



An Roinn Coimirce Sóisialaí
Department of Social Protection

Department of Social Protection Customer Charter and Action Plan 2023 - 2026



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Chapter 1: Introduction

Department of Social Protection

The Department of Social Protection is the largest payment organisation in the state. Our mission is to promote active participation and inclusion in society through the provision of income supports, employment services and other services.

Our overall objective for 2023 to 2026, as set out in our **Statement of Strategy** is:

To continue putting the people we serve at the centre of all we do: designing, developing, building, and providing efficient and effective services and towards this end, to continue developing our staff, structures, and processes.

Our customers

We serve a wide and diverse group of customers including families, people in employment, unemployed people, people with illnesses and disabilities, carers, older people, and employers. This involves administering more than 100 schemes and services, which affect the lives of almost every person in the State.

Our key services include:

- » the payment of a wide range of social insurance and social assistance income supports such as jobseekers' payments, illness benefit, disability payments, pensions, and supplementary welfare allowances, in addition to the universal payment of child benefit
- » integrated employment services and income supports, through our Intreo, which ensures that people who do not have a job, are supported with income and training, education opportunities, and a range of supports, guidance, and placement services to help them find and secure employment
- » the delivery of a range of employer services including recruitment services, online publication of job vacancies, and employment supports which include, for example, wage subsidy schemes for people with disabilities, and redundancy and insolvency services
- » a range of community services to promote social inclusion and provide a pathway to employment for those who are unemployed

- » supporting and leading analysis and the development of policy in areas including income distribution, social transfers, pension provision, social inclusion, labour market participation, and public employment services
- » participation in the implementation of government strategies for social inclusion under the **Roadmap for Social Inclusion** (2020-2025)

Our structure

The department has over 7,000 permanent full-time equivalent staff, who provide our services through:

- » our network of 61 Intreo Centres which provide services primarily to jobseekers and one-parent families
- » a range of service partners including Branch Office providers, Local Area Employment Services, National Employment Services, Community Employment, Tús providers and EmployAbility companies
- » centralised offices which administer schemes and oversee policy at various locations countrywide
- » customer contact centres
- » two digital service channels **MyWelfare** and **Welfare Partners**

Our commitment to quality customer service

The delivery of excellent customer service is central to our mission of supporting and enabling individuals to achieve their potential in Irish society. Most of the staff employed in the department engage directly with our customers daily.

We believe that a positive working environment is an essential foundation for us to deliver our services effectively. To ensure our staff provide quality service to our customers, they are equipped through our People Strategy, with the supports to build and maintain skills and capacity. This strategy is informed by the values of the department and aligned with our broader business strategy.

Listening to our customers is very important to us. We engage widely with our customers and stakeholders to inform them about changes to our schemes and services, to get their feedback on how we are doing through regular surveys, and to get their ideas and suggested improvements. We document all complaints, comments, and compliments from our customers. This is a valuable source of feedback by which service delivery standards can be monitored and reviewed.

Our customers are choosing to engage with us digitally in increasing numbers, using the **MyWelfare** and **Welfare Partners** platforms. We aim to become a digital-first organisation, while continuing to offer a range of other contact options for those who do not want to engage with us online. Our **Statement of Digital Strategy** (2022 – 2025) sets our direction, and guides our work prioritisation and cross-divisional collaboration.

We are guided in our efforts by the **Better Public Services** transformation strategy, published in May 2023, by the Department of Public Expenditure, National Development Plan Delivery, and Reform, which supports public sector organisations to deliver for the public and build trust. Our commitment to quality customer service is enhanced by our active participation in the public sector Quality Customer Service Network and membership of, and accreditation from, the International Social Security Association (ISSA).

About our Customer Charter and Action Plan 2023 – 2026

Our Customer Charter and Action plan is based on stakeholder and staff engagement. It sets out:

- » our commitments to our customers on the level of service they can expect from us
- » the key actions we will deliver over the next three years to continue the enhancement of service quality

Our Customer Action Plan is structured using the 12 Guiding Principles of Quality Customer Service. These principles are at the core of the government's Quality Customer Service Initiative, which was established in 1997 to improve how the Public Service delivers services and engages with its customers.

