



Cairt Chustaiméirí Customer Charter

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Cairt Chustaiméirí Customer Charter

Introduction

Tipperary County Council's Vision Statement is "*Tipperary – A vibrant place where people can live, visit and work in a competitive and resilient economy, a sustainable environment and an inclusive and active community*".

In pursuance of the commitment given in the Tipperary County Council Corporate Plan 2020-2024 this Customer Charter has been put in place and sets out the standards of service you, as a customer, may expect from Tipperary County Council.

Our Customers

Given the diversity of our activities, the Council has a wide range of customers including members of the public, business, community and voluntary groups, elected representatives, other local authorities, government and non-government agencies, our own staff and other visitors to the County. A number of specific services are provided directly to members of the public.

Internal Customers

We aim to:

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

The Council is committed to recognising its staff as internal customers and to acknowledging the important role they play in contributing to the Council's performance – particularly in terms of delivering a high-quality service to all our customers. Internal customer service is a two-way process: we are all customers of each other. Good external and good internal customer service share the same qualities – timeliness, courtesy, respect, openness and consistency. We acknowledge the contribution, input and views of the people who work with us.

Our Commitment to you

Courtesy – Consideration – Openness – Impartiality

Meeting your needs is important to us and we aim to achieve this by:

- Giving you the best possible service and providing helpful advice;
- Treating you properly, fairly, impartially and with courtesy;
- Aiming to ensure that your rights to equal treatment established by equality legislation are upheld in the delivery of our services;
- Aiming to meet any special needs you may have;
- Maintain privacy and confidentiality, where necessary;
- Be honest and open in dealing with you;
- Discuss any aspect of your dealings with us;
- Explain the decision-making procedures.

Our Performance

We undertake to:

- Review and evaluate our performance;
- Examine the development and delivery of our services in order to meet the needs of all customers;
- Provide appropriately trained employees to ensure quality services delivery;
- Maximise the benefits of Information Technology to continuously improve service delivery;
- Carry out surveys on an ongoing basis to assess the quality of services being provided.

Telephone Calls

If you telephone us:

- Our Customer Services Desk Staff will answer your telephone enquiries promptly and politely;
- We aim to answer your calls within an overall average of 30 seconds;
- We will give our name;
- We will aim to answer your questions straight away. If we cannot do so, we will either put you through to the relevant Section/District or record your details and notify the relevant Section/District on the same day;
- Be as helpful and informative as possible;
- If it is necessary to transfer your call to a different Section, we will tell you why and give you the name of the person we are transferring you to.

- In accordance with the criteria outlined in Appendix 3 – Policy on dealing with abusive, persistent or vexatious complaints and complainants, if a call is determined abusive by a staff member, the caller will be informed that in compliance with the customer charter, the call will be terminated and the incident will be recorded using the violence and aggression incident reporting form.
- In the event that the caller changes their behaviour and wishes to continue with the phone call, the staff member shall advise the caller that it will be necessary to activate voice recording, subject to their consent to continue call. If consent is not forthcoming the call will be terminated and logged.
- If behaviour persists and no consent is given, the staff member shall inform the caller that the call is being terminated due to verbal abusive nature of the call.

Note:

It is Council policy not to permit the electronic recording of phone calls by our customers.

Visiting our Offices

If you call to see us we will: -

- Ensure that the Customer Services Desk is staffed during office hours;
- Identify ourselves and be courteous in all interaction with customers;
- Respect your privacy and ensure that all matters are dealt with in a confidential manner;
- Deal with your enquiry as quickly as possible;
- Aim to answer your questions fully; If we cannot do this we will arrange to phone you, or write to you if you prefer;
- Try to arrange meetings at a time that suits you and will not keep you waiting unnecessarily;
- Aim to provide private meeting rooms to discuss your query, where necessary;

- Ensure that our public offices comply with occupational health and safety standards;
- Ensure that our public offices are accessible for people with disabilities; Our main offices providing direct information or services to the public – Clonmel, Nenagh, Tipperary Town, Thurles, Carrick on Suir and all our libraries are accessible for people with disabilities and special needs;
- Continue to proactively support a culture of universal accessibility for all our services.

