



AN TÚDARÁS PÓILÍNEACHTA
POLICING AUTHORITY

**Customer Charter
and Customer Service Action Plan
2017-2019**



Customer Charter and Customer Service Action Plan

Contents

ABOUT THE POLICING AUTHORITY	1
CUSTOMER CHARTER	2
Contact by Telephone	2
Written correspondence.....	2
Attendance at the offices of the Policing Authority	3
Online Communications.....	3
Re-Directing Communications which do not relate to the Authority.....	3
Feedback	3
Suppliers.....	4
Services through Irish.....	4
Freedom of Information Requests.....	4
Equality / Diversity	4
Customer complaints procedure	4
CUSTOMER SERVICE ACTION PLAN.....	6
1. Customer Service Commitments	6
2. What we expect from you.	7
3. Handling of written correspondence	7
4. Meetings of the Policing Authority held in Public.....	8
5. Procurement, Recruitment and Selection Opportunities	9
6. Complaints handling procedures	10
7. Evaluation and Review	12
Appendix A: Complaint Form	13
Appendix B: Unreasonable Conduct Policy.....	14

July 2017

About The Policing Authority

The Policing Authority ('the Authority') is an independent body that oversees the performance of the Garda Síochána of its functions relating to policing services.

Our **Vision** is of a society served by a professional, impartial, constantly improving police organisation which deserves and enjoys the trust and support of the people.

Our **Mission** is to drive excellent policing through valued and effective oversight and governance

The primary focus of the Authority's work is to oversee how the Garda Síochána as an organisation delivers policing services in the State. We do this in a number of ways, for example, the Authority holds monthly oversight meetings with the Garda Commissioner, and these are held in public at least four times a year. The Authority has significant responsibilities in relation to senior appointments of Garda members and senior civilians. On an annual basis, the Authority sets the policing priorities and performance targets for the Garda Síochána and oversees and reviews policing strategy and performance on an ongoing basis.

Full details of the functions of the Policing Authority are set out [here](#) on our website.

This Customer Charter and Customer Services Action Plan sets out the standard of service that people can expect in their dealings with the Authority and explains how you can make contact with the Authority in relation to the various functions it performs.

Customer Charter

The Authority is committed to providing all those who communicate with us a professional, efficient and courteous service with a high standard of service in accordance with the principles of Quality Customer Service.¹ This Customer Charter is the Policing Authority's public statement on the service customers can expect when dealing with the Authority.

Contact by Telephone

When you contact us by telephone you can expect that we will:

- Answer calls to our main switchboard number promptly during office hours [9:30 to 5:00] ;
- Facilitate you recording a voicemail message where phones are unattended and update voicemail messages as appropriate to indicate staff availability;
- Respond to voicemail messages within one working day of receipt;
- Inform you of the name of the person who takes the call and any person to whom you are being transferred when it is necessary to transfer your call;
- Deal with your query in a courteous, respectful and helpful manner; and
- If we cannot answer your queries immediately, take your details and agree to call you back within one working day and at a time that suits you.

Note that if the information you wish to convey by phone is complex or lengthy you may be asked to communicate that information to us in writing.

Written Correspondence

When you contact us in writing, by letter or email, in general you can expect that we will:

- Acknowledge or reply to written communications addressed to the Authority within three working days;
- Reply to your enquiry within fifteen working days. In cases where we cannot provide a full reply within this period, we will provide an interim reply explaining why and tell you when you can expect a full reply; and
- Use automated e-mail responses when staff are out of the office for lengthy periods to provide you with alternative contact details or details of colleagues you can contact in their absence.

Please note that correspondence addressed to the Policing Authority or to individual Members of the Authority, will typically be handled and responded to by the staff of the Authority.

¹ <http://www.per.gov.ie/en/qcs-initiative/>

Attendance at the Offices of the Policing Authority

The Authority does not have a public office and any meetings must be pre-arranged. Anyone personally attending at the Policing Authority offices (e.g. to attend a pre-arranged meeting) can expect that we will:

- Treat you with courtesy, respect your privacy and be fair and helpful in our dealings with you; and
- Provide appropriate facilities for meetings that ensure necessary privacy, comply with health and safety standards and facilitate access for people with disabilities.

