

# **Customer Charter and Action Plan**

**2022 - 2025**

November 2022

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# 1. About the Department of Rural and Community Development

## Our Remit

The Department of Rural and Community Development was established in July 2017 following a Government Decision, with a mission “*to promote rural and community development and to support vibrant, inclusive and sustainable communities throughout Ireland*”.

Delivering on the remit of the Department includes managing a range policy initiatives and funding actions to improve the economic and social development of both rural and urban areas, including to address gaps in meeting the social needs of those areas. Further details on our policies and funding supports are available on our website: [www.gov.ie/drcd](http://www.gov.ie/drcd)

## Our Structure

The Department is led by the Minister for Rural and Community Development and assisted by the Minister of State for Community Development and Charities. Details of the Department’s structure, Management Board, and senior management team are available on [www.whodoeswhat.gov.ie](http://www.whodoeswhat.gov.ie)

## Our Locations

The Department’s staff are based in Dublin, Ballina and other regional locations (details of our office locations and contact details are outline in Appendix 1).

## Our Agencies

The Department has four bodies under its aegis, namely:

- Pobal
- Charities Regulator
- Water Safety Ireland
- Western Development Commission

The Department also has oversight of the Charity Appeals Tribunal.

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## 2. Our Commitment to Quality Customer Services

The Department of Rural and Community Development published its first Customer Action Plan and Charter in June 2019 in line with the public service's Customer Charter Initiative as part of its commitment to providing a quality customer service.

The Customer Action Plan details planned progress under each of the 12 Guiding Principles of Quality Customer Service. Each Principle is accompanied by specific objectives and actions with related performance indicators.

The Customer Charter provides guidance and information to the public on contacting a public service organisation, and describes the level of service a customer can expect.

Both are produced as part of the same process and published every three years, or where there is a strong business case for a new Action Plan and Charter.

During 2022 the process of reviewing and updating the Charter and Action Plan commenced with a view to informing the development of a new Charter and Action Plan for the following three year period.

As part of the review the Department invited external stakeholders, via an online Customer Services Satisfaction survey, to submit their views on the Department's customer service delivery. The survey posed questions around satisfaction with DRCD's delivery of services, responsiveness to queries, clarity of communication, feedback on supports/schemes accessed, how supports have benefitted communities, suggestions for innovations or improvements to policies or programmes and feedback on COVID 19 supports.

The review of the Customer Action Plan highlighted a small number of areas which require a strengthened focus going forward, including:

- Irish language provision, in particular making further progress towards targets on the percentage of press releases and speeches in Irish and a greater level of consistency in terms of provision of Irish language material across the Department's funding schemes.
- More regular review of the Customer Action Plan in order to ensure commitments are delivered on over the course of the three year timeframe. It is proposed to undertake a review of the next iteration of the Customer Action Plan for the period 2022 – 2025 at the mid-term stage rather than at the conclusion of its lifecycle. This will enable greater insight into progress being made and highlight any areas which require increased consideration.
- A continued focus on raising awareness of customer service, and promotion of available learning and development opportunities to staff, is required in order to maintain quality customer service standards throughout the work of the Department.

The above items have been reflected in the actions outlined in this document, to be implemented as part of the Customer Charter and Action Plan for the 2022 – 2025 period.

Since its establishment the work of the Department and its staff has made a significant positive difference to rural Ireland and to communities throughout Ireland. We remain committed to organisational excellence and will continue to support improvement and innovation in how we deliver, in how we measure the impact of what we do and in how we communicate what we do and why we do it.

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## 3. Customer Charter 2022 - 2025

This Customer Charter is the Department of Rural and Community Development's public statement on the levels of service customers can expect when dealing with this Department. It does not seek to cover all the functions and services provided by the Department, but outline our commitment to you, the customer, and describes:

- The levels of service you are entitled to expect when you contact the Department.
- How your input can contribute to the improvement of our services.
- How to obtain further information or make a complaint.

### Levels of Service

We will be polite, friendly and fair in our dealings with you. No matter how you contact us, we will deal with your query promptly efficiently and to the best of our ability.

We are committed to providing **easy access to our services** by:

- Using simple, clear language;
- Offering a range of different ways to contact us; and
- Supplying you with full, up-to-date and accurate information in the format you request, wherever possible.

If you **contact us by phone**, we aim to:

- Answer all calls within 20 seconds
- Give you our name when we answer your call; and
- Help you as much as we can and give you all the relevant information we have.

We will aim to try to answer your query immediately but, if we cannot do so, we will take your details and tell you when you can expect to hear from us again. We will also make it easy for you to contact us by providing a range of contact options.