Note:

It is Council policy not to permit the electronic recording of conversations or meetings by our customers.

Written and Electronic Communication

If you write to us we will: -

- Acknowledge your correspondence in clear plain language within 7 working days. Please note that this will be an automated reply, which will include a case number for reference purposes, and a comprehensive reply will issue. We will issue a comprehensive reply within 3 weeks of receiving your correspondence. This correspondence will include a printed contact name, a contact number and a reference number, where appropriate. If we cannot do this we will write to explain why and tell you when you can expect a full reply – this undertaking does not in any way affect statutory deadlines.
- If your correspondence relates to a matter that comes within the remit of another public body, we will direct the correspondence to that body and inform you accordingly;
- Use automated email responses when employees are out of the office:
- Reply “as Gaeilge” when correspondence is received through Irish; *Note:* We have a dedicated council address: customerservices@tipperarycoco.ie for all customer enquiries.

Social media

Tipperary County Council uses social media to share information, gather feedback and create a dialogue with our community. We welcome your input and thoughts, but will not engage with comments or content that includes:

- Abusive or threatening language
- Offensive, indecent or obscene language that could be discriminatory or promotes discrimination of any kind
- Posts of a defamatory or potentially defamatory nature
- Inciting, condoning or encouraging conduct which could result in a criminal offence, civil liability, or otherwise breach any laws
- Plagiarised material; any material in violation of any laws, including copyright
- Private, personal information published without consent Information unrelated to the content of the forum
- Commercial solicitation or solicitation of donations
- Spamming in nature
- Trolling or deliberate disruption of discussion

Comments on our social media accounts will not be considered as contacting Tipperary County Council for official purposes. The best way for us to respond to questions you raise is by emailing [**customerservices@tipperarycoco.ie**](mailto:customerservices@tipperarycoco.ie) or phoning 0818 06 5000.

Content posted by other users on Tipperary County Council's social media channels does not necessarily reflect the opinions or policies of Tipperary County Council.

We may share information that we think will be of interest or use to our followers, but please do not be offended if we do not share something you ask us to; as a trusted organisation, any sharing of information could be seen as endorsement of a particular view, individual or organisation, and it is important that we remain impartial. For this reason, we do not promote, share or engage with political events such as protests, marches and rallies.

Service in Irish

We aim to ensure that:

- Customers who wish to conduct their business through Irish can do so, within the resources available to us;
Note: Documents such as the Annual Report and Corporate Plan are available in both Irish and English;
Information leaflets on various schemes are available in Irish and English; Our website www.tipperarycoco.ie includes content in Irish for certain services and information.

Our Service Through Other Languages

We aim to:

- Accommodate in so far as possible all our customers who wish to conduct their business through the medium of Sign Language or other languages.

Customer Responsibilities – Help us to Help You

Customers also have an important role to play in assisting the Council achieve its service commitments. By adhering to the following principles, you will greatly assist us in delivering a quality service to you;

- **Providing Accurate Information**
 - Quote reference numbers, where available, in all correspondence and communications with the Council;
 - Familiarise yourself with the terms and conditions of schemes before filling out applications/forms and provide all necessary supporting documentation;
- **Providing Contact Details**
 - Provide a daytime telephone number or email address, if available, in all correspondence;

- **Adhering to Closing Dates**

- Ensure, where applicable, that applications/forms are submitted in sufficient time to meet specified deadlines;

- **Responding to Requests for Additional Information**

- Respond as soon as possible to any queries raised, including supplying any additional information requested in support of applications;
- Inform us of any changes in circumstances which may have a bearing on a decision made by the Council;

- **Making appointments**

- If you need to visit the Council regarding a complex matter, please make an appointment in advance. This will ensure that the appropriate officials will be available and that any necessary preparations can be undertaken;

- **Cooperating with Council Staff**

- Treat staff of the Council with the same courtesy and cooperation you would like to receive;
- Accord staff the due respect and freedom to carry out their duties and refrain from intimidating or threatening staff in any manner whatsoever. The following behaviour is not acceptable from any member of the public in any of our facilities, or in the provision of any of our services
 - Harassment of staff by use of abusive, racist or threatening language;
 - Use of violence or threat of violence towards staff members;
 - Behaviour which is disruptive and interferes with delivering a quality customer service.

