

CUSTOMER CHARTER



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Irish Water Safety Customer Service Action Plan

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1. Introduction

Irish Water Safety, as part of its commitment to quality customer service, has published this action plan to give effect to the Principles of Quality Customer Service approved by the Government in July 2000. The plan contains detailed proposals aimed at improving the quality of the services delivered by the IWS over the period 2006 to 2011.

2. The work of the IWS

Functions and Guiding Principles

Our focus is on Public Awareness. Unfortunately over 170 people drown each year in Ireland. We feel that this is simply unacceptable considering that most fatalities are avoidable. We strive to reduce these fatalities by increasing water safety awareness, changing attitudes and behaviors so that our aquatic environments can be enjoyed with confidence and safety.

WHAT WE DO:

- Teach swimming, lifesaving, water confidence, safety, survival, rescue skills and Basic Life Support. Courses are provided to children as part of the Primary School Curriculum and adults. Some participants will progress to qualify as Pool and Beach Lifeguards. There are a series of qualifications that are internationally recognized.
- Arrange conferences, lectures and demonstrations to Local Authorities, Government Agencies, NGO's, schools, Colleges and members of the public.
- Publish literature to promote water safety and target at-risk groups. We provide publications for all aquatic activities to assist the public adhere to best practices.
- Our volunteers carry out Risk Assessments on bathing areas and waterways nationwide that may pose a particular risk to the public, in order to make them safer by the erection of Public Rescue Equipment, signage and other necessary facilities. We also advise and assist Local Authorities, state agencies and private enterprises on matters relating to water safety.
- Beach Lifeguards are trained and tested by our examiners for the Local Authorities, prior to the annual summer season each year.
- Train and examine rescue boat crews for the Community Inshore Rescue Services and the Coast Guard.

- Promote marine safety along with other members of the Marine Safety Working Group and the Irish Marine Search and Rescue Committee.
- National and local media help build public awareness by actively communicating our safety messages to the public.
- Regular Press Releases are available, which target the seasonal hazards at sea, on our inland waterways and other aquatic environments.
- Analysis and provision of drowning statistics that enables effective targeting of “at risk” groups in Ireland.
- Work with a range of organizations to help reduce the high number of drownings by suicide annually.
- Organize the Annual National Lifesaving Championships; some of our members then go on to compete in international events each year.
- Organise the National Water Safety Awards Ceremony. The “JUST IN TIME” Rescue Award and other awards recognize people’s work, providing training and promoting Water Safety in Ireland.
- Partners from the private sector sponsor the delivery of messages to key “at risk” groups.
- Provide information on the locations of Lifeguarded waterways in Ireland.
- Public and private bodies call on us to make submissions on water safety related matters.
- Maintain a comprehensive website of water safety advice, publications and courses.
- IWS is registered charity CHY 16289

Responsibilities

Council

The Council controls and manages Irish Water Safety as defined in our Establishment Order, Statutory Instrument 389 of 2006.

Volunteers

To respect the values and aims of Irish Water Safety.
To undertake essential training in order to maintain the highest standards of delivery.
To adhere to all defined Codes of ethics, practice and good behaviour.
To promote the teaching of swimming, lifesaving and rescue.

Staff

Support the voluntary commitment of members.
Provide a Quality Customer Service to the public.
Ongoing measurement of outcomes should ensure that both internal efficiencies are achieved and customer's expectations are assessed and needs met.
To assist the Council with all their duties and responsibilities.

The mission of IWS and high-level goals

Through Water Safety education and training, promote a stronger water safety ethos and culture in order that everybody will have the water safety attitude, skills and the behaviour necessary to safely use and enjoy our aquatic environment.

Vision

“Every person a swimmer - every person a lifesaver”

3. Customers of IWS

Our customers may be described under the following broad groupings. Our internal customers include staff members, and members of the IWS Council and Commissions as well as Water Safety Area Committees. Under this broad heading we can include members of the Houses of the Oireachtas and Government departments and agencies.