**If you write to us**, we aim to give a **full reply to your query within 15 working days** (from the day we receive your letter). If we cannot do this, we will write to explain the reason why and tell you when you can expect a full reply. We will also make sure all our written replies include a contact name, an email address; and contact phone number.

If you contact us by email, **we aim to acknowledge your email within two working days**. We will give you the contact details of the division or staff member that is dealing with your query. We aim to give you a **full reply within 10 working days**. If we cannot do this, we will email you to explain why and tell you when you can expect a full reply.

We also aim to make sure all our email replies include a contact name, email address, and a phone number.

If you **visit us in person**, we promise to:

- respect your privacy;
- be polite and fair in our dealings with you;
- be professional in our dealings with you;
- keep our offices safe and clean and make sure they meet health and safety standards;
- make sure our offices are accessible for visitors, including visitors with disabilities;
- arrange meetings for a reasonable time that suits you; and
- meet you on time.

To arrange a meeting, please contact the office you wish to visit before you arrive. The main contact details of our offices are listed below.

### Service through Irish

The Department of Rural and Community Development's has a Language Scheme in effect which has been prepared in accordance with the Guidelines outlined under Section 12 of the Official Languages Act 2003. This scheme complements the

principles of Quality Customer Service and our Customer Charter alongside our Customer Action Plan.

To this end:

- if you write to us in Irish, we will answer in Irish;
- if you wish to speak to an Irish-speaking member of staff we will put you in contact with one;
- we will publish our most important corporate documents, such as our Annual Report, in both Irish and English; and
- we will put as much Irish language material as possible on our website

### Our Website

The main method of contact with DRCD is our website [www.gov.ie/drcd](http://www.gov.ie/drcd)

It is the main source of information on our Department's roles, functions and activities. It is updated in accessible and plain English format regularly for each of the areas for which we have responsibility.

The Department has a responsibility to provide information and updates to its stakeholders and the general public on its work. We are committed to the ongoing maintenance and development of our online material to ensure that it is accessible, informative and up to date. We will ensure that our publications are clear, address user needs and are available on our website.

### How your input can contribute to the improvement of our services

You are our customer and it is our responsibility to provide you with the best service we can. You can help us to do this by:

- making comments, complaints or suggestions about the service you receive;
- completing and returning any customer survey questionnaire that we send you;
- giving us all the information we need to help you; and
- treating our staff the way you would like to be treated yourself.



We welcome your comments, suggestions and views on any aspect of our service. These can be emailed to us at [info@drcd.gov.ie](mailto:info@drcd.gov.ie). We believe this will help us to serve you better. You can help us provide the best possible service to you, by telling us how we do. It is important for us to know what works well. If you tell us when you have received excellent customer service, it will help us to recognise the efforts of our staff and identify best practices that can be used across our organisation.

### How to obtain further information or make a complaint.

We aim to deliver the best possible service to all customers. However, if you are unhappy with our service, tell us – you have the right to complain.

Please direct your complaint to [info@drcd.gov.ie](mailto:info@drcd.gov.ie) where you can expect prompt referral to the unit that can help resolve it.

Further information on our complaints procedure can be found in Section 5 of this document.

### Statutory Obligations

The Department of Rural and Community Development is fully committed to fulfilling all relevant statutory obligations in relation to Data Protection, Equality, Freedom of Information, Access to Information on the Environment, and Prompt Payment of Accounts. Information on how we meet these obligations can be found on our website at [www.gov.ie/drcd](http://www.gov.ie/drcd). Relevant contact details are also provided in Appendix 1 of this document.

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## 4. Customer Service Action Plan

### Introduction

The Customer Service Action Plan of the Department of Rural and Community Development sets out the steps we will take over the next three years to meet our commitments under each of the Government's 12 Quality Customer Service (QCS) Principles.

The Department of Rural and Community Development's Customer Charter sets out the principles that underpin our service and our Customer Service Action Plan describes how we will apply these principles.

The Department of Rural and Community Development (DRCD) is committed to delivering quality customer services in achieving its mission which is **to promote rural and community development and to support vibrant, inclusive and sustainable communities throughout Ireland**. To do this we will consult during the term of the Customer Service Action Plan with customers, delivery partners and other stakeholders to measure how we are meeting the commitments in our Customer Service Action Plan. Our Annual Reports will provide updates on the progress in the implementation of objectives set out in our business plans.

### Principles of Quality Customer Service

One of the fundamental themes in delivering better government is the achievement of excellence in service for customers.

Our Customer Action Plan is an essential tool that outlines our response to specific objectives concerning delivery of services, as specified in the 12 Guiding Principles of Quality Customer Service approved by the Government.