Customers are advised that where a staff member is subjected to such treatment, contact will have to be terminated. For further details please see Appendix 3 attached: "Policy on dealing with abusive, persistent or vexatious complaints".

Complaints

1. We aim to provide the best possible service to you. However, should it happen that you are not happy with the service provided we will deal with your complaints in a timely, courteous and helpful manner.
2. In the first instance, we would advise you to write to or phone or ask to see the Section Head in question.
3. If you do not receive a satisfactory response to your complaint you may send a written complaint to the appropriate Director of Services/Head of Function.
4. Please address your letter to the appropriate Director/Head of Function, to either Civic Offices, Clonmel or Civic Offices, Limerick Road, Nenagh and provide as much information as possible to enable your complaint to be dealt with in a speedy and appropriate manner. We will acknowledge your complaint within 7 working days. The matter will be investigated and a response will be issued to you within 21 days. You can also email customerservices@tipperarycoco.ie.
5. We will aim to deal with all complaints concerning delays in services, mistakes and poor customer service within 21 days of receipt of complaint. If we cannot forward a full reply in that time, we will write to you and inform you of the delay and the reason for same.
6. Should your complaint consist of complex, technical or legal aspects, we would advise you to put your complaint in writing in order to avoid any mistakes or misunderstandings.
7. When we make a mistake, we will apologise for same, explain why it happened and rectify the matter immediately.
8. We will include information on internal and external appeals and complaints procedures in all our documentation, publications and forms.

The Office of the Ombudsman

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

The Ombudsman will ask you for details of your complaint and a copy of this letter/email (our final response to your complaint). The best way to contact the Ombudsman is by:

- **Clicking on the 'Make A complaint' link at www.ombudsman.ie**
- Writing to: Office of the Ombudsman, 6 Earlsfort Terrace, Dublin 2, D02 W773 or
- Calling the Ombudsman on 01 639 5600 if you have any queries or if you need help making your complaint.

Website <http://www.ombudsman.ie>

Feedback

The Council is committed to consulting with its customers and to evaluating its services. You can help us by:

- Providing comments or suggestions regarding the service you receive;
- Completing and returning any customer survey forms that we may send you.

If you want to forward a suggestion on how we could improve our service to you, please email customerservices@tipperarycoco.ie or send your suggestion directly to:

Senior Staff Officer, Customer Services Desk, Corporate Services,
Tipperary County Council, Civic Offices, Emmet Street, Clonmel, Co.
Tipperary.

Note:-

Customer Care contact forms are available in all of our public offices/libraries and online at www.tipperarycoco.ie (attached).



APPENDIX 1

Customer Care Form

Customer Care Form

Tipperary County Council is committed to providing an efficient and courteous service to all our customers. Please complete the form below to submit your complaint, query or comment to the Customer Services Desk in Clonmel or Nenagh, or any of our Municipal District offices. You can complete this form online by clicking in the relevant box and typing the information.

