



Oifig an
Rialaitheora Pleanála
Office of the
Planning Regulator



Customer Service Action Plan

August 2020

1. The OPR and its Customers

The delivery of effective, quality customer service is a priority for the Office of the Planning Regulator (OPR) and forms an integral part of our overall Strategy Statement.

Our Customer Charter sets out our key customer commitments in clear terms and the standards we have in place to help achieve these commitments. This Customer Service Action Plan 2020-2023 sets out the steps that we will take to deliver on the commitments and standards set out in the Charter. Implementation of this Action Plan is one of the key strategies we will pursue to support the achievement of the objectives in our Strategy Statement.

The role of the OPR

The Office of the Planning Regulator (OPR) is the regulatory body with responsibility for overseeing the delivery of effective planning services to the public and reporting on findings to the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage and to the Oireachtas.

The OPR has three main functions:

- i. Independent assessment of all statutory forward planning, including development plans, local area plans and regional spatial and economic strategies;
- ii. Examination of the systems and procedures used by any planning authority, including An Bord Pleanála, in the performance of any of their planning functions; and
- iii. Driving national research, training, education and public information programmes.

The OPR's Strategy Statement sets out our five key goals for the period to end-2024:

1. Building a reputation as a clear, fair and independent voice on the effectiveness of Ireland's planning process
2. Driving innovation and learning for all those that are stakeholders in the planning process
3. Focusing on the needs of customers and those with whom the OPR engages
4. Creating a high-performing and efficient organisation that supports and enhances Ireland's planning process
5. Building a resilient and agile organisation with a commitment to continuous learning

Our customers

The OPR has a large and varied external customer base that includes:

- o the public, including non-governmental organisations and other stakeholders in the planning and development process;
- o the Oireachtas;
- o the State's 31 planning authorities, including elected members;
- o State organisations and Government departments, in particular Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage; and,
- o Professional bodies and interest groups, the Higher Education Institute sector, expert commentators and the media.

In addition, the OPR's three teams and staff are customers of one other and it is important that the internal customer is acknowledged (see principle 12 in section 2).

Our customer commitments and statutory obligations

The OPR is committed to delivering fair, effective, courteous and timely services to all its customers in line with the twelve Government 'Guiding Principles for Quality Customer Service' (outlined at section 2 below).

The OPR will be responsive to customer requirements and proactive in identifying where we can make improvements to our service.

We believe it is important that all OPR staff are aware of their statutory obligations. The OPR is committed to fulfilling all relevant statutory obligations and training our staff on these obligations, as required, including:

- data protection
- freedom of information
- safety, health and welfare at work
- equality and disability
- ethics and standards
- protected disclosures
- prompt payment of accounts
- lobbying

Measuring and evaluating performance

The OPR employs a range of mechanisms to measure and evaluate our performance against the standards set out in our Customer Charter and to ensure that we continue to deliver the highest levels of service to our customers.

- We have signed an Oversight Agreement with the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage.
- We have signed a Performance Delivery Agreement with the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage.
- We will seek feedback and suggestions from our customers on ways in which we can enhance our service provision and delivery.
- We will use internal management information systems to inform our customer service policies.
- We will use independent external experts to ensure full compliance with statutory obligations, e.g. Health and Safety standards.

2. Quality Customer Service

The OPR is committed to achieving excellence in service delivery for all our customers in accordance with the 12 Principles of Quality Customer Service.

1. Quality Service Standards

Publish a statement that outlines the nature and quality of service that customers can expect, and display it prominently at the point of service delivery.

Over the lifetime of this Plan we will:

- Ensure that all our customers are kept fully informed of the standards of service they can expect to receive from us through a Customer Charter and a Customer Service Action Plan.
- Provide copies of our Customer Charter and Customer Action Plan available to any customers who wish to have a copy.
- Publish our Customer Charter and Action Plan on our website.
- Place copies of our Customer Charter in any public areas of our offices.