In respect of each principle, we set out below our implementation strategy over the next three years, including key actions.

## 1. QUALITY SERVICE STANDARDS

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

### ACTIONS

- Publish a Customer Charter and the Customer Action Plan on our website and on our intranet.
- Let customers know, at the point of service, the standard of service they can expect.
- Communicate our Customer Action Plan and service delivery standards to all our staff.
- Periodically review the Customer Charter and Action Plan to monitor progress and ensure it remains relevant and up to date.

### KEY PERFORMANCE INDICATORS

- Publication and availability of summary information to customers on service standards on our website and on our intranet.
- Training in Quality Customer Service is provided to staff as required.

## 2. EQUALITY/DIVERSITY

**OBJECTIVE:** 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 (on the grounds of gender, civil status, family status, sexual orientation, religious belief, age, disability, race and membership of the Traveller Community). Identify and work to eliminate barriers to services for people experiencing poverty and social exclusion and for those facing geographic barriers to service.

## **ACTIONS**

- Ensure that our funding programmes and awards are accessible to all the groups covered by equality legislation and that the appropriate level of service is available.
- Ensure that access to, participation in, and availability of services are available to all communities, both internally and across all areas of the Department of Rural and Community Development's work.
- Review the quality and clarity of the information about different forms of access to available services, on a regular basis.
- Ensure the needs for customers with disabilities are considered from the earliest planning stages across all areas of the Department of Rural and Community Development's work.
- Provide equality and diversity training for departmental staff as appropriate.
- Review and update our HR equality/disability policies as required.

## **KEY PERFORMANCE INDICATORS**

- Adherence in our work to the relevant provisions of Irish Equality legislation.
- Adherence in our work to the provisions of Children First legislation.

## **3. PHYSICAL ACCESS**

**OBJECTIVE:** We will 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.

## **ACTIONS**

- Maintain existing accommodation to a high standard for both customers and staff.

- Regularly update our health & safety policy as staff, equipment, work methods and legislation changes.
- Maintain a high standard of physical access at our reception area for receiving our customers.
- Maintain a high standard of physical access at events hosted by the Department of Rural and Community Development both internally and externally.
- Disability proofing to be addressed in any new building occupied by the Department.

#### **KEY PERFORMANCE INDICATORS**

- Review of health and safety procedures, including a risk assessment.
- Adequate resources and funding in place for the management and securing of the safety of staff and visitors at our offices.
- Maintain a clean and accessible reception area.

## **4. INFORMATION**

**OBJECTIVE:** 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 provided online follows the guidelines on web publication.

#### **ACTIONS**

- Use clear language in our forms, policies, information leaflets, and grant application forms.
- Abide by our commitments in our Customer Charter concerning written communications.

- Continue to utilise Gov.ie to provide key information to our customers on the Department and our services, as well as promote a greater level of interaction with our stakeholders.
- Engage with the Office of the Government Chief Information Officer to keep our suite of ICT policies under review.
- Provide a timely, concise and informative Annual Report.
- Comply with the statutory requirements in relation to the processing of requests made under the Freedom of Information Act 2014 (FOI) and the Access to Information on the Environment Regulations (AIE).
- Develop our data protection compliance procedures and policy in line with best practice standards.

#### **KEY PERFORMANCE INDICATORS**

- Relevant statutory requirements as apply to provision of information are met.
- Disclosure log of FOI requests available on website is kept up-to-date.
- Compliance with the Data Protection Act 2018 and the GDPR, and increased awareness among staff.

## **5. TIMELINESS AND COURTESY**

**OBJECTIVE:** Deliver quality services with courtesy, sensitivity and the minimum delay, fostering a climate of mutual respect between provider and customer. Give contact names in all communications to ensure ease of on-going communications.

#### **ACTIONS**

- Meet the standards of service as set out in our Customer Charter and review our performance in this regard.
- Ensure that staff are aware of the guidelines and recommended procedures in relation to answering phone calls and dealing with correspondence.

- Ensure that all written correspondence uses clear, simple language and that contact name, telephone number and/or email address is included on all written correspondence
- Voicemail and out of office facilities will be utilised when staff are not in the office.

#### **KEY PERFORMANCE INDICATOR**

- Monitor customer feedback through communications from our various stakeholders.
- Guidelines are circulated on our intranet and staff are aware of recommended procedures.
- All staff provide name, address and direct phone line in their email signatures and use voicemail and out of office replies when unavailable.

## **6. COMPLAINTS**

**OBJECTIVE:** Maintain a well-publicised, accessible, transparent and simple-to-use system of dealing with complaints about the quality of service provided.