Name	
Address	
Telephone number	
Email	

Please give details of your complaint, query or comments (include date, location, department and other relevant details): -

Signed: _____ Date: _____

Post to:-

Customer Services Desk, or
 Tipperary County Council,
 Civic Offices
 Emmet Street,
 Clonmel,
 Co. Tipperary
 E91 N512

Customer Services Desk,
 Tipperary County Council,
 Civic Offices,
 Limerick Road,
 Nenagh,
 Co. Tipperary
 E45 A099

Telephone: 0818 06 5000
 Email: customerservices@tipperarycoco.ie
 Web: www.tipperarycoco.ie



APPENDIX 2

Code of Conduct

Code of Conduct for Customers and Members of the Public

Tipperary County Council aims to provide a high quality of service, in a safe and secure environment. In order to achieve this, we would ask our customers to note that the following behaviour will not be accepted in any of our facilities. This Code of Conduct has been established for all those who use the facilities and have dealings with Tipperary County Council including customers, elected members and members of the public.

Please note that the following behaviour is not acceptable:

1. Behaviour which is disruptive and interferes with the use and enjoyment of the facility by others.
2. Harassment of staff or members of the public by use of abusive, racist, obscene or threatening language.
3. Use of violence or threat of violence toward staff and/or members of the public.
4. Malicious damage to and/or theft of Tipperary County Council property.
5. The use of alcohol and illicit drugs while using Tipperary County Council's facilities.
6. Smoking in public areas within any Tipperary County Council premises.
7. Personal property being left unattended while using Tipperary County Council facilities.
8. Abusive, threatening, offensive, indecent or obscene posts and comments on any of Tipperary County Council or other social media channels
9. It is Council policy not to permit the electronic recording of conversations or meetings by our customers

Please help us to encourage the responsible and considerate use of Tipperary County Council facilities by observing the Code of Conduct.

Signed: _____ Date: 8 October 2021

Director of Services
Corporate Services and Human Resources



APPENDIX 3

Policy on dealing with abusive, persistent or vexatious complaints and complainants

1. Introduction

- 1.1 Dealing with a complaint is a straightforward process, but in a minority of cases, people pursue their complaints in a way which can either impede the investigation of their complaint or can have significant resource issues for the council. This can happen either while their complaint is being investigated, or once the council has finished dealing with the complaint.
- 1.2 We are committed to dealing with all complaints equitably, comprehensively, and in a timely manner.
- 1.3 We will not normally limit the contact which complainants have with council staff or offices.
- 1.4 We do not expect staff to tolerate unacceptable behaviour by complainants or any customer. Unacceptable behaviour includes behaviour which is abusive, offensive or threatening and may include
 - Using abusive or foul language on the telephone
 - Using abusive or foul language face to face
 - Sending multiple emails
 - Leaving multiple voicemails
 - Abusive, threatening, offensive, indecent or obscene posts and comments on any of Tipperary County Council or other social media channels
- 1.5 We will act to protect staff from such behaviour. If a complainant behaves in a way that is unreasonable persistent or vexatious, we will follow this policy.
- 1.6 Raising legitimate queries or criticisms of a complaints procedure as it progresses, for example if agreed timescales are not met, should not in itself lead to someone being regarded as a vexatious or an unreasonably persistent complainant.
- 1.7 Similarly, the fact that a complainant is unhappy with the outcome of a complaint and seeks to challenge it once, or more than once, should not necessarily cause him or her to be labelled vexatious or unreasonably persistent.

Aim of this policy

- 1.8 The aim of this policy is to contribute to our overall aim of dealing with all complainants in ways which are demonstrably consistent, fair and reasonable.
- 1.9 It sets out how we will decide which complainants will be treated as vexatious or unreasonably persistent, and what we will do in those circumstances. The policy is for the information of Staff and Councillor's, as well as customers.

