



**Comhairle Cathrach
na Gaillimhe**
Galway City Council

**Plean Gníomhaíochta
na Seirbhísí do Chustaiméirí
2025 – 2029**

**Customer Service Action Plan
2025 – 2029**



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Introduction

This Customer Service Action Plan has been developed following the adoption of Galway City Council's Corporate Plan 2024 – 2029. The Corporate Plan sets out the Council's core values, principle objectives and the strategies for achieving these objectives over its lifetime.

Mission Statement:

“To continue the development of Galway as a world class city in which to live, work, study, visit, and invest through delivering services in an equal, inclusive and sustainable manner.”

Vision Statement:

“Galway City Council will lead a cultural and creative city, collaborating with the diverse communities and businesses of Galway and beyond, to strengthen and enhance our unique attributes, sustainability, inclusiveness, safety and innovation.”

The Customer Service Action Plan has a key role in realising the Mission and Vision Statements through the following supporting strategies:

- Ensuring that our services meet the needs of customers, are accessible to all and are in line with our public sector duty on equality and human rights.
- Operating a clear internal and external communications strategy which maximises the potential of modern ICT technology to get important messages and information across to our customers and stakeholders.
- Responding to customers reporting issues in a timely manner.

We will apply the above supporting strategies by:

- Making it clear to all our customers and stakeholders what level of service you should expect from Galway City Council and our staff.
- Using the resources we have efficiently and effectively, to deliver the best standards of services we can.
- Learning from situations where a service is not consistent or does not provide the quality we would like.
- Monitoring and reviewing our performance against recognised standards and through customer feedback from our diverse customer base.
- Living our equality and human rights values of dignity, autonomy, participation, inclusion and social justice in our customer service in accordance with our Equality and Human Rights Values Statement and aligned with the Statement of Process for each value in this.
- Establishing detailed accessibility standards for all service locations, and completing annual audits and reports on accessibility standards established for all service provision locations and annual reports on current situation and improvements made.
- Taking steps to identify and eliminate all forms of discrimination and of harassment or sexual harassment in access to services that might be experienced by the diversity of our customers, to remove barriers and make adaptations to ensure access and respond to the specific needs of this diversity of customers, and to eliminate stereotyping in interactions and in public materials, ensuring all public materials follow inclusive language guidelines.
- Training for staff on: Non-discrimination and the requirements of equality legislation; eliminating stereotyping in interactions and communications; and diversity and responding to the specific needs that arise from diversity, in order to enable them to give full effect to our commitment to equality and human rights for the diversity of our customers.



Galway City Council is committed to the elimination of all forms of discrimination, the promotion of equality and the protection of human rights for the diversity of its customers, in compliance with the Public Sector Equality and Human Rights Duty, in the preparation and implementation of this Customer Service Action Plan.

This focus on customer diversity encompasses the identified groups for the Duty:

- Those covered by the nine grounds under equality legislation of gender (including gender expression, gender identity and sex characteristics),
- Civil status,
- Family status (including lone parents and carers),
- Age,
- Disability (broadly defined to include all impairment groups and certain medical conditions),
- Sexual orientation,
- Race (including migrants and international protection applicants),
- Religion,
- Membership of the Traveller community;
- Those covered by the ground of socio-economic status (specifically those at risk of or experiencing poverty and exclusion);
- Those at the intersections of the above ten grounds,
- Individual rights holders under the various human rights instruments relevant to the functions of the public body.

This document also includes key policies and procedures in relation to key areas of customer service and communications, including:

- Customer Charter (Appendix 1)
- Public Sector Equality and Human Rights Duty (Appendix 2)
- Customer Code of Conduct (Appendix 3)
- Customer Complaints & Appeals Procedures (Appendix 4)
- Policy on Abusive, Persistent, Vexatious and Unreasonable Customers and Complaints (Appendix 5)
- Freedom of Information (Appendix 6)
- Data Protection (Appendix 7)

Quality Service Standards

What you can expect when contacting Galway City Council

Visiting our Offices:

- We will ensure that public counters are properly staffed during opening hours.
- We will be polite, courteous and fair in our dealings with you.
- We will address your query and provide relevant information as quickly as possible.
- We will provide accessible public offices that are welcoming to diversity through use of imagery and multilingual signage.
- We will ensure public offices are clean and safe, to ensure compliance with occupational and safety standards.
- We will aim to keep waiting times to a minimum. If no appointment has been made prior to your visit, the person you wish to speak with may not always be available, in this instance, someone else will try to assist you. If no-one else can provide you with the information you require, your details will be recorded and given to the relevant person to contact you as soon as possible.
- We will meet you punctually if you have an appointment.
- We respect your right to confidentiality and will try to provide private facilities upon request, unfortunately this may not always be possible without prior appointment.