The 12 Guiding Principles:

- » **Quality Service Standards**
- » **Equality and Diversity**
- » **Physical Access**
- » **Information**
- » **Timeliness and Courtesy**
- » **Complaints**
- » **Appeals**
- » **Consultation and Evaluation**
- » **Choice**
- » **Official Languages Equality**
- » **Better Co-ordination**
- » **Internal Customer**

Chapter 2: Customer Charter



Our Commitments to You

When you engage with us, we will:

- » greet you politely and treat you with courtesy and respect, regardless of your gender, marital status, family status, age, disability, sexual orientation, race, religion, or ethnicity
- » direct you to the service(s) or supports that you need
- » inform you of your rights, entitlements, and responsibilities
- » protect your personal information in line with all data protection requirements
- » ensure that our online information and services are up-to-date, inclusive and accessible to all
- » provide access to necessary translation and interpretation services, including Irish Sign Language, with advance notice
- » make sure our public offices are fully accessible for all, and comply with health and safety standards
- » listen and provide an appropriate response should you have feedback or a complaint

What to Expect When You Contact Us

We will:

- » provide clear, accessible, accurate and comprehensive information on all our schemes and services
- » use clear plain language in our application forms, information leaflets and written communications
- » ensure that information provided on our online platform **MyWelfare**, and our website **gov.ie/welfare** is up-to-date and accessible

When you contact us by letter or email:

- » we will aim to process your correspondence as promptly as possible and will respond to you within a maximum of 15 working days
- » we will always provide you with a contact name and a telephone number, email address or postal address, so that you can contact us again if you need to

When you contact us by telephone:

- » we will answer all calls promptly and courteously
- » we will give you our name, identify our area of work, and provide you with the information that you need
- » if we cannot deal with your query immediately, we will find the information you need and call you back promptly
- » if your call needs to be transferred to another area, we will tell you the name of the business area and offer to transfer your call or provide you with a phone number

When you make an application to us:

- » we will process any application you make to us in a timely and impartial manner, in accordance with legislation
- » we will let you know the outcome of your application as promptly as possible, in writing
- » we will communicate effectively to ensure that you understand the outcome of your application, and the reasons behind it
- » we will advise you of your right to review a decision and/or appeal the outcome of your application to the Social Welfare Appeals Office, if you wish to do so



How You Can Help Us

We ask when dealing with us that you:

- » have your Personal Public Service Number (PPSN) and/or Employer Number, your Public Services Card or suitable photo identity available
- » take the time to complete all forms fully, clearly, correctly and give full and accurate information
- » ensure that you bring/share all documents required for any in-person or online appointments
- » respond promptly to any correspondence from the department
- » notify us of any change to your personal circumstances that could impact your eligibility for services or supports
- » treat our staff and other customers with courtesy and respect regardless of their gender, marital status, family status, age, disability, sexual orientation, race, religion, or ethnicity – the department will not accept behaviour that is physically or psychologically abusive or threatening to our staff or customers
- » do not record our staff in the course of their work, this applies to any form of sound recording and any type of still picture or video recording
- » adhere to any public health advice that may be in place
- » understand that our staff have the right to terminate a call or meeting if the customer is considered aggressive, offensive, abusive or intimidating
- » ensure you have a verified **MyGovID** account to access our online services at **MyWelfare**

Access to Our Services

Access to our services for people who have a disability:

We will ensure that our offices and services are available for people with disabilities. We have appointed Access Officers in accordance with section 26(2) of the **Disability Act 2005**. Access Officers are the point of contact for people with disabilities.

They will help you by arranging and coordinating assistance and guidance to access our services.

Where possible, we ask that you contact your local Access Officer in advance of your visit, if you need specific supports to help you access our services or buildings.

A list of our Access Officers and their contact information is available online at gov.ie - **Access Officers under the Disability Act 2005**.

Seirbhísí trí mheán na Gaeilge:

Tá foireann againn atá in ann ár seirbhísí a sholáthar trí mheán na Gaeilge. Más mian leat do ghnó a dhéanamh linn trí mheán na Gaeilge, déanfaimid gach iarracht cabhrú leat.

Is féidir linn rochtain a sholáthar ar chainteoir Gaeilge, chomh maith le foirmeacha iarratais agus doiciméid i nGaeilge más gá.

Services through Irish:

We have staff who can provide our services through Irish. If you wish to conduct your business with us through Irish, we will make every effort to help you.

