

Unacceptable Customer Behaviour Policy

1. Introduction

Gloucestershire County Council ('the council') believes that residents and visitors have the right to express their views and ask questions about the council's services. It believes customers' comments and suggestions are important in helping the council shape and improve the services it provides. We also recognise that in times of trouble or distress people may act out of character when they approach us. The council does not view behaviour as unacceptable simply because someone is reasonably forceful or determined in their approach. Unfortunately, on occasion, some customers may choose to behave in a manner towards council employees, county councillors, contractors or other body providing services on behalf of the council and/or place demands on our services that are unacceptable. This policy sets out the council's approach to the minority of our customers whose behaviour the council has assessed as being unacceptable. It also sets out the various actions we may take in order to manage any instances of such behaviour. The policy applies to staff, county councillors, contractors and others providing services on the council's behalf.

This policy does not supersede other policies in place for specific areas of the council, or agencies operating on the council's behalf

This policy should be read in conjunction with the following council policies and procedures (as appropriate):

- [Adult Social Care Complaints Policy](#)
- [Children's Social Care Complaints Policy](#)
- [Gloucestershire County Council Corporate Complaints Policy](#)
- [Gloucestershire County Council Warning Flags Policy](#)

The council's definition of a customer is, 'If you contact us for any reason, or you are affected by anything we do, you are one of our customers.'

Gloucestershire County Council wants to have a reputation for putting customers first and to deliver a consistent approach that we have developed through consultation with Gloucestershire residents. Our customer care standards can be viewed using this link [Customer Care Standards](#).

2. Defining unacceptable behaviour

2.1 Abusive or offensive behaviour

Council employees have the right not to suffer abusive, offensive or threatening behaviour even when a customer is under stress.

Some examples of unacceptable behaviour might include:

- Abusive or offensive language; remarks of a sexual nature; racist language; homophobic or other discriminatory remarks
- Shouting

- Offensive gestures
- Verbal or physical threats
- Punching, kicking, head butting, spitting
- Bullying or intimidating behaviour
- Attempting to assault someone
- Using, brandishing or throwing weapons or objects aiming to inflict harm
- Stalking or other forms of harassment
- Publishing unacceptable information on social media, websites, newspapers, etc.

2.2 Unacceptable demands on services

Some customers may make unacceptable demands on services due to the amount of information they ask for, the nature and scale of service they expect and the number of approaches they make in relation to an issue(s). The council recognises that in some cases this may be unintentional and what amounts to unacceptable demands will depend on the circumstances surrounding the particular issue(s) and the customer's behaviour.

Examples of unacceptable demands might include:

- Demanding responses within an unreasonable timescale
- Insisting on seeing or speaking to a particular member of staff
- Sending the same or similar request to several members of staff
- Refusing to end a telephone call – and/or insisting on speaking to someone who is either not available or not the appropriate person (e.g. the Chief Executive)
- Requiring responses to correspondence where the content is malicious

The council can view these and other types of contact to be unacceptable if it impacts significantly upon workloads and/or the capacity to deliver an effective service, for example, taking an excessive amount of employees' time to the disadvantage of other customers.

2.3 Unacceptable persistent contact

The council recognises that some of our customers will not or can not accept that the council is unable to assist them further or provide a level of service other than that already provided. Customers may persist in disagreeing with the action or decision taken in relation to their concerns or they may contact the council persistently about the same issue(s).

Examples of unacceptable persistent contact might include:

- Persistent refusal to accept a decision that has been made in relation to their complaint
- Persistent refusal to accept explanations relating to what the council can or cannot do
- Persistent refusal to follow the proper procedures explained to them in order to pursue their issue/concern
- Making an excessive number of telephone calls or visits to council offices
- Sending an excessive number of emails, faxes or letters

- Continuing to contact the council on the same issue(s) without presenting any new information
- Use of other names by the customer to try and access officers or county councillors to raise the same issues

It is not necessarily the manner in which such customers communicate with the council, but their persistence in doing so that goes beyond them being reasonably forceful or demanding. In certain instances, continuously contacting an individual member of staff or the council with telephone calls, texts, emails etc. or other unacceptable persistent behaviour may be considered to be harassment.

2.4 Unacceptable behaviour whilst engaging in public expression of views or acts of civil disobedience on council premises

Everyone has the right to access the services of the council without disturbance. Our commitment is to deliver excellent service in a space that is welcoming and safe and we ask all our customers and visitors for their co-operation in maintaining this environment. The council also recognises the importance of striking a balance between providing an opportunity for the lawful expression of views and opinions and unacceptable behaviour and actions that affect its employees, county councillors, customers and visitors.

