

Unreasonable and Unacceptable Behaviour Policy

Policy name;	Unreasonable and unacceptable behaviour policy
Executive responsible;	Chief Executive
Review by;	Director of Housing & EDI Steering group
Tenant involvement;	EDI Steering Group - which includes residents and staff and the Resident Engagement Panel
Type of review;	Full
Authority to amend;	Chief Executive
Supporting Documents;	Housing Ombudsman Complaint Handling Code
Frequency of review;	Every three years
Last review;	September 2024
Next review;	September 2027
Strategy;	Customer Strategy
Associated risk;	Risk 4 Loss of key stakeholder support and reputation (cause and control), Risk 8 Inadequate and ineffective customer service and/or engagement (control and source of assurance), Risk 9 Health and safety failure or neglect.
Health & safety;	This policy supports us to manage customer contact which can be harmful for staff whilst also ensuring we are treating residents fairly and with respect.
Equality & diversity;	Review by EDI Steering group and Impact Assessment completed.
VFM & benchmarking;	None

VERSION CONTROL				
Version Number	Sections Amended	Date of update	Approved by	Date Approved
1.0	First issue	September 2024	Pending	ET Approved January 2025

1. Purpose

We believe that customers should be listened to and that they should have fair access to our services. We work hard to be open and accessible to everyone.

Occasionally, the behaviour or actions of individuals makes it very difficult for us to provide services to customers. In a small number of cases the actions of individuals become unacceptable because they involve abuse of our staff or our processes.

When this happens, we have to take action to protect the health and wellbeing of our staff who have a right to do their jobs without fear of being abused or harassed. We also consider the impact of the behaviour on our ability to do our work and provide a service to others.

This policy explains how we will approach these situations. The policy applies to all areas of our work and to all methods of contact including telephone, face-to-face, letters, e-mails, social media and other digital channels.

2. Actions Cornerstone considers as unacceptable

People may act out of character in times of trouble or distress. There may have been upsetting or distressing circumstances leading up to a contact we have with a customer.

However, Cornerstone will not tolerate unacceptable behaviour or actions that result in unacceptable or excessive demands on our service in that it prevents staff from carrying out their duties effectively.

It is these behaviours and actions that we aim to manage under this policy.

2.1 Aggressive or abusive behaviour

We understand that customers may be upset and angry about the issues they are raising with Cornerstone. If that anger escalates into aggression towards Cornerstone staff, we consider that unacceptable and it will not be tolerated.

We consider aggression to be angry, hostile behaviour, which could include actual violence, threats of violence, displaying behaviour which is deemed readiness to attack or confront. Aggression can be physical and result in physical harm, it can also include gestures and verbal or written communication that may cause staff to feel offended, afraid, threatened or abused.

We will judge each situation individually and appreciate individuals who come to us may be upset. While we accept that those who contact us may feel angry, it is not acceptable to shout or swear at Cornerstone staff.

Unacceptable behaviour or language is that which:

- is rude, offensive, insulting, belittling, patronising, lacks respect,
- is discriminatory in any way, including racist, sexist, homophobic or transphobic comments; or
- makes serious allegations that individuals have committed criminal, corrupt or perverse conduct without any evidence.

We may decide that comments aimed not at us but at third parties are unacceptable because of the effect that listening or reading them may have on our staff. For example, raising false or untrue allegations about third parties.

Threats against staff will be taken very seriously and if staff feel scared or threatened at any point during a conversation with a customer, the interaction may be ended at any time.

2.2 Harassment

Staff have the right to carry out their duties free from harassment or threats of harassment. We ask all customers to respect that staff are delivering services and communication decisions on behalf of Cornerstone and therefore this may not reflect their own views or preferences.

Examples of behaviours we consider to be harassment against our staff include:

- recording telephone discussions and publishing the information online such as through social media or other online platforms;
- contacting staff using their personal details or social media presence such as Facebook, X or LinkedIn;
- publishing personal, sensitive or private information about staff online or other public domains such as in reviews, noticeboards or newsletter,
- singling out individual members of staff,
- hate crime.

