

Health Service Executive



Framework for the Corporate and Financial Governance of the Health Service Executive

Customer Service Charter and Complaints Procedure

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1. Foreword

In preparing this document the HSE has consulted a number of sources and authorities. The customer service charter meets the highest standards by reference to available models of best practice and the customer complaints procedure meets the legal requirements imposed on the Health Service Executive (HSE).

The relevant legal provisions are set out in Part 9, Sections 45 – 55 of the Health Act 2004, the Health Act 2004 (Complaints) Regulations, 2006 and Part 2 and Part 3 of the Disability Act 2005 and these provisions have been taken into account in the preparation of this document.

The purpose of this document is to set out the Customer Service Charter and the HSE's responsibilities and commitments in relation to the principles of quality customer service. The document also sets out the responsibilities of the HSE with regard to complaints made about services provided by the HSE.

This document is part of a suite of documents forming the HSE Governance Framework and it should be read in conjunction with, in particular, the Code of Standards and Behaviour.

Additional information in relation to the 'Your Service, Your Say' - The Policy and Procedures for the Management of Consumer Feedback to include Comments, Compliments and Complaints in the Health Service Executive (HSE) can be found on www.hse.ie and on the intranet site.

This Framework for the Corporate and Financial Governance of the HSE was first approved by the HSE Board at its meeting held on 7th September 2006 and version 2 was approved at the Board meeting held on 1st November 2007. The Framework was approved by the Minister for Health and Children on 26th March 2008.

The Code will be kept under review by the Consumer Affairs Division of the Office of the CEO and the HSE Audit Committee will approve any amendments as required.

2. Principles of Customer Service

The central principle of the Customer Service Charter is to integrate services around the customer, which take account of best practices and standards of leading customer service organisations in Ireland.

The HSE will:

- Further promote and develop a strong customer service culture throughout the organisation
- Improve the quality of services, to make them responsive to the needs and preferences of customers
- Equip staff with the skills, information and supports to fulfil customer service objectives
- Develop participative structures and fora where customers' views and opinions can be valued (e.g., patient advisory panels and regional fora)
- Ensure that customers are informed about services and entitlements

The HSE is committed to following the twelve principles of Quality Customer Service, adopted by Government in the Irish Public Service Modernisation Programme. These principles relate to the following:

- Quality Service Standards
- Equality /Diversity
- Physical Access
- Information
- Timeliness and courtesy
- Complaints
- Appeals/reviews
- Consultation and evaluation
- Choice
- Official Languages Equality
- Better Co-ordination
- Internal Customers

3. Summary of the main features of the Customer Service Charter

The Customer Service Charter will be developed in line with the principles of Quality Customer Service and the principles set out in the section entitled “Statement of Good Practice for the Public Health Service in Dealing With Patients” of the Ombudsman’s report. The charter includes:

(a) Services

The HSE will improve the patient/client journey and provide a better working environment for staff.

(b) Service Commitments

The HSE will provide all patients/clients with high quality, customer service in an efficient and courteous manner.

(c) Timeliness

The HSE will seek to:

- respond to letters within 10 working days of receipt and inform the individual who submitted the letter of any progress/ delays etc.

Provide information in a timely and accurate manner using:

- service areas
- the HSE website
- the HSE Customer Service Desk

(d) Equality and Diversity

All patients/clients will be dealt with in a fair and open manner and in the spirit of the Equal Status Acts, 2000 and 2004.

The HSE will ensure the rights to equal treatment established by equality legislation, and accommodate diversity, so as to contribute to equality for those 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).

(e) Physical Access

The HSE will provide clean and accessible facilities to protect customers' privacy, and to comply with occupational and safety standards. Access for people with disabilities, older people and others with specific needs will be accommodated.

The HSE will:

- improve the standards of accommodation for service delivery outlets
- ensure that all accommodation meets Health and Safety Standards and those set out in the Equal Status Acts 2000 - 2004.

(f) Co-ordination

The HSE will work with Government Departments and other agencies to co-ordinate the services provided.

(g) Irish Language

The HSE will comply fully with the provisions laid down in the Official Languages Act 2003. The HSE will inform customers, where possible, of their right to be dealt with through one or other of the official languages.

Signage at all HSE offices will be in Irish and English.

