
Unacceptable customer behaviour policy

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Corporate Policy,
Governance and
Engagement

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1.0 Introduction

Stroud District Council is committed to delivering high quality, customer focused services. [Our Service Standards](#) set out what you should expect when accessing our services in person, by email, telephone and on social media. These include our customer care principles: being helpful, fair and honest, friendly and understanding and accessible to all.

Our standards also set out what we expect from our customers to help ensure a positive experience for everyone. We recognise that some customers will contact the Council during difficult or stressful circumstances. We will always aim to provide appropriate support, guidance and where necessary make reasonable adjustments such as offering information in alternative formats, allowing an advocate or adapting the timing or method of contact to ensure fair access.

Most interactions with customers are constructive and respectful. However, there are occasions when a customer acts in a way that is unreasonable, or their behaviour is not acceptable to the Council. This policy explains how the Council identifies and manages these situations.

1.1 Purpose and scope

All those working for and representing the Council are entitled to be treated with respect as they carry out their duties. This policy defines the customer behaviours we consider are unacceptable or actions that are unreasonable, how we manage these behaviours and what actions the Council may take in response.

This policy also aims to:

- ensure fair and consistent approach across all Council services.
- enable the Council to respond effectively to unacceptable behaviour.
- clarify roles and responsibilities in managing unacceptable behaviour.
- promote awareness of the correct processes for addressing unacceptable behaviour, helping to reduce incidents.

We will always apply this policy using an evidence-based approach. Any decision to manage contact or restrict a customer's access to services is taken with care and consideration.

2.0 What is unacceptable behaviour

A wide range of behaviours may be considered unacceptable. While it is not possible to list every example this policy highlights two broad categories:

- aggressive and/or abusive behaviour intended to offend, intimidate, or threaten.
- unreasonable actions or demands placed on the Council.

Ultimately it will be a matter for the Council to decide whether a particular customer's actions or behaviour are unacceptable or unreasonable, as outlined below.

2.1 Aggressive and/or abusive behaviour

The Council expects that all those working for or representing the Council to be treated with courtesy and respect. We understand that customers may feel frustrated or upset about their

circumstances or a complaint. Reasonable annoyance is understandable. However, when this escalates into aggression or abuse, it becomes unacceptable.

Violence, threats, offensive language, or abusive behaviour towards those working for or representing the Council will not be tolerated. Violence includes any act of aggression that may result in physical harm as well as behaviour or language that causes others to feel intimidated, threatened or distressed.

Examples of behaviours that fall under this heading include:

- physical violence and or intimidation.
- using insulting, degrading, or abusive language
- threatening self-harm with the intention of causing pressure or intimidation
- derogatory or discriminatory remarks including racist, sexist, disablist, homophobic or transphobic comments.
- behaviour or communication (verbal or written) that causes a person to feel threatened, afraid, or abused.
- making serious allegations against another person without evidence.
- entering or attempting to enter restricted and/or non-public areas of our council offices or wilful damage to council property.
- refusing to co-operate with procedures, obstructing access to assets and information or to follow instructions, such as failing to leave the premises, providing further details or evidence.

Unacceptable behaviour can also involve actual or threatened damage to property, including buildings, furniture, computers or digital equipment.

2.2 Unreasonable actions or demands placed on the Council.

Customers may also place unreasonable demands on the Council, for example by:

- repeatedly requesting information or services which have already been provided, does not exist, or fall outside the Council's responsibilities.
- expecting services beyond what the Council can reasonably deliver.
- generating an excessive volume of correspondence
- requesting outcomes outside Council policies, procedures, or timescales

Persistence in pursuing a matter is not necessarily unacceptable. However, behaviour becomes unreasonable when the time and resources required to respond negatively affect our ability to deliver services to the individual or to other customers.

What constitutes an unreasonable action or demand will always depend on the circumstances and the seriousness of the issues raised.

Examples of behaviours that would fall into this category include:

- excessive or inappropriate number of visits, phone calls, emails, or letters
- insisting on or refusing to speak with a particular member of staff or elected member when it is not possible.
- contacting those working for or representing the council using their personal details or personal social media accounts.
- publishing personal, sensitive or private information about those working for or representing the council online or via other methods.
- recording of those working for or representing the council (audio/ visual) while they carry out their duties for malicious purposes, without prior consent or knowledge.
- repeatedly ignoring established procedures for handling queries or complaints
- continually requesting the same information
- copying the same correspondence to multiple staff, elected members or services unnecessarily.
- demanding responses within unrealistic timescales
- refusing to accept that a matter has been addressed.
- refusing to accept the issue is not within the Council's remit despite being informed.
- frequently changing the nature of a query or complaint during the investigation
- regularly raising unrelated issues to divert or complicate the process
- continuing to pursue a complaint after the Council's Complaints and Feedback policy has been fully applied.

