



Kildare County Council
Customer Service Action Plan 2023 - 2025



Comhairle Contae Chill Dara
Kildare County Council

www.kildarecoco.ie

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Introduction

Kildare County Council provides a wide range of services to the citizens of County Kildare and interacts daily with a diverse range of customers.

The [Corporate Plan for Kildare County Council 2019-2024](#) sets out a vision for County Kildare:

*Shaping a sustainable future while improving the quality of life of all citizens.
Delivering enabling infrastructure and efficient accessible services and pursuing our vision through collaboration, innovation, inclusion and community engagement.*

This Customer Service Action Plan (CSAP) has been prepared with reference to guidance of the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (DPER) regarding customer service action plans. This Plan outlines our approach to customer service. It states the standards that you, the customer, can expect from Kildare County Council and our initiatives, over the period 2023-2025, to meet customer needs and improve the effectiveness of our customer service.

The CSAP has been influenced by several factors including:

- A rapidly changing communications environment
- A growing and increasingly diverse population
- The on-going development of new technologies and the need for innovation
- The priority for regular stakeholder engagement and feedback
- The requirement to achieve greater efficiencies from our resources
- Changing customer needs, as experienced during the Covid-19 pandemic

While Kildare County Council commits to implementing this Plan, it must be recognised that there are times when resources cannot meet demand and priorities must be determined. It should also be noted this Plan relates to the period 2023 – 2025 and the delivery of actions over this timeframe. The on-going dedication and

commitment of our staff will play a critical role in delivery of the actions set out in this Plan.

Our Customers

Kildare County Council provides services to a population of over 222,000 (Census 2016) people, a population that has increased by 71% over the last 20 years and now has the third youngest population in the State. Preliminary 2022 census data published on 23rd June 2022 by the CSO suggests continued expansion, with a growth rate of 11% for Kildare since 2016 i.e., approx. 246,000+. The 2022 Census will be published during 2023.¹

Our customers include:

- The general public of County Kildare
- Internal customers and elected representatives
- Other County Councils
- Statutory Bodies
- Community and Voluntary Sector organisations
- Online Customers
- The Business Community

Many of the services provided are developed and delivered through a partnership approach with Government Departments, statutory agencies, other County Councils, local development and community organisations, and business interests.

Public Sector Duty

Section 42 of the [Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission Act 2014](#) imposes a statutory obligation on the council to have regard to the need to eliminate discrimination, promote equality and protect the human rights of people availing of public services. The Public Sector Duty is a mechanism to ensure a positive contribution to human rights obligations and equality objectives. A review and analysis of data and policy development identified the following key human rights and equality issues within County Kildare:

- Socio-economic disadvantage
- Lone parents
- Member of the Traveller and Roma communities
- Black and Asian people
- Women

¹ CSO Press release June 2022:

<https://www.cso.ie/en/csolatestnews/pressreleases/2022pressreleases/pressstatementcensusofpopulation2022-preliminaryresults/>

- People with disabilities

The council recognises there is considerable scope through its policies and services to influence outcomes across the issues identified. Embedding the public sector duty into our customer service delivery and initiatives mitigates against the risk of the creation or reinforcement of such exclusions. The council is committed to building organisational awareness of the Public Sector Duty to safeguard that our services and policies ensure the protection of human rights and the achievement of greater equality.

Monitoring and Implementation

Responsibility for delivery of this Plan rests with all service areas across our organisation.

Kildare County Council is required to measure performance, across a range of services. The local government sector is subject to oversight by the National Oversight and Audit Commission (NOAC) and Kildare County Council's performance across a range of service indicators can be accessed through the reports published by NOAC available here: www.noac.ie.

Local Service Indicators are also incorporated into our [Annual Service Delivery Plan](#). In addition, Kildare County Council's Performance Management & Development System (PMDS) monitors staff performance against agreed objectives, as set out in the Council's Corporate Plan, delivery of which are reported on annually as part of the Annual Report. Delivery of the CSAP will be reported in [our Annual Report](#).

The monthly Chief Executive's Report also gives more detail on the ongoing delivery of services and projects and is accessible [here](#).

