



An Coimisiún um
Chosaint Sonraí
Data Protection
Commission

Quality Customer Service Action Plan

2021 - 2023

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1. About the DPC

1.1 The role of the DPC

The Data Protection Commission (DPC), which was established under the Data Protection Act 2018, is the national independent supervisory authority in Ireland with responsibility for upholding the fundamental right of the individual to have their personal data protected.

Our Mission

Safeguarding data protection rights by driving compliance through guidance, supervision and enforcement.

What we do

The DPC's statutory powers, functions and duties derive from the Data Protection Act 2018, General Data Protection Regulation, Law Enforcement Directive, as well as from the Data Protection Acts 1988 to 2003 which, inter alia, gives effect to Council of Europe Convention 108.

Using its statutory powers as it considers appropriate, the Data Protection Commission:

- examines complaints from individuals in relation to potential infringements of data protection law;
- conducts inquiries and investigations into relevant cases regarding infringements of data protection legislation and takes enforcement action where necessary;
- promotes awareness amongst members of the public of their rights to have their personal information protected under data protection law;
- drives improved awareness and compliance with data protection legislation by data controllers and processors legislation through the publication of high-quality guidance, proactive engagement with public and private sector organisations;
- through consultations with organisations, assists in identifying risks to personal data protection and offers guidance of best practice methods to mitigate against those risks; and
- cooperates with (which includes sharing information with) other data protection authorities, and acts as lead supervisory authority at EU level for organisations that have their main EU establishment in Ireland.

1.2 Our customers and the services we provide to them

The DPC has a very broad and multi-layered remit, in terms of the range of its supervisory, advisory, enforcement and awareness-raising functions, and also in terms of its scope in monitoring the compliance of processing of personal data by every type of organisation based in Ireland, in both a national and international context. The following are an example of the services we provide to the different types of customers.

Under the GDPR's One Stop Shop provisions, the DPC acts as lead supervisory authority at an EU level for many of the technology, internet and social media companies that have their European headquarters in Ireland. This places the DPC in a very central role in safeguarding the data protection rights of many millions of individuals across the EU. Consequently, in many circumstances the DPC's customers and audience are not located in Ireland.

Individuals

The DPC upholds the data protection rights of individuals. Services provided include:

- answering queries and providing information via our front line Information and Assessment Unit;
- provision of advice and guidance on data protection rights via our website, social media, and other means of publishing;
- dealing to the extent appropriate with complaints from individuals who believe their data protection rights have been infringed in accordance with the DPC's case handling procedures as set out in the Data Protection Act 2018.

In addition to upholding the data protection rights of individuals, the DPC is subject to legislation that involves the provision of services to individuals.

- the DPC is partially subject to Freedom of Information legislation and responds to Freedom of Information requests;
- the DPC is a prescribed person under Protected Disclosures legislation and responds to protected disclosures submitted.

Organisations

The DPC has supervisory, monitoring, advisory, enforcement, and awareness-raising functions in relation to organisations that process personal data. This includes both public sector and private sector organisations. Services provided to organisations include:

- Answering queries and providing information via our front line Information and Assessment Unit;
- Provision of advice and guidance on data protection obligations via our website, social media, and other means of publishing and dissemination;
- Active engagement with organisations and sectoral groups via the DPC's consultation functions;
- Providing observations to proposed regulatory/legislative measures;
- Organisations that process personal data have a number of responsibilities under data protection legislation that require engagement with the DPC.¹

EU and International Stakeholders

The DPC engages with other EU data protection authorities and the European Data Protection Board (EDPB) in line with the GDPR's consistency and cooperation provisions.

Outside of formal statutory mechanisms, the DPC engages with peer EU and international data protection authorities as required, such as through participation in visits and meetings, participation in forums and conferences, and answering information requests.

Internal customers

DPC staff members should be considered as customers and are entitled, as are all customers, to expect the highest standards of service delivery with the organisation.

¹ For the DPC's guidance on the responsibilities of organisations under the GDPR please see <https://www.dataprotection.ie/en/organisations>

2. Quality Customer Service Action Plan

2.1 Development of the Quality Customer Service Action Plan

The service standards set out in the Customer Charter were developed with regard to:

- DPC staff experiences of service delivery since the introduction of the legal framework on the 25th May 2018;
- feedback received from customers relating to service delivery;
- guidance issued by the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform on best practices and guiding principles of Quality Customer Service.