3.0 Managing unacceptable customer behaviour.

We will manage each case individually and follow a staged approach when responding to unacceptable or unreasonable customer behaviour. In certain circumstances we may escalate our response straight to Stage 2 where we implement a managed contact approach without a formal written warning.

Where behaviour is sufficiently serious to raise concerns about the safety or wellbeing of officers and/or elected members, or where there is a clear operational need to be made aware of specific risks when carrying out their duties, we will share information to manage that risk.

All incidents will be recorded on the council's incident reporting system. Any incidents of physical attack or threats of violence will be automatically added to the council's Personal Safety Register (PSR) and, if appropriate, notification will be sent to the police.

3.1 Staged approach

Stage 1 - Ask & warn.

- When a customer displays unacceptable or unreasonable behaviour, staff will **ask** them to moderate or stop the behaviour, language or actions. If the behaviour continues, staff may end the communication, report the incident on the corporate system, and notify their service manager.

- If multiple incidents of unacceptable or unreasonable behaviour are reported relating to the same customer, this can lead to a formal written **warning** being issued by either the service manager or the Community Access and Engagement Manager if contact involves multiple services.
- The warning will explain why the behaviour is unacceptable or unreasonable, what changes are required, and what may happen if the behaviour continues. In most cases this will be progression to Stage 2, where a managed contact approach to the customer contacting the council will be implemented.
- The council will consider, on a case-by-case basis, whether information relating to unacceptable customer behaviour resulting in a formal written warning letter being issued should be shared with relevant officers or elected members where there is a legitimate operational need to do so, including where there are identified safety, welfare, or safeguarding concerns relevant to their role

3.2 Stage 2 - Managed Contact

If a customer fails to adhere to the formal warning or if the service manager has evidence that service delivery and the well-being of their staff is being significantly affected by the behaviour and or actions of an individual, then a **managed** approach when contacting the council will be implemented.

The options we may consider at this stage include, but are not limited to:

- requesting the customer enters into an agreement about their future contact.
- placing time limits on contacts
- restricting all or limiting the number of telephone calls that will be accepted
- limiting the customer to one type of contact (telephone, letter, or email)
- refusing to acknowledge or respond to any repeated complaints on closed cases
- requiring the customer to communicate only through a single point of contact (SPOC)
- restricting all or limiting contact with elected members
- requiring any contacts to take place face-to-face in the presence of a third party
- restricting any face-to-face contacts to designated council premises
- asking the customer to contact us through an advocate
- requiring in person meetings or visits with customers to be conducted in pairs
- instigating formal legal action such as issuing a Community Protection Warning

This list is not exhaustive, and we may include other measures appropriate to the circumstances.

The managed contact arrangements will be recommended by the service manager and/ or the Community Access & Engagement Manager then authorised by the Head of Service.

The customer will be notified in writing with full details of the details of the managed contact arrangements including when they will start and how long they will remain in place.

All relevant officers including any elected members or representatives of the council involved will be notified of the managed contact arrangements including the timeframe and an alert will be placed on council systems.

3.3 Right to appeal

If the customer wishes to appeal the managed contact arrangements put in place, they must write to the Community Access & Engagement Manager at customer.services@stroud.gov.uk within 5 working days of being notified. The appeal will be reviewed by another senior manager to ensure an independent and impartial assessment.

3.4 Reviewing managed contact arrangements.

When any managed contact arrangements are implemented, they will include a review period of no longer than 6 months.

When the review period is due to end each case will be reviewed by the service manager and the Community Access & Engagement Manager. The managed contact arrangements will either be recommended to be removed or extended, this will be authorised by the Head of Service, and the customer will be notified in writing along with all those who had been made aware that the measures were being put into place.

3.5 Record keeping

We will record all incidents of unreasonable and unacceptable customer behaviour on our corporate incident reporting system and can include the following:

- the name and contact details of the customer
- description of incident
- evidence i.e. call recording, email, photo, correspondence, witness statements
- copy of any correspondence received by or sent to customer
- details of the managed contact arrangements
- when the managed contact arrangements commenced and provisional end date
- the review date and outcome

Cases will be deleted from the incident reporting system after 12 months from the date the case is closed if within that period there has been no further activity requiring consideration of the policy to manage unacceptable customer behaviour

3.6 Elected members

The council has a duty of care towards elected members, who have direct contact with residents and customers as part of their role. When applying this policy, the council will take reasonable steps to support the safety and wellbeing of elected members and will consider whether information should be shared where there are identified risks relevant to the performance of their duties.