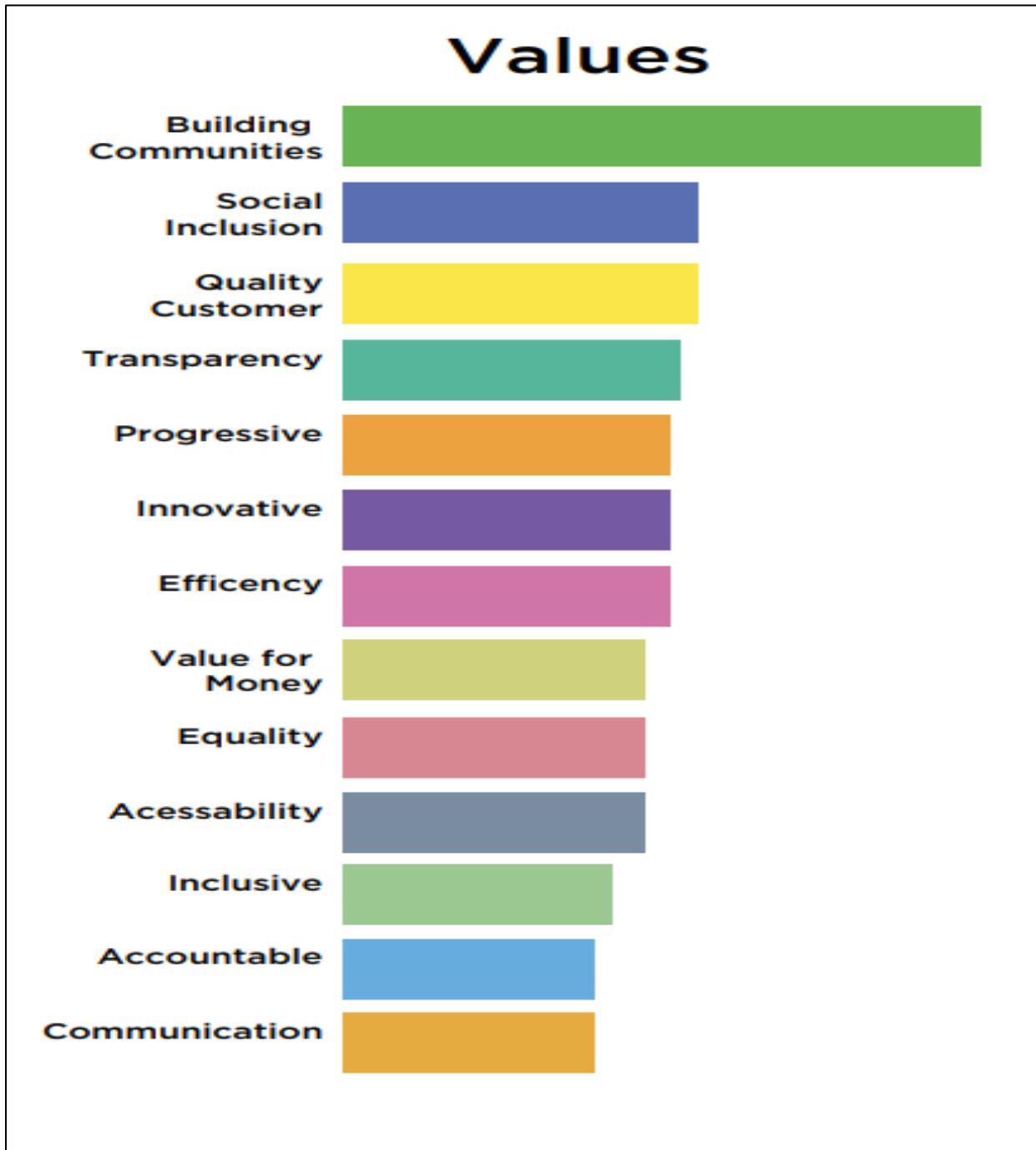
Irish Language

The Official Languages Act 2003 (as amended) provides for the expansion and improvement of the quantity and quality of public services provided through Irish. Following commencement of the Official Languages (Amendment) Act 2021, in October 2022, [the councils Irish Language Scheme 2018-2021](#) remains in force until replaced by Irish Language Standards to be determined in consultation with the Minister and following public consultation.