Online Communications

We are committed to ensuring that we will:

- Make key information and publications relating to the work of the Authority available on our website;
- Ensure that publications and other information on our website are clear, accurate, up to date, easily accessible and address user needs;
- Maintain and continuously improve our website to ensure that it is accessible, informative and up to date; and
- Use social media appropriately and respectfully.

It is not the policy of the Authority to respond to communications made through social media. If you desire a response to a query or comment we request that you communicate with us by email.

Re-Directing Communications which do not relate to the Authority

If you make contact with us about a matter which does not fall within our remit we will:

- Indicate that we do not have a role in the particular matter;
- Explain our functions to you; and
- Make every reasonable effort to identify the organisation which will be in a position to deal with the matter and if possible provide contact details.

Feedback

We welcome and value your comments and suggestions on all aspects of our services. One of the Authority's functions is to promote and support continuous improvement of policing in Ireland. In particular in this context, we encourage you to provide feedback, including positive feedback, to the Authority about matters relating to policing or the performance of the Garda Síochána. Any such relevant feedback may inform our ongoing oversight work.

Suppliers

We will operate clear, impartial and transparent tendering and purchasing procedures in accordance with Public Procurement Guidelines. We will ensure that payments to suppliers are made in accordance with applicable Prompt Payment legislation and regulations.

Services through Irish

We will accommodate people who wish to conduct their business with us through Irish, including by:

- Responding in Irish to correspondence received in Irish;
- Publishing main Authority publications simultaneously in Irish and English;
- Provision of information leaflets in Irish and English; and
- Provision for translation of content on our website from English to Irish.

Freedom of Information Requests

We commit to processing any Freedom of Information requests received within the required statutory timeframe.

Equality / Diversity

We commit to providing a service to customers that upholds their rights to equal treatment established by equality legislation. We will aim to ensure that our services and facilities are accessible to all our customers, including those with special needs.

Customer Complaints Procedure

If you are unhappy about the standard of service provided by or on behalf of the Authority by its staff we would encourage you to raise this issue directly with the individual concerned. If the issue is not resolved to your satisfaction, you may make a formal complaint by completing the complaint form on our website. The matter will be dealt with fairly and impartially and in accordance with our complaints handling procedures. If you are not satisfied with the resolution of the matter, you will be provided with a right of appeal. If the matter remains unresolved, you have the right of further appeal to the Office of the Ombudsman.

Contact Details For The Authority

By Phone:	<i>Main number :</i> +353 1 858 9090 <i>Appointments Unit:</i> +353 1 858 9058 <i>Press Office:</i> +353 1 858 9038
By Post:	The Policing Authority, 4th Floor, 90 King Street North, Dublin 7, D07 N7CV
By Email:	<i>General Enquiries:</i> info@policingauthority.ie <i>Press Office:</i> pressoffice@policingauthority.ie

Customer Service Action Plan

This Customer Service Action Plan develops the commitments and standards set out in the Customer Charter and outlines the nature and quality of services that customers can expect to receive from the Authority.

1. Customer Service Commitments

The Policing Authority strives to provide the highest quality customer service.

We are committed to meeting your needs by:

- Listening to you and responding to you fairly and with respect.
- Being professional and courteous. We will do what we promise to do and endeavour to give you the right information in a timely manner.
- Being open and transparent in the way in which we carry out our functions. We will answer your questions as fully as we can in a timely manner and will make sure our answers are as simple and easy-to-understand as possible.
- Being accessible. We will be available to answer your questions where appropriate by telephone, by letter or by electronic means of communication.
- Directing you to the person or organisation who is best placed to assist with your query. We will note your correspondence and provide you with the details you need to make contact with the person or organisation concerned.
- Publishing information and material on the conduct of our business in a timely manner. This will include making the minutes of Authority and Committee meetings and video footage of meetings held in public available on our website.
- Protecting your privacy. We will keep accurate records of your dealings with us and keep those records safe and confidential.
- Striving to make sure that our service takes account of any special needs or requirements that you may have.
- Processing complaints relating to the Policing Authority efficiently and treating all suggestions and feedback with due consideration.

