

# Managing Customer Contact Policy

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## Introduction and definitions

Excellent customer care is at the forefront of everything Flintshire County Council do; we do our best to make our services accessible to all and easy to use, making reasonable adjustments if necessary. We aim to deliver a high quality complaints handling service, which considers and determines complaints thoroughly, but proportionately and conveys decisions clearly.

This policy sets out how contact with customers may be managed in the very small number of cases where the actions or behaviour of a customer challenges our ability to deliver an effective service to all.

The core aims of the policy are to ensure equity and fairness, improve efficiency and manage risks to the health and safety of employees. It applies to all services and employees who have contact with any customer by phone, in writing (including electronic communication and social media) and in person. The term customer means anyone who has requested a service or made a complaint, or any other person acting on their behalf.

All customers will be treated with fairness and respect even if we perceive actions or behaviour to be challenging. We will always separate the way we may need to manage contact with a customer from the way we deal with their request for service or complaint.

More complex challenging behaviour can be referred to a senior manager. One of the intentions of the involvement of senior managers is that challenging behaviour is identified early, and informed decisions made. Senior managers will also be consulted where a customer who has challenging behaviour may need reasonable adjustments.

This policy refers generally to the Customer Contact Service Manager (CCSM), as this is the role that would most often be involved in managing customer contact. However, CCSM is to be interpreted as CCSM or any other senior manager.

## Aggressive, abusive or offensive behaviour

Employees have the right to work in an environment free from aggressive, abusive or offensive language or behaviour at all times. This right applies to all channels of communication including social media.

We consider such behaviour to include:

- Swearing, abusive language or over-bearing behavior;
- Refusing to give staff an opportunity to speak or repeated derogatory comments;
- Inappropriate sexual or gender-based remarks;
- Inappropriate cultural, racial, political or religious references;
- Rudeness or shouting;
- Threatening behaviour;
- Emotional abuse or manipulative behaviour.

Threats of physical violence or harassment to any person are unacceptable and will be reported to the police.

## Unreasonable demands and persistence

We are committed to providing a proportionate amount of time and resources to each request for service or complaint. Unreasonable demands and persistence may prevent employees from fulfilling this commitment.

We consider such behaviour to include:

- Excessive telephones calls, emails or letters;
- Sending duplicate correspondence;
- Persistent refusal to accept a decision or explanation;
- Continuing to contact us after a decision, about the same or similar matters, without presenting new or relevant information;
- Demanding responses within an unreasonable time scale or information not relevant to a request for service or complaint;
- Refusing to cooperate with our complaint handling procedures;
- Raising matters that are immaterial to a request for service or complaint or repeatedly changing the substance of a request for service or complaint;
- Repeatedly contacting or insisting to speak to an employee who is not directly dealing with a request for service or complaint.

## Social Media

We use social media to help communicate information about the services we provide. We use social media to respond and to identify questions, themes, views and opinions on our services.

We want our social media to be a safe and respectful place for everyone. We encourage customers to post feedback and questions. We also ask customers to follow our Social Media House Rules.

We will block and report customers whose posts are:

- Defamatory, slanderous, misleading or false;
- Abusive or threatening – this includes swearing, adapted spellings with the same meaning;
- Intimidating towards our employees, elected Members or other social media users;
- Inciting hate crime or hate crime words;
- Obscene, profane or sexually oriented;
- Discriminatory in any way;
- Promoting illegal activity;
- Promoting individual products or services;
- Completely off topic;
- The same message posted multiple times, otherwise known as 'spamming';
- Controversial, irrelevant and off topic, otherwise known as 'trolling';
- Private or identifying information about a particular individual, typically posted with malicious intent, otherwise known as doxing.

We will retain details of public posts which breach our house rules and results in the account being blocked.

Any form of aggressive or abusive behaviour towards our employees on social media is not acceptable. We monitor social media and any evidence of unacceptable behaviour towards employees will be investigated internally.

## Terminating a telephone call

Employees may terminate a call if subjected to the behaviours outlined in sections 2 and 3. 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, no further warnings will be given and the call will be terminated.

The employee who terminates a call will report it to their Team Leader/Manager. Following a terminated call if the customer makes further contact and the behaviour has not changed, the CCSM may restrict telephone contact for one day. This decision will be recorded and communicated at the earliest opportunity to all employees taking frontline calls.

In the event that the customer does not modify their behaviour, further consideration will be given to formally managing contact between the customer and the service.