The council shall ensure that a summary of performance regarding Irish Language initiatives is included in our annual report.

Consultation

Consultation for the Corporate Plan 2019-2024 identified a range of values important to customers in how the Council delivers its services.



This feedback has been developed into 8 Core Values in the Corporate Plan 2019 – 2024.

Our Core Values

Our values guide us. They define the way we want to be and to act to enable us to make the lives of our citizens better.

In fulfilling our mission and pursuing the implementation of this plan, members and staff will be guided by the following core values:

ACCESSIBLE

**Approachable.
Easy to Use**

ACCOUNTABLE

**Takes Responsibility
for Actions**

ADAPTABLE

**Flexible and Open
to Change**

COURTEOUS

Polite & Respectful

INCLUSIVE

**Fairness &
Equal Opportunity**

INNOVATIVE

**Forward Looking
& Collaborative**

SUSTAINABLE

**Serving today,
protecting tomorrow**

TRANSPARENT

**Informed Cooperative
& Open**

Our Core Values, align with the 12 Quality Customer Service (QCS) principles (see below) and the Customer Service Action Plan sets out how these values underpin delivery of a quality customer service.

Customer Service Action Plan

The Quality Customer Service Initiative of the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform sets out the Guiding Principles of Quality Customer Service (QCS).

Set out below are the principles, and the actions that the Council is taking to give effect to these principles, through the Customer Service Action Plan for the period 2023-2025.

It is intended that these actions be delivered over the lifetime of the Plan.

Quality Service Standards	Equality/Diversity	Physical Access
Information	Timeliness and Courtesy	Complaints
Appeals	Consultation & Evaluation	Choice
Official Languages Equality	Better Co-ordination	Internal Customer

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1. Quality Service Standards	Publish a statement (Customer Charter) that outlines the nature and quality of service which customers can expect and display it prominently at the point of service delivery.
How this principle will be implemented	
Actions: Kildare County Council will	
Publish and raise awareness of the Customer Charter by ensuring the Customer Charter is on display at public counters in our offices and available on our website.	
Include Customer Service Action Plan (CSAP) progress in the Annual Report.	
Include Customer Service information comprising Complaints, Customer Code of Conduct, Customer Charter and CSAP in formal staff inductions.	
Equip staff to deliver a quality customer service through PMDS and addressing performance and training needs to meet corporate objectives.	
Develop a customer service reporting module in the Customer Relationship Management System (CRM) system for managers to identify performance trends to enable active management of customer service issues.	

2. Equality and Diversity.	Ensure the right to equal treatment established by equality legislation (under the grounds of gender, marital status, family status, sexual orientation, religious belief, age, disability, race and membership of the Traveller Community) and accommodate diversity. Identify and work to eliminate barriers to access to services for people experiencing poverty and social exclusion, and for those facing geographic barriers to services.
How this principle will be implemented	
Actions: Kildare County Council will	
Treat all customers equally in accordance with the principles of equality and diversity, and in line with statutory requirements	

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Maintain the organisations JAM (Just a Minute) friendly status, alongside other initiatives that ensure inclusive customer service and work with the Council's Accessibility Officer to identify and address needs.
Promote staff awareness of obligations under the Equality Act and Public Sector Duty.
Include customer service within the competency framework for staff recruitment
Brief staff to display awareness and sensitivity having regard to age, literacy, disability, cultural diversity and the capacity to understand often complex statutory processes.
Endeavour to provide, where possible, a translation service for people whose first language is not English.

3. Physical access	Provide clean, accessible public offices that ensure privacy, comply with occupational and safety standards and, as part of this, facilitate access for people with disabilities and others with specific needs.
How this principle will be implemented	
Actions: Kildare County Council will	
Ensure accessibility is a priority concern in all offices and in refurbishment of existing offices.	
Provide clean, safe and accessible customer service areas.	
Ensure all Council offices comply with health and safety legislation.	
Ensure Safety Statements are updated and implemented in all locations.	
Continue to provide Health and Safety training to staff.	

