

## Unreasonable Customer Behaviour Policy

### Introduction

The purpose of this policy is to set out Grand Union Housing Group's (GUHG) approach to unreasonable and unacceptable customer behaviour and to provide staff with the necessary support and guidance for challenging such behaviours.

### Policy statement

Grand Union Housing Group takes customer service very seriously and expects all staff and contractors to be polite, respectful and helpful when dealing with our customers. Equally, they are entitled to expect a similar courtesy in return. Fortunately, the majority of customer contacts pass without issue or incident, however, on the rare occasion, a customer will behave in a way that is unreasonable and/or unacceptable and this is the focus of this policy.

### Objectives

- To ensure that all staff are clear about what is meant by 'unacceptable' and 'unreasonable' behaviour.
- To confirm that GUHG will not tolerate such behaviour.
- To provide guidance to ensure that staff are aware of the available sanctions for responding to unacceptable and unreasonable, behaviour or demands.
- To ensure that all customers have an equal opportunity when accessing GUHG's services.
- In specific regard to complaints, to ensure that all complainants are given the same opportunity of access to the customer complaints procedure.
- To ensure that the complaints procedure is properly used and not abused.
- To allow **all** staff to use their time effectively.

### Other related policies/documents

- Anti-social Behaviour Policy
- Complaints Policy and Procedure
- Equality, Diversity and Customer Care Policy
- Health and Safety Policy (Corporate)
- Lone Worker Procedure
- Risk Appetite Framework and Risk Management Policy
- Terms and Conditions for Social Media sites
- Violent Warning Marker (Red Flag) Procedure

## **Definition of unreasonable and unacceptable behaviour**

Customers understandably get frustrated at times and, therefore, may act out of character, however, we should be able to recognise and deal with this. Additionally, we should be able to identify the difference between anger expressed in relation to a particular issue and anger directed towards our staff and contractors. When frustration and anger turns into abuse and aggression, this is unreasonable and unacceptable. It is also important to understand that a customer may be behaving in an acceptable manner, however, their persistence and unrealistic demands, may also deem their behaviour to be unreasonable.

### **Aggressive and abusive behaviour**

Any behaviour that causes staff or our contractors to feel unsafe, afraid or abused. This may be verbal or written and include the following examples:

- threats
- abuse, swearing
- repeated personal remarks
- threats of violence and/or actual violence
- excessive shouting and rudeness
- racist or sexist comments.

### **Unreasonable demands**

A customer's demands become unreasonable when they take up a disproportionate amount of staff time and begin to impact on the service available to other customers. Examples may include:

- continuing to pursue a complaint that has exhausted the complaints process
- constantly demanding the attention of senior/executive managers and refusing to deal with less senior staff
- sending an excessive amount of emails and not giving staff time to respond
- making repeated telephone calls and not allowing staff time to respond
- expecting immediate responses to complaints and failing to accept the agreed timescales
- constantly referring back to old issues that have been dealt with
- refusing to be specific about a particular issue or complaint
- constantly adding new issues to complaints that are on-going.

In practice, a customer may display behaviour that falls into a combination of these categories, and it may be the *combination* that defines the behaviour as unacceptable.

## Social media

This policy also applies to contacts made via social media platforms, for example, Facebook and Twitter. Sanctions available in this policy will be considered alongside those detailed in the Terms and Conditions for Social Media sites.

## Sanctions

The decision to impose any sanction on a customer whose behaviour has been defined as unreasonable and/or unacceptable, will be the responsibility of the Director of Customer Experience in consultation with the relevant service director. At this point, consideration should also be given as to whether the Violent Warning Marker (Red Flag) procedure criteria would apply.

The particular sanction(s) applied will be dependent on the level and severity of the unacceptable behaviour and may include one or any combination of the following:

- An initial written communication to the customer to advise that the particular behaviour has been considered unacceptable, in accordance with this policy, and warning that should there be any repeat, sanctions will be applied to their level, and/or methods, of contact with us. A copy will be placed on file.
- A written communication to advise the customer that a sanction(s) has been applied and the reasons why. The communication should also detail what the sanction(s) is and for how long it will apply. A copy will be placed on file.
- We reserve the right to restrict contact by telephone, letter, personal visit, email or fax in any combination but we will always try to maintain at least **one** form of contact.
- If appropriate, it may be necessary to inform the customer that no more can be said or done regarding a particular issue and that the matter is considered closed. Any further communication on the same subject will simply be read, acknowledged and placed on file.
- We may decide to appoint **one** point of contact for any communication. The contact may also decide to restrict contact/responses to a particular day or time in the week. If this becomes necessary, we will ensure that a deputy is available to cover any absences of the appointed contact.
- We may seek advice from our solicitors and consider legal action depending on the nature or severity of any behaviour or incident.
- Threats or the use of physical violence, harassment or verbal abuse towards staff is likely to result in the end of **all** direct contact. Incidents may also be reported to the police.
- Where physical violence is threatened or used, all incidents **will** be reported to the police.
- Any sanctions imposed will be reviewed on a regular basis.
- A note of any action taken under this policy will be made on the housing management system.

## Discretion

You are expected to exercise discretion within the context of this policy. If you then act using discretion it should be recorded as to the reason(s) why.

Agreed by Senior Management Team 12 February 2015

Approved by Executive Management Team 27 February 2015

Approved by Board May 2015

## Monitoring

Regular review as part of the policy review programme

<b>Customer Consultation:</b>	March 2015
<b>Equality Impact Assessment carried out:</b>	initial screen
<b>Person responsible for review:</b>	Director of Customer Experience
<b>Supported in the review by:</b>	Customer Services Manager
<b>Ratified by:</b>	Leadership Team September 2018
<b>Date of review:</b>	September 2018
<b>Date of next review:</b>	September 2021