**Workington Town Council**

Town Hall, Oxford Street, Workington, CA14 2RS

Telephone: 01900 702986

Email: office@workingtontowncouncil.gov.uk

Website: www.workingtontowncouncil.gov.uk

**Unacceptable customer behaviour policy and procedure**

**1. Purpose**

This policy sets out the Council’s approach to managing unacceptable behaviour by members of the community; ensuring staff and councillors are treated with respect while maintaining fair access to services for all.

The Council has a duty to protect the welfare and safety of staff, who should be able to come to work without fear of violence, abuse, harassment, or discrimination.

**2. Scope**

This policy applies to all interactions with members of the community, including in person, by telephone, in writing, or through digital channels.

**3. Definition of Unacceptable Behaviour**

Unacceptable behaviour means acting in a way that is unreasonable, regardless of the level of someone’s stress, frustration or anger. It may involve acts, words or physical gestures that could cause another person distress or discomfort.

**Aggressive or abusive behaviour**

This is behaviour or language (written or spoken) that could cause councillors or staff to feel afraid, threatened or abused. This includes threatening emails, telephone calls, meetings, and comments on social media or elsewhere.

For example:

* insulting or degrading language, including inappropriate banter, innuendo or malicious allegations
* any form of physical violence or threats of physical violence
* derogatory racist, sexist, ageist, or homophobic remarks
* comments relating to disability, perceived gender, religion, belief, or any other personal characteristic

**Unreasonable demands and vexatious contact**

Customers might make requests that the Council cannot reasonably accommodate. This may include but is not limited to:

* the amount of information they seek
* the nature and scale of service they expect
* the volume of correspondence they generate
* a remedy or outcome that cannot be achieved

The Council accepts that someone who is persistent is not necessarily guilty of unacceptable behaviour. What is seen as an unreasonable demand will depend on the circumstances of each case. The Council will always consider each communication on its own merits.

However, the behaviour of someone who persistently contacts the Council about the same issue, when that issue has been dealt with in line with Council policy, can, in some circumstances, amount to unreasonable demand. Such behaviour takes up a disproportionate amount of time and resources and can affect the Council’s ability to provide a service to others.

Examples of behaviour which the Council considers as unreasonable demands and vexatious contacts include but are not limited to:

* refusing to follow the Council’s complaints procedure
* persistently pursuing a complaint where the Council’s complaints procedure has been fully and properly implemented and exhausted, but no appeal has been made.
* contacting repeatedly and frequently without giving enough time to respond to previous correspondence
* insisting on seeing or speaking to a particular member of staff when a suitable alternative has been offered
* visiting Council offices without an appointment
* focusing disproportionately on a matter in relation to its significance and continuing to focus on this point despite receiving proportionate responses addressing the matter
* adopting a ‘scatter gun’ approach: pursuing parallel complaints about the same issue with different members of staff
* recording meetings or conversations (whether face-to-face or on the telephone) without the prior knowledge or consent of other people involved

**4. Principles**

The Council and its staff will always:

* provide a fair, open, proportionate, and accessible service
* listen and try their best to understand
* treat everyone with respect, empathy, and dignity
* continue to offer services effectively while managing disruptive behaviour appropriately.

The Council expects people accessing their services to:

* be courteous
* engage in a way that does not hamper ability to carry out work effectively and efficiently for the benefit of all.

**5. Procedures for Handling Unacceptable Behaviour**

The Council does not expect its councillors or staff to tolerate unacceptable behaviour. When this happens, councillors and staff have the right to:

* place callers on hold
* end the call
* not reply to an abusive email or letter

Before taking such action, the Council will warn members of the community that they are behaving in an unacceptable way (using an appropriate communication method) to give them chance to change their behaviour. However, a warning will not be given in extreme cases to protect councillors and staff, for example, when a physical threat is made.

Where these circumstances arise, the following steps will be taken:

* members of the community will be asked to modify their behaviour
* if the behaviour continues to be unacceptable, councillors and staff will remove themselves from the situation. If the communication is by telephone, the caller will be told that the call will be ended
* councillors or staff will inform the Chief Officer who will keep a record of the incident. In all cases the Chief Officer and Chair of Finance and General Purposes will investigate the situation and decide what action to take. This could include limiting a persons contact with the Council
* refer the matter to the police where a criminal offence has been threatened or committed

**Communication restrictions**

If members of the community continue to behave unacceptably, The Mayor, Chair of F & GP and/or the Chief Officer can put in place a temporary or permanent communication restriction on that person. If this action is decided, the person will be informed, setting out:

* why the Council considers their behaviour unacceptable
* what action is being taken and if there is a time limit on the restrictions

Communication might be:

* limited to being conducted in writing
* limited to a specific individual
* removed from the Council’s social media and blocked from accounts
* limited to a specific email address or telephone number
* placed on file without a further response if the issue raised in the correspondence has previously been considered and answered
* limited in other ways which the Council considers appropriate in the circumstances, in line with this policy

In addition, the Council reserves the right to:

* limit telephone contact to set times on set days
* restrict contact to a nominated employee or councillor who will deal with all future calls or correspondence
* restrict the issues on which the Council will correspond
* block emails or telephone numbers if the number and length of communication sent is excessive
* refuse to consider a complaint or any further contact in exceptional circumstances
* take any other action considered necessary or appropriate

Where circumstances are serious enough to warrant further restrictions, the Council may take legal action to prevent further contact/poor behaviour.

**6. Right to Appeal**

Individuals may appeal decisions in writing to the Council within 14 days of notification. The appeal will be reviewed by The Mayor and the Chair of the Finance & General Purposes Committee or another councillor deemed suitable by the Council.

Contact details can be found at [www.workingtontowncouncil.gov.uk](http://www.workingtontowncouncil.gov.uk)

**7. Review and Monitoring**

All incidents and actions will be logged, reviewed periodically, and reported (in summary) to the Finance and General Purposes Committee to ensure consistency and fairness.