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Maintain a flexible and accessible service that accounts for the needs of customers and includes lunchtime opening hours.
Co-ordinate with the Council's Access Officer in customer initiatives that support accessibility.
Display the Customer Code of Conduct at all customer service points to ensure a safe and a suitable environment for all customers and staff.
Train relevant staff to implement the Customer Code of Conduct to ensure an appropriate response to unacceptable customer behaviour.
Ensure a safe, efficient, and well managed service at public counters and continue to offer online or telephone appointment booking options.
Provide Induction Loop facilities for people with hearing requirements at public counters.

4. Information	Take a proactive approach in providing information that is clear, timely and accurate, is available at all points of contact, and meets the requirements of people with specific needs. Ensure that the potential offered by Information Technology is fully availed of and that the information available on public service websites follows the guidelines on web publication. Continue the drive for simplification of rules, regulations, forms, information leaflets and procedures.
How this principle will be implemented	
Actions: Kildare County Council will	
Grow the use of social media and other information apps to expand communications with all customers.	
Implement the Communications Strategy to support delivery of quality customer service.	
Present timely, accurate and accessible information on our website.	

Ensure customer privacy, where necessary and that customers are aware of their privacy rights by publication of relevant privacy statements at suitable locations.

In forms and leaflets we will:

- Use simple and clear language in forms and leaflets
- Having regard to demand and climate action, ensure leaflet and application form stands are adequately stocked with current information.
- Explain precisely what is required from customers
- Not ask unnecessary questions
- Make forms and leaflets freely available
- Provide text in Irish as well as English
- Review forms and leaflets regularly
- Make them available in electronic format and facilitate on-line application

Regarding applications/claims made to Kildare County Council, we will:

- Make application forms available in electronic format
- Make a decision as quickly as possible on receipt of a valid application
- Deal with all applications equally and in accordance with policies
- Give reasons for decisions
- Advise you of your right to, and procedures for, an appeal of our decision

Develop portals, apps and other technological initiatives to enhance self-service, enable payments and access to information – [see our online services](#).

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Maintain the training and awareness of staff regarding skills to use technology to maximise customer service.

Implement the integration of the [National Service Catalogue](#) with our CRM system to facilitate access to services and relevant information.

5. Timeliness and Courtesy

Deliver quality services with courtesy, sensitivity, and the minimum delay, fostering a climate of mutual respect between provider and customer. Give contact names, as appropriate, in communications to ensure ease of ongoing transactions.

How this principle will be implemented

Actions: Kildare County Council will

Expand online services to enable 24/7 service access where possible.

Ensure all payments to suppliers are made in accordance with the Prompt Payments Act 1997 (as amended).

Include customer policies and procedures in staff inductions to facilitate compliance with standards set out in the Customer Charter.

Develop and monitor management reports regarding telephone performance for our main contact number.

Over the lifetime of the Plan expand the use of CRM to maximise the recording, tracking and reporting of customer interactions.

Share and update internal information sources to enable the Customer Service Team to respond to and resolve as many routine customer queries as possible at the first point of contact.

If customer enquiries relate to a matter that comes within the remit of another public body, we will endeavour to direct customers accordingly.

Emails to customerservice@kildarecoco.ie , and our [Customer Portal](#) :

- Acknowledge within 3 working days and issue a response within 15 working days unless a different statutory timeline applies to your enquiry. If this is not possible, we will state when we hope to be able to do so. We will also explain the reason for the delay.
- Write as clearly as possible
- Only use technical terms where it is necessary
- Ensure that all interactions give contact name and details
- Respond in Irish to contacts received in Irish

Email communication: Managing communications

- All e-mail replies will include contact name, address and telephone number using a corporate wide approved format
- All staff will use automated e-mail responses when out of the office with information on alternative contacts

Written Correspondence:

