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Acceptable Behaviour Policy

1.0 Aim of the Policy

1.1 This policy applies to all customers (irrespective on tenure type) and sets out the Coastlines approach to the very few customers whose actions or behaviour is considered unacceptable.

2.0 Introduction

2.1 We do not view behaviour as unacceptable just because someone is assertive or determined as there may have been upsetting or distressing circumstances leading to a customer approaching us. However, the actions of some customers who are angry or persistent may result in unreasonable demands on, or behaviour towards Coastline staff and we will take appropriate action to manage such behaviour.

2.2 We have grouped unacceptable behaviour under two broad headings below, namely aggressive or abusive behaviour and unreasonable demands.

3.0 Legislation and Statutory Regulatory duties

3.1 This Policy reflects guidance recommended by the Housing Ombudsman Service.

3.2 Due regard must be given to implications of the Equalities Act 2010, the Data Protection Act 2018 and the Health and Safety at Work Act 1974.

4.0 Aggressive or abusive behaviour

4.1 All staff receive Customer Service Training and will endeavour to do their best to assist in difficult or distressing times. However, it is not acceptable when anger escalates into aggression towards our staff. Aggression is not restricted to acts that may result in physical harm. It also includes behaviour or language that may cause staff to feel afraid, threatened or abused.

4.2 Examples of aggressive behaviour include;

- Threats;
- Physical violence;
- Personal abuse;
- Derogatory or discriminatory remarks; or
- Rudeness, aimed at Coastline staff.

4.3 We also consider inflammatory statements and unsubstantiated allegations to be aggressive behaviour.

5.0 Unreasonable demands

5.1 Customers may make what we consider unreasonable demands if they impact substantially on our work through the amount of information they seek or provide, the nature and scale of service they expect, or the frequency of approaches they make.

5.2 The following list, which is not exhaustive, contains examples of unreasonable demands;

- Excessive telephone calls, emails, letters or contact via social media which are disproportionate to the issue being raised (this could include the frequency of contact, the volume of correspondence received as well as the frequency and length of telephone calls);
- Demanding to speak to a particular member of staff or refusing speak to particular staff;
- Unrealistic expectations for responses which are disproportionate to the issues being raised, for example requesting large volumes of information, asking for responses within a short space of time;
- Persistent refusal to accept what services Coastline can and cannot provide;
- Repeatedly changing the substance of a complaint or raising unrelated concerns;
- Persistent refusal to accept a decision made by Coastline by continually pursuing a case without presenting any new information; and / or
- Refusing to speak with, or allowing appropriate members of staff to deliver services, without providing sufficient evidence or justification.

5.3 Any of these may be considered unacceptable and unreasonable in isolation or collectively, if they start to impact substantially on Coastline's capacity by adversely affecting staff ability to carry out their duties or in providing services to other customers.

6.0 Dealing with unacceptable behaviour

6.1 Colleagues will experience on occasion 'difficult' customers, however all attempts will be made by staff to deal with customers queries through seeking to understand whether a customer is upset due to having received poor service or for some other reason.

6.2 Where a customer behaves in an unacceptable manner staff will try to assist through seeking to calm the customer down but will warn the customer to desist from behaving in this manner. However, if the behaviour persists or there is a perceived risk to personal safety staff will terminate the customer contact.

6.3 Coastline staff will end telephone calls if the caller is considered aggressive, abusive or offensive. The staff member taking the call has the right to make this decision, tell the caller that the behaviour is unacceptable and end the call if the behaviour does not stop.

- 6.4 Following the phone call the Customer Relationship Management system (CRM) will be updated accordingly. If the incident is considered to be of a serious nature the Tenancy Manager will be advised who will issue a warning or Notice (as appropriate) in the same way as any other breach of tenancy.
- 6.5 Such incidents should also be reported to People and Culture, in line with the Safety, Health and Environment Policy, to ensure the relevant receive any additional support needed.
- 7.0 Response to unacceptable behaviour**
- 7.1 Coastline's response to unacceptable behaviour will take account of the behaviour and any history the customer has of similar behaviour. The support needs of the customer will also be taken into consideration at this time.
- 7.2 In appropriate cases, Coastline will attempt to reach a voluntary (informal) arrangement with the customer before taking formal action, in order to allow the customer time to consider and adjust their behaviour. Mediation or advocacy through third parties may be considered, depending on the circumstances, to try and improve the situation.
- 7.3 If this informal approach fails or is not appropriate, a written warning may be issued to the customer before taking any formal steps. Any warning should include examples of where the customer's behaviour has been considered unacceptable with reference to what formal steps may be taken if the behaviour continues.
- 7.4 Actions that may be taken to address incidents of unacceptable behaviour, although not exhaustive, include;
- Managed contacts; including
 - Providing a single point of contact
 - Limiting contact to a single form i.e. to writing, email or telephone only
 - Limiting contact to certain times or to a limited number of times per week or month
 - Declining to give any further consideration to an issue unless any additional evidence or information is provided
 - Only considering a certain number of issues in a specific period.
 - Allowing staff who become a target of excessive or abusive emails to block the senders contact details
 - Visit in pairs arrangements; and / or
 - Tenancy enforcement.
- 7.5 The options available depend upon the severity and impact of the unacceptable behaviour demonstrated by the customer and will be agreed in consultation with the relevant Assistant Director or by the Single Case Governance Panel, if established (see supporting procedure).
- 7.6 In extreme cases such as physical violence or harassment towards a staff, actions could include involving the police, taking legal action and ending direct contact with the customer.

- 7.7 Wherever possible, we will give customers the opportunity to modify their behaviour or action before this decision is taken. Customers will be told in writing why a decision has been made to restrict future contact, the restricted contact arrangements and, if relevant, the length of time that these restrictions will be in place.
- 7.8 A customer can appeal a decision to restrict contact. A senior manager who was not involved in the original decision will consider the appeal. They will advise the customer in writing either that the restricted contact arrangements still apply or that a different course of action has been adopted.
- 7.9 Where it is decided to restrict customer contact, an entry noting this will be made on CRM, in line with the Warning Flags Policy.
- 7.10 A decision to restrict customer contact may be reconsidered if the customer demonstrates more acceptable behaviour over the following months. In line with the Data Protection Act and the Warning Flags Policy, this should be reviewed on a six monthly basis.
- 8.0 Working in Partnership**
- 8.1 This Policy will be kept under review and amended to take account of any relevant changes in Housing Ombudsman Service guidance.
- 9.0 Related documents**
- High Impact Customer Procedure
 - Red Flags Policy
 - Customer Feedback (Compliments and Complaints) Policy