

Policy for dealing with unacceptable customer behaviour

This policy applies to all customer contact with Denbighshire County Council departments and employees and will also apply to our complaints procedures.

This policy will be applicable at all times when staff are carrying out their duties, either during or outside of working hours, where the unacceptable behaviour is linked to work activities. This policy will also be applicable at any location where the employee has to carry out his or her duties, ie. office, citizens home, public areas, online etc.

1. Overview

- 1.1. At Denbighshire County Council, we believe that our customers have a right to be heard, understood and respected.
- 1.2. We also believe that our staff and Councillors have the right to work in a safe environment, free from any harm caused by others.
- 1.3. We expect all customers to treat our staff and Councillors with courtesy and respect.
- 1.4. In a small number of cases the actions of some customers become unacceptable because they involve abuse of our staff and Councillors and/or our processes.
- 1.5. We do not view an action as unacceptable, just because a person is forceful or determined. However, we do consider actions that result in unreasonable demands and/or abusive behaviour to be unacceptable.
- 1.6. There are a range of actions we consider to be unacceptable, which can be best grouped as follows:
 - Aggressive or abusive behaviour; and
 - Unreasonable demands and/or unreasonable levels of contact.

2. Aggressive or abusive behaviour

- 2.1. We understand that people can become angry when they feel that matters about which they feel strongly are not being dealt with as they wish. If that anger

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escalates into aggression or abuse directly towards our staff or Councillors, we consider that unacceptable.

2.2. Aggressive or abusive behaviour includes language (whether verbal or written) that may cause staff or Councillors to feel afraid, threatened or abused and may include threats, personal verbal abuse, derogatory remarks and rudeness. We also consider inflammatory statements, remarks of a discriminatory nature and unsubstantiated allegations, to be abusive behaviour. Where a customer is aggressive or abusive, we may decide to:

- Advise the customer that we consider their actions offensive, unnecessary and unhelpful and ask them to stop;
- End telephone calls / appointments;
- Include the offender's name and address on our staff protection register;
- Terminate all direct contact with the customer;
- Notify the police. This will always be the case if physical violence is used or threatened;
- Take any other action that we consider appropriate to the circumstances.

3. Unreasonable demands and / or unreasonable levels of contact

3.1. A demand becomes unacceptable when it starts to impact excessively on the work of our staff and Councillors, or when dealing with the matter takes up an excessive amount of time and in so doing, disadvantages other customers.

3.2. Where a customer is unreasonably demanding, repeatedly contacts us in person, by phone, email etc., contacts various officers about the same issue, raises the same issue repeatedly, or sends us large numbers of documents about which the relevance is not clear, we may decide to:

- Limit contact to telephone calls from the person at set times on set days;
- Restrict contact to a nominated member of staff who will deal with future calls or correspondence;
- See the person by appointment only;
- Restrict contact to written correspondence only;

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- Refuse to deal with further correspondence and return any documents;
- Advise the person that further irrelevant documentation will be destroyed;
- Take any other action that we consider appropriate to the circumstances.

4. Unreasonable Actions by a Complainant

4.1. The Authority fully respects and promotes the rights of people to complain. We take complaints seriously and look to learn and develop better services from them.

4.2. We do not view behaviour as unacceptable just because a complainant is forceful or determined. It is accepted that being persistent can be an advantage when pursuing a complaint. However, certain actions may result in unreasonable behaviour towards DCC staff.

The list below is by no means exhaustive but highlights examples of unreasonable complainant behaviour:

- Refusing to specify the grounds of a complaint despite offers of assistance from authority staff;
- Refusing to cooperate with the complaints process whilst still wishing their complaint to be processed;
- Refusing to accept that issues are not within the remit of the complaints procedure, despite having being given information about the procedures scope;
- Insisting on the complaint being dealt with in ways which are incompatible with the complaints procedure or good practice;
- Making what appear to be groundless complaints about the staff dealing with the complaints and seeking to have them replaced;
- Changing the basis of the complaint as the investigation proceeds and/or denying statements made at an earlier stage;

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5. Taking action

5.1. Before we take any action, we will give the customer the opportunity to modify their behaviour. If the behaviour continues, we will take action as set out in this document.

5.2. Customers will be told in writing why a decision has been made, what the alternative arrangements will be and the length of time that these restrictions will be in place.

6. Appealing a Decision to Restrict Contact

6.1. There will be no right of appeal. An individual who has been informed that their behaviour is unacceptable and wishes to challenge the decision, will be advised to make a complaint to the council. An individual who has made a complaint, and has exhausted the council's complaints procedure, will be advised to contact the Public Services Ombudsman for Wales.

The decision to restrict contact will be reviewed within 12 months, dependent on the situation, by the relevant manager. The manager may review this decision earlier at their own discretion.

7. Recording our decision

7.1. We will record all incidents of unacceptable behaviour which have resulted in contact being restricted. We will also clearly document the rationale for imposing restrictions.

All records will be held by relevant departments.

8. Review

This policy will be reviewed periodically.