



North
Northamptonshire
Council

Unacceptable Customer Behaviour Policy

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Document Version Control

Author: Customer Services

Type of document: **Draft Corporate Policy and Procedure**

Version Number: **.11**

Document File Name: Unacceptable Customer Behaviour Policy

Issue date: **XXXX**

Approval date and by who (CMT/committee): **XXXX**

Document held by: Assistant Director Customer Services

For internal or external publication: External

Document stored on Council website or Intranet: website

Next review date: **XXXX**

Change History

Issue	Date	Comments

Consultees

Internal	External
Staff	
Trade Unions	

Distribution List

Internal	External
All staff	All constituents of North Northamptonshire
Councillors	

Links to other documents

Document	Link
North Northamptonshire Council Enforcement Policy	Enforcement policy
North Northamptonshire Council Equality Policy and Strategy	Equality policy and strategy

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1. Introduction

The council helps thousands of customers every year and welcomes customers' comments and suggestions; they are key in helping the council develop and improve the services it provides. The council's service provision will be guided by its values:

- Customer-focused
- Respectful
- Efficient
- Supportive
- Trustworthy

The council recognises that in times of distress, customers accessing services may act out of character. The council is committed to dealing with customers fairly, impartially and empathetically. Occasionally some customers may behave in a manner that is unacceptable or unreasonable. Threatening, bullying, discriminatory or abusive behaviours are not acceptable and may require customer contact to be managed or stopped to protect our officers, councillors, contractors and others providing services on the council's behalf. Similarly, contacts of excessive frequency, repetition, duration or content which unreasonably hinder the council's ability to deliver services may require managing.

2. Scope

North Northamptonshire Council's customers are the people who contact the council and use our services and who are affected by the work we do. The council works to ensure that services remain accessible to all customers.

This policy identifies customer behaviours which are unacceptable and sets out actions that the council will take to manage those behaviours in order to protect staff,

councillors, contractors and others providing services on the council's behalf and to ensure council business is not impeded.

This policy does not supersede policies in place for specific areas of the council or for agencies operating on behalf of the council.

3. Behaviours assessed as unacceptable

3.1 Abusive, offensive or threatening behaviour

Persons providing council services have the right not to suffer abusive, offensive or threatening behaviour even when a customer is distressed. Some examples (not an exhaustive list) of behaviours assessed as being unacceptable include:

- Abusive, foul or offensive language
- Name calling
- Shouting
- Remarks of a sexual nature
- Racist language
- Misogynistic language
- Discriminatory remarks due to sexuality or trans gender status
- Offensive gestures
- Verbal or physical threats
- Physical violence such as punching, kicking, spitting
- Attempted physical violence
- Bullying or intimidating behaviour
- Using, brandishing or throwing weapons or other objects with the intention of inflicting physical or psychological harm
- Using or threatening to use an animal to inflict physical or psychological harm; this includes failure to control an animal from inflicting harm
- Harassment, including stalking
- Publishing unacceptable information on social media, websites, newspapers, etc.

3.2 Unreasonable and unacceptable demands on services

Expectations from a customer may be viewed as unreasonable or the level of demand from a customer may be deemed unacceptable. This could include the number of contacts made in relation to an issue or issues. In some cases, this may be unintentional and what is deemed to be unacceptable will depend on individual circumstances surrounding the behaviour or issue. The council may view these types of behaviours to be unacceptable if they impact significantly on workloads or the capacity to deliver services by taking up excessive amounts of time, thus disadvantaging other customers. Some examples of unreasonable or unacceptable demands may include:

- Demanding a response within an unreasonable timescale
- Insistence on dealing with a specific member of staff
- Same or similar requests to several members of staff
- Refusal to end a telephone call or insistence on speaking with a person who is unavailable or not the appropriate person for example, the Chief Executive
 - Requiring responses to malicious correspondence

3.3 Unacceptable persistent contact

Where persistent contact becomes unreasonable, or if communications become forceful or unreasonably demanding, persistence may be considered harassment.

Some examples of unacceptable persistent contact may include:

- excessive contact and/or communications beyond requirements
- refusal to accept a decision where due process (appeal/complaint) has been completed
- refusal to follow the explained process to pursue an issue or concern
- continuing contact about the same issue(s) without presenting new information
- using other names to continue to try to access officers or councillors about the same issues

3.4 Unacceptable public expression of views or acts of civil disobedience while on council premises

The council is committed to delivering excellent services to all its customers and this includes ensuring that our environment is safe and welcoming which requires cooperation from visitors. Customers should be able to express their views and opinions in a lawful manner without resort to unacceptable behaviours or actions that affect employees, councillors or other visitors. The council will take necessary action to remove from its property and prevent a person from entering its property if the following types of unacceptable behaviours of these types are used

- Use of intimidating, threatening, discriminatory or foul language towards staff, councillors, volunteers, customers or visitors.
- Harassment or bullying of staff, councillors, volunteers, customers or visitors.
- Disorderly conduct such as causing disturbances, shouting or any other type of activity which prevents or hinders day to day business of the council.
- Congregating in the building or blocking access points and thoroughfares and preventing and hindering day to day business of the council.
- Entering or attempting to enter non public areas of its building.
- Recording or photographing people without giving appropriate notice.
- Damaging, defacing or otherwise spoiling council property.
- Failure to leave the premises when instructed to do so by council employees.