External Customers

Members of the general public
Local Authorities
Schools, teachers, learners, and parents

Internal customers

Council and Commissions
Water Safety Area Committees
Water Safety Volunteers
Staff members
The legislature, Government departments and the wider public service
Researchers
Publishers
Suppliers
The Minister for the Environment and the Department of Environment, Heritage and Local Government.

4. Adoption of Principles of Quality Customer Service

This part of the plan sets out how the IWS is adopting the Principles of Quality Customer Service adopted by the Government. For each principle we outline what the Council intends to achieve over the period of the plan.

Principle

Quality Service Standards

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

IWS is committed to providing a high quality service to its customers.

To this end we will

- ensure that this Action Plan is available in both the Irish and English languages at the reception desk in our main office and on our website
- put in place a range of new web-based services and maintaining our intranet to improve services offered to staff members.

Principle

Equality/Diversity

Ensure the rights to equal treatment established by equality legislation, and accommodate diversity, so as to contribute to equality for the groups covered by the equality legislation (under the grounds of gender, marital status, family status, sexual orientation, religious belief, age, disability, race and membership of the Traveller Community). Identify and work to eliminate barriers to access to services for people experiencing poverty and social exclusion, and for those facing geographic barriers to services.

In meeting this challenge we will

- raise awareness of equality/diversity issues among IWS staff members through the provision of continuing professional development and training
- introduce policies to ensure that all publications issued by IWS take account of equality and diversity issues in their content, design and dissemination
- ensure that the IWS website conforms to the Web Accessibility Initiative (WAI) guidelines for public websites
- where the need is identified, make provision for sign language at IWS public events
- make every effort to take account of the particular needs identified in the provision of services to minority ethnic groups
- ensure that our workplace policies take account of the Employment Equality Act (1998) and the Equal Status Act (2000) which outlaw discrimination on grounds of gender, marital status, family status, age, disability, race, sexual orientation, religious belief and membership of the Traveller Community.

Principle

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.

Over the period of the plan we will

- ensure that all our premises and facilities are kept accessible for people with disabilities
- ensure that all offices are kept clean and tidy and comply with occupational safety standards
- provide suitable visitor facilities to ensure that their privacy is respected.

Principle

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 our public service website follows the guidelines on web publication. Continue the drive for simplification of rules, regulations, forms, information leaflets and procedures. IWS is committed to providing information on its activities and services. This is currently achieved through a range of media – print and electronic publications, information leaflets and flyers, press releases, research reports and surveys.

Over the period of the plan we will

- continue to produce printed material which is well designed, readable and accessible
- upgrade the IWS website and ensure that the information available is clear, up to date and accurate
- ensure that information is available in a format appropriate to the customer
- develop procedures to comply with our obligations under the Official Languages Act (2003), the objective of which is to ensure better availability and a higher standard of public services through Irish
- review information leaflets, forms and consultation material to ensure that all material is user-friendly and easily understood
- ensure that IWS continues to adhere to its obligations under the Freedom of Information Act (1997) and the Data Protection Act, (2003).

Principle

Timeliness and Courtesy

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

IWS is committed to providing a quality service to all its customers by ensuring that queries are dealt with in a timely fashion and that customers are treated with courtesy.

For customers who telephone the IWS we will ensure that

- all calls are answered promptly
- staff members give their name when answering the telephone
- a helpful and courteous service is provided to callers
- staff are available to answer the calls at all times during office hours
- all staff members update their voicemail greetings if absent from the office
- messages left on the central and individual voice-mail systems are attended to in a timely manner
- front line staff have available to them up-to-date contact details and information relating to the responsibilities of all IWS staff members to enable them to handle and transfer calls in the most efficient and effective manner
- if a query cannot be dealt with immediately, contact details will be taken and the call will be returned or the information issued in writing to the caller as soon as possible
- when it is necessary to transfer a call to another person, which the caller will be told the name of the person to whom the call is being transferred
- if the information required by a caller is not available, IWS will endeavour to advise on a possible alternative source for that information.

For customers who visit the IWS office we will ensure that all personal callers are treated with courtesy and sensitivity and that waiting time is kept to a minimum.