2. Definitions

- 2.1 We define unreasonably persistent and vexatious complainants as those complainants who, because of the frequency or nature of their contacts with the Council, hinder our consideration of their or other people's complaints. The description 'unreasonably persistent' and 'vexatious' may apply separately or jointly to a particular complainant.
- 2.2 Examples include the way or frequency that complainants raise their complaint with staff, or how complainants respond when informed of our decision about the complaint.
- 2.3 Features of an unreasonable persistent and/or vexatious complainant include the following (the list is not exhaustive, nor does one single feature on its own necessarily imply that the person will be considered as being in this category): An unreasonably persistent and/or vexatious complainant may:
 - Have insufficient or no grounds for their complaint and be making the complaint only to annoy (or for reasons that he or she does not admit to make obvious)
 - Refuse to specify the grounds of a complaint despite offers of assistance
 - Refuse to co-operate with the complaints investigation process while still wishing their complaint to be resolved
 - Refuse to accept that issues are not within the remit of the complaints policy and procedure despite having been provided with information about the scope of the policy and procedure (e.g. parking ticket and planning appeals)

- Refuse to accept that issues are not within the power of the Council to investigate, change or influence (examples could be a complaint about a private car park, or something that is the responsibility of another organisation)
- Insist on the complaint being dealt with in ways which are incompatible with the complaint's procedure or with good practice (insisting, for instance, that there must not be any written record of the complaint)
- Make what appear to be groundless complaints about the staff dealing with the complaints and seek to have them dismissed or replaced
- Make an unreasonable number of contacts with us, by any means in relation to a specific complaint or complaints
- Make persistent and unreasonable demands or expectations of staff and/or the complaints process after the unreasonableness has been explained to the complainant (an example of this could be a complainant who insists on immediate responses to numerous, frequent and/or complex letters, faxes, telephone calls or emails)
- Harass or verbally abuse or otherwise seek to intimidate staff dealing with their complaint, in relation to their complaint by use of foul or inappropriate language or by the use of offensive and racist language. Staff will deal with such calls in the following manner: -
 - In accordance with the criteria outlined in Appendix 3 – Policy on dealing with abusive, persistent or vexatious complaints and complainants, if a call is determined abusive by a staff member, the caller will be informed that in compliance with the customer charter, the call will be terminated and the incident will be recorded using the violence and aggression incident reporting form.
 - In the event that the caller changes their behaviour and wishes to continue with the phone call, the staff member shall advise the caller that it will be necessary to activate voice recording, subject to their consent to continue call. If consent is not forthcoming the call will be terminated and logged.
 - If behaviour persists and no consent is given, the staff member shall inform the caller that the call is being terminated due to verbal abusive nature of the call.

- Raise subsidiary or new issues whilst a complaint is being addressed that were not part of the complaint at the start of the complaint process
- Introduce trivial or irrelevant new information whilst the complaint is being investigated and expect this to be considered and commented on
- Change the substance or basis of the complaint without reasonable justification whilst the complaint is being addressed
- Deny statements he or she made at an earlier stage in the complaint process
- Electronically record meetings and conversations without the prior knowledge and consent of the other person involved
- Adopt an excessively 'scattergun' approach, for instance, pursuing a complaint or complaints not only with the Council, but at the same time with other Councils, Elected Councillor's of this and other Councils, the Councils independent auditor, an Garda Síochána and the Office of the Ombudsman
- Refuse to accept the outcome of the complaint process after its conclusion, repeatedly arguing the point, complaining about the outcome, and/or denying that an adequate response has been given
- Make the same complaint repeatedly, perhaps with minor differences, after the complaint's procedure has been concluded, and insist that the minor differences make these 'new' complaints which should be put through the full complaint's procedure
- Persistently approach the Council through different routes about the same issue
- Persist in seeking an outcome which we have explained is unrealistic for legal or policy (or other valid) reasons
- Refuse to accept documented evidence as factual
- Complain about or challenge an issue based on a historic and irreversible decision or incident
- Combine some or all of these features

