



Caribbean Centre for Development Administration

**BUILDING
A SERVICE
CHARTER CULTURE
IN THE BRITISH
VIRGIN ISLANDS**

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in collaboration

with the Public

Sector

Development

Programme

Government of
the British Virgin

Islands

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1. Introduction

In its continuing efforts to document best practices in the region a case study on PSR efforts in the British Virgin Islands (BVI) was contemplated after CARICAD's 2002 Annual Policy Forum held in Guyana, where member states indicated that an assignment such as this would be useful.

In the 2003 Annual Policy forum held in Anguilla the issue was also raised. Since that meeting the BVI Public Sector Development Coordinator presented a case study on the strategic planning initiative in the BVI at the CARIFORUM Strategic Planning meeting in St. Kitts, held in Nov 2003.

As a follow-up to that case study, the TOR for this particular mission focused on the introduction of service charters in BVI. The overall purpose of the PSR effort is encapsulated in four (4) strategic objectives, listed below:

1. Maximize the scarce resources of the State through the coordination and integration of ongoing actions and the sustaining of planning culture in the Public Service;
2. Provide prompt, high quality and cost effective service that the citizens value and in so doing significantly raise the prestige of the Public Service;
3. Develop a customer sensitive Public Service;
4. Improve transparency, accountability and governance in the business of the State.

The introduction of service charters is seen as an initial step in addressing 2, 3 and 4.

The assignment, on the drawing board since June 2003, was postponed on numerous occasions. The holding of the general election in BVI last year was the overriding factor, as the Government was not in a position to host the mission, pre and post election. Subsequent to this the case study assumed priority status in CARICAD's 2004 work plan. A mission to Tortola, BVI over the period 8 – 13 February 2004, was organized to collect necessary data.

2. Background

2.1 Citizens Charters in the UK

The Civil Service in the UK was one of the earlier advocates of 'service charters', though falling under the banner of 'citizens' charters'. In the UK today there are some 10,000 local services. They are now an integral part of public sector service delivery. The charters are designed to encourage consumers to judge whether the services they receive match up to targets set in the charter and related documents.

The rationale behind the production of a local charter is that it helps organizations communicate more effectively with users, staff and other local service providers, finding

out from users what they want, and determining how best to meet their needs. A charter is designed to help public organizations set out clearly what they are aiming to do; to clarify what their users need and target resources in the way they want them; encourage users to provide feedback on services, which can be used to raise standards; to explain to users the role they can play in helping public service agencies deliver the services they want; to explain how public services link together, to help drive and sustain a process of continuous improvement in service quality; and to encourage good relations with users, staff and other local service providers generally.

2.2 Service Charters in Australia

The Commonwealth of Australia is also in the forefront of introducing a service charter culture in its civil service. The charter in Australia is viewed as a very clear expression of what services an agency provides. Charters are usually produced as an easy-to-read publication in the style of a brochure. A Customer Service charter enables customers to check their expectations against what is offered and provides a mechanism for giving feedback if expectations are not met. It also enables the organization to describe the way it allocates its resources and explain to customers the realistic level of service they may expect. In addition the Australian government sees the charter as a useful planning tool as it focuses attention on current service expectations and the needs of customers as well as future service needs and expectations.

2.3 Adoption of the Service Charter Concept in BVI

In 1999 the Government, through the Public Sector Development Programme (PSDP) commissioned a diagnostic review of the public service. Ernst & Young were contracted and issued the Diagnostic Review Report in October 1999.

During the data collection stage in the study Ernst & Young spoke to a number of concerned groups and individuals, internal as well as external to the public service. A stakeholder analysis was conducted. The general public cited a number of issues that needed attention and subsequently did not meet their expectations. Some of the more prominent issues identified were:

- Efficient and professional services
- Timely response; improved turnaround time
- Timely and better information
- Respectful and courteous treatment
- Honesty, transparency and integrity
- Fair, impartial treatment
- Clearer, published policies and procedures
- Easier access to information
- Customer service center

Ernst & Young analyzed the responses and in its conclusions to the study, recommended the following:

Key Issues	Description & Root Causes	Optional Strategies
Inadequate customer services focus	The public service is primarily internally focused because there are no direct incentives to focus on customers service agreement with the public	Develop a service agreement (such as Citizens Charter) Each Ministry to develop performance agreements linked to service agreement Frequent surveys to assess customer satisfaction
Frontline officers are sometimes not caring	Feedback from public consultations indicate that frontline staff are uninterested, discourteous	Provide customer service training Set up complaints / suggestion box Managers to evaluate interaction of officers and the public
Long response time	Lack of clear policies Unclear / cumbersome procedures Centralized decision making Lack of urgency Poor delegation Insufficient / untrained staff	Develop clear policies Streamline procedures Develop manuals Train and empower staff Increase awareness of good customer services
Inadequate information to public on policies and procedures	Public not provided with adequate information	Make information easily accessible to public Consider setting up customer service and information centre
Insufficient opportunities for the public for redress	No clear procedures	Develop clear procedures and inform the public

It is against this backdrop, i.e. the results of the diagnostic report and the interest and energy of His Excellency Governor Frank Savage that the concept took root in the public service of the BVI.

