



GOVERNMENT OFFICE
FOR THE NORTH EAST



Customer Service Standards

**The standard of service you can expect from
us and our expectations of you**

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What you can expect from us

We are committed to providing a high standard of service at all times.

This leaflet sets out the standards of service you can expect. If we don't meet our standards, then you can expect a full explanation from us. We'd like to know if you are not satisfied. Your feedback helps us to put things right if they've gone wrong and to improve the standard of our services.

We realise that sometimes people only contact us when they want to complain, but we'd also like to hear from you if we've done something particularly well.

We will:

- meet you, and take you to your meeting
- answer your letters, faxes and emails quickly and clearly
- answer telephone calls promptly, within six rings, and ensure that enquiries are dealt with courteously and professionally
- provide clear and straightforward information about our services
- do all that we can to make our services available to everyone, including people with special needs
- listen to comments about our services and ensure that if problems occur, steps are taken so that they don't happen again
- treat you respectfully, considerately and fairly.

Visiting us

If you have an appointment and are unfamiliar with our location, we will give you a [location map](#) and directions. We will also give all visitors to our offices a contact name and telephone number. If you require special access, we will make the necessary arrangements.

When you arrive at our office we will meet you and take you from reception to your meeting within five minutes of the time of your appointment. In the event of an emergency, the person you are meeting will be responsible for ensuring your safe evacuation from the building.

If you don't have an appointment our reception staff will contact the appropriate team to help you.

If you need privacy we'll arrange suitable quiet accommodation.

If we have to cancel a meeting we'll do our very best to give you at least 24 hours notice unless there are exceptional circumstances which prevent this.

Answering your letter

We will:

- answer your letter, fax or email within 20 working days of receiving it
- include in our reply the name, email address, direct line telephone and fax number of the person replying to your letter, and our full address
- reply to your letter clearly, concisely and courteously and in plain English, avoiding jargon, abbreviations and acronyms unless we are certain that you will understand them.

If we think it will take more than 20 working days to reply to your letter, we will let you know we have received it and tell you how long it will take to provide a full reply.

Answering your telephone calls

Our switchboard is open from 0830 to 1730 Monday to Friday (except during public holidays). Our number is 0191 201 3300.

If you have a direct line telephone number for the person you wish to speak to you can expect this to be answered (or transferred to voicemail) between 0900 and 1700 (1630 on a Friday).

Outside of these hours, you will be able to leave a recorded message. All answer phone messages left after 1700 will be dealt with as soon as possible the following working day.

If we cannot deal with your enquiry we will do our best to provide you with a contact number for the organisation we consider most likely to be able to help you.

We will always aim to:

- answer our telephones promptly and within six rings, exceptionally 7 rings to voicemail
- tell you the name of the person to whom you are speaking
- transfer your call internally if we consider someone else is more able to help. We will always give you the person's name and extension number in case you are cut off and need to call back
- tell you when the appropriate member of staff can be contacted if they are not available. Alternatively, we will leave them a message to contact you by a given time
- treat you respectfully, considerately and fairly.

What we expect from you

That you will treat us with respect. We will not tolerate harassment, threats or assaults. If you call or visit us and behave in a threatening or abusive way, or use threatening or abusive language, we may terminate the telephone call or ask you to leave the office. If you write to us using threatening or abusive language we may not reply to your letter.

That you'll be on time for appointments we arrange with you – or let us know if you are delayed or unable to attend.

That you will be polite and considerate to other customers. If you visit us, especially without an appointment, you may find that we are already dealing with other customers. Please be patient and show them the same courtesy that you'd expect to be shown yourself.

Complaints about the service we provide

We take all complaints about the quality of our services seriously. We will provide a speedy response and a full and fair investigation of your complaint, respecting your right to confidentiality.

A complaint about the service we provide might include the following:

- attitude and conduct of a member of staff
- quality of service
- maladministration, for example, failing to follow the right procedures
- delays in receiving information or a response from us.

We have a three stage complaint process to ensure that if you are unhappy with the response we give you (in Stage 1), you can ask more senior staff to consider the issue again (Stages 2 and 3).

Stage 1: You should first take up your complaint directly and informally with the person with whom you have been in contact. You can express your dissatisfaction by letter, fax, email or telephone. You can expect a reply from us within five working days.

