

Speaking ahead of a round table discussion at the Consumer Summit with the National Consumer Council, David Cameron will make remarks on the public service ethos. He will say:

(Check against delivery)

“The recent disasters in the Home Office have contributed to a stereotype of public sector inefficiency and lack of commitment.

Of course there are serious problems in the quality of administration in this country.

But let’s not tar the whole of the public sector with the same brush.

I want to challenge the idea that the public sector is somehow synonymous with an underachieving, couldn't-care-less attitude.

That may be the exception but today I want to concentrate on the rule.

The Conservative Party has always focused, rightly, on giving taxpayers value for money and reducing burdens on the state.

But in our legitimate desire to drive out government waste and improve public sector efficiency, we have sometimes risked giving the impression that we see those who work in the public sector as burdens on the state rather than dedicated professionals who work hard to improve the quality of people’s lives.

Anyone working in the public services could easily have heard a pretty negative message from my Party: “there’s too many of you, you’re lazy and you’re inefficient.” This is far from how I see things.

Public service - the concept of working for the good of the community - is a high ideal. We see it in our doctors and nurses, our police officers and our soldiers.

But we also see it in many, many areas of our civil service and local government. Yet this is rarely, if ever, acknowledged.

When I hear MPs bashing bureaucrats - and I'm sure I've done it myself - I often think that what they’re really complaining about is some idiotic bit of red tape that has landed on the desk of the blameless public servant.

And when I hear Ministers bashing bureaucrats – or declaring that their departments are ‘not fit for purpose’ – I wish they’d have the decency to admit that very often it’s their policies that are at fault, not the people who work for them.

Instead of using public servants as scapegoats we should acknowledge their successes.

The truth is that public servants are privately dedicated to what they do. To them, it’s not just work – it’s their vocation. Often it’s

not just their job – it's their life.

Think about what the term “public service” actually means.

It signifies two clear things: that something is being provided for the public, and that it is a service.

So if we want to improve public services for everyone, we need to think hard about what makes good service and what doesn't. In the current political debate about public services, I don't think there's nearly enough thought given to this vital question.

Too often these days, there seems to be an automatic and lazy assumption that you get terrible service in the public sector and fantastic service in the private sector.

You regularly hear politicians and commentators going on about “bringing private sector efficiency to public services” - for example sending in private sector ‘hit squads’ to teach hospitals how to perform better.

There's a widespread assumption that we should always and everywhere encourage the public sector to adopt the techniques and the style of service found in the private sector. Of course we want the public sector to adopt best practice in terms of cost-savings, modern management and successful, cutting-edge business models. But that's not the whole story.

The quality of service that someone gets doesn't depend primarily on whether that service is being provided by the private sector or the public sector.

It depends on a whole range of things that affect the people who are actually delivering the service.

Whether they're well led.

Whether they're motivated.

Whether they have the resources to give good service.

Whether they're trusted to use their personal skills, experience and discretion to do a good job.

These are some of the things we'll be looking at with the National Consumer Council.

We want to learn first-hand from consumers what they think makes for good service, whether the service is delivered by the private sector, the public sector - or indeed the voluntary sector.

And we want to understand what lessons the public sector may have for the private sector, instead of the automatic and lazy assumption that it's always the public sector that has to learn from

the private.

If we're sensible about this, we'd recognise that in our everyday lives, we receive all kinds of service from people and organisations in all sectors - and that the quality varies hugely.

In my life, I've received amazing service from the public sector – with a quality of care and commitment that you do not always find in the private sector.

But I've also seen shoddy, careless service that's enough to drive you crazy – both in the public sector and in the private.

I'm sure that most people share this mixed experience of both sectors.

The idea that the private sector has a monopoly on great service just doesn't fit the reality of most people's lives. Ask anyone who's been pushed from pillar to post for days and weeks on end when dealing with their bank, or insurance company, or utility.

So instead of constantly beating up on the public sector and telling it to be more like the private sector, let's be more reasonable and constructive.

Let's understand what it is that enables people to give the public great service - whether they work for a private company or the

state - and encourage more of those things.

My instinctive belief is that if you trust people to do their jobs, if you trust in their professionalism and expertise, if you set a clear framework and then avoid constantly looking over their shoulder, and if you show that they're valued and respected, then they will give great service.

That's the direction we're taking in our Policy Review.

We believe we can improve public services by trusting public servants more.

And I think that the private sector, rightly concerned with profits and the bottom line, could learn a lot from the public sector.

Not just about dedication to the common good, but also about efficiency and good practice.

So let's stop the knee-jerk attacks on public sector workers and focus on what really matters - improving the quality of service in our lives, whoever is providing it."