Note: For non-routine matters, or if you need to meet a specific person, it is advisable to make an appointment in advance.

Written and Electronic Communication:

- We will acknowledge emails sent to Departmental email addresses within 2 working days.
- We will acknowledge other written and electronic correspondence within 5 working days (except where legislation states otherwise).
- We will issue a comprehensive response to written and electronic correspondence within 20 working days (except where legislation states otherwise). If more time is required, we will explain the reasons for the delay and issue you with an update.
- The timeline for responses to requests in relation to non-statutory public consultation events will be dealt with on a project-by-project basis.
- We will ensure that all responses contain a contact name, telephone number, email address and reference number if applicable.

- We will use clear and simple language and only use technical / legal terms when necessary.
 - If your correspondence relates to a matter that comes within the remit of another public body, we will direct the correspondence to that public body and advise you accordingly.
 - We will use automated out-of-hours responses on all emails to advise you of staff return dates or alternative contact details, where the staff member is absent for more than 3 days.
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Telephoning our Offices:

- We will respond to your call promptly and will deal with your query in a polite and courteous manner.
 - We will be helpful and provide as much information as possible.
 - We will try to deal with your query at your first point of contact, if we have to transfer your call, we will inform you of the relevant section and contact person, if possible.
 - If we cannot deal with your query immediately, we will call you back as quickly as possible.
 - We will provide a voicemail facility on all extensions to allow you to leave a message out of normal office hours or where staff members are absent. Messages will be responded to promptly.
 - We will provide an out-of-hours contact service for emergencies / urgent issues.
 - We will respect privacy and confidentiality in communications.
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Online Services

- We will respond to you in your preferred format (e.g. electronically, letter, email or telephone).
- We will ensure that as many of our services as possible are made available online so that you can access our services at a time and place that is convenient for you.
- We will provide readily available instructions on the use of our online services in a clear and concise format.
- We will ensure that all security precautions are adhered to.
- We will provide Frequently Asked Questions where appropriate.
- We will ensure that links to other web pages and sites are maintained.

- We will take account of digital inequality by ensuring alternative access for those unable to use digital services, including in-person, phone-based, and paper-based options.
 - We will establish free access points (e.g., in libraries, community centres) with computers and Wi-Fi for those lacking infrastructure for digital access.
 - We will enable digital accessibility by providing assistive technology (screen readers, keyboard navigation, etc.) and meeting accessibility standards in our digital infrastructure in accordance with the European Accessibility Act (EAA).
 - All Departments of Galway City Council will strive to deliver all applicable services via digital means as per the National Digital and ICT Strategy 2024 – 2030 and the Digital Government 2030 Act.
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Application Forms:

- We will seek only necessary information, which is essential for a fair and prompt assessment of your application, and explain precisely what is required.
 - We will make a decision as quickly as possible on receipt of a valid application (i.e. fully completed and supported by necessary documentation) and within statutory deadlines.
 - We will deal with all applications fairly and consistently in accordance with the relevant rules and regulations and give reasons for our decisions.
 - We will inform you of your right to appeal and how to appeal a decision.
 - We will ensure that personal data acquired by us is used only for the purpose for which it was sought and provided.
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Information Provision:

- We will ensure that information provided is relevant, up-to-date, easily understood, accessible and widely available at all points of contact, including online.
 - We will make provision of advisory supports or guidance services to help people make informed choices about Council services, with particular attention to groups experiencing inequality.
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Service Requests:

- We will deal with all requests in a fair and consistent manner.
- We will deal with all requests promptly and tell you when you can expect a response.
- We will explain the basis for decisions made.

Complaints / Appeals:

- We will advise you of our complaints and appeals procedure if you are unhappy with the service you have received.
 - We will advise you of your rights to appeal.
-

Service through Languages:

- As a bilingual city and a Gaeltacht Service Town, Galway City Council is committed to service through Gaeilge, in line with our Irish Language Scheme. We will be happy to facilitate your preference to conduct your business in Irish or Irish Sign Language.
 - Galway City Council is committed to increasing the number of staff who can provide services through Gaeilge – especially in customer-facing roles. This is in line with the Official Languages Act, which states that 20% of our staff must be competent in Gaeilge by 2030.
 - We will ensure all public signs in Council offices / facilities will be in Irish and English.
 - If you contact us electronically or in writing through Irish, we will issue a response in Irish.
 - We will ensure that our Application forms and Information Leaflets and Brochures are available in Irish and English.
 - We will provide interpretation services on request, to the extent possible.
 - We will provide public-facing documents in easy-to-read, plain language options and consider requests for translation of documents to accommodate the top spoken languages in Galway.
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Choice, Welcome and Adaptability:

- We will be flexible in our customer service to ensure barriers do not arise and necessary supports are available for customers from groups that experience inequality.
- We will offer a range of options for accessing services, ensuring the diversity of people can make choices based on their needs.