Stage 2: If you are not satisfied with the response you should then write to your first contact's immediate line manager setting out your complaint clearly and in detail. We will reply within 20 working days of receiving your complaint.

Stage 3: If you are still not satisfied with our explanation you can write to the relevant Director. You will receive a full response within a further 10 working days.

These procedures do not affect your right to ask your MP to refer your complaint to the Parliamentary Ombudsman (officially known as the Parliamentary Commissioner for Administration). We will respect your confidentiality at all times.

Please note that this procedure relates to complaints about the services we provide and not about government policy, the content of legislation, or contractual issues. However, when your complaint does not involve the Government Office for the North East or is a matter outside of our control, we will do our best to advise you how to pursue it.

Paying our bills

All acceptable invoices will be paid within 30 days of receipt.

Helping us to improve our service

We aim to improve our service by:

- listening to your views and ideas
- taking full account of your complaints
- monitoring our performance against our published standards
- reviewing and evaluating our performance annually and publishing the results
- undertaking customer surveys.

Any comments and suggestions you have which might help us to improve our service can be sent either directly to the person with whom you have been dealing or to general.enquiries@gone.gsi.gov.uk

Contacting us

Government Office for the North East
Citygate
Gallowgate
Newcastle upon Tyne
NE1 4WH

Email: general.enquiries@gone.gsi.gov.uk
Tel: 0191 201 3300
Fax: 0191 202 3830
Website: www.go-ne.gov.uk

Access to Information

In the spirit of the Rights of Access legislation, Data Protection Act, Environmental Information Regulations and Freedom of Information Act, we affirm our commitment to fostering a culture of open access to information throughout the organisation.



The Data Protection Act 1998 (DPA) enables you to access information about you, for example, your own education, medical records, credit reference files or personnel file. DPA requests have a £10 charge each. A valid request will be answered within 40 calendar days of its receipt.

More information at: www.informationcommissioner.gov.uk

The Environmental Information Regulations 2004 (EIRs) enable you to access environmental information relating to:

- air, water, land, natural sites, flora and fauna, the built environment and health
- all information relating to decisions or activities affecting, or likely to affect, any of these, including environmental protection and cost benefit analysis.

Enquiries can be made on the telephone or in writing and you should receive a response within 20 working days. The 20 working day limit can be extended up to 40 working days if the request is for complex or high volumes of information.

More information can be found at: www.informationcommissioner.gov.uk

The Freedom of Information Act 2000 (FOIA) gives you a general right of access to all types of recorded information held by public authorities, including ourselves. The Act has created two rights for you:

- to know if information exists
- to have it supplied on written request.

What we must do

- Maintain a Publication Scheme, which sets out the information that we will routinely make available. The Government Office Publication Scheme, is part of the Publication Scheme of the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG), and can be found [on their website](#).
- Tell you whether we hold the information requested and provide it, or explain why it has not been provided quoting the relevant exemption under the Act
- Reply to you within 20 working days
- Advise and assist you to make your request. We may contact you to clarify your request
- Although there will be no charge for information that costs us less than £600 to produce, we may request a fee if this limit is exceeded. If you do not wish to pay the fee, we can refuse to supply the information.

More information about the Freedom of Information Act can be found at www.informationcommissioner.gov.uk or www.dca.gov.uk/foi/index.htm

How to request information

For any of the three types of query, Freedom of Information (FOI), Environmental Regulations (EIR) or Data Protection Act (DPA) put your request in writing (this includes by fax or email, or for EIR only, telephone also) to the appropriate individual or team, or you can write to:

Access to Information Manager
Government Office for the North East
Citygate
Gallowgate
Newcastle upon Tyne
NE1 4WH

Fax: 0191 202 3998

Email: information_manager@gone.gsi.gov.uk

- State clearly what information is required
- State your name and an address for correspondence
- You may request the information in any format. However, we may take into account the cost of supplying the information before complying with your request.
- If you wish to appeal against a decision made by us not to release certain FOI/EIR/DPA information you will be advised of your right of appeal in a leaflet accompanying the response. The leaflet is also available at:
http://www.odpm.gov.uk/embedded_object.asp?id=1165117

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