2.2 Service delivery

Legal framework

The General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR), alongside the Data Protection Act 2018, enhances and adds to the data protection rights of individuals, and imposes greater responsibilities on those who process personal data. The introduction of GDPR has enhanced public awareness of data protection rights and has driven a significant increase in contacts to the DPC.

This increase in volume of contacts has been accompanied by a significant evolution in the nature of contacts to the DPC, as all categories of stakeholders are adapting to the new rules, and the DPC implements new statutory case-handling procedures.

The GDPR's 'One Stop Shop' provisions have a particularly high impact on the service delivery demands placed on the DPC. The DPC is 'lead supervisory authority' in the EU under the GDPR for many of the multinational technology and social media companies located in Ireland. This places the DPC in a very central role in safeguarding the data protection rights of many millions of individuals across the EU, and the DPC is required to take account of the views of other EU data protection supervisory authorities, particularly as we finalise our findings on statutory inquiries related to cross-border processing.

Organisational transformation

The period following the introduction of the new EU and Irish legal framework under which the DPC operates on 25 May 2018 has been a transformative development in the services provided by the DPC. The DPC has taken on new

responsibilities, gained additional powers, experienced a major year-on-year increase in the number of complaints, contacts and breach notifications made to the office, and consequently has been undergoing a major organisational transformation programme.

The DPC has expanded its staff numbers and continues to manage this growth carefully, in terms of recruitment, induction, training and management oversight. As the DPC has gained more experience of regulating under the new legal framework, it has engaged in ongoing review of its procedures, organisational structure, and service delivery model.

The DPC's long-term organisational strategy will be informed by a new comprehensive, long-term Regulatory Strategy that is currently under development.

Online Service Delivery

The website is the primary medium through which the DPC publishes information and guidance for the public.

The website also serves as the most convenient way for both individuals and organisations to engage with the DPC. The DPC's automated webforms offer a streamlined means through which customers can provide the DPC with the information it requires to progress their case, and webforms are automatically routed to the relevant business unit. The effectiveness of the DPC's webforms is constantly under review and refinement.

Public Health Measures arising from Covid-19

The DPC is following all relevant public health advice and regulations arising from the Covid-19 outbreak. The DPC is continuing to provide a full suite of services to its customers during this period. Service delivery channels such as face-to-face meetings may be impacted by protocols on social distancing in the workplace.

2.3 Implementing the 12 Guiding Principles of Quality Customer Service

The Quality Customer Service Initiative was established in 1997 and expanded in 2000 to set out 12 guiding principles for the development, promotion and implementation of quality customer service for public service organisations. In

line with recommended best practice guidelines² published by the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform, the DPC sets out its customer service commitments in its Customer Charter, and sets out in detail how the commitments and standards will be delivered and evaluated.

2.3.1 Quality Service Standards

Publish a statement (Customer Charter) that outlines the nature and quality of service which customers can expect, and display it prominently at the point of service delivery.

The DPC's Customer Charter sets out the standard of service delivery to which we are committed to providing to our customers. The DPC shall publish and disseminate the Customer Charter as appropriate in order to ensure that all of our customers are aware of the standard of service they can expect.

Key Action points

- Publish Customer Charter and Quality Customer Service Action Plan online.
- Communicate Customer Charter and Quality Customer Service Action Plan to all staff.
- Communicate commitments in Customer Charter to service users as appropriate.
- Draw attention to the Customer Charter in any future Customer Surveys or other feedback/consultative exercises regarding service delivery.
- Invite and consider all customer feedback.

Key Performance Indicator

Availability of information regarding customer service standard commitments to our users.

2.3.2 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

² <https://www.gov.ie/en/policy-information/a2c52c-customer-charter-initiative-guidelines/>

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, comply with occupational and safety standards and, as part of this, facilitate access for people with disabilities and others with specific needs.

The DPC is committed to providing a service to customers that upholds their rights to equal treatment established by equality and disability legislation. The DPC aims to ensure that our services and facilities are accessible to all our customers, including those who may require special assistance.

Key Action Points

- Respect the principles of equality and diversity in all dealings with our customers and report on progress made in fulfilling our obligations under Section 42 of the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission Act 2014, Public Sector Equality and Human Rights Duty.
- Maintain full compliance with all relevant legislation.
- Provide any necessary Diversity and Disability Awareness training to staff as and when the need arises.
- Provide any required accommodations to staff with disabilities or specific needs.
- Ensure website and other published materials are published with regard to best practice in accessibility.