Customer Participation

Customer participation in the planning and delivery of services is vital to their success.

There are a number of ways that you can become involved and influence the delivery of services through:

- Contacting Galway City Council Customer Service section
- Contacting your local Elected Representatives
- Attendance at public consultation meetings
- As a member of an organisation, voluntary or community group on the Galway City Community Network, including through those organisations representative of groups experiencing inequality
- As a member of an organisation on the Strategic Policy Committees or Joint Policing Committees
- Participation in Customer Satisfaction Surveys carried out by Galway City Council
- We encourage customers to provide feedback to us in writing by email to customerservice@galwaycity.ie or by letter to Customer Service, Galway City Council, College Road, Galway City Council

We are particularly concerned to hear from customers and groups that experience inequality, either by direct contact or through their representative associations, and we will take steps as required to enable and empower their voice.

Monitoring our Performance

Through the lifetime of this Customer Service Action Plan, regular internal reviews will take place to assess the effectiveness and compliance with the Quality Service Standards and Actions set out in the Plan.

Progress reports on the Actions set out in the Plan will be provided in the Annual Service Delivery Plans.

We will undertake equality and human rights reviews of the delivery of particular services, where there is a concern that systemic discrimination might be present or any feedback from groups experiencing inequality to this effect.

Customer Feedback Processes

- Implement focus groups and public forums specifically for marginalised communities and employees
- Introduce staff feedback mechanisms that protect anonymity and allow open discussions on inclusion and workplace experiences, tracking the participation of those from groups experiencing inequality, to ensure their perspectives are addressed
- Undertaking customer satisfaction surveys as a method of gathering feedback, tracking the input of customers from groups experiencing inequality, to ensure their perspectives are addressed

Contact Us

The Customer Service team are available to take your calls on 091-536400 from 9am to 5pm, Monday to Friday.

Outside of these hours, including Bank Holidays and weekends, calls to 091-536400 automatically route to an out-of-hours emergency call centre service. Emergencies are escalated to on-call staff immediately.

Postal Address: Galway City Council, City Hall, College Road, Galway, H91 X4K8

Website: www.galwaycity.ie

Email: customerservice@galwaycity.ie and seirbhisdochustaimairi@galwaycity.ie



Appendix 1 Customer Charter

The provision of high-quality Customer Service and Care is a key priority for Galway City Council.

Galway City Council is committed to providing an excellent quality service to all our customers in an effective, fair, respectful, accessible, confidential and non-discriminatory manner having regard to the specific needs that arise from the diversity of our customers.

This customer charter sets out the principles of quality customer service you may expect from Galway City Council.

 <p>Quality Service Standards We will ensure compliance with the quality service standards set out in our Customer Service Action Plan 2025 – 2029.</p>	 <p>Equality, Diversity & Human Rights</p> <p>We will ensure non-discrimination and equal treatment of all and embrace and foster the city's diversity and strive for equal outcomes for all groups, in line with our Public Sector Duty on equality and human rights.</p> <p>We will work to identify and eliminate barriers to access to services for people experiencing inequality, poverty and social exclusion.</p> <p>We will ensure service provision environments are welcoming to the diversity of our customers and free of all forms of harassment.</p>
 <p>Openness and Impartiality We will deal with you in a fair and open manner. We will discuss any aspects of your dealings with us and we will explain how a decision was reached.</p>	
 <p>Physical Access We will provide clean, accessible public offices that comply with occupational and safety standards and facilitate access for people with disabilities and special needs.</p>	 <p>Information</p> <p>We will provide clear, helpful, accurate, accessible and up-to-date information that can be easily understood.</p> <p>We will use simple language and only use technical/legal terms when necessary.</p> <p>We will ensure our website and social media are kept up-to-date, and that our website meets accessibility standards.</p> <p>We will protect your information in compliance with Data Protection Regulations.</p>
 <p>Timeliness and Courtesy We will treat all customers promptly, courteously and with sensitivity while having due regard to privacy and confidentiality. We will be professional and helpful and will provide staff contact names to ensure ease of ongoing transactions.</p>	



Choice

We will aim to provide choice, where feasible, in payment methods, access to services and service delivery.

We will maximise the use of technology to improve service delivery and to provide online access to services where we can.



Consultation & Evaluation

We will provide a structured approach to meaningful consultation with, and participation by, our customers in relation to the development, delivery and review of services.

We will monitor and evaluate our services and performance against the commitments in this Charter and continue to review our Customer Services.

