



Sherburn House
Charity

SHC Policy & Procedure

Unacceptable Customer Behaviour

Document	Unacceptable Customer Behaviour
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1. Purpose of Policy

This policy sets out our approach to managing contact with the few customers whose actions or behaviour are considered unacceptable.

This policy covers all forms of contact with customers such as telephone, text, letter, email, messaging via social media or face to face contact.

2. Policy Statement

Sherburn House Charity, (SHC), respects the rights of freedom of speech and rights of opinion. However, some behaviours are considered unacceptable. These actions are grouped under six broad headings:

- a) Aggressive or abusive behaviour.
- b) Anti-social behaviour.
- c) Unreasonable behaviour.
- d) Unreasonable requests.
- e) Unreasonable persistence.
- f) Vexatious behaviour.

3. Introduction

Sherburn House Charity has customer service standards that staff are expected to uphold when dealing with residents and other customers. It is equally important that our staff should not be subjected to unacceptable behaviour from anyone they deal with in the course of their work.

The Charity is committed to providing the highest level of customer service and we have an expectation that customers in return will behave appropriately towards our staff and that staff will not be subjected to unacceptable behaviour in the course of their work.

The Unacceptable Customer Behaviour Policy is necessary for the efficient management and administration of our housing service and has been designed to define behaviour which the Charity deems to be unacceptable and to put safeguards in place should staff encounter such behaviour.

4. Policy Aims

The aims of this Policy are:

- To define what behaviour from residents and other customers we consider to be unacceptable.
- To make every effort to ensure that our staff, contractors, and agents working on behalf of the Charity can perform their duties safely, without disadvantage, fear of discrimination or distress caused by unacceptable behaviour.
- To give a commitment to our staff and make it clear to residents and other customers that unacceptable customer behaviour by them will not be tolerated and will be dealt with robustly.
- To provide guidance when particular circumstances would mean that we would consider a decision to restrict or change access to our service.

5. Scope of Policy

The Unacceptable Customer Behaviour Policy extends beyond our staff to trustees, contractors, consultants, and other agents working on behalf of the Charity. Our view is very clear in that no one should be subjected to unacceptable behaviour when representing or working with or for the Charity.

6. Links to Relevant Legislation

The Unacceptable Customer Behaviour Policy is framed within the context of, and complies with relevant legislation, which includes:

- a) The Equalities Act (2010)
- b) The Human Rights Act (1998)

This Policy also complies with the Charity's Tenancy and Licence Agreements.

7. Links to Internal Policies and Procedures

This Policy should be used in conjunction with other relevant SHC policies and procedures, which include:

- a) Complaints and Compensation Policy and Procedure.
- b) Dignity at Work policy.
- c) Equality, Diversity and Inclusion policy.
- d) Health & Safety at Work policy.
- e) Lone Working Policy and Procedure.

8. Definitions

For the purposes of this Policy, the term customer refers to:

- a) Current or former SHC residents.
- b) Private and Social Housing residents.
- c) Housing applicants.
- d) Visitors to any property owned by SHC including people's homes and SHC offices or other premises.
- e) Friends, relatives, carers, advocates or a person or group acting on behalf of a customer or group of customers.
- f) Suppliers and contractors.
- g) Members of the general public.

For the purposes of this Policy, the term 'staff' refers to:

- a) Staff directly employed by SHC.
- b) SHC trustees.
- c) Staff employed by contractors or suppliers when they are working on behalf of SHC.
- d) Any agent working on behalf of Sherburn House Charity.
- e) Any person working with Sherburn House Charity on a voluntary basis.

Note:

We will not deem behaviour to be unacceptable just because a customer is determined or forceful when making reasonable requests or complaints. We also appreciate that there may be circumstances where a customer is angry or upset and this will be taken into account when considering whether or not their actions are unacceptable.

9. Roles and Responsibilities

Any Charity representative who believes they have experienced unacceptable behaviour from anyone from the above list at must take responsibility for raising a concern, in line with our internal procedures.

Managers should deal with reported incidents of unacceptable behaviour within the timescales set out in the Unacceptable Customer Behaviour procedure's timescales.

10. Equality, Diversity and Inclusion

The Charity will comply with the terms of our Equality and Diversity Policy (PE03) policy when dealing with incidents of unacceptable behaviour. We will take into account the individual circumstances of the staff member and the customer involved when investigating an incident and determine the most appropriate course of action.

Sherburn House Charity is committed to a diverse, inclusive, and equitable environment where all trustees, staff, and residents feel respected and valued regardless of gender, age, race, ethnicity, national origin, sexual orientation or identity, disability, education, or any other bias.

