

**Address by Senator the Honorable John Williams on the occasion of the Launch of
the First Customer Charter for the Land Tax Department.**

Land Tax Department, Bridgetown,

October 30th, 2003

Distinguished guests, colleagues, ladies and gentlemen,

it is indeed a pleasure for me to address you this afternoon to celebrate the inaugural launch of the first Customer Charter for the Land Tax Department. I am sure that the significance of this event would not be lost on you since this occasion represents the launch of the very first Customer Charter of the Barbados Public Service. Indeed, I commend the Land Tax Department on this initiative and I hope that it will be the first in a series of very positive steps aimed at making the needs of our clients the most important facet of our work.

The Customer Charter programme represents but one of the tools which this government has decided to employ in order to establish national service standards in the public service. A service standard is essentially a promise to ourselves and to our customers that we will define specific performance standards and most importantly adhere to these standards while recognizing that there is always room for improvement. This task is not expected to be an easy one. It will entail the Department actively assessing, reviewing, reengineering, reorganizing, refocusing and reforming every aspect of what we do and how we do it. We undertake this task with the aim of making the customer the central focus of our operations.

This exercise is based on already determined and realistic service standards which the modern and enlightened customer now demands. It is driven by the customers' belief, with which we wholeheartedly concur, that service should be timely, efficient and delivered in a courteous manner. It is also driven by the customers' belief that service will be reliable, responsive, consistent and cost effective. Today's savvy customers expect that service will be delivered in a culture of professionalism.

According to service quality expert, Len Berry, there are five broad service dimensions that our customers' use to judge service quality. These dimensions are not mutually exclusive rather they interact to form mutually reinforcing pillars of a single framework. They provide a useful tool in identifying what our customers expect from us. The five dimensions are:

- Reliability: The ability to perform dependably and accurately.
- Responsiveness: A willingness to help customers and provide prompt service.
- Assurance: Knowledgeable and courteous staff who convey trust and confidence.
- Empathy: Caring individual attention, and;
- Tangibles: The appearance of physical facilities, equipment, staff, and communication materials.

Of the five dimensions, reliability is the core of quality service. Little else matters to our customers when our service is unreliable.

The overall benefits of this improved approach cannot be underestimated. It is envisioned that the establishment of service standards will herald in an era of openness, transparency, and fairness to all those seeking to utilize our services. This customer charter programme makes every public officer accountable for the standard of service rendered.

The government is also aware that while seeking to establish service standard indicators, formal and informal measures must be put into place that will speedily address complaints, queries and suggestions from customers and clients, and as such, it is vital for organizations to monitor and review its standards.

Whilst we acknowledge the importance of the launching of the Land Tax Department's first Customer Charter, we must seek to develop ways to continually improve our service standards by constantly monitoring our performance, this will enable us to quickly identify problems with customer /client services. Continuous examination of our policies and procedures will allow us to set higher and higher service standards which allow us to minimize operational cost while enhancing customer satisfaction.

Other customer service initiatives have already taken place in many areas throughout the public sector, where the thrust of reform is to create a culture of professional service ethics through training and retraining of our staff.

I congratulate the staff of the Land Tax Department in achieving a Customer Charter this charter is clear evidence of public sector reform in action. We must all be aware of the roles we have to play in order to bring about changes in the way we carry out our business. The Public Sector Reform logo carries the banner of “Making Barbados Work Better,” but we must always remember that Public Sector Reform is not just a fancy name; it is about improving efficiency and effectiveness throughout the Public Service ensuring that employees work consistently towards common goals which in effect will make Barbados a more competitive nation.

The customer charter program is but one initiative of Public sector Reform that seeks to transform the Barbados Public Service into a culture that is customer friendly and results driven, thereby improving the quality of life for all Barbadians.

I thank you all.