3. Methodology

Four (4) full working days were allocated to the conduct of the mission, which were sufficient to cover all aspects of the data required. Data was collected through open-ended discussions with a number of senior management personnel in the Government of the BVI, such as the Coordinator of the Public Sector Development Programme and the entire PSDP Unit, Head of Town and Country Planning, the Ag. Director of Human Resources, and the Director of the Development Planning Unit. In addition discussions

were held with various other Heads of Departments in Ministries / Departments and their staff, including Immigration, Customs, and the Disaster Management Unit.

In the design of the mission the researcher targeted a sample of customers / clients, i.e. members of the general public as well as Ministries / Departments who rely on input from other Ministries. Unfortunately it was not possible to interview individual members of the public. However, the researcher was able to hold free and frank discussions with a focus group, consisting of anonymous members of the public, who play the role of 'mystery shoppers' in service delivery areas. It should be noted that members of the group came from outside of the civil service, which gave a slightly different perspective from that of Departmental Heads and their staff. In addition the President of the Community College was interviewed, again his views taking on a different slant from those within the civil service.

4. Findings

4.1 PSDP mandate

The PSDP Unit is charged with the responsibility of driving all public sector reform initiatives, including the development of service charters, public service wide. It is envisaged that with the success of the PSDP customers should see significant improvements in the services offered by the public sector.

In the BVI it is recognized that a charter is a public document that details the standards of service customers can expect, essentially the same premise proposed by charters in the UK and Australia. They should improve access to public services and promote quality by helping people understand what the particular department or ministry does, how to contact it, what to expect by way of service and how to seek a remedy if expectations are not met.

As with charters in other countries where the initiative has been introduced, service charters in the BVI are expected to:

- Set out standards of service users can expect
- Tell users how to complain
- Make clear how customers can contact service providers for further information
- Encourage a partnership between the organization, its customers and staff
- Assure people that they will receive fair service
- Say if there is relevant legislation
- Clearly state the publication date and date for review

4.2 Setting up the programme

After several consultations stretching over a period of a number of months, Government approved the service charter initiative. Early training then focused on three main areas:

1. Introduction
2. Gearing up for better service delivery
3. Action Planning

In the introduction stage the emphasis was on developing vision and mission statements. The idea was that there should be some guiding principle as to where the organization should be heading. The notion was that 'if you don't know where you are going, any road will get you there'. Thus the vision is meant to give some direction to the journey ahead, while the mission would give some purpose for the existence of the organization. Value statements were also developed in this stage.

In gearing up for improved service delivery, it was recognized that the launching of a service charter was not a one-off task. Service delivery requires a cycle of continuous improvement, which consists of eight different stages. The general idea is to assist senior managers to take their departments from where they are now to where they should be in terms of the vision and mission statements developed earlier, taking into account the need for continuous improvement.

The eight stages are explained as follows:

(1) Identify the Customer

The starting point is to establish who the recipients are, and who benefits from the services offered. This is done through a stakeholder analysis, bearing in mind that customers / stakeholders can be internal, external, direct, indirect, end users as well as suppliers. Existing as well as potential customers must also be considered.

(2) Establish the Customer's needs and priorities

Once the customers have been identified the next step is to understand what their needs are and how they want those needs to be satisfied. There is a tendency for organizations to deliver services that they believe the customer wants, without really finding out if this is what they really need. There may be the feeling that these are the services we have been delivering for years, and there is no reason to change.

Increasingly though there is a realization that the customer should be consulted to determine his/ her needs and expectations. This could be done in a number of ways:

- By inviting feedback on current services
- Conducting one-to-one surveys
- Issuing comment cards
- Consulting frontline staff

(3) Establish the current service baseline

Accurate information about the current level and quality of service is essential in order to decide where and how to make improvements. A thorough scrutiny of departmental arrangements, work processes and practices involved in delivering the services as well as the motivation of staff will be required to establish the current service baseline.

(4) Identify the improvement gap

The improvement gap refers to what customers need, and the level of service currently provided. Closing this gap is the prime aim of the service delivery improvement programme.

(5) Set Service Standards

Once the 'improvement gap' has been identified the task then becomes raising the standards for closing that gap. The standards should always consider the customer's perspective and available resources. In terms of setting quality service standards the following should be considered:

- Establish a target

This will give a clear sense of purpose and focus everyone in the organization in directing efforts to achieve that target.

- Communicate expectations

Internal and external customers need to know what to expect, what is wanted and what service delivery is all about.

