

South Tipperary County Council

Customer Action Plan

INTRODUCTION

Customer care has been a priority consideration of South Tipperary County Council for many decades. The provision of a large range of services across areas such as housing, planning, motor tax, water supply and treatment, refuse collection, roads and amenities involves the Council in regular contact with almost all the people of South Tipperary on an ongoing basis. Our customers are therefore the people of South Tipperary together with visitors, business, community and voluntary groups to whom we provide a service. Our customers also include our elected representatives, government and agencies, non government agencies and our own staff. The involvement of our highly committed elected representatives has always been central to ensuring the delivery of fair, equitable and courteous services.

Customer care was formally included in our day to day operation as a result of the governments Quality Customer Service Initiative which was extended to all the sectors of the public service in 2000. Our initial Customer Action Plan was launched in 2001 and this new plan builds on the experienced gained in the years since 2001. We recognise the continuing need to improve on the ways in which we serve our customers. Factors such as changes in the economic climate, extended services and developments in information technology require ongoing review, assessment and adaptation of how we do business with our customer.

It is a core objective of our Corporate Plan 2004 – 2009 “To ensure quality service to our customers setting standards for responsiveness, efficiency and cost effectiveness”. This plan is based on the ethos of our core objective and contains commitments in relation to leadership, standards, evaluation, consultation and complaints. We look forward to working with all our customers in the coming years to ensure the delivery of a responsive efficient and friendly service to the people of South Tipperary.

PRINCIPLES OF QUALITY CUSTOMER SERVICE

The Council is committed to the creation of an ethos centred on customer care throughout the organisation.

The provision of an efficient and effective service will be underpinned by the following core principles. In respect of each of these core principles, South Tipperary County Council will:

Quality Service Standards

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 and on our website.

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).

Access

Where feasible provide accessible public offices that ensure privacy, comply with occupational and safety standards and facilitate access for all our customers.

Information

Take a proactive approach in providing information that is clear, timely and accurate and is widely available and meets the requirements of people with specific needs. Ensure that the potential offered by Information and Communications Technology is fully availed of and that the information is available on public service websites.

Continue the drive for simplification of rules, regulations, forms, information leaflets and to work towards a common presentation and style.

Timeliness and Courtesy

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 ongoing transactions.

Complaints

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

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.

Consultation

Improve public and community participation in how we do our business.

Evaluation

Ensure meaningful evaluation of service delivery by way of periodic review.

Choice

Provide choice, where feasible, in service delivery including on-line services, 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.

Official Languages Recognition

Provide quality services through Irish and/or bilingually in accordance with the requirements of the Official Languages Action 2003.

Civic Leadership

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

Internal Customer

Ensure that members and staff are recognised as internal customers and that they are properly supported and consulted with regard to service delivery issues. Central to this principle is the provision of a structured programme of training and development at all levels and in all disciplines.

CUSTOMER CARE STANDARDS:

South Tipperary County Council is committed to delivering a quality service with a strong customer focus by the creation of a customer friendly culture.

In order to achieve this objective, the following standards will be developed throughout the organisation:

Telephones

- We will deal with your call as quickly as possible and in a courteous and polite manner.
- We will be helpful and provide you with as much information as possible.
- If we cannot answer your enquiry promptly, we will either call you back or write to you with the relevant information.
- We will give you contact names in all telephone communications.
- If your call needs to be transferred, we will give the name and section to which it is being transferred and explain your query before transferring it.
- Freephone numbers and direct dial access will be provided for specific services as required.
- The facility to leave voice messages or to speak to another staff member when a phone is unattended will be made available.
- Contact numbers for emergency services outside normal working hours are available in the telephone directory.
- Customers will be expected to deal with staff in a reasonable and courteous manner.

Callers to Public Office

- We respect your need for privacy and confidentiality.
- We will be polite, courteous and fair in our dealings with you.
- We will deal with your enquiry in a prompt and efficient manner.
- If we cannot deal with your enquiry, we will endeavour to introduce you to someone who can and explain your query to them.
- We aim to keep all our public offices clean and safe.
- We are committed to improving accessibility in all our offices for all our customers.
- Staff will identify themselves to customers.
- Opening hours will be reviewed having regard to the nature of services provided.
- Customers will be expected to deal with staff in a reasonable and courteous manner.

