

# dlr County Council Customer Service Action Plan 2017-2020

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## Introduction

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This **Customer Service Action Plan (CSAP)** has been developed following the adoption of the Council's new 5-year Corporate Plan 2015-2019. The Corporate Plan together with the Customer Service Plan set out to fulfil the Council's key roles as a local authority, namely:

- To provide appropriate quality services for residents, ratepayers and visitors to the County
- To provide and facilitate the development of County infrastructure
- To fulfil a regulatory role in areas including planning, traffic, waste management, road safety etc
- To facilitate economic and community development in partnership with other agencies and business, community and voluntary organisations

The **CSAP** has a key role to play in realising these tasks and its development has been influenced by a number of external and internal factors including:

- A rapidly changing external communications environment
- The growth of new media channels
- The on-going development of new technologies
- The priority for active, regular stakeholder engagement
- The enhanced role in economic and community development
- The requirement to achieve efficiencies and deliver a high quality service to all our stakeholders

The document also includes key procedures and protocols relating to key areas of communications including:

- A range of actions outlined in The Ten Principles of Quality Customer Service – **Appendix 1**
- Customer Charter – **Appendix 2**
- Official Complaints Procedure – **Appendix 3**
- Freedom of Information – **Appendix 4**
- Data Protection – **Appendix 5**
- Irish scheme – **Appendix 6**
- Policy in relation to vexatious customers – **Appendix 7**

The **CSAP** provides a focus on the key events, milestones and activities around which the customer service activities will be delivered.

## Purpose

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The primary purpose of the **CSAP** is to act in line with and support to the dlr Corporate Plan 2015-2019.

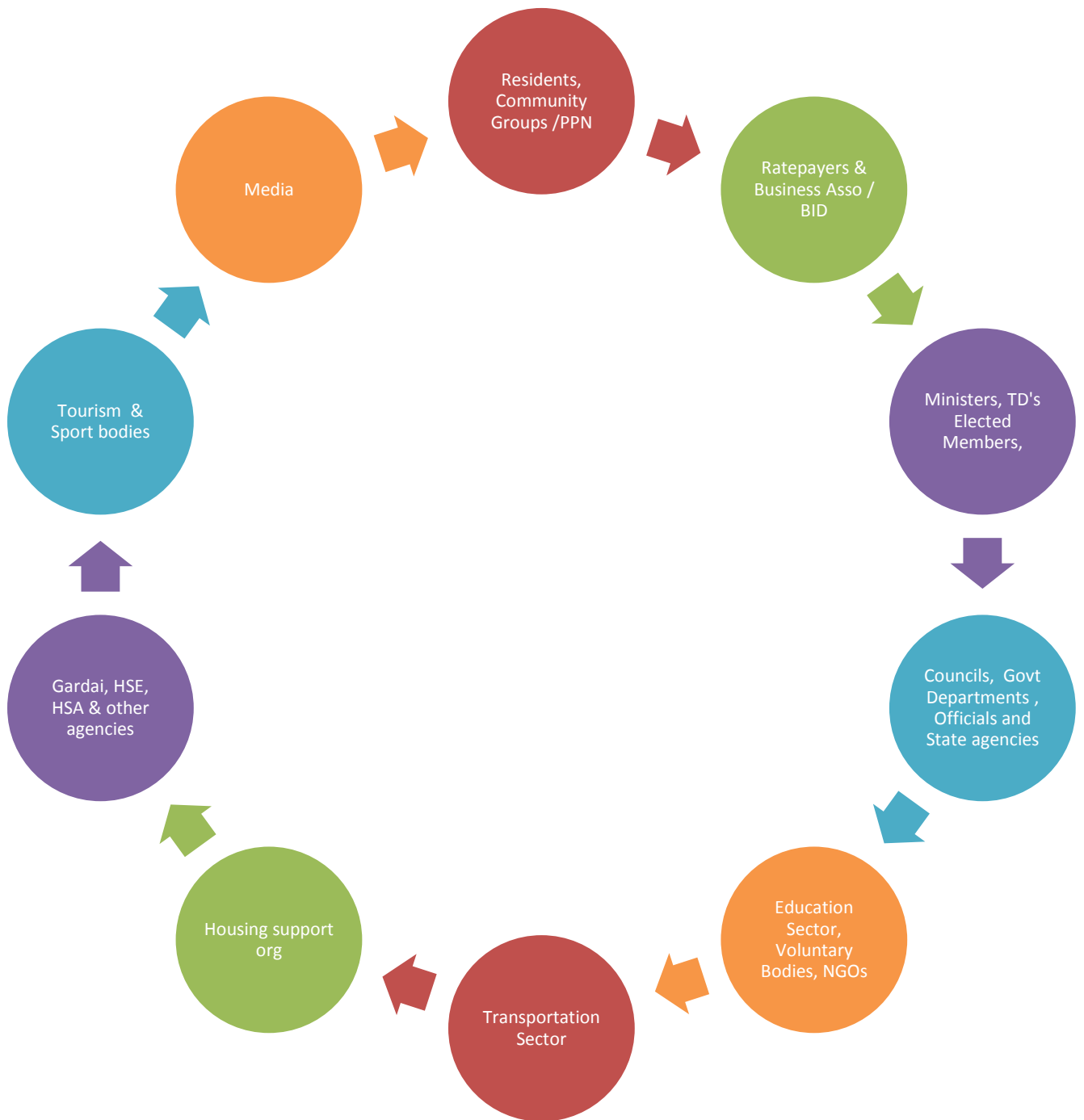
As part of the Corporate Plan process a Vision, Mission, Values and Themes were developed arising from the consultative process with all the Council's stakeholders.