2. Equality / Diversity

Ensure the rights to equal treatment established by equality legislation, and accommodate diversity, so as to contribute to equality for the groups covered by the equality legislation (under the grounds of gender, marital status, family status, sexual orientation, religious belief, age, disability, race and membership of the Traveller Community).

Identify and work to eliminate barriers to access to services for people experiencing poverty and social exclusion, and for those facing geographic barriers to services.

Over the lifetime of this Plan we will:

- Ensure that our staff are familiar with The Public Sector Equality and Human Rights Duty.
- Create a working environment and culture that is attentive, responsible, competent and responsive to equality / diversity.
- Ensure the right to equal treatment for all customers, while at the same time accommodating diversity by respecting individual differences and needs.
- Ensure that the ways we communicate with our customers meet the needs of our diverse customer base.

3. Physical Access

Provide clean, accessible public offices that ensure privacy, comply with occupational and safety standards and, as part of this, facilitate access for people with disabilities and others with specific needs.

Over the lifetime of this Plan we will:

- Ensure ease of access for any customers with disabilities or specific needs required to attend at our offices.
- Appoint an Access Officer to ensure that any issues or difficulties in relation to physical access can be addressed without delay. Any such issues arising can be directed to accessofficer@opr.ie.
- Ensure that all areas of our buildings are clean, comfortable and comply with occupational and safety standards.
- Appoint a member of staff as Health and Safety Officer ensuring they receive appropriate training to fulfil the role.
- Appoint a member of staff as Fire Warden ensuring they receive appropriate training to fulfil the role.

4. Information

The OPR will take a proactive approach in providing information that is clear, timely and accurate, is available at all points of contact, and meets the requirements of people with specific needs. Ensure that the potential offered by Information Technology is fully availed of and that the information available on public service websites follows the guidelines on web publication. Continue the drive for simplification of rules, regulations, forms, information leaflets and procedures.

Over the lifetime of this Plan we will:

- Ensure our replies to correspondence are in clear plain language, free, wherever possible, from jargon and technical terms.
- Maintain an up-to-date and user-friendly website that conforms to web publication guidelines in terms of accessibility and official languages.
- Communicate through contemporary information distribution networks, including social media.
- Keep up-to-date with developments in information and communications technology to improve the delivery of services.
- Disseminate information in various formats as required by customers.

5. Timeliness and Courtesy

Deliver quality services with courtesy, sensitivity and the minimum delay, fostering a climate of mutual respect between provider and customer.

Over the lifetime of this Plan we will:

- Ensure that all customers are treated with courtesy and that all correspondence is dealt with effectively and efficiently.
- Aim to meet the standards of service set out in our Customer Charter with regard to the response times for written / email correspondence, we will review our performance in this regard on an ongoing basis.

- Ensure that contact details, including name of the relevant official, telephone number and an email address, are provided on all written or email correspondence from the OPR.
- Use automated email responses, with alternative contact details, when out of the office.
- Meet all statutory requirements in relation to answering FOI, AIE, etc. requests.
- Ensure that each OPR team promptly answer customer calls during core office hours (9am to 4pm with lunch from 1pm to 2pm) and that staff provide their name when answering telephone calls.
- Offer to ring customers back promptly when queries cannot be answered immediately.
- Keep the transferring of calls to a minimum and provide the name of the person to whom a call is being transferred.
- Ensure that voicemail messages are updated regularly and that all voicemail messages are responded to promptly.

6. Complaints

Maintain a well-publicised, accessible, transparent and simple-to-use system of dealing with complaints about the quality of service provided. Customers have a right to complain if they consider that they have not received an appropriate level of service.