We will encourage customers to provide feedback (positive or negative) regarding the quality of service they have received.

We will encourage feedback in relation to any forms of discrimination encountered and any issues in adapting for specific needs.



Services in other Languages

We will accommodate our customers who wish to conduct their business through Irish or Irish Sign Language and other languages where possible.

We will provide public-facing documents in easy-to-read, plain language options and consider requests for translation of documents to accommodate the top spoken languages in Galway.



Better Co-Ordination

We will encourage a more coordinated and integrated approach to the delivery of services to our customers.



Accountability

We will carry out our work with honesty and integrity to the highest professional standards across all our services ensuring decisions are made in the best public interest.

We will monitor compliance and complete annual reviews of standards and performance and publish details of performance achieved against service indicators across the range of Council services in our Annual Report.



Internal Customer

We will ensure staff are recognised as internal customers and that they are properly trained, supported and consulted in the services they deliver.

We will use communications channels to support and respond to the important representational, corporate governance and community leadership roles of the Elected Members.

Complaints & Appeals

We will provide customers with an accessible, transparent and user-friendly complaints and appeals procedure for people who are unhappy with our quality of service, or who might have experienced any form of discrimination or failure to address specific needs that arise from diversity - details of which can be found at

<https://www.galwaycity.ie/services/your-council/complaints-and-appeals>



Appendix 2 Public Sector Equality and Human Rights Duty

In compliance with Section 42 of the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission Act 2014, the Disability Act 2005, the Equal Status Act 2000-2018, the Public Sector Equality and Human Rights Duty, Galway City Council is committed to eliminating discrimination, promoting equality and protecting human rights for the identified groups for the Duty. In accordance with our Implementation Plan for the Duty, Galway City Council undertook an equality and human rights impact assessment in the preparation of this Customer Service Action Plan and Customer Charter.

In this, Galway City Council ensured an appropriate and adequate response in the plan and in the charter to the following equality and human rights issues:

- High levels of discrimination in accessing and participating in services
- Systemic discrimination
- Harassment and sexual harassment
- Stereotyping, attitudinal barriers, misinformation, and false assumptions
- Lack of initiative to address experiences of discrimination, and ensure effective redress
- Lack of supports to enable informed choices
- Lack of voice and mechanisms to hear the voice of service-users and employees from across the identified groups
- Inaccessible environments including places to access services
- Inflexibility in and non-adaptive services
- Inaccessible communication and failure to adapt communication
- Invisibility for diversity
- Lack of understanding of and capacity to respond to diversity and its practical implications
- Digital disadvantage

In the implementation of this customer service action plan and in any monitoring or review of the plan, Galway City Council will ensure consistent and ongoing endeavour to address these issues that face the diversity of our customers, as part of our customer service.

Appendix 3 Customer Code of Conduct

Galway City Council aims to provide a high-quality service in a safe and secure environment. This code of conduct is for customers, elected members and members of the public who use the offices / facilities and who have dealings with Galway City Council.

In accordance with the Council's Dignity at Work Policy it is our responsibility to treat our customers and staff in a professional, courteous and civil manner at all times. Similarly, it is your responsibility as a customer of Galway City Council to treat employees of the Council in a professional, courteous and civil manner at all times. We ask you to respect our staff and our offices / facilities.

In order to achieve this, we ask our customers to note that the following behaviour will not be accepted in any of our offices / facilities or in any interaction with Council staff.

 <p>1. Behaviour which is disruptive or dangerous and interferes with the use and/or enjoyment of the facility by others or interferes with staff carrying out Council business and/or persons carrying out work on behalf of the Council.</p>	<p>2. Harassment or sexual harassment of staff or members of the public on the basis of their diversity, that undermines their dignity, and creates a hostile, intimidating, degrading, humiliating or offensive environment for them, as addressed under equality legislation.</p> 
 <p>3. Use of violence or threat of violence or intimidation towards staff and/or members of the public.</p>	<p>4. Any deliberate damage to or theft of Galway City Council's property or threats to carry out such damage or theft.</p> 
 <p>5. Intimidating behaviour, including accosting members of staff outside of their relevant office or place of work and attempting to coerce staff in any way.</p>	<p>6. The use of alcohol and illicit drugs.</p> 
	<p>8. Littering.</p> 
 <p>7. Smoking and vaping, unless in designated areas.</p>	<p>9. Partaking in any illegal activity.</p> 

 <p>10. Leaving personal property unattended while using Galway City Council's facilities.</p>	<p>11. Using video and/or audio recordings or taking photographs and/or the inappropriate posting of same on social media, without specific written authorisation.</p> 
 <p>12. Allowing children to be unsupervised and disruptive in Galway City Council's offices / facilities.</p>	<p>13. Bringing pets or animals (other than Guide Dogs / Assistance Dogs) into Galway City Council's premises is generally not permitted. The exceptions to this include parks or other recreational facilities, where dogs should be on a lead and under the control of the owner at all times.</p> 

The above list of unacceptable behaviours is not exhaustive, any discourteous and/or unprofessional behaviour or bad language will not be accepted and our staff may end a phone call or meeting, withdraw a service immediately, suspend a service temporarily or request that you leave our offices / facilities if you do not comply with this Code of Conduct, while this is regrettable it may be necessary. Customers who refuse to leave our offices / facilities when requested to do so may be referred to An Garda Síochána.