For customers who correspond with IWS by letter or e-mail we will

- issue a definitive reply to routine queries within ten working days and within 20 working days to complex queries involving research or further consultation
- if a reply cannot issue within these time frames, an interim reply will issue informing the correspondent of progress
- ensure that replies are clear, using technical terms only where this is absolutely necessary
- ensure that all replies carry a contact name, telephone number and e-mail address.

For customers who submit invoices or travel and subsistence (T&S) claims we will ensure that

- payment for goods and services provided in accordance with contact or

agreement is issued within the 30 days as mandated under the Prompt Payment of Accounts Act (1997)

- payment of correctly completed T&S claims is issued within 30 days and that every assistance is offered to customers in relation to the completion of the claim forms
- customers are notified of any query in relation to claim for payment within 10 working days of receipt.

Principle

Complaints

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

IWS is committed to dealing with complaints about the quality of service provided.

Over the period of the plan we will

- develop and maintain a well-publicised, accessible, transparent and simple-to-use system of dealing with complaints
- provide training to staff on handling customer complaints
- ensure that feedback from the operation of the customer complaints procedures is kept under review.

Principle

Appeals

Maintain a formalised, well-publicised, accessible, transparent and simple-to-use system of appeal/review for customers who are dissatisfied with decisions in relation to services.

IWS is committed to introducing a formal appeals system for customers dissatisfied with decisions made in relation to our services.

Over the period of the plan we will

- develop and maintain a well-publicised, accessible, transparent and simple-to-use system of dealing with appeals
- provide training for staff on handling customer appeals
- ensure that feedback from the operation of the customer appeals procedures is kept under review.

Principle

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.

IWS has a strong track record in relation to consulting with the partners and interest groups in water safety, through the representative nature of the Council itself and through consultative documents, discussion papers, surveys, seminars and meetings. We are committed to building on the consultation processes already established and to the continuing evaluation of all our services, to ensure the provision of a relevant, quality service to all our customers.

Over the period of the plan we will

- continue to consult with relevant interests prior to offering advice to the Minister for Environment.
- examine measures to include other voices in our consultation processes
- provide opportunities to seek the views of staff members on the development, delivery and review of our services
- identify measures for obtaining feedback on the services provided by IWS

Principle

Choice

Provide choice, where feasible, in service delivery, location of contact points, opening hours and delivery times. Use available and emerging technologies to ensure maximum access and choice, and quality of delivery.

Over the period of the plan we will

- continue to develop Information and Communications Technology (ICT) to improve the delivery of services
- continue to offer choice in relation to the dissemination of documentation in various formats
- provide greater choice in relation to payment methods for creditors, e.g.

Principle

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.

IWS committed to providing a quality service in both Irish and English.

Over the period of the plan we will

- ensure that Irish language versions of all newly published documents are made available
- as far as is practicable, ensure that the name of a member of staff able to provide the service required through Irish will be given to callers and that calls will be returned in Irish
- ensure that signage in all our offices is displayed in both Irish and English
- ensure that all IWS forms are available in both Irish and English
- adhere to our obligations under the Official Languages Act (2003).

Principle

Better Coordination

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

IWS is committed to fostering a more coordinated and integrated approach to the delivery of public services. IWS is involved in a range of cross-sectional committees and task forces which facilitate co-ordination across government departments and agencies to improve the delivery of services.

Over the period of this plan we will

- continue to participate and initiate co-operation with other Government Departments and agencies on issues of mutual concern
- continue to foster internal co-ordination of policy advice through the use of cross-sectional in-house teams and co-coordinated project management.

Principle

Internal Customer

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

IWS will ensure that staff members are also recognised as customers.

Over the period of this plan we will

- ensure that standards applied to external customers will apply equally to internal customers
- ensure that all processes and services involving the internal customer comply with the provisions of equality legislation
- promote a culture of respect for diversity among all internal customers
- continue to provide timely briefings to staff members on all aspects of the work of IWS
- maximise the use of technology to facilitate simple and prompt access to all internal information

- involve the internal customer in the development, delivery and review of services
- publish a staff manual and guide on internal communications
- provide for and actively encourage continuing professional development and training for staff
- articulate job descriptions, in partnership with individual staff members and their staff representatives, with clear goals and responsibilities and ensure that these are understood by all staff members.