

QUALITY CUSTOMER SERVICE CHARTER

CONTROL

This policy is a controlled document and must not be amended in any way without the permission of the Risk Officer (Corporate Services Director) or Chief Executive. Any authorised changes should be recorded in the amendment/revision history below.

Amendments and Revisions

Review Date	Document Owner	Version No.	Amendments & Revisions	Author	Authorised By	Next Review
23 April 2018	NTPF Board	1	New policy	Audit, Quality Assurance and Research Director (Secretary to the Board)	NTPF Board	
27 June 2022	NTPF Board	2	Insertion of a Consumer Complaints Procedure and Handling of Vexatious or Malicious Complaints	Corporate Services Director (Secretary to the Board)	NTPF Board	Q1 2024
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Contents

1.	Introduction	4
2.	Vision & Mission Statements and Corporate Values	4
	Mission Statement	4
	Vision Statement	5
	Values statement	5
3.	Our Commitment to our Customers	5
4.	Co-ordination	6
5.	Complaints, Queries & Feedback	6
6.	Languages	6
7.	Equality and Diversity	7
8.	Physical Access	7
	Personal callers	7
9.	Consultation and Evaluation	7
10.	Contact Information	7
	Members of the public contacting the NTPF by telephone	8
	Standards of Service	8
	Contact by email or post	8
11.	Unacceptable or Unreasonable Behaviour Policy	8
	Appendix 1 – Complaints Procedure	10
	Appendix 2 - Unacceptable or Unreasonable Behaviour Policy	13

1. Introduction

The National Treatment Purchase Fund (NTPF) was established by Statutory Instrument S.I. No. 179 of 2004 – The National Treatment Purchase Fund Board (Establishment) Order, 2004.

The key functions are:

- To make arrangements with persons, whether resident in the State or elsewhere, for the provision of hospital treatment to such classes of persons as may be determined by the Minister, from time to time;
- To collect, collate and validate information in relation to persons waiting for hospital treatment and to put in place information systems and procedures for that purpose;
- To furnish whenever it is so required by the Minister or on its own initiative, advice to the Minister on issues relating to its functions under this Article;
- To perform any other function in relation to the purchase of hospital treatment that the Minister may from time to time assign to it; and
- To make arrangements with a person it considers to be appropriate, being a proprietor of a nursing home, relating to the price at which long-term residential care services will be provided by such person to persons requiring such services, and who are in receipt of financial support under the Nursing Homes Support Scheme Act.

The purpose of this Charter is to set out the NTPF's commitment to a high standard of service and behaviour that underpins our interactions with all customers including but not exclusive to the general public, patients, public and private hospitals, Department of Health, the Health Service Executive (HSE), our service providers and suppliers.

2. Vision & Mission Statements and Corporate Values

Mission Statement

Our mission is to advance equitable access to quality care for public patients.

We do this by:

- Arranging treatments.
- Providing independently assured waiting list information.
- Developing systems and processes which contribute to health system reform.
- Negotiating prices for nursing home care and providing expert advice to the Minister of Health.

Vision Statement

Our vision is an Ireland where everyone can access healthcare and nursing home services when needed, supported by a system that is trusted, transparent, fair and person centred.

Values statement

People first

We put the interests of patients and nursing home residents at the centre of our work and pursue our mission in a fair and just manner.

Trust

We are independent, objective, transparent and accountable, and hold the public good as our primary aim.

Collaboration

We engage with our stakeholders in a spirit of consultation, collaboration and mutual respect.

Innovation

We are innovative, adaptable, proactive, and bold in our thinking.

Expertise

We are experts in our field, and we adopt an objective and evidence-based approach to our work.

Respect

As an organisation we value diversity, equality and inclusion, and respect our staff, the public, and our partners.

3. Our Commitment to our Customers

We will provide you with high quality customer service in an efficient and courteous manner. Providing this high-quality service to our customers is very important to us and we aim to achieve this by:

- Responding to and engaging with our customers over the phone or in writing including email, in a timely and courteous manner;
- Providing customers with clear, accurate advice and information;
- Treating everyone in a proper, fair and impartial manner while always remaining courteous and sensitive with due regard to privacy and confidentiality;
- Ensuring that rights to equal treatment set out in equality and diversity legislation are upheld in the delivery of our services;
- Meeting the special needs our customers may have, where possible; and
- Taking a proactive approach in providing information that is clear, timely, accurate and where possible meeting your needs.