Please help us to encourage the responsible and considerate use of Galway City Council's facilities by observing this Customer Code of Conduct.



Appendix 4 Customer Complaints & Appeals Procedures

Galway City Council is committed to providing a quality service to all our customers and service users. Every effort is made by our staff to ensure that high quality services are delivered in a fair, open, efficient and courteous manner. However, there may be occasions when you feel that we have not achieved this aim and you may not be satisfied with the quality of service provided.

Galway City Council has a complaints and appeals system to assist customers who feel that they have been treated unfairly and not in accordance with the standards of Customer Care outlined in our Customer Charter.

This document sets out the procedures for dealing with Customer Service complaints.

What is a Customer Service complaint?

A complaint is defined as “An expression of dissatisfaction by one or more members of the public about an organisation’s action or lack of action, or about the standard of service or communication provided by or on behalf of the organisation

A complaint exists where a person feels that the manner in which they were dealt with by Galway City Council was not in accordance with good administrative practice and/or the standards of Customer Care outlined in our Customer Charter.

Who can make a Customer Service complaint?

All queries / complaints should be made in the first instance at department level. Staff are trained to answer your queries / complaints and every effort is made to resolve them promptly and efficiently.

However, you have a right to make a Customer Service complaint if you believe:

- You have been treated unfairly by Galway City Council,
- That a service to which you believe you are entitled is not being provided or is inadequate,
- That an action carried out by the Council or a decision made by it affects you adversely, or did not take into consideration all of the facts,
- That a request for service / information has been ignored,
- Anyone who feels they have experienced any form of discrimination or any form of harassment or sexual harassment or any failure to make reasonable accommodation, as provided for in our equality legislation.

In order to enhance accessibility and accommodate customer preference complaints can be made through various channels such as in person, by email, by telephone or by any other relevant channel.

An access officer is available for complainants who may have specific needs or require additional assistance.

A formal complaint will not be accepted unless it has been investigated by the relevant department first.

To support consistency in complaint submission and to ensure all relevant information is captured a formal complaints form must be completed.

Further information on our complaints handling procedure can be found at:

<https://www.galwaycity.ie/sites/default/files/2026-02/Complaint%20Handling%20Procedure%202026.docx>

What Issues are covered?

- Complaints in relation to delays, mistakes, poor customer service – instances where you did not receive the quality of service you feel you are entitled to
 - Complaints under Section 39 of the Disability Act 2005 relating to access to our services, building or information
 - Complaints about discrimination under the Equal Status Acts 2000 - 2018
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What Issues are not covered?

There are separate procedures in respect of the following issues / faults / complaints:

- Where a statutory procedure or right of appeal already exists, e.g. Planning, Traffic Fixed Charge Notices, requests under Freedom of Information, GDPR, Access to Information on the Environment, Ethics
- Illegal Dumping / Littering / Pollution
- Abandoned Vehicles
- Potholes / Road Maintenance
- Faulty Street Lighting
- Housing Maintenance
- Faulty Pay & Display machines

What is Galway City Council's Complaint & Appeals Procedure?

Customer Service Complaints

All complaints will be taken seriously and dealt with properly, fairly and impartially. Complaints will be responded to within 30 working days.

Upon receipt of a complaint, clarification may be sought, where necessary, from the designated Galway City Council staff member responsible for managing the complaint

Complaint Handling Stages

Frontline Resolution – Informal resolution by the relevant department.

Investigation – A formal review carried out by a senior manager not previously involved in the matter.

Any time critical decisions should be escalated directly from the frontline stage to the Office of the Ombudsman.

Where a mistake has been made by Galway City Council, we will apologise, endeavour to explain what happened and rectify the issue, where possible.

Where appropriate, we will review our procedures and make the necessary changes to avoid a reoccurrence of the issue.

Particular steps will be taken where complaints relate to discrimination, harassment, sexual harassment and lack of reasonable accommodation to ensure speed of response, to address any fears of victimisation, and to provide trained contact points in our Customer Services team for those making such complaints.

The Corporate Services Section will monitor the Complaints Procedure.

