OPERATOR GUIDELINES

General Business Processes

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1.1	Business planning process showing evidence of plans for growth over a minimum 3-year period.
	For example. These are for guidance and not requirements but examples of best practice. • *Evidence of business plan (may only be one page) demonstrating an understanding of the current business environment and a plan for the future. This may be described verbally without the document being presented.* • *The plan may be an outline of activity only for very small businesses, as a guideline, usually those with around three or fewer staff.* • *Sit with your staff to discuss what your business and service goals are, how they can contribute and what the likely benefits are to all concerned for trying to be better at what you do.*
1.2	Marketing planning process demonstrating an understanding of Ireland's, and the business's, main markets.
	For example. These are for guidance and not requirements but examples of best practice. • *Evidence of a marketing plan (may only be one page) demonstrating an understanding of the current and future markets, trends and their potential for the future. This may be described verbally without the document being presented.* • *The plan may be a combined business and marketing plan.* • *Support provided by local programmes, such as Wild Atlantic Way may help with this area.* • *Keeping information updated on Discover Ireland is part of the businesses' overall marketing activity.*
1.3	Evidence of operational processes (at a minimum a clear verbal description) including maintenance, safety and cleanliness.
	For example. These are for guidance and not requirements but examples of best practice. • *Naturally, you want your service to exceed expectations for as much of the time as possible but even to 'meet expectations' you may have a defined way of doing things and for that you need Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) of some kind.* • *Only small businesses, those with around three of fewer staff, the plan may be provided* **verbally.**
1.4	Guest services policy, including procedures for handling enquiries, responding to phone calls and emails.
	• *Is there a defined time within which emails are replied to? Is this met on most occasions? This should be within a maximum of 24 hours from the email being received.* • *Is booking confirmation provided, and how? Confirmation wherever possible, is appreciated by guests and provides reassurance that a warm welcome awaits. If no deposit is taken, an email, text or call will be expected.* • *Could include evidence of staff training.*

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1.5	Guest service <u>planning</u> processes for the effective management of current and future guest requirements (at a minimum a clear verbal description).
	For example. These are for guidance and not requirements but examples of best practice. • *Defined/commonly understood basic processes for working with guests, e.g. all emails responded to and within a defined time, response and reply procedures for phone calls.* • *How does the business identify the need for change, if any? Are guests asked what they would change? Changes may not be needed as guests are satisfied with the service and facilities provided. If this is the case, then evidence should be provided.* • *Evidence of guest comments on any channels noted and, where appropriate, action taken.* • *You may have developed with your staff a 'Service Promise', or similar, which captures a shared vision of what you all want to achieve in terms of service quality. This is a good example.* • *It helps to have clear service goals (collective and individual) to provide tangible targets related to your Service Promise; for example, you could have a target to reduce complaints, increase repeat business volumes, and raise customer satisfaction levels and so on.* • *Good quality service is essentially about identifying a guest's needs and meeting, and trying to exceed, their expectations.* ***The following is advice which could be included in a business's guest planning process document:*** ***Service Delivery*** *Service delivery is identified as meeting the accommodations guest's needs, and then trying to exceed these to add more value. These needs are:* ***Providing secure, safe and clean accommodation.*** • *Rooms/sleeping options should be safe and secure for guests and their belongings, and all hygiene rules met and fulfilled by the management.* ***Providing satisfaction of all other needs.*** • *Guests will appreciate a friendly welcome and happy smiling faces. This should be provided within pleasant, relaxing surroundings. Guests wish to have all their questions answered and their requests met.*
1.6	Evidence of collaboration with other tourism operators, locally and/or nationally (this may include membership of a relevant trade association e.g. Irish Self Catering Federation and Irish Caravan & Camping Council, regional tourism organisation/body, service level agreements with suppliers/activity providers, etc.).
	For example. These are for guidance and not requirements but examples of best practice. • *Verbal description of cooperation with one or more local, regional or national businesses/organisations can include WAW, IAE or Dublin.* • *There may be written evidence e.g. supply partners described on a menu.*