The staff of the Policing Authority are bound by the Code of Conduct for Policing Authority Members and Staff which can be viewed [here](#). In accordance with that Code, Members and staff are required to observe the highest standards of conduct by adhering to the key principles of:

- Acting in the Public interest;
- Integrity and Independence;
- Transparency;

- Confidentiality;
- Participation; and
- Fairness.

In addition, as civil servants, our staff must comply with the requirements of the Civil Service Code of Standards and Behaviour, which can be viewed [here](#). This sets out the framework of behaviour and values, including quality customer service, within which we must work.

2. What we expect from you.

We expect you to:

- ensure that, to the best of your knowledge, the information you provide to us is correct;
- understand that we cannot enter into lengthy discussions about matters by phone or email if those matters do not relate to our statutory functions; and
- conduct yourself in a polite manner when dealing with us.

We understand that in times of trouble or stress, people may act out of character. There may have been upsetting or distressing circumstances leading up to your communication with the Authority. We do not view behaviours as unacceptable or unreasonable just because someone is forceful or determined. We do believe that people have the right to be heard, understood and respected. However, we also consider that our staff have the same rights.

To provide for where unreasonable conduct arises, we have set out an *Unreasonable Conduct Policy*, in Appendix B.

3. Handling of written correspondence

When you contact us in writing, by letter or email, in general you can expect that we will:

- Acknowledge or reply to written communications within three working days;
- Reply to your communication within fifteen working days. In cases where we cannot provide a full reply within this period, we will provide an interim reply explaining why and tell you when you can expect a full reply;
- Explain to you when the matter raised is not within the Authority's remit and where possible provide you with alternative contact details if relevant;
- Consider comments, suggestions and feedback on all aspects of our services where it is judged to be of value to the Authority's ongoing oversight work;
- Handle complaints about Authority members and staff in line with the Authority's complaints procedures;

- Use automated e-mail responses when staff are out of the office for lengthy periods to provide you with alternative contact details or details of colleagues you can contact in their absence.

Although the Authority will generally acknowledge or respond to all correspondence which is addressed to it, there are certain circumstances where it may be judged appropriate not to acknowledge correspondence, for example:

- Where it makes sense to issue an immediate final reply
- Where the correspondence contains abusive material;
- Where the Authority receives persistent correspondence which does not contain new information; or
- Where the Authority is copied on communications which are clearly primarily being directed at another person or body;

Where a person is unhappy with the way in which Authority staff have responded to his/her correspondence he/she may make a complaint in accordance with section 6 below.

4. Meetings of the Policing Authority held in Public

The Policing Authority has a statutory function to hold at least four meetings with the Garda Commissioner in public each year. These meetings are open to members of the public and the media to attend, and are an opportunity to see the work of the Authority in action.

In making arrangements for these meetings we aim to provide a safe and accessible venue and to ensure that the proceedings can be clearly observed and heard by the audience. We also aim to provide an environment in which the Members of the Authority and representatives of the Garda Síochána can conduct their business effectively and without disruption.

Observers at these meetings can expect that:

- Information about the meeting including venue, agenda, date and time will be published on the Authority's website generally one week in advance;
- Any cancellation or change in arrangements will be published on the Authority's website as soon as possible; and
- Staff of the Authority at the venue will provide assistance and information in a courteous, helpful manner.

Details of these arrangements and the conduct of observers are set out in the 'Arrangements for attending Authority Meetings held in Public' which can be viewed on our website [here](#) .

5. Procurement, Recruitment and Selection Opportunities

We will operate clear, impartial and transparent tendering and purchasing procedures in accordance with Public Procurement Guidelines and within the frameworks established by the Office of Government Procurement.

In seeking opportunities for:

- Contracts for the supply of goods and services above certain procurement thresholds;
- Open recruitment of staff for the Authority; and
- Selection competitions for the ranks of Assistant Commissioner, Chief Superintendent and Superintendent in the Garda Síochána, for which the Authority has responsibility,

You can expect that we will:

- Advertise opportunities on our website, in addition to other communication appropriate to the process concerned;
- Provide dedicated means of contacting us by phone and email in relation to these opportunities;
- Provide comprehensive details of our requirements and the process for submitting an application, tender or other expression of interest;
- Provide details of our processes and the standards of practice which we aim to provide;
- Clearly state any deadline for submitting an application, tender or other expression of interest or for the provision of related information or supporting documentation;
- Respond to all queries and requests for information in regard to the process within a reasonable time period with regard to relevant timeframes;
- Publish details of queries in relation to a process as “Frequently Asked Questions” (‘FAQs’) so that responses are available to all interested parties in an open, transparent manner;
- Respond to your enquiry, application, tender or other expression of interest, as appropriate, in a timely and effective manner;
- Put in place processes to provide appropriate feedback and review in relation to our processes and
- Treat your personal information as confidential in accordance with Data Protection legislation.