3. Imposing restrictions

- 3.1 We will ensure that the complaint is being, or has been, investigated properly according to the Council's complaints procedure
- 3.2 In the first instance the Head of Section will consult with the Head of Customer Services prior to issuing a warning to the complainant. The Head of Section will contact the complainant either by phone, in writing or by email to explain why this behaviour is causing concern, and ask them to change this behaviour. The Head of Section will explain the actions that the Council may take if the behaviour does not change.
- 3.3 If the disruptive behaviour continues, the Head of Section will issue a reminder letter to the complainant advising them that the way in which they will be allowed to contact us in future will be restricted. The Head of Section will make this decision and inform the complainant in writing of what procedures have been put in place and for what period.
- 3.4 Any restriction that is imposed on the complainant's contact with us will be appropriate and proportionate and the complainant will be advised of the period of time the restriction will be in place for. In most cases restrictions will apply for between 3 and 6 months but in exceptional cases may be extended. In such cases the restrictions would be reviewed on a quarterly basis.
- 3.5 Restrictions will be tailored to deal with the individual circumstances of the complainant and may include:
 - Banning the complainant from making contact by telephone except through a third party e.g. Solicitor/Councillor/Friend acting on their behalf.
 - Banning the complainant from sending emails to individual and/or all Council officers and insisting they only correspond by letter.
 - Banning the complainant from using any of the Council's services e.g. libraries or leisure centres.
 - Banning the complainant from accessing any council building except by appointment.
 - Removing content and comments from social media.

- Requiring contact to take place with one named member of staff only
 - Restricting telephone calls to specified days/times/duration
 - Requiring any personal contact to take place in the presence of an appropriate witness
 - Letting the complainant know that we will not reply to or acknowledge any further contact from them on the specific topic of that complaint (in this case, a designated member of staff should be identified who will read future correspondence)
- 3.6 When the decision has been taken to apply this policy to a complainant, the Head of Section will contact the complainant in writing (and/or as appropriate) to explain:
- Why we have taken the decision
 - What action we are taking
 - The duration of that action
 - The review process of this policy and
 - The right of the complainant to contact the Office of the Ombudsman about the fact that they have been treated as a vexatious/persistent complainant
- 3.7 The Head of Section will enclose a copy of this policy in the letter to the complainant
- 3.8 Where a complainant continues to behave in a way which is unacceptable, the Head of Section in consultation with the Director of Corporate Services may decide to refuse all contact with the complainant and stop any investigation into his or her complaint.
- 3.9 Where the behaviour is so extreme or it threatens the immediate safety and welfare of staff, we will consider other options, for example reporting the matter to an Garda Síochána or taking legal action. In such cases, we may not give the complainant prior warning of that action.

4. New complaints from complainants who are treated as abusive, vexatious or persistent

- 4.1 New complaints from people who have come under this policy will be treated on their merits. The Head of Section will decide whether any restrictions which have been applied before are still appropriate and necessary in relation to the new complaint. We do not support a “blanket policy” of ignoring genuine service requests or complaints where they are founded.
- 4.2 The fact that a complainant is judged to be unreasonably persistent or vexatious, and any restrictions imposed on our contact with him or her, will be recorded and notified to those who need to know within the Council.

5. Review

- 5.1 The status of a complainant judged to be unreasonably persistent or vexatious will be reviewed by the Head of Section after three months and at the end of every subsequent three months within the period during which the policy is to apply.
- 5.2 The complainant will be informed of the result of this review if the decision to apply this policy to them has been changed or extended.

6. Referring unreasonably persistent or vexatious complaints to the Office of the Ombudsman

- 6.1 In some cases, relations between Councils and unreasonably persistent or vexatious complainants break down completely while complaints are under investigation and there is little prospect of achieving a satisfactory outcome. In such circumstances, there may be little purpose in following all the stages of the complaint’s procedure. Where this occurs, the Ombudsman may be prepared to consider a complaint before the procedure has run its course.

7. Record Keeping

7.1 Adequate records will be retained by the appropriate Head of Section of the details of the case and the action that has been taken. The Head of Section will retain a record of

- The name and address of each customer who is treated as abusive, vexatious or persistent
- When the restrictions came into force and ends
- What the restrictions are
- When the customer and sections were advised

7.2 The Director of Services, Corporate Services will be provided with an annual report giving information about customers who have been treated as vexatious/persistent as per this policy.