- Issue a full reply within 15 working days. If this is not possible, we will state when we hope to be able to do so. We will also explain the reason for the delay
- Write as clearly as possible
- Only use technical terms where it is necessary
- Give contact name and details in our responses
- Respond in Irish to letters received in Irish

Telephone calls:

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- Ensure staff identify themselves by name and the name of the Section the customer has called
- Answer quickly and courteously
- Provide the information required in a helpful manner
- Answer your questions straight away. If it is necessary to transfer your call you will be advised of the reason and the individual or area you are being transferred to. Your call should not be transferred more than once, where possible.
- Take your enquiry, e-mail address and/or telephone number and write or call back if the enquiry cannot be answered quickly
- Provide a voice mail service for staff who are out of their office.
- Except in exceptional circumstances (e.g. annual leave, sick leave, staff shortages) voicemail messages will be checked daily and insofar as possible calls returned within 2 working days.
- Ensure a call forwarding system is used when people are absent.

Callers to Public Offices:

- Deal with enquiries as quickly as possible
- Respect your privacy
- With the cooperation of customers, ensure that queues are kept to a minimum
- Keep offices safe, clean, and accessible
- Prominently display the customer charter and hours of service in all public offices/counters

<p>6. Complaints and appeals.</p>	<p>Maintain a well-publicised, accessible, transparent and simple-to-use system of dealing with complaints about the quality of service provided</p>
<p>How this principle will be implemented</p>	
<p>Actions: Kildare County Council will</p>	
<p>Publicise the complaints procedure online and at public counters through the Customer Charter.</p>	
<p>Ensure responses to complaints under the Complaints Procedure inform customers of their right of appeal to the Office of the Ombudsman, where a complaint is not upheld.</p>	
<p>Effectively engage and meet statutory timelines in responding to complaints referred by the Office of the Ombudsman, the Workplace Relations Commission (regarding Equality grounds) and the Office of the Ombudsman for Children.</p>	
<p>Utilise a CRM system to track and manage responses to complaints, and to quality control responses, in line with commitments in the official Complaints Procedure.</p>	
<p>Monitor and report on complaints made under the Complaints Procedure, in the Annual Report.</p>	
<p>Produce and promote best practice guidance for staff to assist them in quality management of customer complaints.</p>	

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7. Consultation and evaluation	Provide a structured approach to meaningful consultation with, and participation by, the customer in relation to the development, delivery, and review of services. Ensure meaningful evaluation of service delivery
How this principle will be implemented	
Actions: Kildare County Council will	
Evaluate and address customer service response times by developing and promoting a CRM (Customer Relationship Management) performance dashboard.	
Develop our CRM system to enable customer rating of customer service experience, identify areas for improvement and explore other online means of collating customer feedback and responding to customer service deficits.	
Engage within the local authority sector to develop and roll out initiatives such as mystery shopper and customer surveys.	
Ensure customer comment cards are available and publicised at public counters.	
Monitor and annually report on customer complaint statistics to identify patterns and areas for improvement.	
Promote and grow the use of the consultation online platform and ensure staff are upskilled to maximise its potential as a consultation tool.	
Produce and promote standardised internal guidance on consultation processes to ensure consistency and maximise engagement.	
Implement the actions of the Communications Strategy to enhance public engagement and feedback.	

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8. Choice	Provide choice, where feasible, in-service delivery including payment methods, location of contact points, opening hours and delivery times. Use available and emerging technologies to ensure maximum access, choice, and quality of delivery.
How this principle will be implemented	
Actions: Kildare County Council will	
Continue to provide and expand choice in payment methods.	
Continue to develop and improve the range of customer focussed online services – see our online services .	
Ensure that information leaflets and forms are available in printed and electronic formats, with due regard to the digital divide and climate mitigation and environmental matters.	
Continue to offer a range of communication channels to customers by phone, online, email, in person (including appointments), written etc.	
Maintain sufficiently resourced dedicated customer service teams offering efficient customer contact points by phone, in person, by post and online.	
Continue to offer opening hours from 9am to 5pm including lunchtime opening.	
Continue to offer online or phone appointment booking options to make the in-person customer experience as efficient as possible and to minimise queueing.	
Continue to offer an out of hours emergency phone service for urgent Non-Fire Emergency issues with essential infrastructural services the Council provide	

