



Managing unreasonable behaviour.



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Purpose of the policy

Milton Keynes City Council is committed to enhancing the customer experience by upholding our Customer Charter for all customers, residents, and visitors. At the same time, our staff have the right to work in a safe and respectful environment.

We have zero tolerance for discriminatory, threatening, and abusive behaviour towards our teams. We will act quickly and decisively to manage unreasonable customer behaviour.

This policy sets out how we will address unreasonable customer behaviour, and aims to:

- Define what we mean by 'unreasonable customer behaviour'
- Illustrate how we make sure that our teams are protected from harm and abuse
- Clarify how unreasonable behaviour will be consistently managed
- Ensure that our limited council resources are not directly impacted

Milton Keynes City Council provides over 200 different services to those who live, work, visit or do business in Milton Keynes. This policy covers all services we deliver from our very visible universal services like waste and landscaping to our social care and housing functions

This policy applies to:

- All contact received across the council's various channels including:
 - Telephone
 - Written correspondence (including emails, online forms, social media and letters)
 - Face to face contact both on council's premises and any other locations in the community including resident's homes
 - Contact from those representing the customer such as family members, advocates
 - All services provided by Milton Keynes City Council whether delivered directly by us or by contractors or other third parties on our behalf

Reasonable adjustments

To support customers who find there are barriers to accessing our services, we offer reasonable adjustments to our interactions.

From your first contact with us, we assess the need for any adjustments to ensure you receive the necessary support. If an adjustment is required, it will be recorded in our customer records management system.

We always consider how any restrictions might affect the adjustments made for each customer.

Sometimes we may put a contact restriction in place which impacts a reasonable adjustment. This is because the behaviour we are experiencing means the adjustment is no longer reasonable where the person has shown unacceptable or unreasonable behaviour towards our employees. This could be because that adjustment is no longer effective or practical. Where

possible, we will prioritise selecting contact restriction(s) that provide an alternative way to access to our service.

We will consider contact restrictions on a case-by-case basis and will always let the customer know of a decision to impose a contact restriction in writing.

Identifying unreasonable behaviour

Below sets out what types of behaviour we consider unacceptable or unreasonable, how this will be managed, and what customers can do if they believe a restriction should be reconsidered.

What is unreasonable or unacceptable behaviour

Sometimes people may be upset, angry, or anxious about the issues they have raised in their complaint. We will always try to help but we will not accept aggressive, abusive or harassing behaviour towards our employees.

Examples of this type of behaviour can include:

- Repeated behaviour or language (verbal or written) that may cause employees to feel offended, afraid, threatened, or abused
- Derogatory, abusive or discriminatory remarks; including racist, sexist, disablist, homophobic, or transphobic abuse.
- Using insulting or degrading language
- Making serious allegations against us or partner agencies related to your service provision without any evidence
- Publishing information about employees online including social media
- Recording and publishing, whether audio, visual or both, discussions with employees that are taken without their consent
- Inappropriately contacting employees using their personal details or social media presence such as Facebook, Instagram, X or LinkedIn

Unreasonable demands

Demands on the Council can be unreasonable if they impact our teams' ability to provide a consistent service to the customers of Milton Keynes, or if involves an excessive amount of employee time.

Examples of these type of demands can include:

- Repeatedly demanding a response within a timescale outside of normal timescales
- Insisting on, or refusing to speak to employees when that is not possible
- Repeatedly and vexatiously changing the substance of a complaint or raising unrelated concerns
- Refusing to accept a decision where explanations for the decision have been given other than by exercising their rights of complaint and appeal.

- Refusing to co-operate by not providing information we request to allow us to help resolve the issue
- Being deliberately opaque or over complicating complaints or communications

What are unreasonable levels of contact

Levels of contact become unreasonable when the amount of time spent managing it impacts our ability to respond to the complaint or limits the time and service that we can give to other customers.