Key Performance Indicator

Nature of feedback from customers and representative groups on service standards.

Ongoing review of accessibility of DPC services and appropriate resolutions provided to requests for special assistance.

2.3.3 Physical Access

Provide clean, accessible 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.

The DPC does not operate a public counter and may only meet with customers in exceptional circumstances and by appointment only. Where such exceptional circumstances arise, the DPC will provide clean, accessible offices that ensure privacy, comply with occupational and safety standards, and are accessible to all, including persons with disabilities or with specific needs. The DPC will comply with all relevant social distancing or other public health measures at its premises.

Key Action Points

- Provide a clean, safe and comfortable environment for staff and visitors.
- Provide access and facilities to meet all our customers' needs, including those who require reasonable accommodation(s).
- Ensure full compliance with all Workplace Health and Safety legislation.
- Ensure that Equality Audits and Equality/Diversity policies and procedures take full account of physical environment factors.
- Provide contact details for Access Officer to any customers requiring special assistance in relation to physical access.

Key Performance Indicator

Nature of feedback from customers and representative groups on service standards.

Effective resolution of all requests for special assistance.

Effective implementation of compliance measures in relation to Health and Safety legislation.

2.3.4 Information

Take a proactive approach in providing information that is clear, timely and accurate, is available at all points of contact, and meets the requirement 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.

The DPC has a dedicated Communications Unit responsible for coordinating and disseminating guidance and information. The DPC publishes a broad range of information on its website, www.dataprotection.ie, through a broad range of formats including formal guidance notes, blogs, infographic and podcasts. The DPC proactively promotes its publications on social media. The DPC reviews its materials for accuracy, clarity, and adherence with plain English guidelines on an ongoing basis. The DPC's website is designed with regard to accessibility principles.

The DPC has a dedicated public information service, and receives and responds to queries from individuals and organisations by means of email, online form or telephone. The DPC helpdesk receives and responds to several hundred queries on a weekly basis. In all written and verbal correspondence with members of the public, the DPC endeavours to ensure information provided is clear, timely and accurate.

Key Action Points

- Publication of information that is clear, timely and accurate.
- Proactive promotion of information on social media and other fora as appropriate.
- Maintenance of Freedom of Information Publication Scheme.
- Ongoing review of published information for accuracy, clarity and adherence to plain English principles.
- Ongoing review of website for clarity and accessibility.
- Effective provision of public information service, including ongoing monitoring of service levels.

Key Performance Indicator

Regular publication of information and guidance.

Ongoing review of information and website for accuracy, clarity and timeliness.

Numbers of queries answered by Helpdesk service and nature of feedback received.

2.3.5 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.

The DPC sets out in its Customer Charter its commitment to delivering its services within defined timelines and with appropriate courtesy, efficiency and effectiveness.

Key Action Points

- Provide appropriate customer service training to staff.
- Monitor and evaluate our performance against the standards of quality service we are committed to providing.
- Monitor customer satisfaction and review and improve standards of delivery where appropriate.

Key Performance Indicator

Adherence to customer service standards as set out in Customer Charter.

2.3.6 Customer Service Complaints

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

The DPC sets out its complaints procedures in its Customer Charter, and a dedicated Customer Services Complaints team deals with all customer services complaints in an appropriate manner. The DPC aims to maintain an accessible, transparent and easy-to-use system of dealing with complaints about the quality of service provided, and will try to address customer concerns at the point of service if at all possible.

Key Action Points

- Ensure all customers are aware of the customer services complaints procedure.
- Ensure Customer Services Complaints team is empowered to make enquiries and issue authoritative responses to complaints.
- Monitor the number and nature of complaints received.

- Raise staff awareness of the cause of complaints and provide training as appropriate.

Key Performance Indicator

Effective resolution of all complaints received.

2.3.7 Customer Service Appeals

Similarly, maintain a formalised, well-publicised, accessible, transparent and simple-to-use system of appeal/review for customers who are dissatisfied with customer service actions in relation to services where a right of appeal exists.

In engagements where customers have a right of appeal, appeals procedures are clearly communicated to customers.

Key Action Points

- Ensure internal procedures take account of communicating to the customer the right of appeal to Customer Services Complaints where applicable.
- Ensuring all appeals are considered fully.

Key Performance Indicator

Clear communication to customers of appeals process where applicable.

2.3.8 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.

