



**Oifig an
Rialaitheora Pleanála**
Office of the
Planning Regulator

CUSTOMER SERVICE ACTION PLAN

2024 - 2026

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 commitment to build a world-class planning oversight body. Our Customer Charter sets out our key customer commitments in clear terms and the standards we have in place to help achieve these commitments.

Taking account of the 2022 updates to the official guidance and building on the successful implementation of our previous Action Plan, this Customer Service Action Plan 2024-2026 identifies the steps that we will take to deliver on the commitments and standards set out in our Customer Charter. We will review implementation of this Action Plan at key stages to be sure that appropriate action is being taken on an ongoing basis to achieve our objectives.

The role of the OPR

The 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 & Heritage and to the Oireachtas. The OPR has three main functions:

- i. independent evaluation of all statutory forward planning;
- ii. examination of the systems and procedures used by local authorities and An Bord Pleanála, in the performance of their planning functions; and,
- iii. driving national research, training, education and public information programmes.

The OPR's Strategy Statement sets out our purpose, our vision for the organisation and the values that underpin their achievement. Upon establishment, five key organisational goals were identified, these are:

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:

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

In addition, the OPR's internal teams and staff are recognised as customers and it is important that the internal customer is also acknowledged (see principle 12).

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
- Public sector duty regarding equality, diversity and integration including 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 implemented an Oversight Agreement with the Department of Housing, Local Government & Heritage.
- We implement a Performance Delivery Agreement with the Department of Housing, Local Government Heritage on an annual basis.
- We will seek feedback and suggestions from our customers on ways in which we can enhance our service provision and delivery.
- We use internal management information systems to inform our customer service policies.
- Where necessary we use independent external experts to ensure full compliance with statutory obligations, e.g. Health and Safety standards.
- We review and update our Customer Charter on an ongoing basis in response to wider developments and conduct a mid-term evaluation of progress in relation to the actions as included within this Customer Service Action Plan.
- We are developing a Case Management System to further improve our management and monitoring of customer engagement.
- We publish quarterly reports summarising progress in relation to key deliverables and publish an annual report comprehensively outlining how we are fulfilling our statutory functions.

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 our customers are informed of the standards of service they can expect from us. Our commitment to quality customer service, as well as our Customer Charter and Customer Service Action Plan, will be displayed prominently on our website.
- Review and update our Customer Charter on an ongoing basis in response to wider developments and conduct a mid-term evaluation of progress in relation to the actions included in our Customer Service Action Plan.

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. This includes ensuring that staff receive training on equality, human rights and disability awareness matters.
- Ensure that the designated role of Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) Officer continues to be fulfilled and oversees our internal EDI Forum.
- Maintain a working environment and culture that is attentive 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.

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 that all areas of our buildings are clean, comfortable and comply with occupational and safety standards.
- Ensure that the designated role of Health & Safety Officer continues to be fulfilled with appropriate training as required.
- Ensure that a number of staff members fulfil roles as Fire Wardens and receive appropriate training.
- Ensure ease of access for any customers with disabilities or specific needs required to attend at our offices.
- Ensure that the designated role of Access Officer continues to be fulfilled with a dedicated email account in place for any queries. Any such issues arising can be directed to accessofficer@opr.ie.

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 publically available information and correspondence with members of the public is, as far as is possible, in clear language, limiting the usage of jargon and technical terms.
- Maintain an up-to-date / relevant 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 digital technology to help overcome business challenges, improve the delivery of services and add value for the organisation and our stakeholders / customers.

- Publish quarterly reports summarising progress in relation to key deliverables and publish an annual report comprehensively outlining how we are fulfilling our statutory functions.
- Disseminate information in various formats to meet the various requirements of our diverse customer base.

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 customer calls are answered promptly during core office hours (9am to 4pm with lunch from 1pm to 2pm) and that staff provide their name when answering telephone calls.
- Keep the transferring of calls to a minimum, in favour of a commitment for a prompt call-back from the appropriate official. Where calls are transferred we will provide the name of the official to whom the call is being transferred.
- Ensure that voicemail is available where calls cannot be answered immediately 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 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 strive to resolve complaints within 21 working days, where this is not possible an interim reply will issue.
- Ensure that our designated Quality Customer Service Officer oversees the effective and timely coordination of any customer service complaints received.

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 a decision in relation to their customer service 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 in relation to the delivery of the OPR's statutory functions and work programmes, reflecting comments and suggestions as appropriate.
- Coordinate 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:

- Keep our Irish Language Policy up-to-date and adhere to its objectives.
- 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 stationery 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.

- Operate a protocol to ensure the efficient provision of information to Oireachtas members.
- 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.
- Proactively engage on an inter-agency basis with a view to evaluating and enhancing service delivery and to contribute to the development of inter-agency initiatives.
- Promote opportunities to enhance and develop partnership arrangements with other sectors, including non-governmental organisations, property sector professionals, professional associations and 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 and promoting staff wellbeing.
- Ensure that the training and development needs of each staff member are provided for through the continued 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.