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1.7	Documented processes for the management of guest feedback including complaints.
	For example. These are for guidance and not requirements but examples of best practice.
	• *Verbal description of how feedback (comments/ complaints) noted and if and how they are responded to. If in doubt, written evidence required e.g. copy of a complaint and response at the minimum.*
	• *It helps to identify your key guest markets and attribute an overall value to each in terms of what they generate for your business. Which markets deserve most attention?*
	• *You may hold regular focus groups with customers from these segments to better understand their needs or conduct wider online/email surveys with larger number of customers to get a broader view of needs.*
	• *Documented feedback mechanisms (digital and/or physical), for capturing complaints, and for gathering general satisfaction data are helpful in improving service and facilities. In the case of very small businesses (most likely two-person family partnerships with no staff), this may be a guest comment book which is regularly reviewed.*
	• *If staff receive informal feedback on a daily basis, how is that information captured and then actioned in your business? What information do you want from your customers, what is valuable to you?*
	• *Whatever combination of feedback mechanisms you use, do not overload your customers with pointless questions, or make it cumbersome for them to help you improve.Use a mix of feedback mechanisms from telephone follow-up calls, surveys, interviews and comment cards so that you get data from all segments.*
1.8	An access policy and strategy for welcoming all guests is evident and/or the business to hold a recognised accessibility award.
	For example. These are for guidance and not requirements but examples of best practice.
	• *Has a self-assessment/audit been carried out by the operator to identify if they can welcome guest with disabilities in any way? The accommodation may not be appropriate for, say, wheelchair users, but guests with limited mobility, sight, or hearing, could be provided with services or facilities at little cost.*
	• *See National Disability Authority website for guidance and publications http://nda.ie/Publications/. Example includes "Building for Everyone: A Universal Design Approach" provides comprehensive best practice guidance on how to design, build and manage buildings and spaces so that they can be readily accessed and used by everyone, regardless of age, size, ability or disability.*
	• *An example of a recognised association for organisations interested in accessibility and providing guidance available for tourism accommodation is ENAT (European Network for Accessible Tourism).*
	• *If no attempt to identify the needs of potential guests with disabilities has been taken, then this is a No.*
1.9	An environmental impact policy and/or the business to hold a nationally recognised environmental award.
	For example. These are for guidance and not requirements but examples of best practice.
	• *Does the accommodation business take any steps to minimise any adverse effects on the environment?*
	• *Does the accommodation hold any environmental awards e.g. Sustainable Ireland, Green Tourism scheme?*
	• *Most guests wish to know, or assume, that an accredited business will be taking responsible steps in the area of environmental impact.*

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1.10	A policy to ensure the use of Irish products and produce, and the business promotes Irish culture and heritage.
	For example. These are for guidance and not requirements but examples of best practice. • *This may be written or verbal evidence that the business makes a concerted attempt to promote aspects of Irish culture and heritage.*
1.11	A policy for continuous training and development of staff and owners.
	For example. These are for guidance and not requirements but examples of best practice. • *Is appropriate and continuous training provided for all staff? It goes without saying that training and development are vital cogs in the wheel when it comes to aiming for service excellence. But, regardless of the numbers of staff you have, as far as is possible, the content of training needs should be tailored to the experience levels and needs of staff.* • *There should be (at a minimum); a record of staff induction training maintained onsite. This provides owners with reassurance that all staff have the basics required to operate their roles to at least the minimum standards.* • *How are training and development needs identified, provided for and monitored? For businesses with four or more staff, this should be documented; this may be a short, bullet-pointed page or two pages in smaller businesses.* • *Operator subscribes to relevant Fáilte Ireland communications and cascades information to staff, so they are always up to date.* • *In the case of very small businesses (most likely two-person family partnerships with no staff), this will be evidence that they monitor competitor standards. For example, staying in or visiting other tourism businesses on a regular basis and recording changes and trends, reviewing Fáilte Ireland research documents etc.*
1.12	Involvement of staff and managers in all processes.
	For example. These are for guidance and not requirements but examples of best practice. • *For businesses with any staff, in discussion, can a few examples be provided of how staff are engaged with the business, kept up to date on plans or changes?* • *In the case of very small businesses (most likely two-person family partnerships with no staff), this may be NA.*