We can provide access to an Irish speaker, as well as application forms and documents in Irish if required.

Translation and Interpretation services:

If you need any of our translation or interpretation services, our staff will arrange these for you with advance notice.

We can provide access to our services in all languages. Our staff can access a language interpreter by phone to assist you in your dealings with the department. This can be provided in any language. We can also provide you with an interpreter by video or in-person.

While help from English speaking family, friends or translation apps can be used in limited circumstances (for example, requesting an application form or asking basic information such as opening hours), they should not be relied on for official engagements with us, such as

meetings or interviews. With advance notice, we will provide an interpreter for such engagements either by phone, video, or in-person, for any language.

We can also provide an Irish Sign Language interpreter in-person or by video link.

The department provides a document translation service, on request, where the documents are required to support your application. This includes the translation of documents into or from English, Irish and any other language, as well as alternative formats such as braille and audio translation. We can also translate correspondence from the department to you, if you require it.

Privacy and Data Protection

We take your privacy and the protection of your personal data very seriously. Any personal information which you volunteer will be treated securely and confidentially in accordance with,

the **Data Protection Acts 1988-2018** and the **General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR)** and the department's **Privacy Statement**.

Data Protection Officer

In accordance with Article 37 of the GDPR, the department has appointed a Data Protection Officer who heads a dedicated Data Protection Unit. If you wish to contact our Data Protection Officer you can do so in either of the following ways:

By post:

Data Protection Officer,
Department of Social Protection,
Goldsmith House, Pearse Street, Dublin 2
D02 YY17

By email: dpo@welfare.ie

Use of recording equipment

The Department of Social Protection does not allow the use of any type of recording on its premises or any location where interviews or meetings take place, for example phone or virtual meetings/webinars.

This includes our Intreo Centres and Social Welfare Branch Offices, which are places where people conduct private business with the State. Our customers' privacy is important to us, and no recording is permitted. If it comes to the department's attention that any recording has taken place or that the data protection rights of customers and/or the staff of the department

have been breached, the department will take all reasonable steps to protect the privacy and data protection rights of customers and staff.

This applies to any form of sound recording and any type of still picture or video recording, whether including sound recording or not, and covers any type of device used for these purposes.

This policy is in place to protect the privacy of our customers and staff. Use of recording equipment by any person is a breach of this policy.

Social Media

The Department of Social Protection uses social media to share important information and updates. You can view the department's Social Media Terms and Conditions of Engagement on gov.ie - **Social Media Terms and Conditions of Engagement**.



gov.ie/welfare



Your Feedback

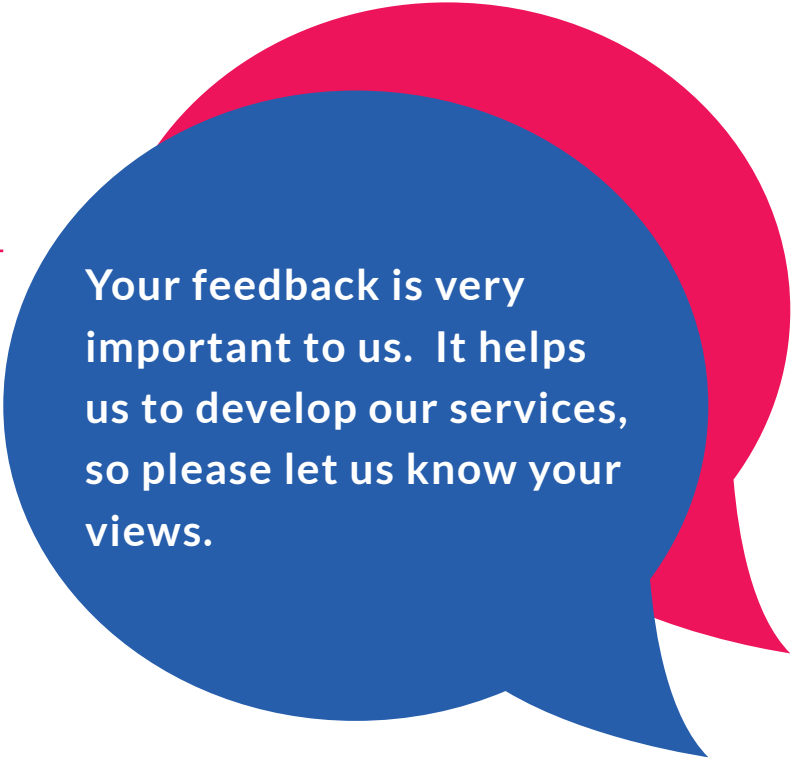
Feedback

We are interested in hearing your comments, compliments, and complaints. We commit to using this feedback to assist us in providing the best possible customer service.