Correspondence

- We will endeavour to reply to your correspondence within a maximum of 10 working days. If this is not possible, we will send you an acknowledgement and indicate when you can expect a detailed reply.

- We will use “official” terms only where necessary.
- We will ensure that all letters carry a contact name and telephone number.
- Correspondence received in Irish will be replied to in Irish.

Information

- We will use local media where appropriate to disseminate information.
- We will make every effort to supply you with up-to-date accurate and comprehensive information.
- We will try to ensure that all information provided is easily understood by using simple and clear language.
- Maximum use of information technology, explanatory leaflets and media will be made.

Forms

- We will use simple and clear language in the design of our forms, make them easy to complete and provide assistance when required.
- We will only ask questions that are necessary.
- All forms will be available at all our public offices and on our website.
- Forms will be available in Irish and English.

Members and Staff

- We will ensure that our members and employees are recognised as internal customers and ensure that they are properly consulted, empowered, supported and trained with regard to service delivery issues

Complaints

- We will treat complaints fairly and sympathetically.
- We will comply with the Council’s complaints procedure which is available at all our public offices and on the internet.

COMPLAINTS PROCEDURE

At the June 2003 meeting of South Tipperary County Council the following revised complaints procedure was adopted by the Council as a result of the recommendation of the Corporate Affairs and Cultural Development Strategic Policy Committee:-

A Complaints Officer per service area has been appointed and also one overall complaint reviewer as follows:-

<u>Service</u>	<u>Designated Officer</u>
Roads	Tom O'Dwyer, Administrative Officer
Sanitary Services	Angela Dillon White, Senior Staff Officer
Finance	Ken Conway, Senior Executive Officer
Rates	Sean Lonergan, Senior Staff Officer.
Motor Tax	Donnacha Commins, Administrative Officer
Information and Communications	Marion O'Neill, Head of Information Services
Technology	
Environment/Waste Management	Jimmy Harney, Senior Executive Officer
Planning/Fire	Marie McGivern, Administrative Officer
Housing	Catherine Meade, Senior Staff Officer
Community & Enterprise	Breda O'Connor, Assistant Staff Officer
Corporate Affairs	Mary Carroll, Administrative Officer
Human Resources	Josephine Brett, Senior Executive Officer

Complaints Reviewer

John O'Mahoney, S.E.O. Corporate Affairs.

The Complaints Procedure may be used by any customer of the Council who feels that:-

- They have been unfairly treated by the Council.
- That a service to which they are entitled is not being provided.
- That a service, which is being provided, is inadequate.
- That a decision made with regard to them is wrong, or did not take into consideration all the facts.
- That a request for a service/information has been ignored.

Complaints should be set out in writing, and forwarded to the sections Complaint's Officer relevant to the service provided e.g. Housing complaints should be addressed to the Housing Complaints Officer. Where a person is not happy with the response received from within the service section concerned an appeal may be lodged with the

Complaints Reviewer at the Council's Corporate Affairs Section, Aras an Chontae, Emmet Street, Clonmel.

It should be noted that the use of the Complaints Procedure is voluntary and does not affect your rights of appeal to the Ombudsman.

It is intended to work within the following time limits:-

- Acknowledgement within working week.
- Response within 4 working weeks.
- Appeal within 4 working weeks.

The above appeal procedure does not apply to decision of the Council where there is a statutory appeal process e.g. planning appeals nor does it interfere with your rights under the Freedom of Information Act, 1997.

RESPONSE STANDARDS

Response Standards will be published in relation to service delivery. These standards will be available to our customers. Performance will be assessed against these standards on an annual basis in conjunction with our performance report on National Service Indicators.

Performance Indicators

We will report promptly on the 42 Service Indicators published in “Delivering Value for People – Service Indication – January 2004”. Annual reports will also include details of locally agreed indicators.