4. How unacceptable behaviour will be managed

4.1 Face to face contact

If a customer presents unacceptable behaviour during a face to face contact the person dealing with the customer has the right to ask them to stop and the right to ask them to leave the premises if the unacceptable behaviour continues.

Customers may be asked to leave if they do not adequately supervise children or other adults accompanying them, where the behaviour of the children or other adults results in damage to council premises, disruption to council business or adversely affects other visitors. Customers may be asked to leave if they bring animals, other than those who guide or assist, into council premises.

Following an initial incident of unacceptable behaviour, a warning notice may be issued to the customer explaining why the behaviour caused concern and what sanction the council may make if the behaviour is presented again. The Assistant Director or a delegated senior manager of the service will be responsible for the issuance of the warning notice and notification to the customer.

If a behaviour is so extreme it poses an immediate threat, the council will report the matter to the police and may apply sanction immediately.

4.2 Telephone contact

If a customer presents unacceptable behaviour during a telephone contact the person dealing with the customer has the right to ask them to stop and will advise the customer that the call will be ended if the unacceptable behaviour continues. The person dealing with the customer has the right to terminate the telephone contact if the unacceptable behaviour continues and will do so in a polite way.

There may be occasions where the person dealing with the customer is unable to interrupt the conversation to give a warning about the behaviour and in these cases the person dealing with the contact has the right to end the call immediately.

Following an initial incident of unacceptable behaviour, a warning notice may be issued to the customer explaining why the behaviour caused concern and what sanction the council may make if the behaviour is presented again. The Assistant Director or a delegated senior manager of the service will be responsible for the issuance of the warning notice and notification to the customer.

If a behaviour is so extreme it poses an immediate threat, the council will report the matter to the police and may apply sanction immediately.

4.3 Written correspondence, including e-mails

If correspondence received by the council expresses unacceptable behaviour the council has the right to refuse to process it. The council will advise the customer that

their correspondence is not acceptable and will ask them to stop the behaviour or the council will cease to respond to communications. If the behaviour is not stopped the council will not respond to further communications and may take further action.

Following an initial incident of unacceptable behaviour, a warning notice may be issued to the customer explaining why the behaviour caused concern and what sanction the council may make if the behaviour is presented again. The Assistant Director or a delegated senior manager of the service will be responsible for the issuance of the warning notice and notification to the customer.

If a behaviour is so extreme it poses an immediate threat, the council will report the matter to the police and may apply sanction immediately.

5. Managing persistent unacceptable behaviour

5.1 When sanction will be applied

If there are further demonstrations of unacceptable behaviour within a 12-month period of a warning notice being issued to a customer, the council may impose sanction for customer. This applies even where the behaviour occurs whilst accessing a different service from the one which issued the original warning notice.

5.2 Types of Sanction that may be applied

1	Contact restricted to a specific format
2	Contact restricted to a specific date and time
3	Contact restricted to an appropriate named person only
4	Contact restricted to a specified time limit
5	Contact restricted to being made via a designated third party
6	Contact disregarded if it raises no new issues
7	Contact blocked or redirected
8	Customer barred from entering council premises

5.3 Determining sanction types and period

The Assistant Director or a delegated senior manager of the service applying sanction will determine the sanction and period and notify this to the customer. A combination of sanction may be applied where required. The period shall be proportionate to the nature of the unacceptable behaviour.

Further demonstrations of unacceptable behaviour within the period may attract further sanctions to be determined by the Assistant Director or delegated senior manager of the affected service(s). The Assistant director or delegated senior manager of the service will determine whether the subsequent sanctions will run concurrently or consecutively to the original. The decision will be proportionate to the nature of the unacceptable behaviour and the history of previous sanctions. The Assistant Director or delegated senior manager of the service will notify the customer of the type of sanction applied and the period.

If a person's unacceptable behaviour with one service leads to issue of warning or sanction, this could affect access to other services the council provides.

5.4 Enforcement action

Where it is applicable or warranted, enforcement action may be taken in accordance with the North Northamptonshire Council Enforcement Policy Schedule: Community Safety in respect of Anti-Social Behaviour.

6.0 Proportionality

The Council will endeavour to ensure that any action taken under this policy is proportionate to and balanced against the risks. The council will take account of the individual circumstances of each case when considering the application of a sanction. This includes the seriousness of the offence, history, confidence in management, the consequences of non-compliance and the likely effectiveness of the various sanctions.

7.0 Vulnerability

Vulnerability is defined as a person who, by characteristics and/or circumstances, is unable to act or respond appropriately.

The Council recognises that vulnerability can come in many forms, and it can also be multi layered. Vulnerability can also be temporary, permanent, or come in a series of episodes and anyone at any time could potentially be identified as vulnerable.

If a person demonstrating unacceptable behaviour does not have capacity to fully understand or control their actions, the principles of this procedure will still apply however, services should always follow any enhanced or professional guidance for managing risk within their work activities.

8.0 Appeals process

Customers who have had a warning or sanction issued under this policy have the right to challenge a decision through the council's complaints process. The right will not exist where this policy has been applied because of behaviour so extreme it has posed an immediate risk.

9.0 Equalities

This policy is compliant with the NNC Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Policy and supports the council's equality strategy; Equality Screening Assessment completed.

This policy is compliant with writing for inclusion guidance to support accessibility and inclusion.