Complaints

We aim to resolve complaints at local level. Where this is not possible, you can submit a formal complaint. This will be investigated and dealt with promptly, impartially and in confidence and will have no negative impact on your claim or payment. We will aim to deal with your complaint as promptly as possible and will respond to you within 15 working days.

If you make a complaint to us, you will never prejudice your right to make an appeal to the Social Welfare Appeals Office, or to raise issues with the Workplace Relations Commission, the Ombudsman or under the Disability Act.



Your feedback is very important to us. It helps us to develop our services, so please let us know your views.

Contact us:

Email your comments, compliments and complaints to our customer service team at **customerservice@welfare.ie**

You can also give us your feedback on our customer feedback form on gov.ie - **Customer Feedback**

You can ask any of our staff to register a comment, compliment or complaint on your behalf - a list of all our social welfare phone numbers and contact details can be found on gov.ie - **Social Welfare Phone Numbers.**

Chapter 3: Customer Action Plan



Quality Service Standards

Publish an up-to-date Customer Charter and display it in our public offices and headquarters

Monitor the customer service standards set out in our Customer Charter and Action Plan to ensure the delivery of a quality service



Equality and Diversity

Investigate the barriers to accessing our services, and the potential need for a protocol enabling advocates to easily act on behalf of customers, subject to statutory provisions

Review availability of information in other languages to identify gaps

Raise awareness of our network of Access Officers who are responsible for co-ordinating access for persons with disabilities to our offices and services



Physical Access

Introduce JAM (Just a Minute) cards to Intreo Centres to assist customers who may need extra time or help

Complete the rollout of sensory rooms in all Intreo Centres

Standardise and clearly display opening hours in our public offices



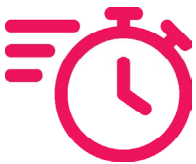
Information

Review and increase the level of proactive communications to keep our customers informed of the status of their claim or query and other important information

Review and ensure our correspondence to customers is in plain English and easy to understand

Ensure our interactive voice recording messages (IVR) on our contact centre phones are clear, user-friendly, and direct customers to the relevant areas

Update our communication and social media strategy



Timeliness and Courtesy

Staff to give their names in all interactions with our customers

Invest in training for frontline staff to ensure they have knowledge and skills to serve our customers with courtesy



Complaints

Ensure our complaints process is well publicised, clear and accessible for customers

Monitor and evaluate complaint trends to improve our services



Appeals

Ensure our appeals process is well publicised, clear and accessible for customers

Monitor and evaluate appeals trends to improve the quality and consistency of our decisions



Consultation and Evaluation

Incorporate a design mindset and a customer centric design approach to our services

Engage proactively with customers and their representative groups on proposed new services, or significant changes to existing services



Choice

Implement an omnichannel customer contact system, using technology to introduce more choice for our customers, and improve contact with us

Migrate more schemes online with a view to having 90% of applicable services online by 2030

Progress the roll out of self-service desks in all Intreo Centres, to enable customers to access our online services



Official Languages Equality

Ensure services are available to our customers in their choice of official language, Irish or English

Improve the level and standard of services provided through Irish

Ensure staff are made aware and reminded of their obligations under the Official Languages Act



Better Co-ordination

Use technology to equip frontline staff to deliver up-to-date, comprehensive information to our customers

Centralise and improve the co-ordination of our customer and stakeholder events

Actively engage with the cross governmental Life Events Portal project



Internal Customer

Provide clear guidance and training supports for staff on delivering quality customer service

Draft an implementation plan, in consultation with staff, to ensure that the commitments of the Customer Charter and Action Plan are fulfilled

Recognise and celebrate quality customer service across the department, and share positive feedback with staff

Improve communications between central support units and staff to keep them informed and updated about changes

Foster and drive a positive working environment for staff