6. Complaints handling procedures

The Authority is committed to dealing openly and effectively with any complaint you may wish to make about its Members or staff. A complaint should set out the basis for your dissatisfaction about the standard of service provided by or on behalf of the Authority.

Informal Resolution

If possible, we believe it is best to deal with things as soon as possible and in a straightforward and direct way. If you have a complaint we would encourage you, where possible, to raise it with the staff member you are dealing with. He or she will try to resolve it for you there and then if this is possible. If there are lessons to be learnt from addressing your complaint, you may ask the member of staff to draw them to the attention of the Chief Executive.

Making a formal complaint about Authority members or staff

If you wish to make a formal complaint you may do so by:

- Completing the complaint form at Appendix A (also available on our website [here](#)) and sending it to Secretary of the Authority, either by mail to our office address marked for the attention of the Secretary or by email to info@policingauthority.ie with 'For the attention of the Secretary' in the subject line of your email; or
- Calling the Secretary of the Authority on 01-858 9090

Who will deal with a complaint?

- Complaints about staff will be handled by the relevant line manager;
- Complaints about the Chief Executive will be handled by the Chairperson;
- Complaints about Authority Members will be handled the Chairperson; and
- Complaints about the Chairperson will be handled by the Chair of the Authority's Audit and Risk Committee.

Depending on which circumstance the person dealing with a complaint will be referred to as the "Complaints Officer".

Process for dealing with Complaints about staff

In considering a formal complaint received the Complaints Officer will review the Complaints form and will have regard to whether the complaint relates to the work of the Authority or the conduct of Authority Members or staff in the context of their Authority work. If the matter appears to require further consideration then the Complaints Officer will further examine the complaint and make recommendations in relation to it. This may include asking for further information to validate the complaint.

The individual complained against shall be shown the material gathered, including the initial complaint, and shall be given the opportunity to respond to the Complaints Officer. The individual against whom a complaint has been made shall have an opportunity to comment on the final letter to the complainant before it issues in all cases. If there is a disagreement between the individual and the Complaints Officer on the outcome of the examination, the matter should be referred to the Chief Executive for review.

The decision of the Chief Executive shall be final. Each complaint will be dealt with on its own merits and if a complaint is upheld, the Complaints Officer may recommend action to the Chief Executive to resolve the matter and to avoid any recurrence of the circumstances concerned.

Process for dealing with Complaints about the Chief Executive, Authority members or the Chairperson

The process will be as described for staff but references to the Chief Executive above will be replaced by the Chairperson in the case of complaints about the Chief Executive or Authority members and by the Chair of the Authority's Audit and Risk Committee in the case of complaints about the Chairperson.

Communication to complainant

Once a determination has been made in relation to the complaint, you will be informed about the outcome and any lessons learnt. If you are unhappy with the resolution of the complaint a review may be requested by writing to the Secretary of the Authority either by mail to our office address marked for the attention of the Secretary or by email to info@policingauthority.ie with 'For the attention of the Secretary' in the subject line of your email. If the matter remains unresolved from your perspective, you have the right to refer the matter to the Office of the Ombudsman.

Referral to Office of the Ombudsman

If you are not happy with the resolution of the complaint by the Authority you may complain to the Office of the Ombudsman. The Ombudsman is independent and can look into your complaint if you personally, or a person on whose behalf you are complaining:

- have been treated unfairly or received unsatisfactory service through some failure on the part of the Authority;
- have been disadvantaged personally by a service failure.

