



Quality Customer Service Action Plan

September 2008

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Foreword from the Director of the Probation Service

I am pleased to present the second Customer Service Action Plan for the Probation Service. This plan will further develop and build on the foundations laid by the first Customer Service Action Plan launched in 2005.

The Probation Service is committed to delivering the highest quality service and to providing a positive and accessible working environment which promotes dignity and equality for all. This is identified in our Strategy Statement 2008-2010 which forms our work plan for 2008. This plan sets out how we will monitor, review and make adjustments where necessary to ensure that we achieve our Customer Service objectives and ensure continuous improvement in the standard of service that we provide.

Since the publication of the Customer Service Action Plan in 2005 the Service has undergone a number of developments. Steps have also been taken to improve internal functioning and to improve operating efficiency. These include

- establishment of a new senior professional management structure with responsibility for 3 Directorates:
 - Operations
 - Research, Training and Development
 - Corporate Services and Human Resources.
- An audit has been undertaken of how the work of the Service is organised and delivered which resulted in an internal re-organisation.
- An administrative review has been completed

- A programme of refurbishing or replacing Service offices across the country is well under way. The thrust of the programme is to locate Service personnel within the communities they serve as much as possible.
- A Health and Safety audit of Community Service sites was completed and the recommendations are being implemented.

Our goal is to become a leading probation service using the best evidence based probation practice to serve our stakeholders and meet service users' needs to the highest standards of efficiency and accountability. We acknowledge the skill and dedication of the Probation Service staff in all the areas of their work. It is through our staff that we will create a culture of excellence and innovation.

I would like to thank those who contributed to the preparation of this Plan and I look forward to working with staff and customers in its implementation.

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Michael Donnellan", written over a horizontal line.

Michael Donnellan

Director

This Action Plan outlines how we will monitor and evaluate the commitments outlined in our Customer Charter.

INTRODUCTION/WHO WE ARE

The Probation Service is an agency within the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform. The Probation Service is the lead agency in the assessment and management of offenders in our communities.

The role of the Service is to reduce the level of crime in the community and increase public safety by:

- The effective assessment and management of offenders
- Challenging offending behaviour
- Facilitating the integration of ex-offenders

We provide probation supervision, community service, offending behaviour programmes and specialist support services, to both adult and young offenders, which aim to stop them committing further offences.

Many of our activities are inter-agency, and our key partners include the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform, Irish Youth Justice Service, the Court Service, Irish Prison Service, An Garda Síochána and a range of other organisations in the statutory sector as well as in the voluntary and community sector. We deliver services to individuals, communities, courts and prisons across the entire country. While our services are organised nationally, they are managed and delivered locally.

OPERATIONS DIRECTORATE

The aim of the Operations Directorate is to reduce the risk of re-offending through quality assessments and effective supervision and re-integration of offenders. To achieve this, staff provide probation work and related services to the courts, prisons and places of detention.

We have almost 500 staff in offices in more than forty locations nationwide comprised as follows:

Our work with offenders and communities

We deliver services to help protect the public, improve communities and support offenders to change. In this context:

- We work with communities and within neighbourhoods to manage offenders and reduce offending behaviour
- We acknowledge and reflect victim issues in all areas of our work
- We challenge offending behaviour and facilitate the integration of ex-offenders into society to reduce re-offending
- We manage, through effective partnerships, dangerous offenders and those at risk of causing harm

Our work with the Courts, Prisons and places of detention:

- We prepare pre-sanction assessments for the Courts
- We assess the risk offenders pose to the community
- We supervise offenders in the community, including those released on licence from custody and on post sentence orders

- We provide a range of services to prisoners and their families and prepare parole board reports

Young Persons Probation (Y.P.P.) is a division of the Probation Service established to work with children and young people aged 12 to 18 years who come before the Courts or are in Children Detention schools.

What we do

- We convene Family Conferences with young people who offend, their families and victims, on behalf of the Courts
- We prepare pre-sanction reports to assist the Courts in determining sentences
- We assess and manage risk of re-offending using evidence based practices
- We provide a Probation service to the Children Courts and Children Detention Schools.
- We engage with children and young people in a supportive manner
- We ensure the protection and empowering of the interest and roles of victims
- We implement the relevant provisions of the Children Act 2001 (as amended)
- We develop effective partnerships with families and key agencies to reduce re-offending

RESEARCH, TRAINING & DEVELOPMENT DIRECTORATE

The aim of the Research, Training and Development Directorate is to inform, oversee and support the continuing professional development of all staff.