We are committed to the twelve principles of Quality Customer Service as approved by Government and can be accessed at [Guiding Principles of Quality Customer Service](#).

4. Co-ordination

We will work with other Government Departments and Agencies, where appropriate, to co-ordinate our services to you.

5. Complaints, Queries & Feedback

This Charter relates to the services provided by employees of the NTPF to members of the public, service providers, and other stakeholders.

If you are unhappy with any aspect of our service, please inform us at ask@ntpf.ie and we will try to rectify the problem. We have a formal complaint and appeal procedure found in *Appendix 1* of this document. You may also refer complaints to the Ombudsman if you wish, details also contained at *Appendix 1*.

Please let us know what you think of the service we provide by submitting comments, views, and suggestions. We will always endeavour to use this feedback to assist us in providing the best possible customer service.

If you were happy with the service provided, please let us know. It is always nice to hear. Contact us at ask@ntpf.ie.

6. Languages

Every effort will be made to accommodate people who wish to conduct their business through the Irish language.

Corporate documents and recruitment information is available in both Irish and English.

We will try to provide a service through sign language and other languages where possible.

7. Equality and Diversity

The NTPF is committed to ensuring that:

- the rights to equal treatment established by equality legislation, and to accommodate diversity, to contribute to equality for the groups covered by the equality legislation, as laid down in the Employment Equality Acts 1998-2024 and the Equal Status Acts 2000-2018.
- the service we deliver is accessible to customers within the nine grounds of the equality legislation.
- we 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.

8. Physical Access

Although most of our work does not require customers to travel to our offices, they are kept clean, safe, and accessible to people with disabilities.

Personal callers

The NTPF office address is included in the contact information section below. Our staff will be available to meet by appointment only with our customers and contractors during normal office hours. Such appointments are only possible once they adhere to public health and safety advice.

Staff will greet visitors politely, be fair and helpful and deal with their enquiries as quickly as possible.

9. Consultation and Evaluation

We will provide a structured approach to meaningful consultation with, and participation by, the customer in relation to the development, delivery, review, and evaluation of service delivery.

The NTPF will record and analyse queries, complaints, and customer feedback to ensure that they are being dealt with effectively, and to improve the service given to customers.

10. Contact Information

The Contact details for the National Treatment Purchase Fund are as follows:

- Address: National Treatment Purchase Fund
Ashford House
Tara Street
Dublin 2
D02 VX67
- Phone: 01-6427101
- Email: ask@ntpf.ie

Members of the public contacting the NTPF by telephone

Customer service queries are dealt with between 9:00am and 4:30p.m. Monday to Friday, excluding weekends and public holidays.

Standards of Service

- We will answer phones quickly and courteously.
- We will give the information you ask for in a helpful way.
- As far as possible, we will deal with your query at your first phone call.
- If we cannot give you an answer immediately, we will take your details and either write or phone back.
- We will tell you when you can expect to hear from us or arrange to call at a time which is convenient for you.
- We will give you the name of the person dealing with your query in case you need to phone again.

Contact by email or post

- The NTPF will acknowledge your letter/email within three working days of the query/complaint being received. If this reply is an acknowledgement rather than a full reply it will indicate the name and contact details of the person dealing with the query/complaint and the estimated time scale for a full reply.
- All communications with you will be in 'plain English' as much as possible and avoid the use of jargon.
- You will be kept informed if the original time scale changes.

11. Unacceptable or Unreasonable Behaviour Policy

The NTPF believe that all individuals who contact us have a right to be heard, understood, and respected. We work hard to be open and accessible to all stakeholders.

Our experience is that most people who engage with NTPF do so in a reasonable manner. However, there may be times when the behaviour of people contacting the NTPF makes it difficult for us to deal with the issues they raise. In a small number of cases their behaviours may become unacceptable or unreasonable because of the way they treat our staff, or the

demands they make on the NTPF. We have a duty to protect the welfare and safety of our staff and cannot condone any behaviour that is abusive, offensive, or threatening, unprofessional, or which places unreasonable demands on the work of the NTPF.