Over the lifetime of this Plan we will:

- Highlight our customer service complaints procedure through our website and our Customer Charter and will ensure that feedback from the operation of the procedure is used to improve our services.
- Deal with all complaints promptly, fairly, impartially and in confidence.
- Acknowledge customer service complaints within 5 working days and will strive to resolve complaints within 21 working days, where this is not possible an interim reply will issue.
- Appoint a Quality Customer Service Officer to deal with customer service complaints, which can be directed to QCS@opr.ie.

7. Appeals

Similarly, maintain a formalised, well-publicised, accessible, transparent and simple-to-use system of appeal/review for customers who are dissatisfied with decisions in relation to services.

Over the lifetime of this Plan we will:

- Ensure customers are aware of any appeal mechanisms that may be available to them when they are dissatisfied with a decision made by the OPR in relation to services (e.g. FOI, AIE, data requests, etc.)
- Highlight our customer service complaints and appeals procedure through our website and our Customer Charter.
- Provide for internal review, by a more senior officer, where customers are not satisfied with the outcome of the Quality Customer Service Officer's consideration of their complaint.

8. Consultation and Evaluation

Provide a structured approach to meaningful consultation with, and participation by, the customer in relation to the development, delivery and review of services. Ensure meaningful evaluation of service delivery.

Over the lifetime of this Plan we will:

- Consult with relevant stakeholders as we develop OPR services, reflecting comments and suggestions as appropriate.
- Convene working groups of key stakeholders to assist the OPR in delivering on its statutory functions.
- Provide a dedicated contact point – QCS@opr.ie – through which the public can submit comments regarding OPR services
- Highlight OPR services and initiatives through social media channels.
- Recognise and consult with internal customers in the development and delivery of services.

9. Choice

Provide choice, where feasible, in service delivery including payment methods, location of contact points, opening hours and delivery times. Use available and emerging technologies to ensure maximum access and choice, and quality of delivery.

Over the lifetime of this Plan we will:

- Provide for a range of contact options for customers, including direct dial, email, traditional mail, social media and the submission of comments via our website.
- Maintain the quality of our website and its content including links to relevant resources and implement further enhancements having regard to customer feedback.
- Ensure that customer calls are answered promptly during core office hours (9am to 4pm with lunch from 1pm to 2pm).
- Make information available, upon request, in a format appropriate to the customer e.g. email, PDF, paper copy, etc.

10. Official Languages

Provide quality services through Irish and/or bilingually and inform customers of their right to choose to be dealt with through one or other of the official languages.

Over the lifetime of this Plan we will:

- Implement an internal Irish Language Policy in advance of the OPR's designation under the Official Languages Act.
- Implement an Irish Language Scheme following designation under the Official Languages Act.
- Maintain an Irish language version of our website mirroring, as far as practicable, the static material from the main website.

- Publish any documents of major public importance, including the OPR's Strategy Statement, Annual Report and Accounts, in Irish as well as English.
- Respond to written queries received in Irish through Irish.
- Produce all stationary in a bilingual format.

11. Better Coordination

Foster a more coordinated and integrated approach to the delivery of public services.

Over the lifetime of this Plan we will

- Collaborate with our parent department, and bodies under its aegis, to coordinate on service provision and delivery.
- Engage proactively with the local government sector, across our various statutory functions, to improve the national planning system and the delivery of services to the public citizen.
- Contribute to the development and implementation of inter-agency initiatives.
- Promote opportunities to enhance and develop partnership arrangements with other sectors, including non-governmental organisations, property sector professionals, higher education institutes, etc.

12. Internal Customers

Ensure staff are recognised as internal customers and that they are properly supported and consulted with regard to service delivery issues.

Over the lifetime of this Plan we will:

- Recognise our staff as our internal customers and acknowledge the key role they have in contributing to the organisation's success.
- Engage with staff on an ongoing basis to see how well we are meeting internal customer needs.
- Ensure that the training and development needs of each staff member are provided for through the implementation of the Performance Management and Development System (PMDS).
- Implement internal initiatives to allow all staff gain a fuller understanding of all aspects of the role of the OPR.