The function of this Directorate is to:

- Identify the training requirements for our staff to meet new challenges and ensure our strategic objectives are achieved
- Design, deliver and co-ordinate learning programmes to support the continuing professional development of all staff
- Identify, collate and where appropriate, commission research which informs evidence based, effective interventions with customers and stakeholders
- Champion and inform the development of policy initiatives

CORPORATE SERVICES/HUMAN RESOURCES DIRECTORATE

The aim of the Corporate Services/Human Resources Directorate is to ensure efficient and effective systems that enhance the delivery of probation services.

The role of the Corporate Services/Human Resources Directorate is to:

- Provide effective and efficient financial management of the Probation Service
- Provide accurate and high quality information
- Provide a high quality Human Resource service to all our stakeholders
- Provide a safe and accessible environment for staff and Service users

This Directorate draws together a number of different strands which support our staff on the front line to deliver a high quality service.

The Directorate is comprised of four units each with distinct functions and responsibilities;

- Corporate Services
- Finance
- Human Resources
- Information Technology

Corporate Services

This unit is responsible for the management and co-ordination of all the elements to support the core work of the Service. It is responsible for the provision and monitoring of customer services and the delivery of effective and efficient systems that enhance the delivery of Probation services. It is also responsible for the publication of all corporate documents, co-ordination of press queries and parliamentary questions as well as other relevant material.

All staff are trained to be helpful and courteous and to treat our customers with dignity and respect in all their dealings with us.

Finance

The Finance unit is responsible for the financial management and planning of the annual budget of the Service. This includes the provision of financial data, processing supplier payments, employee allowances and purchasing. The unit monitors the financial management of Community Based Organisations to ensure best practice is adhered to and value for money is achieved.