If a customer is still unhappy with how the complaint was dealt with by the Officer in charge of the area to which the complaint refers, the decision can be appealed.

Customer Service Appeals

The Customer Service Appeal must be made in writing, stating the grounds for the appeal and forwarded to Corporate Services Section, Galway City Council, City Hall, College Road, Galway.

The Director of Services for Corporate Affairs will then nominate an appropriate Officer to deal with the appeal.

In acknowledging receipt of a customer service appeal an indicative length of time will be given for dealing with the appeal.

How do I appeal a decision of Galway City Council?

Appeals should be made in writing to an officer who is more senior than the decision-maker, and the grounds for making the appeal should also be outlined.

In acknowledging receipt of a service appeal, an indicative length of time will be given for dealing with the appeal. You will be notified of the outcome of the appeal in writing.

Appeals should be sent in writing to Corporate Services, Galway City Council, City Hall, College Road, Galway.

The appeal submission should state that you are submitting a formal appeal.

Statutory Appeals:

We hope that we have been able to resolve your complaint satisfactorily. However, if you are unsatisfied with our response then you can refer your complaint to the Office of the Ombudsman. The Ombudsman is impartial and free to use.

When submitting an appeal to the Ombudsman, you will be asked to provide details of your complaint along with a copy of our final response. The most effective way to do this is by using one of the following methods:

- **Make A Complaint:** **www.ombudsman.ie**
- **Phone:** **01 636 5600**
- **Postal Address:** **Office of the Ombudsman, 6 Earlsfort Terrace,
Dublin 2. D02 W773**

If your appeal relates to any form of discrimination, harassment or sexual harassment, or failure to make reasonable accommodation, you can contact the Workplace Relations Commission to lodge a complaint, and the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission to seek support in doing so.

The Workplace Relations Commission contact details are:

- **Email Address:** customerservice@workplacerelations.ie
- **Phone:** 0818 80 80 90
- **Postal Address:** Information and Customer Service (ICS),
Workplace Relations Commission, O'Brien Road,
Carlow. R93 E920

The Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission contact details are:

- **Email Address:** info@ihrec.ie
 - **Phone:** 01 858 9601
 - **Postal Address:** Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission,
16-22 Green Street, Dublin 7. D07 CR20
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What information should I provide when making a complaint?

- Name, address, email address and/or phone number
 - Galway City Council reference number, if applicable
 - Reason for your complaint and an explanation as to why / how you think Galway City Council did not meet the required standard in this case – please give as much information as possible including dates and supporting documentation, if relevant
 - The name of the section, and if appropriate, the name of the staff member, with whom you were dealing
 - What result do you wish to achieve through this complaint
 - Have you already contacted the section concerned to resolve your complaint, please provide details of same
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Appendix 5 Policy on Abusive, Persistent, Vexatious and Unreasonable Customers and Complaints

Galway City Council does not expect our staff or Councillors to accept or tolerate behaviour by our customers that is abusive, offensive, threatening, or due to the frequency of contacts, accounts for a disproportionate amount of time and resources.

The aim of this policy is to identify situations where customer contact, service requests and/or complaints may be considered to be abusive, persistent, vexatious or unreasonable. The policy is intended to support Galway City Council's Customer Complaints and Appeals procedures which sets out the process for customers to make official complaints in relation to the service provided by the Council.

Raising legitimate queries, service requests, complaints or criticisms of a complaints procedure should not in itself lead to someone being regarded as vexatious or an unreasonably persistent complainant. Similarly, the fact that a customer is unhappy with the service provided or the outcome of a complaint and seeks to challenge it should not cause them to be considered vexatious or unreasonably persistent.

For the purpose of this policy, persistent, vexatious and/or unreasonable customers and complaints are those which, because of the nature or frequency of the customer's contacts, impede the Council's consideration of their or other customers' complaints / service requests or otherwise disproportionately impact on the operational capacity of the Council. Single incidents may be unacceptable in themselves, but more often the difficulty may be caused by unreasonably persistent behaviour that is time consuming to manage and interferes with proper consideration of the request / complaint.

