

FOREWORD BY THE CHANCELLOR OF THE EXCHEQUER

Public Service Agreements (PSAs) are fundamental to the Government's approach to delivering world-class public services, combining clear national goals with unprecedented levels of transparency. They inject ambition into the public services, whilst providing the public and the users of services with more information than ever before with which to hold services to account.

In the past, the debate around the public services centred just on how much governments were investing – both in terms of money, and in terms of other resource 'inputs', including the number of doctors, nurses, teachers and police officers. Such resources are essential, and we are continuing to invest at significant levels across government. However, since the introduction of PSAs, the debate has shifted. Now we can measure how effectively resources are being used and whether services are delivering the outcomes that will really make a difference to people's lives. Encouragingly, we are now seeing measurable improvements in the standards of public service delivery, including significant reductions in hospital treatment waiting times, improvements in literacy and numeracy for children and adults, and a continued reduction in crime levels. As we move forward, the challenge will be to maintain the high levels of performance where we have met our ambitions, whilst continuing to improve further in other areas.

PSAs are also key to increasing local autonomy. Since PSAs were first introduced, they have become increasingly focused on results, not prescribing the means or process of delivery. PSA targets articulate the outcomes which the Government and the public want, whilst providing front line managers with the freedom to innovate and to make decisions about the most effective and efficient means of delivery.

Alongside commitments to deliver overall improvements in public services, PSAs are an important means of reducing variations in public service outcomes. By setting minimum standards across a range of public services, including health, education and crime, 'floor' targets ensure that everyone benefits from improvements. In this way we are continuing to ensure both equity and excellence in the provision of public services.

This latest set of PSA targets has been developed and refined from those agreed in the last Spending Review, taking into account the findings of the Devolving Decision Making Review, published alongside this year's Budget. In the development of targets, extensive consultation has taken place with those tasked with the delivery of services. We have also abolished the requirement for departments to set Service Delivery Agreements (SDAs), representing a reduction of over 500 input and process targets, providing further flexibility to those delivering services.

The PSAs in this document set out objectives and performance targets across government, explaining what departments plan to deliver in return for the continued investment in resources. The PSA system is an integral part of a framework for increased clarity, devolution and accountability in the delivery of public services.