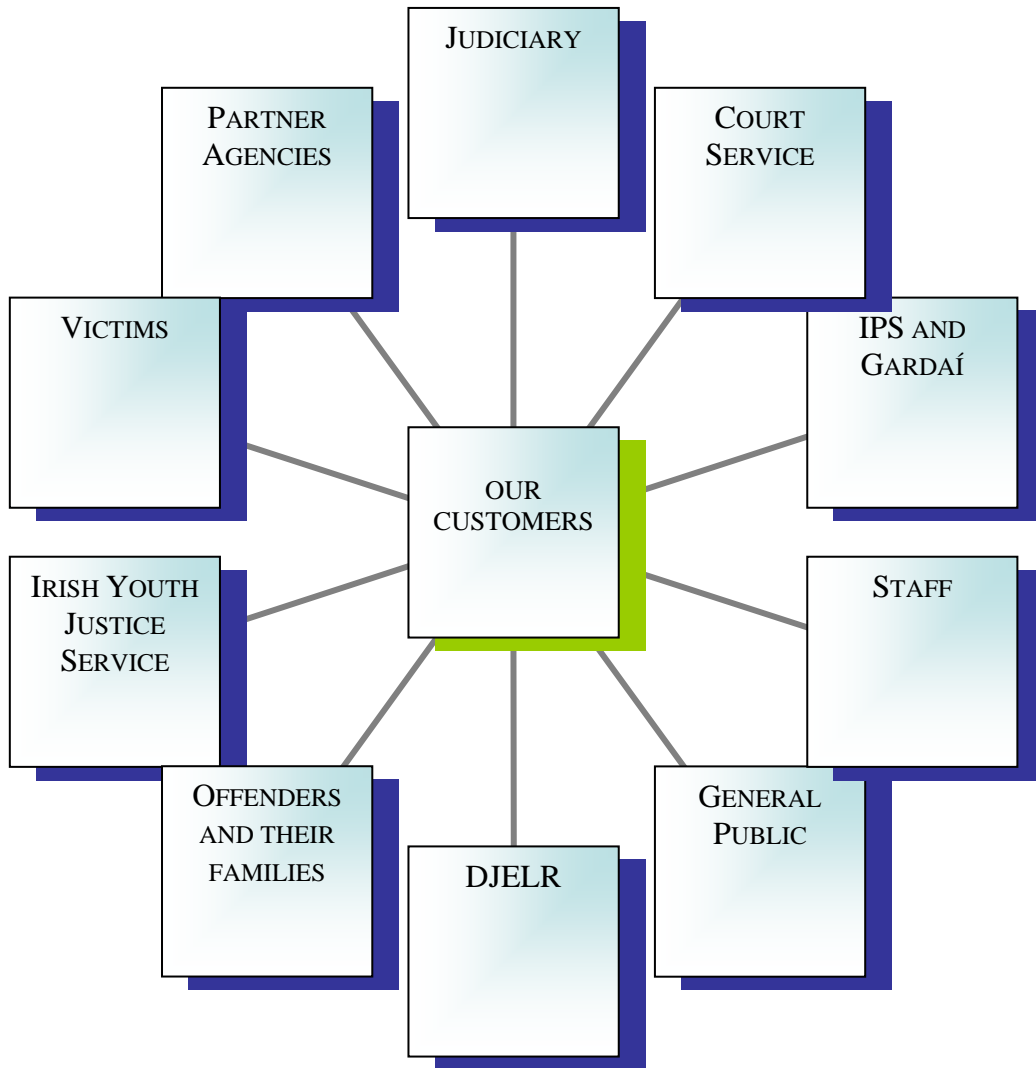
Information Technology

The role of the unit is the provision and support of an effective IT infrastructure which facilitates the Probation Service in pursuit of its objectives. This unit is responsible for the development, management and support of the Probation Service network, applications and infrastructure.

Human Resources

The Human Resources unit is responsible for managing the personnel functions devolved to the Probation Service. The unit works in conjunction with the Human Resources Division of the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform. These personnel functions include manpower planning aligned to the business needs of the service.

Who are our customers?



CUSTOMER SERVICE COMMITMENTS

The Probation Service is an Agency within the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform. Our work in the Justice system is to supervise and rehabilitate offenders in the community and in custody by:

assessing offenders' suitability for community sanctions and managing those referred to us under relevant legislation.

What we do

- Prepare pre-sanction reports on offenders guilty of criminal offences, including structured risk assessments community service reports and reports under the Children Act 2001 (as amended), as well as victim impact reports.
- Supervision of offenders in the community on probation and probation type orders, community service orders, orders under the Misuse of Drugs Acts and community sanctions under the Children Act 2001 (as amended).
- Family conferencing with young people who offend, their families and victims on behalf of the Courts.
- Work to address offending related issues and prepare prisoners for return to society, preparation of reports for the Parole Board, Courts and Irish Prison Service.
- Supervision on temporary release, including long serving and life sentence prisoners, offenders on part suspended sentences, sex offenders on post release supervision orders and young offenders released from children detention schools.

Our Service standards

- Our customer charter sets out the standards of service you may expect in your dealings with us.
- We are committed to providing a high quality and professional service to all users of our agency.
- We are committed to implementing the principles of quality customer service.

Visitors to our Offices

- Our staff are helpful and courteous and treat our customers with dignity and respect in all their dealings with us
- We will ensure that our reception and meeting facilities are clean, accessible to all, and maintained to a high standard of comfort and safety.
- Callers to our offices will be made to feel welcome and will be treated with dignity and respect.
- We will provide you with the maximum level of privacy possible.
- We will meet you at the appointed time and be helpful and courteous in our dealings with you.
- We will provide an interpreter should you need one.
- Your privacy will be given due attention in all our business with you.
- We will continue to review and improve our access for all our customers as required.
- Documents will be provided in a user friendly/plain English format.
- We will provide documents in an appropriate language where necessary.

Contacting Us

Telephone

- We are available to answer telephone calls during normal office hours from 9.15am – 5.30pm Monday to Thursday and 9.15am – 5.15pm on Friday.
- Where voicemail is in use, we will return your call promptly and get back to you with an agreed timeframe if unable to respond to your enquiry immediately.
- Staff will identify themselves and provide as much information as possible or if our staff cannot help you immediately they will refer you to someone who can or take your details and return call as soon as possible.