- Create a valuable management tool

Service standards can direct training efforts and become the foundation for a meaningful and productive performance appraisal system for employees..

(6) Build a winning team

Improving service delivery is not an individual effort. Putting standards in place will have little or no effect if they are not supported by the creation of a winning team. Improving service delivery depends on the whole department being geared up to support the commitments and 'contract' that has been made.

(7) Announce service standards

Everyone in the organization must be made aware of the service standards and ready to deliver to the set standards. Apart from the 'internal' customers, clients and potential customers must know and understand what level and quality of service they can expect to receive from the organization, and what steps they can take if the standard is not met.

(8) Monitor delivery and publish results

To re-emphasize, the launching of a service charter is not a one-off event. Performance must be measured against set targets, to gauge if there have in fact been improvements in service delivery. The following will need to be considered:

WHO will measure quality? An appropriate office(r) needs to be identified who will be charged with the responsibility of keeping records.

WHAT is to be measured? Generally, these areas can be considered:

- Quantity – turnover, through put
- Quality – number of complaints, feedback from customers, number of mistakes, accuracy of information
- Time – how long does it take to deliver the particular service
- Cost – what is the cost in terms of staff time, resources, and equipment.

WHEN to measure. It must be a continuous process, though critical processes must be identified.

WHERE to measure. Measurement must take place throughout the entire organization and in every critical process that can have an effect on customer satisfaction and quality.

HOW to measure. A link has to be established between performance standards and performance indicators.

WHY to measure. This is linked with continuous improvement, learning how to improve quality and measure customer satisfaction. The premise here is that if you cannot measure performance, then you will not know if you are succeeding or not.

4.3 Service Charter Format

The PSDP Unit conducted training in developing a service charter in organizations / departments where it was to be introduced. The programme commenced with the development of charters for the Town and Country Planning Department, Passport Services Department, Library Services and Inland Revenue. These were selected on the basis of being 'high profile' organizations, where service delivery is paramount and where impact could be seen and felt.

The training focused on critical areas, at the end of which organizations were expected to develop a draft charter which would then give the organizations a document that could be further refined. While some leeway was given to organizations to fine tune their charters, a typical charter is expected to contain the following:

- Vision Statement – a statement expressing the long-term vision of the Department

- Mission Statement – a statement explaining the purpose of the Department
- Core Values – a statement or a list of the values that the Department believes in and which will tell the customers how they will be dealt with by public servants
- List of the services – a comprehensive list of services offered to the customer
- Service Standards – the level of quality of the services the Department will deliver to customers
- Advice to customers – advice on the steps customers may need to take before they come to the offices for service
- Feedback from customers – information on how customers can give the department feedback on the quality of services provided
- Complaints – information to customers on how they can register complaints and the assurance that complaints will be dealt with confidentially
- Annual reports – information to customers that an annual report on the performance of the Department will be published
- Contact points – information to customers on official address, telephone numbers, web site and internet address.

4.4 Progress of the Programme

Since the introduction of Service Charters in these four (4) Departments in 2001, all Public Service Departments can now boast of having their own charter. The general consensus among public servants interviewed is that the initiative has produced some positive results. Conversely, they also state that a lot more work needs to be done in specific areas.

Public servants now talk of full participation from all members of staff, whereas before the advent of service charters, some may have felt that their inputs were not considered, if they were consulted at all. They now have an opportunity to make a contribution, from the formation of a charter to working as a team towards achieving common goals that are now owned by everyone in the Department.

One area in which the charter has aided the performance of organizations is that it serves as an induction tool for new entrants. Management has commented that with the introduction of the charter new staff now have the opportunity to know what the aims, role and functions of the Department are from the outset. It helps in building and sustaining the team effort that is necessary for the Department to achieve its stated vision, mission and goals. As a result there has been a noticeable improvement in the attitudes of staff.

While there is recognition that undoubtedly ‘internal’ benefits have accrued, as outlined above, there have been benefits in terms of the intended purpose of charters, which is improvement in service delivery, and to offer redress to customers. With the introduction of charters customers now voice their opinion, and constantly remind departments of their promises and commitments. Suggestion boxes have now become part and parcel of departments’ operations, and customers do not shy away from making full use of them.

On the negative side management as well as concerned external stakeholders point to the broad subjects of monitoring, measuring and evaluating performance. It would appear as though there is room for improvement in these areas.

The PSDP Unit is in the process of instituting a system whereby comments from the general public can be evaluated. It involves the use of 'service comment' cards, which customers can use to submit their comments, positive or negative. Every Department has cards on hand, which are issued to customers in order to elicit feedback. There is a provision for the office visited, and on what date. There are 7 relatively short questions on the card, which the customer can answer with the minimum of effort, utilizing the tick boxes on the card. The questions are:

- (1) Did a member of staff pleasantly greet you?
- (2) Was your service request fulfilled?
- (3) How was your service request handled?
- (4) Are you satisfied with the service you received?
- (5) Have you heard about the PSDP?
- (6) Have you heard about our service charters?
- (7) Have you seen this Department's Service Charter?