Unacceptable Behaviour

Unacceptable behaviour includes behaviour which is abusive, offensive or threatening and may include:

- Having threatened or used physical violence towards staff or members of the public
 - Using abusive, threatening and/or foul language on the telephone
 - Using abusive, threatening and/or foul language at public counters or in face-to-face meetings
 - Using abusive, threatening and/or foul language in written correspondence, including letters, emails, application forms, social media and online
 - Sending multiple emails to the same section / staff member or to multiple sections / staff members on the same issue
 - Recording staff without their consent, both in person and on the telephone
 - Leaving multiple voicemails in relation to the same issue
 - Harassment or sexual harassment of staff on the basis of their diversity, that undermines their dignity, and creates a hostile, intimidating, degrading, humiliating or offensive environment for them, as addressed under equality legislation
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Vexatious, Persistent and/or Unreasonable Customers and Complaints:

The description of "vexatious, persistent or unreasonable" may apply separately or jointly to a customer or complaint. The following are examples, but is not an exhaustive list, of vexatious, persistent and/or unreasonable customers or complaints:

- Making an unreasonable number of contacts with the Council, by any means, in relation to a specific (or similar) query /complaint / service request
- Making excessive demands on the time and resources of staff with lengthy phone calls, emails to numerous Council staff, submission of unnecessary or unnecessarily large volumes of documentation, detailed letters/emails frequently and expecting immediate responses

- Having insufficient or no grounds for their complaint
- Refusing to specify the grounds for the complaint, despite offers of assistance
- Refusing to engage or cooperate with a staff member who is providing assistance and demanding the complaint be referred to a more senior officer
- Making the same complaint repeatedly, perhaps with minor differences, and demanding that these are treated as new complaints
- Introducing trivial and/or irrelevant new information at a later stage
- Refusing to co-operate with the complaints' investigation process
- Refusing to accept that certain issues are not within the scope of the Customer Complaints and Appeals procedure
- Adopting a 'scatter gun' approach: several complainants pursuing parallel complaints on the same issue or one complainant pursuing parallel complaints on the same issue with several organisations
- Persistently approaching the Council, through different routes, about the same issue
- Electronically recording meetings and conversations, through video, audio or photographic means, without the prior knowledge and consent of the other person/s involved
- Refusing to accept that their query, service request or complaint is not within the remit of the Council
- Raising numerous and detailed questions and insisting that they are all answered
- Presenting irrelevant and/or unreasonable arguments, insisting that their version of events be accepted as fact without any evidence to support their argument, refusing to consider or accept counter-arguments, refusing to accept documented evidence as factual
- Continuing to ask the same questions which have either been asked and answered previously or are not within the power of the Council to answer
- Making groundless complaints about the conduct of staff members
- Refusing to co-operate with or impeding Council staff in carrying out their duties
- Misusing Council telephone numbers, e.g. phoning staff landline or mobile numbers repeatedly including outside normal working hours

How the Council will manage this Behaviour

We will ensure that all valid complaints are being, or have been, investigated in accordance with the Council's Complaints and Appeals procedures.

When we consider that a customer's behaviour is unacceptable, we will tell them why we find their behaviour unacceptable or unreasonable and we will ask them to change it. However, if this behaviour continues, we will take action to restrict the customer's contact with the Council.

The decision to restrict access to the Council will normally be taken after we have reviewed the service/s provided to the customer. The decision will be taken at Section Head level and where more than one department is being contacted, agree a cross-departmental approach and designate a lead officer to co-ordinate the Council's response. Any restrictions imposed will be evidence based, appropriate and proportionate.

The following are details of the restrictions that may be imposed:

- Requesting contact in a particular format (written correspondence only)
- Requiring contact to take place with a named staff member only
- Banning the customer from sending emails to specific staff members
- Restricting telephone calls to specified days and/or times
- Refusing access to Council offices and/or facilities or restricting access to Council offices and/or facilities to appointment only
- Requiring any face-to-face contacts to take place in the presence of a witness and in a suitable location
- Requesting that the customer enter into a written agreement about their future conduct
- Refusal to accept any further calls/complaints from the customer, either for a specified period of time
- Letting the customer/complainant know that we will not reply to or acknowledge any further contact from them on that specific topic

explain why we consider their behaviour is unacceptable/unreasonable and inform them of the action we propose to take, the planned duration of the action and how to appeal a decision. We will also enclose a copy of this policy and our Customer Code of Conduct.

Where the contact / complaints are being received anonymously by telephone, we will request contact details from the customer, and

- If the customer provides their name and contact details, they will be informed, in writing, as above of the action we propose to take.
- • If the customer refuses to give their name or contact details, they will be informed during the telephone call that as they are not adhering to the Council's Customer Code of Conduct, the action we propose to take, the proposed duration of the action and how they can appeal a decision. We will also inform them where they can obtain a copy of this policy and our Customer Code of Conduct.

Where the behaviour threatens the immediate safety or welfare of the Council's staff, we will consider other options which may include referral of the matter to An Garda Síochána or the instigation of legal action.

Recording and Reviewing cases of Unreasonable Behaviour

All cases of unreasonable behaviour, where the provisions of this policy have been invoked, will be recorded on an incident form. Completed incident forms will be signed by the appropriate Head of Function and copied, for attention and retention, to the Head of Corporate Governance and Services.