The DPC consults with customers through a number of fora in relation to the development, delivery and review of services. In addition to ongoing review of feedback received by frontline staff and through Customer Services complaints, the DPC occasionally carries out formal public consultations.

The development of a new long-term DPC Regulatory Strategy has been a highly consultative process.

The DPC carries out ongoing evaluation of its service delivery, and has established a dedicated Operational Effectiveness Unit.

Key Action Points

- All public consultations to be communicated and promoted effectively.
- Feedback received through public consultations, in addition to other forms of feedback received, to be considered fully in relation to development, delivery and review of services.
- Feedback received from customers to be incorporated into meaningful evaluation of service delivery.

Key Performance Indicator

Effective communication and promotion of public consultations.

Meaningful consideration of consultation responses and other forms of feedback in relation in the development, delivery and review of services.

2.3.9 Choice

Provide choice, where feasible, in service delivery including means of contact, and public information service opening hours. Use available and emerging technologies to ensure maximum access and choice, and quality of delivery.

The DPC's Customer Charter outlines a number of means of engaging with the DPC. In addition to these specified means, it also provides details of an Access Officer who can facilitate customers who require other accommodations.

Key Action Points

- Ensure contacts through all means outlined in Customer Charter is responded to appropriately.
- Ensure office is technologically and logistically equipped to engage with customers through all means outlined in Customer Charter.

Key Performance Indicator

Ability of DPC to respond appropriately to customers through all means outlined in Customer Charter.

2.3.10 Official Languages Equality

Provide quality services through Irish and/or bilingually and inform customers of their right to choose to be dealt with through one or the other of the official languages.

The DPC has published a language scheme for the purposes of the Official Languages Act 2003. The DPC has a number of Irish speaking staff who will take calls, or where not possible will return calls, from customers who wish to speak in Irish. The DPC's website and published guidance is available in Irish and English.

Key Action Points

- Ensure DPC has Irish speaking staff available to take or return calls from customers who wish to engage in Irish.
- Ensure Irish courses are available to staff.
- Ensure translation and interpretation services are available for both published guidance and written correspondence with Irish-speaking customers.
- Ensure Language Scheme is updated upon expiry and is in adherence to the Official Languages Act 2003.

Key Performance Indicator

Compliance with Language Scheme.

2.3.11 Better Co-ordination

Foster a more coordinated and integrated approach to delivery of public services.

The DPC's Customer Charter sets out our commitment to ensure a high level of co-ordination with relevant bodies in Ireland as well as our counterpart bodies in other EU member states and the EU Commission.

Key Action Points

- Ensure appropriate co-ordination with relevant bodies.
- Ensure DPC effectively implements its mutual assistance and cooperation/consistency obligations under data protection laws, and respond to requests for information from other data protection authorities appropriately.

Key Performance Indicator

Effective and successful cooperation with relevant bodies.

2.3.12 Internal Customer

Ensure staff are recognised as internal customers and that they are properly supported and consulted with regard to service delivery issues.

The DPC is growing and evolving at a rapid rate of change, and appropriate support and consultation with staff is important. The DPC has established internal communications channels, and has appointed a dedicated Human Resources Unit.

Key Action Points

- Implement internal communications channels.
- Provide the leadership, at all levels across the organisation, to motivate staff and provide clear direction, inspiration and support in ensuring continuous improvement in the services we deliver.
- Establish an appropriate HR function and implement appropriate policies, procedures and strategies regarding Human Resources.
- Provide necessary induction, support, training and upskilling to empower staff to carry out their roles.
- Maintain effective Performance Management and Development System.
- Consult with staff on major organisational changes.

Key Performance Indicator

Feedback received from staff.

3. Appendices

3.1 Contact Details

If you have a query, concern or complaint regarding a data protection matter, you can engage with the DPC in the following ways:

- By web-form on our website;
- By email;
- By telephone to our Helpdesk; or
- By post.

The most effective way to contact the DPC regarding queries or complaints is by means of the web- forms, which are available on the DPC's website:

www.dataprotection.ie

It is important to note that the DPC is not in a position to provide a public office facility and therefore we are unable to offer face-to-face meetings. If however you are not in a position to engage with this office by the above-mentioned means, please contact our Access Officer on dpcaccessofficer@dataprotection.ie

Full contact details for the DPC can be found on our website:

<https://dataprotection.ie/en/contact/how-contact-us>

We welcome your comments and suggestions on this Action Plan and on how we can improve our service in the future. You can email these comments to us at customerservice@dataprotection.ie