Further details of the NTPF's Unacceptable or Unreasonable Behaviour Policy can be found in *Appendix 2*

Appendix 1 – Complaints Procedure

Consumer Service Complaints

The NTPF is committed to dealing with complaints about the quality of the service provided. Complaints about our customer service should be made in accordance with the following protocols:

- In the first instance, where a member of the public or other stakeholder that engages with the NTPF, feels that the service being provided via a staff member is deficient, the matter should be raised directly with the staff member concerned.
- If the individual is still unhappy following the staff member's response, the matter can be referred to the staff member's Head of Function. In this regard, the staff member will give the individual the name and contact details of the Head of Function and will inform the Head of Function as soon as possible of the nature of the issue concerned.
- The Head of Function will contact, or be put in contact with, the individual as soon as practicable but no later than three (3) working days from the date the issue has been raised.
- Following contact with the Head of Function and if the individual is still unhappy and wishes to sustain the complaint, then a formal written complaint should be made to the respective Head of Department, The National Treatment Purchase Fund, Ashford House, Tara Street, Dublin 2, D02 VX67.
- Formal complaints relating to Heads of Department (Directors) will be investigated by an independent Head of Department (Director).
- Formal complaints relating to the Chief Executive will be investigated by the NTPF Board Chair.
- We will acknowledge all written & email complaints within three (3) working days. Formal complaints received will also be logged on the NTPF Customer Complaints Register.
- We will investigate all complaints and issue a reply to your complaint within fifteen (15) working days or, where this is not possible, an interim reply will issue explaining the position and advising when a substantive response will issue.
- All complaints will be treated promptly, fairly, impartially and in confidence.
- We will keep records of complaints separate from other records.
- We will ensure that no complaint you have made in good faith will be used to your disadvantage in the future.
- We will endeavour to learn from mistakes to ensure that errors are not repeated.

Vexatious and Malicious Complaints

What is a vexatious complaint?

A vexatious complaint is one that is pursued, regardless of its merits, solely to harass, annoy or subdue somebody; something that is unreasonable, without foundation, frivolous, repetitive, burdensome, or unwarranted.

What is a malicious complaint?

A malicious complaint is one that is made with the intention of causing harm, for example:

- deliberately seeking to defame a staff member and raising a complaint with this intent.
- through lying about an issue or incident in the knowledge that this will cause harm.
- through knowingly basing a complaint with the intention of causing harm.

All complaints received will be handled fairly, always applying a presumption from the outset that the complaint has been made in good faith, unless and until there is clear evidence to the contrary. All complaints, even if thought to be made with malicious or vexatious intent, will be investigated.

Every complaint will be considered on its merits and, even if someone has made a vexatious or malicious complaint in the past, it will not be assumed that any other complaint they make will also be vexatious or malicious.

During investigation if the Head of Function determines the complaint to be vexatious or malicious, he/she will not pursue the complaint any further. However, this does not remove the Complainant's right to submit their complaint to independent agencies such as the Ombudsman/Ombudsman for Children.

If a complaint is found to be vexatious or malicious, there will be no record of the complaint in the file of the staff member / service about which the complaint was made.

Before the complaint is deemed vexatious the Head of Function must bring it to the attention of the relevant Head of Department (Director) or Chief Executive where appropriate.

Rights of appeal

If you feel that you have been unfairly treated or are not satisfied with our decision on your complaint, it is open to you to contact the Office of the Ombudsman. By law, the Ombudsman can investigate complaints about any of our administrative actions or procedures as well as delays or inaction in your dealings with us. The Ombudsman provides an impartial, independent, and free dispute resolution service.

- Contact Address Ombudsman
6 Earlsfort Terrace
Saint Kevin's
Dublin 2
D02 W773
- Telephone: 01 639 5600
- Online Complaints [Ombudsman Complaints](#)

➤ Website: www.ombudsman.ie

Appendix 2 - Unacceptable or Unreasonable Behaviour Policy

Introduction

The National Treatment Purchase Fund (NTPF) believe that all individuals who contact us have a right to be heard, understood, and respected. We work hard to be open and accessible to all stakeholders.

Our experience is that most people who engage with NTPF do so in a reasonable manner. We recognise that the circumstances that lead people to contact NTPF can be stressful and, from time to time, this stress may lead people to act out of character. However, there may be times when the behaviour of people contacting the NTPF makes it difficult for us to deal with the issues they raise. In a small number of cases their behaviours may become unacceptable or unreasonable because of the way they treat our staff, or the demands they make on the NTPF. We have a duty to protect the welfare and safety of our staff and cannot condone any behaviour that is abusive, offensive, or threatening, unprofessional, or which places unreasonable demands on the work of the NTPF.