## Stakeholders/Partnerships/Collaborators

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The Council has a broad range of stakeholders/groups/partnerships with which our role includes positive active engagement in the delivery of customer services.

The Council's key stakeholders include:



## Stakeholders/Partnerships/Collaborators

### *Corporate Plan Vision statements*

The Vision provides the direction for the Council and the County through the period to 2019 while the Mission, Values and Themes provide a framework for all the Council's key business and service delivery priorities during the period of the Plan.

**The County - "A smart vibrant county which is attractive, inclusive and accessible"**

**The Council - "A Council that shapes a better future for our County and all its communities"**

### *The dlr Mission Statement*

The Mission Statement of the Council, as articulated in the Corporate Plan is that:

**"Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown County Council will lead in the delivery, coordination and regulation of quality public services for our communities, in partnership with our stakeholders"**

### *Values – Shaping a Better Future For Our County*

Our ambition is to act at all times in accordance with the values expressed in the Corporate Plan, to the benefit of all our stakeholders. Those values centre around being **accountable, customer focused, proactive, excellence driven, cost conscious and courageous.**

## Customer Service Goals outlined in Corporate Plan

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The key customer service goals set out in the Council's Corporate Plan are:

- To have a customer centric approach to the delivery of excellent services and supports
- To use all channels of communications to ensure effective transparent communication and feedback from stakeholders

## Customer Service Objectives outlined in Corporate Plan

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- To review the Customer Charter and put in place controls for delivery
- To review, monitor and develop the Council's Customer Relationship Management System
- To facilitate all Departments in delivering effective and efficient services to all customers through the effective use of IT systems
- To promote a communications culture in the organisation ensuring customer service delivery is consistent across the organisation
- To provide effective points of contact for callers and visitors to the Council
- To promote the use of 'Citizen Space' as a means of communication with our communities
- To use social media to communicate timely information and messages on Council activities, events and news
- To monitor the effectiveness of internal communications
- To review the structure and content of our corporate website in driving customer service delivery

## Implementation and Monitoring

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The targets set out in the Ten Principles of Quality Customer Service described in Appendix 1 will be monitored on a quarterly basis and progress reported annually in the Annual Service Delivery Plan.

This Plan is linked to the Corporate Plan and there are a range of other mechanisms that can be utilised to measure progress. These include the following:-

- Annual Service Delivery Plan
- Annual Statement of Performance Objectives
- Quarterly Management Report
- Annual Report

## Appendices

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### **Ten Principles of Quality Customer Service - Appendix 1**

Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown County Council will undertake, in the period 2017-2020, a range of actions to improve the quality of its services to customers. The actions to be undertaken are represented under the Ten Principles of Quality Customer Service. A description of each principle is also included.