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9. Official Languages Equality	Provide quality services through Irish and/or bilingually and inform customers of their right to choose to be dealt with through one or other of the official languages.
How this principle will be implemented	
Actions: Kildare County Council will	
Continue to implement the Councils Irish Language legal requirements under the Official Languages (Amendment) Act 2021 (the Act)	
Develop actions related to the use of Irish Language in customer service upon receipt of guidance from the Department of Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media regarding the Act	
Produce key corporate publications in Irish and English – see link	
Respond in Irish to <i>written</i> communications received in Irish.	
Encourage staff, through training, to develop and improve their Irish language skills.	
Maintain an internal list of Irish speakers to facilitate customer engagement through Irish where requested.	
Maintain external expert translation services from relevant Office of Government Procurement (OGP) frameworks as needed.	

<p>10. Better co-ordination</p>	<p>Foster a more coordinated and integrated approach to delivery of public services.</p>
<p>How this principle will be implemented</p>	
<p>Actions: Kildare County Council will</p>	
<p>Participate in and avail of regional and national procurement initiatives that offer value for money in services and operations.</p>	
<p>Participate in and learn from sectoral initiatives to enhance customer services such as the National Service Catalogue and other initiatives of the Local Government Management Agency (LGMA)</p>	
<p>Expand staff involvement and attendance at Quality Customer Service Network (QCSN) events and utilise available resources and guidance of the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (DPER) to enhance customer service delivery.</p>	
<p>Continue to effectively engage with Senior Management and all staff within the Council in the development and rollout of customer service policies and procedures.</p>	
<p>Learn from Citizen-Centric innovation initiatives under the Public Service Innovation Strategy and liaise with the Council’s Innovation Officer to assess and employ best practice approaches to enhance customer service.</p>	
<p>Positively participate in local government reform activities.</p>	
<p>Continue to liaise with Government Departments, State Agencies, local community groups, the business sector and elected representatives to maximise opportunities and improvements in customer service.</p>	
<p>To ensure continuity of service to our customers, customer service teams will ensure procedures are documented, regularly reviewed, and that Customer Service Team are trained regularly.</p>	

<p>11. Internal Customers</p>	<p>Ensure staff are recognised as internal customers and that they are properly supported and consulted with regard to service delivery issues.</p>
<p>How this principle will be implemented</p>	
<p>Actions: Kildare County Council will</p>	
<p>Schedule regular team meetings to ensure staff are briefed on the activities and priorities of their teams</p>	
<p>Continue to provide, maintain and enhance online services for staff and grow internal communications using technology such as ezines, Intranet and other tools.</p>	
<p>Ensure that internal phone directories are up to date to facilitate internal communications.</p>	
<p>Ensure that staff of Kildare County Council are recognised as internal customers and afforded the same courtesy, professionalism, and facilities as external customers.</p>	
<p>Implement the objectives of the Council's Communications Strategy that are aimed at enhancing internal communications.</p>	
<p>Maintain up to date FAQs on the Council's website to assist frontline customer service staff in maximising resolution of routine queries at the first point of contact.</p>	
<p>Expand and formalise communications between the Customer Service Team and all Sections to support induction, ongoing knowledge sharing and staff deployment.</p>	

As a customer you can help us to achieve objectives under the Customer Service Action Plan, in a range of ways.

Help us to help you by....

Quoting reference numbers when contacting us about an existing application or query.

Providing a daytime telephone number or e-mail address in your correspondence if available.

Providing accurate and clear information and submit all necessary supporting documentation.

Checking that all applications are fully completed and signed.

Submitting applications in sufficient time before the closing date and obtain proof of posting.

Ensuring correspondence is sent to the correct address.

Informing us of any changes in circumstances which may have a bearing on your application and maintain your contact details (e.g., address, phone number, mobile number, email address etc).

Responding quickly to any queries or requests for any additional information in support of applications.

Making appointments and attending on time.

Treating staff and other customers with courtesy and respect in line with the [Customer Code of Conduct](#)