If an elected member has concerns in relation to the behaviour of a member of the public they have recently visited, met with, or encountered while undertaking their role, they should

advise Democratic Services who will work with the elected member to follow the guidelines set out in this policy. Likewise, should an elected member have concerns about a member of the public they will be engaging with, they may wish to contact Democratic Services who will check the PSR register and liaise with the Community Access & Engagement Manager who will advise appropriately.

Elected Members are also expected to consider their own safety and wellbeing when meeting or communicating with members of the public. They should take reasonable steps to assess and reduce risks, for example by choosing to meet in a public place, arranging for another person to be present or choosing a different method of contact. Democratic Services can provide risk assessment templates to help elected members consider practical measures that support safe and constructive engagement while reducing or managing any identified risks. Elected members are encouraged to use these tools before attending meetings.

4.0 Legislative and regulatory duties

We have an obligation to protect the safety of our staff in the workplace through the provisions of the Health and Safety at Work Act 1974 and all other regulations made under this and other relevant acts.

This policy should read and followed in conjunction with the following policies:

- [SDC Feedback and Complaints Policy](#)
- [Safeguarding Policy](#)
- [Equality, Diversity, Inclusion, Equity and Belonging Policy](#)

4.1 Data Protection

It is necessary for the performance of this policy to process the personal information of individuals whose behaviour is deemed unacceptable. We will keep the information collected to a minimum, and it will only be accessible on a need-to-know basis. All data is processed in accordance with UK data protection legislation and the Council's Information Governance Framework. Data will be retained for 12 months from last activity unless required as evidence for criminal proceedings. In cases where information is passed to the police, they become a data controller of that data.

See stroud.gov.uk/privacy for more information about how we process personal data.

5.0 Roles and responsibilities

Role	Responsibility
All officers	• Log all incidents. • Log updates promptly • Follow guidance. • Refer to a Service Safeguarding Report Lead (SSRL) with any safeguarding or PREVENT concerns • Ensure police are informed if appropriate • Support colleagues
Service Managers	• Support council officers

	• Ensure incidents are logged promptly • Ensure police are informed if appropriate • Investigate incidents and gather/ review evidence • Review any safeguarding concerns as a SSRL and escalate following the SDC Safeguarding policy and guidance • Recommend appropriate managed contact arrangements • Identify relevant officers/ elected members to be notified of any formal warnings or managed contact arrangements in line with this policy. • Ensure any training needs are identified and addressed. • Produce written customer communications
Community Access & Engagement Manager	• Ensure incidents are logged promptly • Ensure police are informed if appropriate • Investigate incidents and gather/ review evidence • Recommends appropriate managed contact arrangements • Identify relevant officers. elected members to be notified of any formal warnings or managed contact arrangements in line with this policy. • Review any safeguarding concerns as a SSRL and escalate following the SDC Safeguarding policy and guidance • Reviews all incident logs of Unacceptable Customer Behaviour • Identify multiple logged incidents relating to one customer. • Instigates review of cases to be escalated to stage two or PSR
Elected Members	• Report any incidents of unacceptable customer behaviour to a member of Democratic Services who will log the incident, provide guidance and liaise with the Community Access & Engagement Manager.
Data & Information Governance Manager	• Provide advice & guidance
Head of Service	• Authorise the implementation and removal of managed contact arrangements • Ensure due consideration has been taken to ensure all appropriate officers, elected member/s are notified of managed contact arrangements.
HR	• Provide staff training • Provide staff wellbeing support
Monitoring Officer	• Provide advice & guidance

6.0 Future amendments

The Council is committed to managing instances of unacceptable behaviour in a fair, consistent, and proportionate manner, supported by best practice and accurate, relevant recording. To achieve this, we may periodically review and update how unacceptable customer behaviour is identified, managed, and reported, including the introduction of new technologies or changes to operational processes.

The Strategic Director of Resources may authorise minor amendments to this policy and associated operational procedures. Any significant changes to the policy will require approval by Audit & Standards committee. Where amendments result in changes to the processing of personal data, these will be reflected in our Privacy Notices.

Appendices

A. Equality Impact Assessment