#### **ACTIONS**

- Publish our complaints procedure online.
- Monitor all written complaints received from the public and the Ombudsman's Office.
- Provide training on customer complaints procedure for staff if required.
- Address all complaints made in writing (or equivalent) in accordance with the procedures set out in our Customer Charter.

#### **KEY PERFORMANCE INDICATORS**

- Ease of access to our written complaints procedure and Customer Charter on our website.
- Log maintained of complaints received and action taken.

- Written complaints are dealt with in open, accountable and accessible manner
- Written complaints are dealt with in a fair, sympathetic and timely manner.
- Information, advice and appropriate training is provided to staff dealing with complaints.

## 7. APPEALS/REVIEWS

**OBJECTIVE:** 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.

### ACTIONS

- Details of how to appeal decisions are set out in our complaints procedure on our website.
- Monitor the number of appeals received from the public.
- Ensure minimum delay when dealing with appeals for customers who are dissatisfied with decisions in relation to our services.
- A Scheme Management Handbook providing guidance on compliance matters and applications process, including appeals process, has been developed and is available to all Departmental staff.
- Monitor that appeals process is in place across all DRCD funding schemes.

### KEY PERFORMANCE INDICATORS

We have provided:

- Awareness and understanding of appeals procedures among staff and stakeholders.
- Appeals are dealt with in an open, accountable and accessible manner.
- Appeals are dealt with in accordance with our prescribed procedures.
- Appropriate training is provided to staff dealing with appeals.



## 8. CONSULTATION AND EVALUATION

**OBJECTIVE:** 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.

### ACTIONS

- Work with a range of stakeholders, both within the Department of Rural and Community Development and the wider public/private sector, to promote feedback about our services and how they might be improved.
- Build internal and external consultation into process improvement for all new schemes and awards when the opportunity arises.
- Review our funding programmes, schemes and initiatives to fully embed rural and community development objectives.

### KEY PERFORMANCE INDICATORS

- Evidence of feedback from our customers and all our various stakeholders present in policies and decisions.
- Any new investment programmes, schemes or initiatives will be clear in their objectives to enhance rural and community development.

## 9. CHOICE

**OBJECTIVE:** Provide choice, where feasible, in service delivery. Use available and emerging technologies to ensure maximum access and choice and quality of delivery.

### ACTIONS

- Seek to ensure we are responsive to the needs of our customers in terms of how we deliver our services, funding and supports.
- Ensure our publications are available, upon request, in a format appropriate to the customer.

### KEY PERFORMANCE INDICATORS

- Information on all our funding programmes, schemes, awards and initiatives on our website is relevant, accurate and up-to-date.
- Fully utilise the potential offered by information and communications technology across all our services.

## 10. OFFICIAL LANGUAGES EQUALITY

**OBJECTIVE:** 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.

### ACTIONS

- Promote the improved delivery of our services through the Irish language by meeting our requirements under the Official Languages Act 2003.
- Publish key documents in Irish and English.
- Make every effort to accommodate customers who telephone, visit or write to the Department of Rural and Community Development and who wish to conduct their business in Irish.
- Encourage staff to avail of opportunities to use and improve their level of Irish.

### KEY PERFORMANCE INDICATORS

- Our website is available in Irish and English.
- Our annual report is published in both Irish and English.
- Publish, where possible, the communications and documents of public interest, including application forms and guidelines for many of the Department's awards and schemes in both Irish and English.
- Training in Irish language available to staff.

## 11. BETTER CO-ORDINATION

**OBJECTIVE:** Foster a more co-ordinated and integrated approach to delivery of public services.

### ACTIONS

- Develop our partnership with other government departments as well as with local government and with agencies and organisations within and beyond our sector.

### KEY PERFORMANCE INDICATORS

- Continued collaboration and innovation with other public agencies in their business and management.

## 12. INTERNAL CUSTOMERS

**OBJECTIVE:** Ensure that employees are recognised as internal customers and that they are properly supported and consulted with regard to service delivery issues.

### ACTIONS

- Through our HR policies and strategy we will foster a culture that respects, values and harnesses difference and recognises the talents and skills of all employees – with equal opportunities for all.
- Use of the Performance Management and Development System (PMDS) as a meaningful mechanism for employees, jointly with their manager, to identify and plan for learning and development needs in support of continuous learning and career development.
- Provide a safe workplace and working methods that respect the environment and address the needs and responsibilities of employees,

customers and contractors in accordance with legislative corporate requirements.

- Maintain up-to-date HR policies and procedures that comply with employment legislation and best practice, and communicate these to all staff.
- Respect the rights of employees to be a member of a recognised trade union.
- Continue to develop our internal communications functions to benefit our staff.

