



UNACCEPTABLE ACTIONS POLICY

Castlehill Housing Association values comments and feedback from Customers. Where customers are dissatisfied with the service we provide, there is a formal Complaints Handling Procedure.

Occasionally, the behaviour or actions of individuals using our services makes it very difficult to deal with their complaint or for us to provide a service to them. In a small number of cases the actions become unacceptable because they involve abuse of our staff, contractors or our processes.

When this happens, we will take action to protect our staff and contractors. We consider the impact of the behaviour on our ability to do our work and provide a service to others.

People may act out of character in times of trouble or distress. There may have been distressing or upsetting circumstances leading up to contact with our staff or a complaint being made. We do not view behaviour as unacceptable just because a customer is forceful or determined. However, we do consider actions that result in unreasonable demands on our organisation or unreasonable behaviour towards our staff or contractors to be unacceptable. It is these actions that we aim to manage under this policy.

Aggressive or abusive behaviour

We understand that customers can be angry about the issues they have raised with us. If that anger escalates into aggression towards staff, we consider that unacceptable. Any violence or abuse towards staff or contractors will not be accepted.

Violence is not restricted to acts of aggression that may result in physical harm. It also includes behaviour or language (whether verbal or written) that may cause staff or contractors to feel afraid, threatened or abused, any may include threats, personal verbal abuse, derogatory remarks or rudeness. Abusive comments about other customers of the Association will not be tolerated. We also consider inflammatory statements and unsubstantiated allegations to be abusive behaviour.

Any member of Castlehill's staff who directly experiences aggression or abusive behaviour from a customer has the authority to deal immediately with that behaviour in a manner they consider appropriate to the situation and in line with this policy.

The threat or use of physical violence, verbal abuse or harassment toward the Associations staff is likely to result in a termination of all direct contact with the customer. Incidents may be reported to the police. This will always be the case if physical violence is used or threatened.

We will not accept any correspondence (letter, fax or electronic) that is abusive to staff or contains allegations that lack substantive evidence. We will tell the customer that we consider their language offensive, unnecessary and unhelpful and ask them to stop using such language. We will state that we will not respond to their correspondence if the action or behaviour continues.

We may record telephone calls and staff will end calls if they consider the caller to be aggressive, abusive or offensive. Staff have the right to make this decision, to tell the caller that their behaviour is unacceptable and to end the call if the behaviour persists.

In extreme circumstances we will tell the customer in writing that their name is on a “no personal contact” list. This means that we will limit contact with them to either written communication or through a third party.

Unreasonable demands

A demand becomes unacceptable when it starts to (or when complying with the demand would) impact substantially on the work of staff or the organisation as a whole. An example of such an impact would be that the demand takes up an excessive amount of staff time and in doing so disadvantages other customers.

Examples include:

- Repeatedly demanding responses within unreasonable timescales
- Insisting on seeing or speaking to a particular member of staff when that is not possible
- Insisting on seeing or speaking to a particular member of staff without an appointment
- Repeatedly changing the substance of a complaint or raising unrelated concerns

We have to take action when unreasonable behaviour impairs the functioning of our organisation or impairs our ability to provide a service to our customers. We will try to ensure that any action takes account of the issue, relevant personal circumstances including the seriousness of the issue and the needs of the individual.

Unreasonable levels of contact

Sometimes the volume and duration of contact made to our offices by an individual causes problems. This can occur over a short period, for example, a number of calls in one day or one hour. It may occur over the lifetime of the service we provide to a customer when long phone calls are made to us or inundates us with copies of information that has already been sent or that is irrelevant to the service issue.

We consider that the level of contact has become unacceptable when the amount of time spent talking to a customer on the telephone, or responding to, reviewing and filing emails or written correspondence impacts on our ability to deal with that customer, or with other customer issues.

Where a customer repeatedly phones, visits our offices, raises repeated issues or sends large volumes of documents where their relevance is unclear, we may decide to:

- Limit contact to phone calls from the customer at set times on set days
- Restrict contact to a nominated member of staff who will deal with future calls and correspondence from the customer

- See the customer by appointment only
- Restrict contact with the customer to writing only
- Return any documents to the customer or, in extreme cases, advise the customer that further irrelevant documents will be destroyed
- Take any other action that we consider appropriate

Where we consider continued correspondence on a wide range of issues to be excessive, we may tell the customer that only a certain number of issues will be considered in a given period and ask them to limit or focus their request accordingly.

Recording our decisions

With the exception of such immediate decisions taken at the time of the incident, decisions to restrict contact with the customer are only taken after careful consideration of the situation by a more senior member of staff. Wherever possible we will give the customer the opportunity to change their behaviour or action before the decision is taken.

When an employee makes an immediate decision in response to aggressive or abusive behaviour, the customer is advised at the time of the incident. When a decision has been made by senior management a customer will always be advised in writing why the decision has been made to restrict future contact, the restricted contact arrangements and if relevant, the length of time these restrictions will be in place. This ensures that the customer has a record of the decision.

Appealing our decisions

It is important that a decision that is made by the Association under this policy can be reconsidered. A senior member of staff not involved in the original decision will consider the appeal. They have the discretion to quash or vary the restriction as they think best. They will make their decision based on the evidence available to them. They will advise the customer in writing either that the restriction still applies or if a different course of action has been agreed.

The Association operates a Complaint Handling Procedure and should a customer be unhappy about the way we have operated or interpreted this policy, the Complaints Handling Procedure may be used to escalate the complaint, ultimately to the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman.