, jurors, victims, probationers, the accused and prisoners. Quality of service therefore relates to a large range of situations and circumstances.

**Victims of crime**

*Last year the Home Office published the Victims' Charter, the first public statement of the rights and expectations of victims of crime. It set standards for everyone in the criminal justice system who comes into contact with victims.*

*The Home Office grant to the voluntary body, Victim Support, has risen in five years from £300,000 to over £5.5million. As a result, local voluntary schemes now cover most of the population of England and Wales. They help well over half a million victims of crime referred to them by the police each year, and are developing new forms of support.*

**Civil action: access to the courts**

*A number of important jurisdictional changes are being introduced from this July to ensure that cases are dealt with at the most appropriate level.*

*This will mean:*

- **a shift of work from the High Court to the county court;**
- **a significantly greater number of cases being dealt with by a *small claims* arbitration procedure, much cheaper and less formal than normal court procedures;**
- **reductions in the number of *times parties need to attend court*;**
- **over the next two to three years, the procedures governing *housing cases and administration orders (small bankruptcies)* will also be improved. New systems will allow the courts to exercise tighter control over the progress of cases and reduce the opportunities for delay by one or the other party.**

**Courts**

Many jurors and witnesses come into contact with the courts only once. They have too often taken away a poor impression of the value placed on their time and contribution. Measures are being taken to increase awareness and receptiveness to the needs of victims, witnesses and jurors.

We are constantly seeking ways to make the courts more accessible to all who have to use them. Management of the courts will be placed under closer scrutiny. Comparative performance information is already used by managers to assess their effectiveness and suggest corrective action. The Lord Chancellor will publish details of performance standards and indicators in his Annual Report on the Court Service. Information on performance at court level will be made available to the public locally through court user committees, and more effort will be made to obtain the views of those who use the courts.

**Bringing cases to court**

Long delays in bringing cases to court are frequently a justified source of concern to the public. Timetables are set for bringing criminal cases to trial, and delays between committal to the Crown Court and trial are now at their lowest level for over ten years in London. But more needs to be done and further improvements will be an important objective of the Charter programme.

Efforts are being made to reduce time spent in custody on remand. The Home Secretary has announced a time limit of 56 days from first appearance to trial in the

magistrates' courts, and 70 days from first appearance before magistrates to committal to the Crown Court. This change will take effect from 1 October 1991. The Government will review all the time limits for carrying forward a case, and their effectiveness in practice, over the next two years.

**Jurors**

For **jurors** the Citizen's Charter will greatly improve the information that they receive. In particular, we will:

- make the letter summoning them to jury service clearer and friendlier;
- make simpler and more informal the leaflet sent out with the summons to explain the functions of jurors and what they can expect to happen;
- improve the training of those responsible for receiving jurors and explaining procedures;
- review what more can be done to explain the system better to jurors, including the possibility of showing them a video when they arrive in order to explain the court process.

Jury service involves some waiting. This is because there may be challenges to the suitability of potential jurors; because of risk of illness; and because it is not always certain when a particular case will start or for how long it will last. The abolition of the right to peremptory challenge has, however, reduced the number of jurors who need to be summoned. Court staff are instructed to see that jurors are not kept waiting unnecessarily and to release as soon as possible each day those who are not required. Courts are set a **target** that jurors should sit for at least 70 per cent (85 per cent in London) of the days that they attend at court. Overall performance was 74 per cent in 1990/91. Sympathetic consideration is already given to excusing or deferring jury service to those who would be seriously inconvenienced. But, as part of the Charter programme, we will review further how problems could be reduced.

One particular problem is that many defendants change their plea only when their case is about to be heard. By that stage, jurors and witnesses will have been assembled. We have therefore commissioned a study, jointly with the Law Society, the Bar and the Crown Prosecution Service, to investigate what could be done to reduce this.

As another Charter reform, the next legislative opportunity will be taken to bring forward measures which will normally allow juries considering their verdict to go home at the end of the working day. At present, a jury which has retired may not disperse, and is confined to a hotel overnight.

## Witnesses

As far as witnesses in the Crown Courts are concerned, as part of the Citizen's Charter we will:

- make the **order to attend clearer** and more informal;
- ensure a **leaflet** is sent to each witness explaining what to expect when they arrive in court;
- establish an **information point** in each Crown Court centre;
- ensure, wherever possible, that witnesses in long-running cases are **called to court only when needed**, not at the outset of the case;
- review **signs** within court buildings with special attention to the possible needs of victims and witnesses;
- instruct chief clerks to **respond sympathetically** wherever possible to requests for seating from those closely linked to particular cases, particularly relatives of victims or defendants;
- allow victims who are called as witnesses to **familiarise themselves with the courtroom** surroundings before they appear in court.

The Government will encourage similar improvement in the magistrates' courts.

## Prisons

All citizens are entitled to consideration, including those who offend against the law. The Mission Statement of the Prison Service undertakes to look after all prisoners with humanity and to help them lead law-abiding and useful lives.

We favour the idea of prison officers being readily identifiable by name. It is especially important in prisons that no-one is denied information to which they are entitled about decisions affecting their lives and well-being. We are therefore introducing a number of measures to ensure that prisoners receive clear and basic information from the start of their time in custody about decisions affecting them and preparations for their release.