We will take all reasonable steps to ensure we meet our requirements under the Equal Status Acts 2000-2018 ("the Acts"), and we will make appropriate adjustment for individuals who have a disability. In some cases, we know that individuals may have a disability that makes it difficult for them to understand information or communicate clearly or appropriately. Where there is a suggestion that this may be the case, we will explore, and consider, the needs and circumstances of the individual before deciding on how best to deal with the situation.

High quality customer service is important to us as set out in our [Customer Charter - NTPF](#) although we recognise that sometimes we may get things wrong or are unable to help people in the way they would like. We always treat any expression of dissatisfaction seriously and value feedback which may help us identify learning points and improve our services. We have a process in place to handle feedback about the service we provide as outline in our Customer Charter.

What type of behaviour is unacceptable and unreasonable?

We expect:

- all workers to be fair, courteous, and respectful in their interactions with all stakeholders.
- that our workers will be treated fairly, courteously, and respectfully by those who engage with the NTPF.

We recognise that people and stakeholders who contact us or whom we engage with may feel angry, upset or frustrated about the issues they are raising. Our staff are trained to handle interactions appropriately and they are expected to make reasonable allowance for this. We do not view assertive behaviour by anyone using our services or contacting us as unreasonable. However, there may be occasions where an individual's behaviour puts the wellbeing of NTPF workers at risk. Unacceptable or unreasonable behaviour could occur in any interaction with any worker (over the phone, in person, on video call or in writing).

Unacceptable Behaviour

Unacceptable behaviour refers to instances where an individual's actions, remarks, or attitudes adversely affect the well-being, comfort, or security of others. This behaviour can hamper communication and cooperation, creating a hostile environment that impedes productivity and the capacity to deliver services. Examples of unacceptable behaviour may include the following (this list is not exhaustive):

- Obscene or offensive remarks, foul or aggressive language, verbal abuse, shouting or harassment, including sexual harassment.
- Recording meetings or telephone conversations without knowledge or consent.
- Derogatory, abusive, or insulting comments made about NTPF workers including online or in the media.
- Harassing, threatening or inappropriately contacting NTPF workers including on their personal social networks.
- Threats or physical violence, physical intimidation, confrontational behaviour, or aggression.
- Cyber stalking – the repeated use of electronic communications to harass or frighten a staff member, for example by repeatedly looking up staff members LinkedIn profile or other social media, adding negative comments and contacting the staff member outside of NTPF channels.

As a matter of staff safety, where members of the public arrive to Ashford House in an agitated or aggressive state, building security have been instructed to keep them at security. They will then phone the relevant Director/Deputy letting them know their concerns and agreed the next course of action rather than sending them directly to the office floors.

Unreasonable Behaviour

Unreasonable behaviour involves unreasonable levels of contact. Unreasonable frequency or duration of contact can affect the time available to deal with matters of concern or to carry out our role. Unreasonable behaviour can also include placing unreasonable/impossible demands on staff. Examples of unreasonable behaviour may include the following (this list is not exhaustive):

- Making numerous calls in one day or repeatedly making calls or repeatedly making very long calls.
- Repeatedly asking staff to look at the same issue when we have already dealt with the matter through the process or another process.
- Repeated correspondence about the same issue or repeatedly sending emails with large amounts of information attached that is not needed.
- Persistent requests for information e.g., requests for the same information already provided.
- Repeated requests or demands for action(s) to be taken within an unreasonable amount of time.
- Repeated requests or demands for action(s) which would be inappropriate in the

circumstances or beyond our capacity.

Our duty to our workers

These situations are not common, but when they do happen, we will take action to restrict or end our communication and access to our workers and office. We do this because our workers must be able to carry out their work without harassment and it is our expectation that they should be treated fairly, respectfully, reasonably and with courtesy - mirroring the same standards we expect they maintain in their interactions with others. We have a duty to protect our workers and to be mindful of their welfare and safety. We take any threat of violence seriously and will bring any direct contact with the individual to an end. We will also report such threats or actions to An Garda Síochána. We consider violence to include any communication or behaviour that may cause a worker to feel afraid, unsafe, threatened, physically injured, or abused.

How do we manage unacceptable or unreasonable behaviour?