#### **QC Principle 1 Quality Service Targets**

Description: Publish a Charter that outlines the nature and quality of service which customers can expect and display it prominently at the point of service delivery.

<b>Action Step</b>	<b>Performance Indicators</b>
Promote and create an awareness of our customer charter in all public offices and on the public website	Customer Charter on display in all offices and on the public website
Ensure customer service is captured within the competency framework for the recruitment of new staff and the promotion of existing staff	Ensure "competency in customer service" is included in all job specs as a skill requirement
Develop Quality Customer Service projects initiated by the DLRCC Innovation Programme	Number of Quality Customer Service projects initiated from the Open Innovation Programme
Encourage and promote excellence in Quality Customer Service	No of customer service entries for Excellence in Local Government Awards
Report annually on progress in achieving targets	Annual report to Senior Management and Elected Members on progress against key Customer Service Action Plan targets.

## QC Principle 2 Equality/Diversity

### Description:

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.

Action Step	Performance Indicator
Promote equality / diversity awareness among staff	Number of awareness raising initiatives e.g. training, and workshops
Provide information in formats accessible to people with disabilities	Number and nature of requests for information in alternative formats

## QC Principle 3 Physical Access

Description: 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.

Action Steps	Performance Indicators
Ensure access is a priority concern in all offices and in refurbishment of existing offices	<p>New offices and refurbishments meet accessibility regulations</p> <p>Develop Customer Service Centre of Excellence as first point of contact for all customers in County Hall closing all inaccessible counters</p> <p>Increase customer service opening hours</p>
Ensure all DLRCC locations comply with health and safety legislation	Safety Statements updated and implemented in all locations



## QC Principle 4 Information

Description: 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.

Action Steps	Performance Indicators
Train staff to ensure they are equipped with the technical knowledge, skills and attributes to deliver a quality service	Develop Training Plan/Intranet will be used as a portal to up-skill staff on service delivery issues in a timely manner.
Present DLRCC information to the public in a format easy to understand and up to date	Number of press releases issued Number of dlr Times and E-zines published Number of followers on dlr Facebook and Twitter Accounts Number of users accessing the website each year
Actions to improve communication with customers as outlined in the DLR Communications Strategy Action Plan	Person assigned responsibility for communicating to key customer groups Review of existing publications Review of the effectiveness of open days, conferences and other events

## QC Principle 5 Timeliness and Courtesy

Description: 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 transactions.

Action Steps	Performance Indicators
Adhere to protocols regarding timeliness and courtesy specified in the Customer Charter	Satisfaction levels among surveyed groups in relation to timeliness and courtesy
All staff to activate personalised voicemail and out of office email on DLRCC telephones & mobile phones	Develop and circulate Guidelines in regard :  Telephones with personalised voicemail  Out of office for email
Provide appropriate updating of customer service skills where required	Number of staff participating in customer service training

## QC Principle 6 Complaints and Appeals

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

Action	Performance Indicators
Feedback mechanism on <a href="http://www.dlrcoco.ie">www.dlrcoco.ie</a>	Feedback form is available <a href="http://www.dlrcoco.ie">www.dlrcoco.ie</a>  No of likes on usefulness of information published on the website is measured
Review complaints recorded on CRM	No of complaints recorded on CRM are measured
Review official complaints under the Official Complaints Procedure	No of official complaints are measured and evaluated

## QC Principle 7 Consultation and Evaluation

Description: 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.

<b>Action</b>	<b>Performance Indicators</b>
Supporting civic engagement in the county	Number of PPN/deputations meetings held. Number of consultations promoted through the Consultation Hub
Carry out customer survey	Customer Survey to be carried out by end 2018
Evaluate a range of dlr programmes and activities	Numbers of evaluation reports and action plans completed using data from CRM, footfall figures. No of public consultations on Consultation Hub
Post event review for each major event completed by event organiser / head of department such as Marlay Park	Post event review meeting held and lessons learned completed for major events

## QC Principle 8 Choice

Description: 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.