Correspondence

- We will acknowledge your initial correspondence within 5 working days and we will keep you informed of progress.
- We will respond to your correspondence within fifteen working days. If it is not possible to send a full reply, we will send you an interim reply explaining the position.
- All correspondence will be written in clear language that is concise and understandable.
- All correspondence will identify the writers name and position, address of the Probation Service office, a direct telephone number and an e-mail address to facilitate direct contact where necessary.
- All correspondence will be in plain English, clearly written, easily understood and legal terms will only be used where necessary.

Information Technology

- We will maximise the use of technology to improve service delivery.
- The Probation Service website can be accessed at www.probation.ie.
- We will provide a direct link to Customer Service information on the website.
- We will regularly update relevant information on the website.

Internal Customers

- The principles of quality customer service apply to our staff
- We will keep all staff fully informed about service delivery issues.
- We will keep our staff fully apprised of the principles of quality customer service.

Complaints Procedure

It is the goal of the Probation Service to resolve complaints at the first point of contact. If we cannot do this your complaint will be examined at an appropriate higher level.

You may make a complaint in either of the following ways:

- in person at any of our offices
- by phone at 01 8173600
- by completing a complaints form
- by letter
- By accessing our website at www.probation.ie or by email customerservice@probation.ie
- We will investigate complaints in an objective, fair and open manner. If you are not satisfied with the outcome of a complaint at

the point of service, you may seek a review by contacting our Customer Service Officer (see website).

Equality and Diversity

- We will conduct our business in a fair and open manner consistent with principles of human rights, equality legislation and accountability.
- We aim to ensure quality of access to our services, accommodating those covered by the nine grounds identified in equality legislation, as well as those experiencing poverty, social exclusion and geographical barriers to services.

Services through other languages

- We will comply with the requirements of the Official Languages Act 2003.
- We will facilitate customers who wish to communicate through other languages.
- Information leaflets can be downloaded from our website in a number of languages or are available on request.

Working in Partnership

- The Probation Service will work in a spirit of mutual respect with all its partner Agencies and Committees.
- Staff at all levels in the organisation continue to participate in the partnership process in the Service.
- We are committed to the Partnership process and will continue to work in the spirit of partnership in achieving modernisation and flexibility in the Probation Service.

Consultation and Evaluation

We value your feedback to assist us in providing a quality service and ensuring that we meets their needs in the future.

We welcome suggestions and views on any aspect of the Service to help improve quality and efficiency. You can contact us at www.probation.ie or by email customerservice@probation.ie

Delivering on our Customer Service Commitments

This Chapter sets out how we will deliver our Customer Service Commitments.

1. Quality Service standards

A key objective of the Probation Service is the achievement of a high standard of quality customer service. We will progress the implementation of the principles of Quality Customer Services over the lifespan of this Action plan and this commitment is underpinned and supported by the Service Strategy Statement (2008-2010) and business plan (**published on our website www.probation.ie**).

The following specific actions will be undertaken by the Probation Service to ensure delivery of quality customer services:

We will,

- Publish a new customer service charter
- Publish a customer service action plan
- Publish information leaflets on Probation and Community Service
- Prominently display our customer charter in all our offices
- Prepare and publish our complaints procedure
- Appoint a quality Customer Service Officer

2. Equality/ Diversity

The Probation Service aims to treat all customers equally while respecting individual differences and needs. We will conduct our business with you in a fair and open manner consistent with the principles of human rights and equality legislation.

We will;

- Ensure that diverse needs of customers are recognised through awareness raising training.
- Continue to promote the availability of family friendly schemes for staff.
- Address the needs of relevant groups when formulating policy.
- Ensure quality of access to our services for those customers with specific needs,

3. Physical Access

We **will ensure** that our offices and facilities are accessible and convenient to use and in particular we **will comply** with occupational and safety standards. As part of this we will facilitate access for those with specific needs.

We will;

- Maintain our accommodation to a standard acceptable to both our customers and staff.
- Ensure that physical access is a priority for all offices of the Service
- Meet the requirements of people with specific needs for planned consultations/ meetings where required

- Ensure that Health and Safety statements are in place in all offices
- Ensure that Health and Safety audits on all offices has been completed by end 2008

4. Information

The Probation Service will take a proactive approach in providing information to our customers that is clear, timely and accurate. We will ensure that the potential offered by Information Technology is fully availed of and used to reach as wide an audience as possible.