If any worker feels a person is behaving unacceptably or unreasonably, they will bring it to the attention of a manager/ appropriate superior. The manager/ appropriate superior will discuss it with the worker, and consider what action, if any, is appropriate. We will let the individual know about the actions we are taking and the reason for it.

If a worker experiences unacceptable or unreasonable behaviour during a call, meeting or event, the worker has the authority to deal immediately with the behaviour in a manner they consider appropriate and in line with this policy.

- Unacceptable or unreasonable behaviour during a telephone call - the worker is entitled to bring the call to an end provided:
 - Stated clearly what they feel is unacceptable or unreasonable behaviour;
 - Asked the caller to take a more reasonable approach; and
 - States clearly that the call will be terminated unless the caller stops the unacceptable or unreasonable behaviour.
- Unacceptable or unreasonable behaviour in a meeting, during an inspection/audit, negotiation or at an event - the worker is entitled to bring the meeting or visit to a close. The worker will use their personal judgement to decide whether it is appropriate to request that a more reasonable approach be taken first. Our workers will consider their own personal safety in making this judgement.

Except for immediate decisions taken at the time of an incident, any decisions to restrict or limit contact with NTPF will only be taken after careful consideration of the situation by a senior member of staff. When we consider an individual's behaviour to be unacceptable or unreasonable, we will tell them why we find their conduct is unacceptable or unreasonable, and we will ask them to change it. If we feel that their behaviour is unacceptable or unreasonable, we may take action to put limits on contact with the NTPF. Any restrictions

imposed will be appropriate and proportionate. Such a decision will only usually be taken after we have appropriately reviewed matters. Wherever possible we will give the individual an opportunity to change their behaviour before such a decision is taken. All incidents of unacceptable or unreasonable behaviour will be recorded using the Health and Safety Accident & Incident Report Form which will be submitted to the staff members line manager and the Corporate Services Director.

What factors will we consider?

In making our decision, we will consider:

- How the decision affects our worker.
- How the decision affects the individual responsible for the unacceptable or unreasonable behaviour (including their personal circumstances and any appropriate adjustment).
- The extent to which we can assist or support the individual.
- The extent to which the process has been exhausted.

What limits on contact will we consider?

Any restriction on contact will be a position of last resort and at all times, we will try to maintain at least one form of contact with the individual. In extreme situations, we may tell the individual in writing that contact will be restricted to either written communication, or through a third party or advisor where access to our services is needed.

Regardless of an individual's behaviour, our workers will act fairly, respectfully, and courteously and take an impartial attitude. Unacceptable or Unreasonable behaviour does not preclude there being a valid query or concern (for example, a complaint or a data access request).

Examples of the actions we may consider taking are as follows:

- Asking for telephone calls to be made at particular times or limiting the time for the calls.
- Asking for contact to take place with a named worker only.
- Asking for contact in a particular format, for example by letter/email only.
- Where a complaint is concluded and the individual has been advised of the decision and our reasons for this, we may acknowledge the correspondence but there may be no further engagement from NTPF.
- Blocking emails if:
 - The content of the emails is abusive or offensive.
 - The number or length of emails impacts on our ability to carry out our role.
 - Ceasing contact - this is a decision of last resort and can only be taken with the agreement of the Chief Executive.

Taking other action which is reasonable and appropriate (such action must take account of our duty to discharge our role and to comply with other duties that apply to us under the law for example, requirements under Data Protection Legislation).

How we let people know we have made this decision

When a worker makes an immediate decision in response to unacceptable or unreasonable behaviour, the worker will make every reasonable effort to advise the individual at the time of the incident.

In all other cases, where we decide that an individual's behaviour is unacceptable or unreasonable, we will write to or notify them of this by another means and explain:

1. A decision has been made that the individual has behaved unacceptably or unreasonably.
2. What action we are taking.
3. Why we are taking this action.

However, where the behaviour is so extreme that it threatens the safety and welfare of staff, we will consider reporting this to An Garda Síochána or instigating legal action. In such cases we may not give prior notice of this.

How we record and review a decision to restrict contact

We record all incidents of unacceptable or unreasonable behaviour by people contacting NTPF. A decision to restrict contact from an individual may be reconsidered if the person demonstrates a more acceptable approach.

Contact

If you have any questions or queries in relation to this policy, please contact the HR Manager or Director of Corporate Services.