<b>Action</b>	<b>Performance Indicators</b>
Provide services through a variety of channels	<a href="http://www.dlrcoco.ie">www.dlrcoco.ie</a> has been launched and digital payments are being expanded. Online forms will be developed as part of the next stage of the website development. Social media will also be expanded to enhance service delivery and communications around services.

Provision of choice in payment options	All payments may be made a Customer Service Centre of Excellence
Newsletters available in online format and emailed to stakeholders	The dlr Times is published 5 times a year. Expand its audience by circulating digitally and traditional. Email list of stakeholders will be developed to expand circulation Expand circulation by promotion on social media

### QC Principle 9 Official Languages Equality

Description: 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. The actions listed here are agreed actions outlined in the DLRCC Irish Language Scheme

Action	Performance Indicators
Services will be available through Irish	Number of customers availing of services through Irish
DLRCC will ensure 10 % of our press releases will issue in both English and Irish	Proportion of press releases issued in Irish

### QC Principle 10 Internal Customer

Description: Ensure that staff are properly supported and consulted with regard to service delivery issues ensuring quality timely services for Councillors and customers

Action	Performance Indicators
Schedule of staff meetings to be outlined for each departmental business unit	Number of business meetings scheduled with minutes published on Intranet

Develop departmental FAQs to support Customer Service Centre	FAQs to be developed and robust mechanism developed to ensure timely information for Customer Service Centre
Develop a change management model in relation in the delivery of excellent customer services	Customer Service Centre will deliver a transformed customer service experience for citizens
Introduce a staff learning and developmental portal on Intranet	Intranet will provide learning portal for staff to include training on Microsoft suite, providing communication and team working resources, business strategy and learning materials
Improve employee engagement	Intranet will improve employee engagement and internal communications

## **Customer Charter – Appendix 2**

### **Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown Customer Charter**

The Customer Charter contains information on what you can expect from your dealings with Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown County Council regarding service delivery. We are committed to giving you a quality service by trying to resolve your query at the first point of contact where possible. This means that we will try and answer queries and not transfer you to another area to be dealt with.

#### **Our Commitment to You**

To provide a high standard of customer service in an efficient and helpful manner

Treat everyone fairly, impartially and with courtesy

Deal with your enquiry as quickly as possible with due regard to privacy and confidentiality

Give you reference numbers for ease of tracking your query

Make it more convenient and efficient for the residents and businesses of DLR to deal with us, by providing more services online

#### **Openness and Impartiality**

We undertake to;

Respond to you in a fair and open manner

Provide easy-to-understand information

Keep you informed about the services we deliver

Hold your personal details safely and securely, in line with our data commitments

Value feedback from customers and use it to improve our services

Offer a complaints procedure for customers dissatisfied with the quality of service received

## **Our Performance**

We undertake to

Monitor and evaluate our performance

Acknowledge all written correspondence and emails within 7 working days of receipt

Answer all telephone calls promptly and courteously

Respond to all Social Media queries promptly and transparently

Ensure our website and social media are kept up to date

## **Our Service through Languages**

We will aim to accommodate our customers who wish to conduct their business through Irish, sign language or other languages where possible

## **Physical Access**

We will as far as possible, provide clean, accessible public offices that ensure privacy, comply with occupational and safety standards, and facilitate access for all our customers.

County Hall is open weekdays from 09:00am to 17:00pm (16:30pm Fridays)

## **Help Us to Help You By;**

Providing full and accurate information

Quoting reference numbers where available during correspondence

Ensuring application forms are returned on time

## **Customer's Role**

Just as the Customer is entitled to the highest level of customer service, Councillors and members of staff should receive the same levels of respect and courtesy from the Customer.

The following conduct is not acceptable from customers: -

- Behaviour that is disruptive and interferes with the use and enjoyment of Council facilities.
- Harassment of staff or members of the public by use of abusive, racist, obscene or threatening language.
- Use of violence or threat of violence towards staff and/or members of the public.
- Malicious damage to and/or theft of Council property.
- The use of alcohol and illicit drugs while using Council facilities.
- Smoking in Council premises.
- Leaving personal property unattended at any Council premises.



## **Customer complaints handling – Appendix 3**

### **Customer complaints handling**

dlr County Council aspires to the highest standards in delivering the range of services provided to our customers – householders, ratepayers and visitors to the county.