In addition, age and resident status of the respondent are sought. In keeping with the confidentiality of the information, personal information is optional. Completed cards are then collected by the agency concerned and then submitted to the PSDP on a regular basis, where the comments are then evaluated.

The 'mystery shopper' system is also in use. PSDP utilizes the services of an anonymous group of customers, who periodically visit selected Departments and rate the services received, comments then being channeled to PSDP. Members of that body were interviewed in the study, and not surprisingly their comments were a bit more negative than those of management and staff. While they noted that there has been some improvement in attitudes, the concept of service delivery still needs to be addressed. There is a view that in general service is still left wanting.

They noted that telephone etiquette is one area that could be improved. Calls frequently go unanswered or are unreturned by officials. At times staff are discourteous and unhelpful in providing service. In addition, the waiting time for service in seemingly 'quick response' offices is far too lengthy. This they attributed not so much to attitudes, but more a question of lack of clear policies and poor systems and procedures.

Some frustrations were voiced over the apparent lack of communication between cooperating Departments, especially in the processing and issuing of licenses. There was a feeling that Departments do not communicate promptly and effectively with each other, with the end result of customers not knowing who to turn to in time of need. The public then perceived this as public servants did not do their best to put things right, which exacerbates the frustrations experienced.

The performance evaluation system has been developed 'on paper', but the extent to which it is being used as an evaluation tool is debatable. In other words, it is not yet evident that interested parties can get information on a particular Department to determine if performance has improved over a period of time, or whether it has regressed or remained at the same level. In most cases performance can only be gauged by newspaper reports, verbal feedback from customers or intuition on the part of staff. While these do offer some measure of performance, a more stringent and robust method of evaluating performance is necessary.

5. Conclusion

There are many learnings to be derived from the introduction of the Service Charter concept in the BVI. As noted, there have been some positives as well as negatives, with programme evaluation standing out as a negative. This is actively engaging the attention of the PSDP. But Departments cannot rest on their laurels, simply because a service charter has been developed and introduced. In the spirit of continuous improvement, even the positives from the introduction of the programme need to be improved.

Public officials have come to the realization that reform in general is an on-going process. In introducing service charters in their Departments there is now more respect for themselves as well as stakeholders and customers. It has brought about some measure of community involvement, as they have had to reach out to their respective constituents to determine the services required. The development of standards has also played a major role in pushing Departments towards achieving their aims and objectives, building a team in the process.

Charters also lend themselves to the envisaged success of another initiative, i.e. the introduction and implementation of strategic plans in all Ministries / Departments. From the outset Service Charters are attempting to inculcate in all staff a sense of being service and results-oriented, qualities that are also apparent in the strategic planning culture. In this regard Service Charters and Strategic Planning can only complement each other, and this fact augurs well for the improvement of the public service as a whole.

The challenge now is for Departments to reinforce the message that they are in fact in business to serve external customers first and foremost. The charter must become more than just a document; it must become a way of life in the Department. Then and only then will the perception of inadequate service change in the minds of customers.

LIST OF INTERVIEWEES

Mrs. Petrona Smith-James	Coordinator, PSDP
Ms. Suzette Vanterpool	Administrative Officer, PSDP
Mr. Lewis Potter	Chief Physical Planning Officer
Ms. Marva Titley-Smith	Dep Chief Physical Planning Officer
Ms. Alison Williams-Hill	Physical Planner, Level 11
Ms. Sharleen Dabreo	Director, Disaster Management
Ms. Nadine Battle	Executive Director, BVI Chamber of Commerce & Hotel Association
Mr. Edmund Maduro	Entrepreneur
Mr. Godfrey Forbes	Financial Secretary
Mr. Neil Smith	Deputy Financial Secretary
Ms. Michelle Donovan-Stephens	Private Secretary to the Minister of Communication & Works
Mr. Otto O'Neal	Head, Development Planning Unit
Mr. Wade Smith	Comptroller, Customs
Mr. Varisse Hodge	Deputy Comptroller, Customs
Mr. Dennis Jennings	Chief Immigration Officer
Dr. Charles Wheatley	President, H.Lavity Stoutt Community College
Inspector Valston Grahame	Royal Virgin Islands Police Force
Ms. Tamara Archibald-Gill	Information Officer, Royal Virgin Islands Police Force
Mrs. Lisa Penn-Lettsome	Acting Deputy Governor
Mr. David Archer	Acting Director, Human Resources
Ms. Jacqueline Barnes	Communications Officer, PSDP
Anonymous customers (mystery shoppers)	Panel Group