(h) Complaints and appeals

A well publicised, accessible, transparent and simple to use system of dealing with complaints about services, incorporating an appeals process, will be operated by the HSE.

(i) Feedback

Feedback on services provided by the HSE is welcomed. Customer Feedback Cards will be available in HSE offices and the HSE website.

(j) Consultation and Evaluation

The HSE will:

- monitor and evaluate performance against the Customer Service Charter and report the findings in the Annual Report
- examine the development and delivery of services in order to better meet the needs of its customers
- review feedback and implement changes where appropriate.

(k) Internal Customer

The HSE will ensure that staff are recognised as internal customers and that they are properly supported and consulted.

4. Customer Complaints

The HSE has developed and will maintain a Policy and Procedure for the Management of Consumer Feedback in line with the requirements placed on the HSE.

At present Part 9 of the Health Act 2004 establishes a statutory framework for customer complaints in the HSE. The Health Act 2004 (Complaints) Regulations 2006 set out requirements for persons when making complaints and procedures to be followed by the HSE in investigating complaints. Part 9 of the Health Act 2004 was enacted from the 1st January 2007.

Complaints regarding access to services, Part 3 of the Disability Act 2005 will be dealt with in line with The Policy and Procedures for the Management of Consumer Feedback to include Comments, Compliments and Complaints in the Health Service Executive (HSE)

The HSE Procedure for the Management of Consumer Feedback outlines a separate process and provides clear guidelines for managing complaints made under Part 2 of the Disability Act 2005 (Assessment for services).

It is the policy of the HSE to elicit views from patients, service users, carers, visitors and the community about the services provided by the HSE. Any complaint will be viewed as an opportunity to inform service provision, to continuously improve the quality of the services that we provide and to learn lessons so as to prevent similar occurrences in the future.

Complaints, criticisms or suggestions, whether oral or written will be taken seriously, handled appropriately and sensitively. The essential elements of the HSE complaints system will be those that ensure:

- ❖ coherent and comprehensive coverage;
- ❖ consistent approach;
- ❖ customer focus, service provider focus;
- ❖ accordance with natural justice;
- ❖ fairness and impartiality;
- ❖ accessibility, flexibility and transparency;
- ❖ a quality and safe service;
- ❖ optimum leadership, culture and governance;
- ❖ the provision of just remedies;
- ❖ improvements in service as a result of learning from complaints from service users.

The HSE commits to safeguarding the rights and dignity of the service users and staff members in the implementation of this policy and associated supporting documents.

The purpose of this policy is to detail the guiding principles, statutory requirements and the policy of the Health Service Executive in relation to the handling of complaints received within all services of the HSE.

5. Complaints about services provided on behalf of the HSE

It is the policy of the HSE that, service providers who provide services on behalf of the HSE will operate a system for the effective management of complaints. In line with Part 7, Section 38 and 39 and Part 9 of the Health Act 2004, service providers may adopt the HSE Policy and Procedures/Guidelines for the management of complaints or, with the agreement of the HSE, to develop Policies and Procedures that are of a comparable standard to those of the HSE. Such Service Providers are also required to provide an annual general report to the HSE outlining:

- (a) the total number of complaints received,
- (b) the nature of the complaints,
- (c) the number of complaints resolved by informal means, and
- (d) the outcome of any investigations into the complaints.

6. Review

The HSE has an obligation to inform complainants of their right to appeal the decision of the complaints management process and to inform complainants of the alternative and appropriate avenues available to them for the review and investigation of their complaint.

The HSE must inform the complainant at all times of their right to have their complaint reviewed by the Ombudsman or Ombudsman for Children.

Appeals against the decision of the Complaints Officer in complaints made under Part 2 of the Disability Act 2005 can be made to the independent Appeals Officer appointed by the Minister for Health and Children.

7. Report to the Minister

As part of the annual report the HSE is required to submit to the Minister a general report on the performance of its functions under Part 9 of the Health Act 2004. This report will contain such information considered appropriate by the Executive or information specified by the Minister.

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For details about the work of the Consumer Affairs Department please use the link:
Internal:
http://hsenet.hse.ie/Intranet/HSE_Central/Office_of_the_CEO/Consumer_Affairs/
External:
www.hse.ie