11. Policy Review

The Unacceptable Customer Behaviour Policy will be formally reviewed every three years by the Senior Management Team in consultation with staff and customers to ensure the aims of the Policy are being met.

The accompanying Procedure will be reviewed, amended and updated as is necessary in order that it remains relevant and fit-for-purpose.

12. Definitions of Unacceptable Customer Behaviour

Aggressive or abusive behaviour

This type of behaviour includes physical, verbal, or written behaviour which may cause staff to suffer harm, or to feel afraid, intimidated, threatened, or abused.

Examples of this type of behaviour include:

- Physical violence against a person.
- Physical violence against objects such as kicking, defacing, or destroying property.
- Threats.
- Personal verbal abuse.
- Derogatory or insulting remarks.
- Persistent shouting.
- Persistent swearing.
- Unwelcome or rude gestures.
- Statements intended to or likely to cause offence.
- Unsubstantiated allegations.
- Sexist, racist, homophobic or any other discriminatory comments/abuse.

We consider the use of social networking sites and the internet to perpetrate or encourage aggression and/or abuse including any of the above types of behaviour towards our staff to be unacceptable behaviour. The Charity will consider any messages posted via social media or other internet-based media, including email, in the same light as any written or spoken communication.

13. Anti-Social Behaviour

Anti-social behaviour is when someone acts in a way that worries, upsets or frightens people. Antisocial behaviour may be defined as any of the following:

- Dog fouling, uncontrolled and noisy pets.
- Inconsiderate or dangerous parking and abandoned cars.
- Damaging houses, cars or gardens.
- Noise nuisance at high levels or unreasonable hours.
- Damage to the flora and or fauna of the Charity grounds, including environmental health issues such as rubbish dumping.
- Vandalism and graffiti.
- Drug misuse, alcohol-related nuisance and prostitution.
- Hate incidents motivated by someone's age, disability, faith, sexual orientation or race.
- Harassment, including verbal and physical abuse and threats.
- Acts of violence.
- Someone calling people bad names or picking on people.

14. Unreasonable Behaviour

Customers in some instances pursue requests for information or make complaints that are unreasonable.

Examples of this type of behaviour include:

- Refusing to specify the details of a complaint, despite offers of assistance.
- Changing the basis of a complaint/request as the matter proceeds.
- Denying or changing statements made at an earlier stage.
- Making unjustified complaints about staff who are trying to deal with an issue and requesting to have them replaced.
- Covertly recording meetings and conversations.
- Submitting falsified documents from themselves or others.
- Refusing to accept a decision; repeatedly arguing points with no new evidence.

- Persistently seeking an outcome which the Charity has already explained is unrealistic for policy, legal or other valid reasons.

15. Unreasonable Demands

Customers may make what can be considered as unreasonable demands on our staff through the amount of information they seek, the scale of the service they expect or the number of approaches or complaints that they make regarding the same issue.

SHC consider demands to be unreasonable when they impact on the work of staff, for example by taking up an excessive amount of time which is disproportionate to the issue. This is likely to disadvantage other customers as it can impact on the service that can be provided to them.

Examples of this type of behaviour include:

- Demanding responses within an unreasonable timescale.
- Insisting on meeting with or speaking only to a particular member of staff.
- Making persistent phone calls or persistently contacting SHC by other means.
- Repeatedly changing the substance of a complaint or raising unrelated issues.

16. Unreasonable Persistence

We recognise that some customers will not or cannot accept that we are unable to assist them further or provide a level of service other than that provided already.

Examples of this type of behaviour include:

- Persistent refusal to accept a decision made in relation to a complaint.
- Refusal to accept explanations relating to what can and what cannot be done.
- Continuing to pursue a complaint without presenting any new information, although this does not preclude customers from pursuing a complaint through the Sherburn House Charity complaints process.
- Unwillingness to accept the terms of an occupancy agreement or title conditions where these terms are clear and unambiguous.

17. Vexatious Behaviour

We consider vexatious behaviour to be when customers complain to cause unnecessary aggravation, frustration, or inconvenience rather than to resolve a genuine issue. Their complaint may be based on fictitious events or extreme exaggerations of very minor service issues.

Examples of this type of behaviour include:

- Where the requester states the request is meant to cause significant inconvenience, disruption, or annoyance.
- Requests for information the customer has already seen or demonstrate a clear intention to reopen issues that have already been considered.
- Customers who have developed an opportunity to complain by their own actions, or lack of actions, creating or making a situation worse, and then complaining about it.

18. Raising Awareness of Unacceptable Customer Behaviour

A copy of the Charity's Unacceptable Customer Behaviour Policy will be part of the information provided to new residents.

The Housing and Estates Coordinator should emphasise that unacceptable behaviour will not be tolerated during the sign-up of new tenancies.