Any restriction that is imposed will be reviewed by the Head of Section on a regular basis. The customer/complainant will be informed of the result of this review if the terms of the decision to apply this policy to them has been changed or extended.

Appendix 6 Freedom of Information

The Freedom of Information Act, 2014 entitles a member of the public to apply for information held by public bodies. It gives individuals the legal right to:

- Access records held by public bodies,
- Have personal information on them corrected or updated where such information is incomplete, incorrect or misleading,
- Be given a reason for decisions taken by the public body that affects them.

You can ask for the following records held by Galway City Council:

- Any records relating to you personally, regardless of when they were created,
- All other records created after 21st October 1998.

The Act sets out certain exceptions which limit the release of records.

To submit a request please email foi@galwaycity.ie and note in the body of the email that you are making a request under the Freedom of Information Act 2014. You can also send your request to the Freedom of Information Officer, Galway City Council, City Hall, College Road, Galway, H91 X4K8.

Access to Information on the Environment.

This right to access Environmental information comes from Directive 2003/4/EC of the European Parliament, and the Access to Information on the Environment Regulations 2007 – 2011

To submit a request for information under the Access to Information on the Environment Regulations please:

Submit your request in writing by email or by post

Email: foi@GalwayCity.ie with AIE Request in the subject title

Post: AIE Officer, Corporate Services Department, Galway City Council, City Hall, College Road, Galway

State in your communication that your application for information is being made under the 'Access to Information on the Environment Regulations 2007-2011'

State, as accurately as possible, the nature of the environmental information you wish to request and provide your contact details.

For more information, please visit <https://www.galwaycity.ie/services/your-council/your-council-services/freedom-of-information-foi-act-2014>

Appendix 7 Data Protection

Galway City Council will process all customer information in accordance with General Data Protection Regulations and the Data Protection Acts, 1988 to 2018, as amended.

Under GDPR and the Data Protection Acts, you have right to privacy. This is not an absolute right. When processing your applications or requests, we will require you provide personal data and where necessary provide special categories of personal data. When Galway City Council collects personal data and special categories of personal data, we will only request data that is necessary to process your application or deal with your query.

Representations will only be accepted upon receipt of a completed and signed consent form, in accordance with organisational protocols.

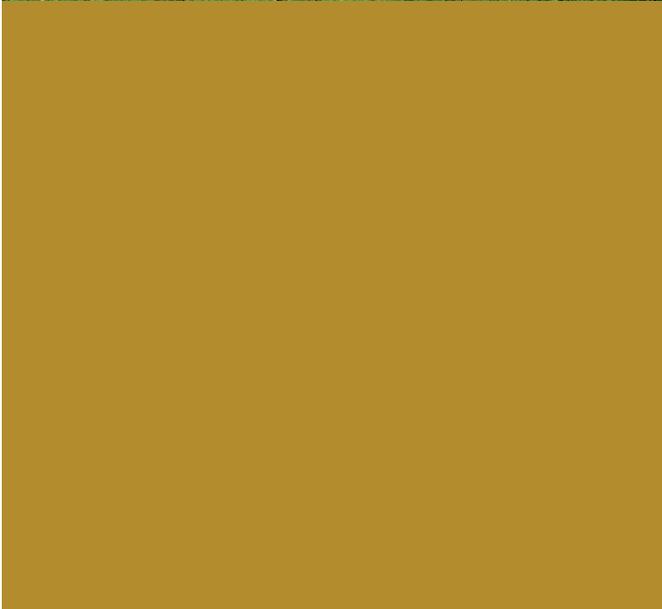
Galway City Council will only hold the personal data and special categories of personal data for as long as we require it to process your request or deal with your application. Galway City Council adhere to the data minimisation principles within GDPR.

As a customer you are entitled to submit a GDPR rights request to the Council. Your GDPR rights include the following:

- (a) Right to be informed about why Galway City Council requires your personal and special categories of personal data.
- (b) Right to request a copy of your personal data
- (c) Right to rectification of any inaccurate personal data
- (d) Right to erasure of your personal data
- (e) Right to data portability
- (f) Right to object to processing
- (g) Right to restrict to processing
- (h) Right not be subjected to automated decision making

If you wish to enforce your GDPR right you can do so by emailing the Data Protection Officer at dpo@galwaycity.ie, write in to us and address the letter for the attention of the Data Protection Officer, contact Galway City Council via telephone or contact us on our social media sites or simply speak to any member of staff. If you are writing to Galway City Council, our address is City Hall, College Road, Galway, H91 X4K8.

For more information, please visit <https://www.galwaycity.ie/privacy-policy>.



Contact

Galway City Council,
City Hall, College Road,
Galway,
H91 X4K8.

Phone: +353 91 536400
www.galwaycity.ie