In the first instance, the Council will try to resolve informally complaints made by customers that are dissatisfied with the Council's response to a request for services and/or the manner in which the service is or is not delivered.

However, in the event that the customer is still unhappy with the Council's response, the following protocols may be invoked.

#### ***Standard procedure for complaints is as follows:***

All official complaints received must be in writing/email and signed by the complainant. Staff are committed to providing assistance to the person making the complaint, with the assurance that the complaint will be treated sensitively and confidentially as far as possible. Application forms to facilitate the public when making a complaint are available in all our public offices, libraries and on the website.

Complaints will be acknowledged by letter within seven working days.

The Complaints Officer will review all files on the matter and issue his/her decision where possible within two weeks of receipt of the complaint. Where we are unable to process a decision within this time the service user will be informed of the expected date of the final decision.

Complaints can be appealed to the Senior Executive Officer of the department who will have full responsibility for reviewing all appeals. The appeal process will be completed within 21 days of receipt of the appeal.

Complaints can be reviewed by the Office of the Ombudsman at any stage.

Dealing with a complaint is generally a straightforward process. In a small number of cases, people pursue their complaints in a way which can either impede the investigation of their complaint or can have significant resource issues for the Council. This can happen either while their complaint is being investigated, or once the Council has finished dealing with the complaint.

It is important to distinguish between:

- People who make a number of complaints because they really think things have gone wrong;
- People who make unreasonably persistent complaints.

If the complainant is persisting because his/her complaints have not been considered in full this should be addressed - normally by invoking the next stage of the complaints procedure. Referral to the Office of the Ombudsman is a further option for the complainant.

However, if the Council has considered the matter fully and has demonstrated this to the complainant, then consideration of whether the complainant is now unreasonably persistent and/or vexatious is required

## FREEDOM OF INFORMATION – Appendix 4

### **Freedom of Information**

The Freedom of Information Act, 2014 entitles a member of the public to apply for information held by public bodies.

The Freedom of Information (FOI) Act, 2014 affirm three legal rights established by its two predecessors (The FOI Act 1997 and the FOI (Amendment) Act 2003):

- **everyone is entitled to access information held by public bodies**
- **everyone is entitled to have official information about them changed when it is incomplete, incorrect or misleading**
- **everyone is entitled to find out the reasons why decisions were made that affect themselves**

## **DATA PROTECTION – Appendix 5**

### **Data Protection**

#### **The Data Protection Acts 1988 and 2003**

The Data Protection Acts 1988 and 2003 require that Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown County Council is responsible for the fair processing of personal data. The Acts protect the personal privacy and uphold the rights of the individual whilst placing certain responsibilities on those persons processing personal data.

The Acts set out the general principle that individuals should be in a position to control how data relating to them is used. DLRCC must comply with certain standards in handling personal data, and acknowledge that individuals have rights under the Data Protection Act.

#### **How do I access information that DLRCC may have on file about me?**

To request access to your details, please send a letter or email to the Communications Office at [foi@dlrcoco.ie](mailto:foi@dlrcoco.ie) requesting a copy of this information, clearly marking your request DATA PROTECTION REQUEST. You should receive these details within 40 days of your request.

In your request you should:

1. Give any details that will help the person to identify you and find your data – for example any previous address or your date of birth and
2. Be clear about which details you are looking for if you only want certain information. This will help the organisation or person respond more quickly

**If you would like further information or if you have any general queries in relation to the Data Protection Act and how it may apply to you, or if you would like to refer to specific case studies, please refer to:**

**The Office of the Data Protection Commissioner, who can be contacted at:**  
[info@dataprotection.ie](mailto:info@dataprotection.ie) Tel: 1890 252 231

## **Irish language scheme – Appendix 6**

### **Irish Language Scheme**

The Irish Language Scheme 2016-2019 was prepared under Section 15 of the Official Languages Act, 2003 by Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown County Council. Section 11 provides for the preparation by a public body of a statutory Scheme specifying the services it proposes to provide:

- through the medium of Irish
- through the medium of English and
- through the medium of both Irish and English

The Scheme sets out the measures that will be implemented in relation to the services which will be provided through the medium of Irish during the life of the Scheme. The Scheme also sets out the actions the Council proposes to take to ensure that reasonable progress is made during the period of the Scheme in achieving the ultimate goal of ensuring that services that are not currently provided in Irish by the Dún Laoghaire Rathdown County Council will eventually be so provided. This will be done with due regard to the underlying level of demand for specific services to be provided in Irish and the resources available to the Council - both human and financial.