Team meetings will be used to openly discuss cases of unacceptable behaviour and actions taken in all departments.

Our website, and resident meetings or newsletters will be used to raise awareness of the Unacceptable Customer Behaviour Policy.

Line managers should take responsibility for ensuring contractors and others as appropriate are aware of our Unacceptable Customer Behaviour Policy.

19. Managing Unacceptable Customer Behaviour

Where staff are subject to unreasonable behaviour (such as verbal abuse) during a telephone call, visit or face to face interview, they will advise the customer concerned that their behaviour is unacceptable and that continued behaviour of this nature will lead to the telephone call, interview or visit being aborted.

There are few customers whose actions we consider unacceptable. How we aim to manage these actions depends on their nature and extent. If it adversely affects our ability to do our work and provide a service to others, we may need to restrict a customer's contact with our office in order to manage the unacceptable behaviour.

In all cases a manager will contact the customer to explain what actions we consider unacceptable and why, ask them to amend their behaviour, and explain what actions we will take if they do not. Where we have to take action, we will tell the customer in writing what action we are taking and why.

We may offer to meet the customer to discuss the unacceptable actions and agree a way forward. It may be appropriate in some cases to engage external experts, such as independent mediators, to assist us in resolving a situation.

We may advise the customer that we consider the issue(s) fully responded to and that continuing correspondence on the issue(s) would serve no useful purpose. In these circumstances future correspondence relating to the issue(s) will be noted and filed but will not be acknowledged or responded to unless it contains new significant information which we consider requires action or response.

We may advise the customer that we can only consider a certain number of issues within a given time period and ask them to limit or focus on their request accordingly.

We may restrict customer contact with our office. For example, we may:

- Only take calls from the customer during specified times and days.
- Arrange for a specific member of staff to deal with calls or correspondence from the customer.
- Require the customer to make an appointment to see a named member of staff before visiting the office.
- Restrict email contact, which is immediate and easily abused.
- Require the customer to communicate in writing or through a third party and add them to a 'no personal contact' list.
- Take other action that we consider appropriate.

Customers will be notified in writing with details of any restrictions being imposed and the duration that these will apply.

20. Aggressive or abusive behaviour

The threat or use of physical violence, verbal abuse or harassment towards staff is likely to result in a customer being added to a 'no personal contact' list. All incidents where physical violence is used or threatened will be reported to the police. Verbal abuse or harassment may also be reported to the police if it is sufficient to cause fear and alarm to a member of staff.

Customer correspondence that is abusive to staff or which contains unsubstantiated allegations of a serious nature will be dealt with by informing the customer in writing why we consider what they have written to be unacceptable. We will ask them to stop communicating in this way and advise that we will not respond to future abusive correspondence. If this behaviour continues, we may apply any of the restrictions listed.

We will end telephone calls if the caller is considered aggressive, abusive, or offensive. All staff have the right to make this decision; they must tell the caller that the behaviour or language is unacceptable and end the call if the behaviour does not stop.

21. Restricting customer contact

With the exception of incidents where immediate action is required, decisions to restrict contact are only taken after careful consideration of the situation by a relevant manager. Wherever possible we will give a customer the opportunity to modify their behaviour or action before a decision is taken.

We aim to restrict contact in a way that allows the customer to continue receiving a service from us and continue to progress through any process they are currently involved in. We will aim to maintain at least one form of contact except in extreme situations where we will require all contact to be through a third party and add the customer to a 'no personal contact' list.

Staff who directly experience aggressive or abusive behaviour from a customer have the authority to deal with that behaviour immediately in a manner they consider appropriate to the situation and in line with this policy.

We will tell customers in writing why a decision has been made to restrict future contact, the restricted contact arrangements, and the length of time that the restriction will be in place.

We will ensure relevant staff are informed of any restrictions put in place.

Any decision to restrict customer contact must be made in the customer file.

We will report on the number of customers subject to Unacceptable Customer Behaviour restrictions annually to the board of trustees.

22. Right to appeal

A customer has the right to appeal against a decision to restrict contact. The customer should be advised in writing about this right and the contact details of the person to whom their appeal should be addressed. The customer will be advised in writing that either the restricted contact arrangements will remain in force, or a different course of action has been agreed.

At this stage we will advise the customer of their right to contact the Housing Ombudsman or other relevant independent organisation if they believe our decision to restrict contact is unjust.

23. Recording and reviewing decisions to restrict contact

We record all incidents of unacceptable actions and any decision taken to restrict customer contact. This information is kept on the relevant customer and/or complaint file on our computer system.

The Senior Management Team will review the status of all customers with restricted contact arrangements annually. A decision may be reconsidered, and restrictions may be lifted or eased if a customer demonstrates a more acceptable approach.