



CYNGOR SIR
YNYS MÔN
ISLE OF ANGLESEY
COUNTY COUNCIL

Managing Contact – Unacceptable Actions by Customers Policy

1. Introduction

This policy sets out The Isle of Anglesey County Council's (the Council) approach to those few customers whose actions or behaviour is considered unacceptable. The term customer includes anyone who contacts the Council for any reason.

2. Aims

- (i) To establish clarity from the outset as to what the Council can or cannot do in relation to initial requests from customers as well as throughout any dealings between both parties. In doing so, the aim is to be open and not raise hopes or expectations that cannot be met.
- (ii) To deal fairly, honestly, consistently and appropriately with all customers including those whose actions are considered unacceptable. The Council believes that all customers have the right to be heard, understood and respected.

It is also considered that Council employees have the same rights.

- (iii) To provide Council services that are accessible to all. However, where it is considered that customer actions are unacceptable, the right to restrict or change access to the Council service is retained.
- (iv) To ensure that other customers and Council employees do not suffer any disadvantage from those who act in an unacceptable manner.

3. Defining unacceptable actions by customers

People may act out of character in times of trouble or distress. There may have been upsetting or distressing circumstances leading up to contact being made. The Council does not view behaviour as unacceptable just because a claimant is forceful or determined.

However, the actions of customers who are angry, abusive, demanding

or unnecessarily persistent may result in unreasonable expectations on the office or unacceptable behaviour towards Council employees. Such actions could also be interpreted as harassment. It is these actions that this policy aims to manage.

The Council has grouped these actions under three broad headings:

Aggressive or Abusive Behaviour

Our staff have the right to work in an environment free from aggressive, abusive or offensive language or behaviour at all times

- (i) Violence is not restricted to acts of aggression that may result in physical harm. It also includes behaviour or language (whether oral or written) that may cause an employee to feel afraid, threatened or abused.
- (ii) Examples of behaviours grouped under this heading include:
 - threats or threatening behaviour
 - personal verbal abuse,
 - derogatory remarks
 - inappropriate references to any characteristics protected under the Equality Act 2010 (age; disability; gender reassignment, marriage or civil partnership; pregnancy & maternity; race; religion or belief; sex; sexual orientation)
 - rudeness and shouting.
 - inflammatory statements and unsubstantiated allegations.
- (iii) We expect our employees to be treated courteously and with respect. Violence or abuse towards employees is unacceptable. Council employees understand the difference between aggression and understandable frustration

- (iv) Threats of physical violence or harassment to any person are unacceptable and may result in the ending of all direct contact with the Council. In these circumstance, the Customer may be placed on the Risk of Violence Marker register (The Council's Risk of Violence Marker Policy & Procedure) and the matter reported to the police. [LINK](#)

Unreasonable Expectations & Persistence

The Council is committed to providing a proportionate amount of time and resources to every customer. Unreasonable expectations and persistence may prevent staff from fulfilling this commitment

- (i) What amounts to unreasonable expectations will always depend on the circumstances surrounding the behaviour and the seriousness of the issues raised by the customer.
- (ii) Examples of actions grouped under this heading include:
- excessive telephone calls, emails or letters
 - demanding responses within an unreasonable time-scale
 - insisting on seeing or speaking to a particular officer,
 - repeatedly changing the substance of their request / complaint or raising unrelated concerns.
 - refusing to cooperate with the Council's complaint handling procedures
 - refusing to accept that the Council is unable to assist them further or provide a level of service other than that provided already.

- customers may persist in disagreeing with the action or decision taken in relation to their complaint or contact the office persistently about the same issue.

These demands are considered unacceptable and unreasonable if they start to impact substantially on the work of the Council, such as diverting an excessive amount of employee time that results in a disadvantage to other customers or functions. The way in which these customers approach the Council may be entirely reasonable, but it is their persistent behaviour in continuing to do so that is not.

4. Terminating a Telephone Call

Council staff may terminate a call if subjected to any of the behaviours outlined above.

- (i) Before taking this action, the caller will be warned once that their conduct is of concern, to allow them the opportunity to moderate their behaviour. If the behaviour persists then no further warning will be given and the call will be terminated.
- (ii) The staff member involved should make a note of the call, with as much detail as possible, and inform their line manager of the incident.
- (iv) If the caller calls again and the unacceptable behaviour continues then consideration will be given to formally managing contact between the customer and the Council.

5. Managing contact - unacceptable actions by customers

There are few customers whose actions are considered by the Council to be unacceptable. How these actions are managed depends on their nature and extent. If it adversely affects the Council's ability to do its work and provide a service to others, customer contact with the Council may need to be restricted in order to manage the unacceptable action.

Contact in person, by telephone, fax, letter or electronically or by any combination of these, may be restricted but every effort will be made to try to maintain at least one form of contact.

The Council may (amongst other considerations) manage contact by:

- Limiting contact to a particular form, for example, by email or letter only
- Limiting telephone calls to specific days and / or times
- Arranging for a single point of contact for all future contact
- Blocking telephone calls and / or emails being received
- Advising the customer that future correspondence will be read and filed but only acknowledged or responded to if there is significant new information requiring a response

6. Formal decision to restrict customer contact

- (i) Employees who directly experience aggressive or abusive behaviour from a customer have the authority to deal immediately with that behaviour in accordance with this policy.
- (ii) With the exception of such immediate decisions taken at the time of an incident, decisions to restrict contact with the Council are only taken after careful consideration of the situation by a more senior member of staff.
- (iii) Wherever possible, a customer will be given the opportunity to modify their behaviour or action before a decision is taken. Customers will be told in writing why a decision has been made to restrict future contact, the restricted contact arrangements and, if relevant, the length of time that these restrictions will be in place.

7. Appealing a decision to restrict contact

- (i) A customer can appeal a decision to restrict contact by responding to the author of the letter setting out their reasons for appealing the decision within 20 days of receiving the letter.
- (ii). A member of the Senior Leadership Team will consider the appeal and the customer will be advised in writing that either the restricted contact arrangements still apply or a different course of action has been agreed.

8. Recording and reviewing a decision to restrict contact

- (i) The Council will record all incidents of unacceptable actions by customers that result in contact being restricted.
- (ii) The record will be kept by the Corporate Information & Complaints Officer.
- (iii) Other than in exceptional circumstances, contact should be restricted for a set period (generally 6 months)
- (iv) Every decision to restrict contact should be reviewed by the decision maker after the expiry period and the customer informed of the decision only if they remain in active contact with the Council at the time of the review.