You can contact the Office of the Ombudsman by the following means:

- **Telephone:** 01 6395600
- **Lo-Call:** 1890223030
- **Email:** ombudsman@ombudsman.ie
- **Website:** www.ombudsman.ie
- **Writing to:** The Office of the Ombudsman
18 Lower Leeson Street
Dublin 2

7. Evaluation and Review

This Customer Service Action Plan and the accompanying Customer Charter are designed to cover the period 2017-2019. In order to ensure that we continue to provide the best customer service possible in compliance with this Customer Service Plan and Charter we commit to:

- Monitoring the operation of this Customer Service Charter and Action Plan and implementing continuous improvements where required; and
- Undertaking a review of our policies at the end of this period and taking account of improvements in future policies.



AN TÚDARÁS PÓILÍNEACHTA
POLICING AUTHORITY

Complaint Form

For use in making a complaint about Authority Members or Staff

Name:	
Address::	
Email:	
Phone:	
Description of Complaint:	
What you are hoping to achieve (for example an apology, an explanation etc.)	
<p><i>Note – in describing your complaint, please provide a full description of the nature of your complaint and how you think it might be resolved, please use additional pages as necessary and sign each additional page)</i></p>	

Signed:

Date:

Please Return your completed form to The Secretary, The Policing Authority, 4th Floor, 90 King Street North, Dublin 7, D07 N7CV or email to info@policingauthority.ie

Unreasonable Conduct Policy

In communicating with customers we require our staff to listen to you, respond to your concerns and treat you fairly and with respect. We also require them to be professional and courteous. However, this does not mean that we expect our staff to tolerate behaviour by our customers that is abusive, offensive, threatening or, due to the frequency of contact, accounts for a disproportionate amount of time and resources that could be spent more effectively dealing with other Authority work.

Unreasonable Conduct

This type of behaviour is classified as unreasonable conduct and can be identified as comprising:

- **Unreasonable Persistence:** Persistence with a matter that does not contain new information and has already been considered by the Authority.
- **Unreasonable Demands:** An outcome or approach is expected that is unrealistic or disproportionate. Examples include repeated demands for investigation or action in relation to a matter that is outside the Authority's remit, seeking a remedy that is disproportionate or unrealistic, or trying to direct the Authority as to how to conduct its work.
- **Unreasonable Lack of Co-operation:** Persistent presentation of information in a disorganised manner. Examples include not identifying a matter clearly, presentation of often unnecessary voluminous material while expecting almost instantaneous responses, and dishonesty in the statement of facts.
- **Unreasonable Arguments:** Examples include exaggerating issues, presenting irrelevant and/or unreasonable arguments, placing too much emphasis on trivialities, insisting that the complainant's version of events be accepted as fact where there is no objective evidence to support this view, obstinately refusing to consider counter-arguments, being guided by unfounded conspiracy theories and/or by desire for revenge or retribution against another person or public body.
- **Unreasonable Behaviour:** Unreasonable behaviour includes threats of violence, abuse of Authority staff, rude or aggressive conduct, and threats of self-harm.

How We Will Manage Such Behaviour

When we consider that a customer's behaviour is unreasonable we will tell them why we find their behaviour unreasonable and we will ask them to change it. Where it might be of assistance, we will consider possible adjustments to our service which may help the customer to avoid unreasonable behaviour into the future.

Authority staff who directly experience unreasonable behaviour may deal with the behaviour at the time of the incident in a manner they consider appropriate and in line with this policy and this may include politely terminating a conversation. When they experience unreasonable behaviour, they will report the matter to their line-manager without delay for consideration in line with this policy.

If the unreasonable behaviour continues, we will take action to restrict the customer's contact with the Authority. The decision to restrict access to our Office will only normally be taken after we have reviewed the service given by our Office to the particular customer. The decision will be taken at Head of Division level or the Chief Executive. Any restrictions imposed will be appropriate and proportionate. The options we are most likely to consider are:

- requesting contact in a particular form (letters only);
- requiring contact to take place with a named officer;
- restricting telephone calls to specified days and times;
- asking the customer to enter into an agreement about their future conduct; and
- ultimately terminating all contact with the complainant where the behaviour shows no signs of abating

In general, we will write to tell the customer why we believe their behaviour is unreasonable and what action we propose to take. However, where the behaviour is so extreme that it threatens the immediate safety and welfare of the Authority's staff or others, we will consider other options, for example, reporting the matter to the Garda Síochána or instigating legal action.