The Scheme can be accessed (insert link) and communications prescribed through Irish are described at (insert link)

## **Policy in relation to vexatious customers – appendix 7**

### **Procedure for abusive or vexatious complaints and complainants:**

From time to time, a complaint or a complainant may be considered abusive or vexatious. The decision to categorise a complainant as abusive or vexatious will be an exceptional step, and should be made by a Director of Services who has not been directly involved in the complaint or with the complainant. This should only be done in a case where there is a clear written record of the complaint and such record shows a pattern of behaviour which is unacceptable. The types of behaviour and actions which may lead to this scenario may include:

- Refusing to co-operate with the Council's, and the statutory, complaints procedures
- Harassing staff through the use of excessive and unnecessary emails, letters phone calls etc.
- Multiple repetition of the complaint through a variety of channels into the Council.
- Use of inappropriate and/or abusive language in dealing with staff

In referring the complaint to a Director of Services to assess its vexatious or abusive nature, the following steps need to be taken:

- The Council will ensure that the complaint is being, or has been, investigated properly according to the Council's complaints procedure;
- Although each complaint is unique, the Council will deal with the complaint in line with other complaints of a similar nature in order to apply a consistent approach
- The Council will contact the complainant to:
- Discuss his or her behaviour and explain about the actions that the Council may take if his or her behaviour does not change.
- If the complainant has not already had a meeting about the complaint with a member or members of staff, the Council will consider offering the complainant a meeting with a senior member of staff to attempt to dispel misunderstandings and move matters towards a resolution.

The complainant should be advised in writing:

- Why we believe their behaviour falls into an abusive/vexatious category
- To cease any abusive or vexatious behaviour in order for the complaint to be finalised
- Possible actions open to the Council
- How the complainant can challenge the decision if they disagree with it (i.e.: Office of the Ombudsman)

## ***Taking Action***

The following is a list of possible options open to the Council:

- Placing time limits on telephone conversations and personal contacts;
- Restricting the number of telephone calls that will be taken
- Limiting the complainant to one medium of contact (telephone, letter, email etc.) and/or requiring the complainant to communicate only with one named member of staff;
- Requiring any personal contacts to take place in the presence of a witness;
- Refusing to register and process further complaints about the same matter;
- Where a decision on the complaint has been made, informing the complainant that future correspondence will be read and placed on the file but not acknowledged. A designated officer should be identified who will read future correspondence;
- Where a complaint is closed and the complainant persists in communicating about the same issue, it may be decided to terminate contact with that complainant.

These options are not exhaustive and there may be other factors that will be relevant in deciding what might be appropriate action.

## **Procedure in dealing with vexatious complaints and complainants via social media**

The decision to categorise a complainant as abusive or vexatious will be an exceptional step and this should be made by the Communications Officer. This will only be done in a case where there is a clear written record and/or such record shows a pattern of behaviour which is unacceptable. The types of behaviour and actions which may lead to this scenario may include:

- Trolling and harassing staff including the use of excessive and unnecessary tweets, posts, messages etc
- Multiple repetition of the complaint (when it has already been acknowledged/referred on/processed)
- Use of inappropriate and/or abusive language over our social media platforms
- Refusing to co-operate with the Council's, and the statutory, complaints procedures
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When classifying a complainant as vexatious with regard to our social media platforms

- The complainant will firstly be issued with **ONE warning** via the relevant social media platform
- Failure to cease their behaviour will result in the Council informing them that we believe their behaviour falls into the abusive/vexatious category and as such if they continue they will be **BLOCKED** from that social media channel
- Complainant will be blocked immediately should they persist

These options are not exhaustive and there may be other factors that will be relevant in deciding what might be appropriate action.