#### **KEY PERFORMANCE INDICATORS**

- Incoming employees are made aware of our customer service principles and mentored to allow for continued delivery of quality customer service.
- Delivery of staff training needs as identified through the PMDS process.
- A workplace based on inclusion, openness, respect and duty of care.
- Appropriate reviews take place of our HR policies and procedures as required and we ensure staff have access to same.

## Monitoring and Evaluating Progress

The Department has put a number of monitoring mechanisms in place in order to ensure we meet the targets we have put in place in this Customer Service Action Plan.

- Our commitments have been reflected in the Department's Statement of Strategy, in divisional business plans and right through to the individual level in the implementation of the Performance Management Development System (PMDS). These are monitored regularly.
- Log of customer will be maintained and significant complaints brought to the attention of the Management Board.
- The provision of ongoing training to staff to maintain quality service across all of the Department's activities.
- Progress towards the implementation of objectives and actions set out in the Customer Charter and Action Plan will be monitored over the course of its three year lifecycle. As part of this process a mid-term review of the Customer Charter and Action Plan 2022 – 2025 will be undertaken.

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## 5.Complaints Procedure

If you are not satisfied that we are meeting the standards that we have set in our Customer Service Action Plan or you have concerns or complaints about any aspect of your dealings with us, we would encourage you to pursue this matter with us. We welcome all feedback and we will deal with all complaints, queries and suggestions in a timely and confidential manner.

The matter should initially be brought to the attention of the senior officer in charge of the area to which the problem relates (in writing, by telephone, or via email). We will deal with any complaints promptly and in confidence.

If the matter is not resolved to your satisfaction at local level, or if you wish to appeal a decision, you can pursue the matter with our Corporate Services team by contacting:

Corporate Services

Department of Rural and Community Development

Trinity Point, 10/11 Leinster Street Lower, Dublin 2, D02 EF85

Tel: 01 7736860

Email: [info@drcd.gov.ie](mailto:info@drcd.gov.ie)

The Department will:

1. Acknowledge receipt of your complaint within five working days and advise you of the named officer who will be handling your complaint;
2. Have the matter fully investigated; and
3. Complete the processing of your complaint within 20 working days.

Where your complaint is upheld and the Department is at fault, we will apologise to you and, where possible, try to rectify the situation immediately and take whatever measures are necessary to prevent a similar situation recurring. Where your complaint is not upheld, we will explain our reasons to you and advise you of your right of appeal to the Ombudsman.

The Ombudsman can investigate complaints about any of our administrative actions or procedures as well as delays or inaction in our dealings with you.

The Ombudsman provides an impartial and independent dispute resolution service.

The contact details for the Ombudsman are:

Office of the Ombudsman,  
6 Earlsfort Terrace, Dublin 2, D02 W773.

Tel: 01 639 5600

Email: [complaints@ombudsman.ie](mailto:complaints@ombudsman.ie)

Complaints will be recorded and monitored to assist in providing us with an accurate picture of the quality of services provided and to identify areas requiring improvement. Feedback will be provided to staff in relation to complaints received and, where complaints disclose system flaws, procedures will be reviewed and appropriate action taken to avoid recurrences.

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## Appendix 1: DRCD Office Locations and Contact Details

The Department's main offices are located in Dublin and Ballina and the Islands Unit is located in Galway.

### Dublin Office

Trinity Point, 10-11 Leinster Street South, Dublin 2, D02 EF85

Telephone: 01 7736860

### Ballina Office

Government Offices, Ballina, Co Mayo, F26 E8N6

Telephone: 01 7736860

### Islands Division

Na Forbacha, Contae na Gaillimhe, H91 KX39

Telephone: 091 503700

### Press Office

Trinity Point, 10-11 Leinster Street South, Dublin 2, D02 EF85

Telephone: 01 773 6843

Email: [press.office@drcd.gov.ie](mailto:press.office@drcd.gov.ie)

### Freedom of Information Officer

Trinity Point, 10-11 Leinster Street South, Dublin 2, D02 EF85

Telephone: 01 7736924

Email: [foi@drcd.gov.ie](mailto:foi@drcd.gov.ie)

### Data Protection Officer

Trinity Point, 10-11 Leinster Street South, Dublin 2, D02 EF85

Telephone: 01 7736924

Email: [dataprotectionunit@drcd.gov.ie](mailto:dataprotectionunit@drcd.gov.ie)



**Access Officer**

Trinity Point, 10-11 Leinster Street South, Dublin 2, D02 EF85

Telephone: 01 773 6860

Email: [accessofficer@drcd.gov.ie](mailto:accessofficer@drcd.gov.ie)