Some examples of unacceptable behaviour in these instances might include:

- Using any foul, abusive, threatening, intimidating or discriminatory language or behaviour towards council employees, county councillors, customers and/or visitors
- Harassing and/or bullying council employees, county councillors, customers and/or visitors
- Disorderly conduct which can include, but is not limited to, causing a disturbance, shouting, causing a nuisance to council employees, county councillors, customers and/or visitors and/or otherwise hindering the day to day business of the council, its employees, county councillors, customers and/or visitors
- Congregating in the building and/or obstructing thoroughfares and emergency routes and access points and otherwise hindering the day to day business of the council, its employees, county councillors, customers and/or visitors
- Entering or attempting to enter restricted and/or non public areas of the building
- Recording or photographing people without their permission
- Wilful damage to any council property, defacing or spoiling council property and/or interfering with council property

- Failing to follow instructions of council employees or security staff when instructed to leave the premises

The council reserves the right to remove any person from its property and to take the necessary action to prevent any person/s from entering its buildings or property.

3. How we manage unacceptable behaviours

3.1 “Face to face” contact

Council employees, county councillors and contractors are empowered to ask a customer to leave the council’s premises if they feel the customer is being aggressive, abusive or offensive. The person dealing with the customer has the right to make this decision. In most cases the person involved will advise the customer that their behaviour is unacceptable and ask them to leave if it does not stop.

When customers are entering council premises using their democratic rights to express their views, council employees may ask to inspect the personal bags or cases of customers entering the premises.

Council or security staff might ask customers to leave if they are not adequately supervising any children or adults accompanying them.

Customers may be refused entry if they attempt to bring animals, other than guide or assistance animals, into the building.

3.2 Telephone calls

The use of abusive and offensive language towards council employees, county councillors and contractors will not be tolerated. Council employees and county councillors will end any telephone call if they feel the caller is being aggressive, intimidating, abusive or offensive. The person taking the call is empowered to make this decision. The caller will be advised that their behaviour and/or language are unacceptable and that the call will be politely ended if it continues. The call may also be ended if the customer refuses to conclude the conversation and persists in staying on the line. There may be rare occasions when the person involved is unable to give a warning that the call will be ended if the customer’s unacceptable behaviour/language continues, in which case they are empowered to end the call immediately.

3.3 Correspondence

The council will not process any correspondence (email, letter or facsimile) that is abusive. If communications of this nature are received we will tell the customer that their communication is considered to be inappropriate and offensive. The customer will be asked to stop corresponding in this way and state that if they do not stop, the council will not respond to any further communication from them. The council may also consider requiring all future contact to be made through a designated third party.

4. Restricting Customer Access

Where there is a concern about the behaviour of customers that may fall within the scope of this policy, the council employee, county councillor or contractor will, in the first instance, ask the customer in writing to modify their behaviour.

If a customer's behaviour continues to cause concern after being given an initial warning then the council will look to restrict access.

Where a customer's behaviour is so extreme that it poses an immediate threat to the health, safety or wellbeing of staff or other service users, the customer may not receive prior warning that access to council services may be restricted. The council will however provide written confirmation of its decision to the customer, where possible.

Sometimes a customer's behaviour can cause significant alarm, distress or concern that a criminal act may have taken, or be about to take place. When such situations arise, the council will consider reporting the matter to the police or other relevant authorities. We will base our decision on an assessment of risk. The underlying principle will be the need to protect our staff and others from harm or the threat of harm.

In any of the circumstances outlined above it is possible that all direct contact with the customer will be ended; they may be banned from entering council premises, and only written communications will be permitted.

If the council does decide to restrict a customer's access, it may decide to adopt one or more of the following actions (or any other action deemed appropriate):

- Request the customer to only send communication to a dedicated council email address and/or only use a dedicated council telephone number
- Place time limits on telephone calls and/or personal contacts
- Require that any personal contact takes place in the presence of a witness (including telephone calls)
- Record all telephone calls and/or personal contacts
- Arrange for a named member of staff to deal with all calls or correspondence from the customer
- Require the customer to make an appointment to see a named employee before visiting council premises
- Limit communication to written only
- Inform the customer that their correspondence will only be read (to ensure no new issues have been raised), acknowledged and filed
- Inform the customer that all contact must be through a designated third party
- Apply a "warning flag" on the service user's electronic record to classify them as using unacceptable behaviour
- Block or redirect the customer's telephone number or email address
- Ban the customer from entering council premises

To ensure the council complies with its Public Sector Equality Duty, consideration will be given as part of the restricting customer access process to the potential impact in relation to any known protected characteristic(s) pertaining to the customer, before the decision is made.

If a decision is made to restrict a customer’s access, they will be advised in writing. The customer will also be advised as to when the decision to restrict their access will be reviewed.

A toolkit is available to support staff who need to consider restricting customer behaviour. The toolkit is available from the Corporate Complaints team.

5. Monitoring and review

Any continued contact with the service area outside of that which has been agreed will continue to be recorded for monitoring purposes.

6. Document information

Owner:	Mandy Tingle, Governance & Executive Support Manager
Author:	Mandy Tingle, Governance & Executive Support Manager Colin Davies, Adult Services Complaints Manager Caroline Jones, Children’s Services Complaints Manager
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