We will

- Publish an Annual Report
- Review forms and information leaflets to ensure that they are clearly written and easily understood
- Produce leaflets on the work of the Service and make available on our website in a number of languages
- Customer Service information will be made available on the Service website and Intranet Portal
- Ensure that the Service website is kept up to date

5. Timeliness and Courtesy

The Service is committed to dealing with all our customers in a courteous and sensitive manner, with mutual respect and with minimum delay.

- Callers to our offices will be treated with dignity and respect.
- Customers will be met at the appointed time.
- Where offices offer a full-time service, telephone calls will be answered during normal office hours – 9.15am – 5.30pm (Monday to Thursday and 5.15pm on Friday)
- Where voicemail is in use, we will return your call promptly.
- Staff will identify themselves and provide as much information as possible or refer to you as someone who can help.
- We will acknowledge your correspondence within 5 working days and we will keep you informed of progress.
- Reports for Court will be delivered daily and in time for Registrars and Judges to process and read as necessary.

6. Complaints and Appeals

The Probation Service is committed to maintaining an accessible, transparent and simple system for dealing with complaints and appeals about the quality of the service provided.

- Our Complaints Procedure will be published on our website.
- We will deal with complaints and appeals in a fair and impartial manner.
- We will put in place procedures for staff in relation to dealing with customer complaints.
- Reviews will be directed to the Customer Service Officer.

7. Consultation and evaluation

The Probation Service is committed to consulting with its customers for the purposes of evaluating our service delivery. We welcome our customer's comments, suggestions and views on any aspect of the service to help improve the quality and efficiency of delivery.

We will

- Keep customers apprised of all new developments within the Probation Service.
- Promote mechanisms to facilitate communications and feedback.
- Where appropriate rectify issues identified to ensure a quality service that meets our customer's needs.
- Continue dialogue with specific customer groups so that agreed protocols and ways of working can be co-ordinated and developed.

8. Choice

Provide choice where feasible in service delivery including location of contact points and appointments outside normal office hours.

We will

- Provide appointments outside normal office hours where necessary and appropriate.
- Provide access to interpreters where language difficulties are a barrier to accessing services.
- Assist customers with specific needs to avail fully of quality customer service

9. Services through other languages

The Probation Service will make every effort to facilitate customers who need to communicate through other languages. We will also provide quality services through Irish and/or bilingually if required and inform customers of their right to be dealt with through one or other of the official languages.

- Customers will be facilitated in dealing with the Service through Irish and other languages if requested.
- Information leaflets and other printed material will be available through Irish and other frequently used languages.

10. Better co-ordination

The Probation Service aims to conduct its business with customers in a spirit of partnership and respect. It is committed to a co-ordinated and integrated approach to delivery of service.

We will

- Continue to enhance our relationships with other partners in the Criminal Justice System.
- Continue to develop relationships and protocols with other Agencies and government initiatives.
- Support and foster relationships within communities in order to integrate offenders and help make communities safer.
- Develop stronger links and protocols with funded Projects to facilitate the added value of projects to the work of the Probation Service.

11. Internal Customer

All staff will be fully supported and consulted with regard to service delivery issues. In particular, we will ensure that our staff are fully appraised of the principles of quality customer service.

We will

- Further promote the Dignity at work charter and appointment of designated contact person's scheme.
- Provide appropriate supervision for staff at all levels.
- Implement P.M.D.S. fully.
- Provide appropriate staff training (including training on quality customer service delivery) as identified through P.M.D.S.
- Facilitate participation by staff at all levels in partnership process.

Procedure for Monitoring and Reporting on Progress

We will monitor our progress in relation to the commitments set out in this action plan by:

1. Establishing procedures to ensure actions specified in the document are achieved.
2. Ensuring that customer service commitments are reflected in the Service work plan.
3. Examining progress on customer service in each directorate through scheduled meetings
4. Rectifying where appropriate any situations brought to our attention that require modification.
5. Reviewing progress under this plan and amending where necessary.
6. Including an update on customer service progress in our annual report.