Examples of this type of contact can include:

- Repeated contact whilst a matter is being investigated or after it is closed
- Lengthy telephone calls repeating the same points for discussion
- High submission volumes of information via email, online, or post which is a repeat of previously settled matters
- Copying in multiple city council officers, ward Cllrs and other external parties where this is not necessary.
- Vexatiously refusing to cooperate with or frustrating the adult social care needs assessment process to such an extent as would justify describing it as declining assessment, resulting in no longer being eligible to receive services.

Managing unreasonable behaviour

Stage one: Warning

If we think a customer's behaviour has become unreasonable, our team will explain this to them and ask them to alter their actions or behaviour. This means we can keep helping them while also making sure that our teams stay safe.

We may also choose to issue a warning (verbally and/or in writing) to customers that, if this behaviour continues, we may take further action to restrict future contact with us. In extreme or urgent cases, we may need to report the matter to the police or take legal action.

Where the warning does not change the nature of the behaviour, our teams may:

- Terminate a telephone call, appointment, meeting or visit
- Escalate the situation to their manager for further action
- Ask the person to leave the premises using appropriate means
- Report the incident to the police
- Take any other action considered appropriate to the circumstances

Stage two: Managing ongoing customer contact

After a customer is issued with a warning and their behaviour becomes reasonable, then no further action will be taken and usual methods of contact will continue. When customer behaviour continues to be defined as unreasonable or when their behaviour is inappropriate and causes immediate concern, we will adopt an alternative method to manage their communications with the Council. This is cognisant of any required exclusions in line with our reasonable adjustments statement. We would normally issue a stage one warning prior to going into stage two, but in exceptional circumstances this will be applied without a warning having been issued. This will be considered on a case-by-case basis.

The decision to manage an individual's contact with a council service will only be taken if it is proportionate to do so and if our requests for a customer to modify their behaviour have not been met. Other than in cases which have been escalated straight to stage 2 for reasons of urgency or extremity.

Managing contact can include but is not limited to:

- Restrictions on:
 - Communication limited to one specific form of contact (such as email)
 - Contact to a specific colleague or the Contact Officer inbox
 - Times when telephone calls can be accepted (specific days/and or times)
 - Subject to legal requirements, replying to emails on a scheduled basis e.g. monthly to any legitimate issues raised
 - Continuing contact through an independent advocate whose conduct has become unreasonable.
 - Temporarily restricting access to council premises

- Not responding further to customers on specific issues where appropriate communication has been exhausted.

We will consider these restrictions on an individual case-by-case basis, and any action taken would be appropriate to the circumstances. We will consider all factors including exceptional circumstances or barriers faced by the customer due to any known or advised protected characteristics, risk factors, or other relevant reasons.

We will formally advise the customer of the decision to put restrictions in place. Contact will be monitored and if behaviour becomes acceptable the Council will remove restrictions. A review can be requested in writing/via email by the customer every six months. We will respond in writing to these requests, sharing the outcome of the review with the customer.

Even if we restrict communication with a customer, we will continue to resolve their enquiry or complaint and deliver services in line with our duties. Alternative contact methods will not affect the decisions or outcomes of their requests or applications.

If a customer continues to contact the council in breach of the contact arrangements, we may need to consider further proportionate restrictions. In some cases, we may need to consider other legal interventions and enforcement options.

Stage three: Further intervention and enforcement options

In cases where customers have repeatedly acted in an abusive, aggressive, disruptive manner or their behaviour is so unreasonable as to cause immediate concern, there are a range of interventions and enforcement options that may also be considered including:

- Removal of implied right of entry from a council building for a fixed or permanent period
- Managing how you access council buildings.
- Serving notices and applying for civil injunctions
- Community protection notices
- Criminal or civil prosecution
- We may also inform the police and the Safer Communities Team

Again, we would expect to have gone through steps one and two prior to this stage, but in exceptional circumstances will go straight to stage three on a case-by-case basis.

Councillors

If a Councillor experiences unreasonable customer behaviour, we will review these circumstances on a case-by-case basis to assess whether this policy applies in those specific circumstances. Where appropriate, we will respond to the issue in accordance with this policy.

Policy review

This policy will be reviewed on a regular basis, incorporating the feedback of colleagues and customers. You may also wish to contact the Ombudsman if you are unhappy with this process – they provide a free and impartial service.