## Considering when to manage contact

In the very small number of cases where the actions or behaviour of a customer challenges our ability to deliver an effective service to all, as set out above, an employee should report it to their Team Leader/Manager. The Team Leader/Manager will consider whether a warning should be given and if it is necessary to provide a copy of this policy. If the behaviour is sufficiently serious, or a warning has already been given, a decision will be taken to either manage contact, or to refer the matter to CCSM, or both.

During the process of considering implementation of a restriction the CCSM should be mindful that independent advocacy could be helpful for the customer in terms of avoiding implementation of this policy. If that appears to be the case, it would be prudent to advise the customer of this and provide appropriate help and advice to that end.

Team Leaders/Managers will follow internal procedures where an employee is the subject of unacceptable behavior on social media. Appendix 2.

## Formal decision to manage contact

We may (amongst other considerations) manage the contact by:

- Limiting contact to a particular form for example, the customer may be limited to contacting us by email or letter only;
- Limiting telephone calls to specific days and/or times;
- Arranging for a single point of contact for all future correspondence;
- An agreed behaviour contract, setting out what is expected of the customer, to be signed by the customer;
- Advising the customer that their correspondence will be read to ensure no new issues are raised, but will then be filed or destroyed without acknowledgement;

Wherever possible, we will endeavour to ensure that at least one line of contact will remain available.

Decisions on how to formally manage contact are made by the CCSM, on a case by case basis. The CCSM may decide to first consult a Chief Officer. This may be where employees are finding behaviour unusually challenging or difficult to manage, and generally where this is exhibited on more than one occasion.

For example, where:

- Employees are struggling to be heard, or feel upset, threatened, bullied or belittled by the contacts;
- The contact is sexist, racist, culturally inappropriate etc.
- A caller demands disproportionate time is spent relative to the circumstances of the issue, or makes unreasonable demands for action by us
- There is repetitive contact that is not merited in the circumstances of the case
- There are disproportionate threats of employees, legal action etc
- The customer is highly needy, emotionally demanding, or appears to be becoming dependent on certain members of staff
- Are repeated challenges to decisions

Referrals to Chief Officers should be made by the CCSM.

Chief Officers will discuss and consider the matter with the CCSM. Chief Officers will issue advice and recommendation(s) and return the matter to the CCSM for a formal decision in consultation with the relevant Team Leader or Manager.

The CCSM will record the decision on the CRM.

The CCSM will notify the customer of a decision to manage their contact, the reasons why this decision has been taken, how long any restriction will be in place, when it will be reviewed and the right to appeal the decision. A copy of this policy will be enclosed with the decision.

### Appealing a decision

The customer can appeal a decision to manage contact within 20 working days of receiving it by writing to the Chief Officer Governance. The Chief Officer Governance will consider the appeal and advise the customer in writing of the outcome.

### Reviewing decisions

The decision to manage contact with a customer will be reviewed by the decision maker at the time specified in the decision letter, which will be no more than six months after the date the decision was taken and any alterations to the restriction will be noted on the CRM. We will only contact a customer to advise them of any change to the restriction if they remain in active contact with this office at the time of the review.

### Decision matrix

Decision Type	Who
Terminate call	All employees (must be reported to Team Leader/Manager)
Restrict contact for one day	Team Leader/Manager
Refer to Chief Officer for guidance	CCSM
Formally manage contact	CCSM
Review decision	CCSM
Appeal	Chief Officer Governance

### Annual review

The CCSM will arrange for a review of restrictions imposed under this policy at the end of each financial year to ensure a consistent approach.

## APPENDIX 1

Request to Chief Officer to consider management of challenging behaviour or reasonable adjustments

Customer reference:

Name of customer:

Contact officer:

Referred by:

Reason for referral (e.g. type of behaviour and impact on office/employees, complex etc. RA requested):

Has any related action been taken to date or previously (e.g. warnings given, previous restriction):

Do we know or believe the customer has any particular needs? If this relates to reasonable adjustments, has the customer told us what reasonable adjustments they seek?

Chief Officer analysis/comments/recommendation:

Manager's decision:

Manager's signature:

Date:

## APPENDIX 2

### Protocol for managing unacceptable behavior on Social Media

#### Managing Customer Behaviour on Social Media

FCC Social Media Abuse / Allegations Diagram - Employee named or identified on Social Media:

Employees may self-refer to Occupational Health or report the matter to the Police as and when they require outside of the steps in this diagram.