2.3 Unacceptable or excessive demands

A demand becomes unacceptable when it starts to (or when complying with the demand would) impact substantially on the work of Cornerstone.

Examples of this behaviour include:

- repeatedly demanding a response within a timescale outside of our published customer service standards,
- insisting on, or refusing to, speak to a particular member of staff, when that is not possible or reasonable,
- repeatedly changing the substance of their service request or complaint or raising unrelated concerns,
- making repeated and unnecessary contact during the course of us dealing with their service request or carrying out investigations,
- refusing to accept a decision where explanations for the decision have been provided.

An example of such impact would be that the demand takes up an excessive amount of staff time and in doing so disadvantages other customers and prevents their own service request or complaint from being dealt with quickly.

2.4 Unacceptable and persistent levels of contact

Sometimes the volume and duration of contact made to us by an individual causes problems. This can occur over a short period, for example, a number of calls in one day or hour.

It may occur over a longer period when a customer repeatedly makes long telephone calls to us or inundates us with copies of information that has been sent already or that is irrelevant to the service issue.

We consider that the level of contact has become unacceptable when the amount of time spent talking to a customer on the telephone, or responding to, reviewing and filing emails or written correspondence impacts on our ability to deal with the service issue, or with other customers' service requests.

Unacceptable or persistent levels of contact include:

- continuous contact while we are in the process of considering a matter,
- repeated telephone calls over a short period, for example, a high number calls in one day or week,
- lengthy telephone calls repeating the same points of discussion,
- high volumes of information provided by email or post referencing the same issues,
- unnecessarily or excessively copying us into emails to other parties,
- pursuing issues that have no substance, are outside of our remit or which have already been investigated and the outcome determined, and we have informed the customer of this.

Staff are encouraged to report and discuss unacceptable and persistent levels of contact with their managers.

2.5 Refusal to co-operate

When we are dealing with service requests and complaints, we may need to ask the individual who has raised the issue to work with us. This can include agreeing action plans with us that include:

- what specifically we are looking into,
- them providing us with further information, evidence or comments on request, or
- help us by summarising their concerns.

Sometimes, an individual repeatedly refuses to co-operate and this makes it difficult for us to proceed. We will always seek to assist someone if they have a specific, genuine difficulty complying with a request.

However, we consider it is unacceptable to bring a service request or complaint to us and then not respond to clear and appropriate requests by staff.

3. Reasonable adjustments

We understand that some customers may find it difficult to express themselves or communicate clearly, especially when they are anxious or upset.

We will complete an assessment of a customers' support and communication needs and ask residents to explain what adjustments they're looking for and how this will ensure they can access our services. We will signpost the customer to and liaise with relevant third party agencies that may be able to support the resident and resolutions.

We will always consider making reasonable adjustments for a resident if we are asked to do so. Examples of adjustments we can consider are:

- we could consider using different methods of communication;
- providing written communication in large print, coloured text, or in translation;
- giving clear warnings if conversations become unproductive and allowing customers to opportunity to modify their behaviour before ending a call.

However, we do not expect our staff to accept being subjected to aggressive, offensive, threatening or abusive actions, language or behaviour.

We may still use the policy if there are actions or behaviours which are having a negative effect on our staff or our work even where a reasonable adjustment has been made.

4. Actions we may take

When we experience behaviour or demands which are unacceptable, we may consider taking more formal action. The actions we will consider can include the following:

- warning the customer about their behaviour and requesting that the customer modifies their behaviour in future contact with us,
- appointing a specific point of contact for the customer at Cornerstone,
- communicating only in writing or via a representative,
- deciding not to investigate an service issue or complaint on the basis that it has been pursued in a way that is unacceptable,
- stop all communication with a customer,
- restricting or limiting contact with Cornerstone,
- placing a marker on a customer's record which warns staff about unacceptable behaviour and any adjustments or measures in place,
- notifying relevant public authorities, for example the Police, where we believe a criminal offence may have been committed, or safeguarding/health professionals where relevant.
- taking tenancy enforcement or other legal action where the behaviour or actions are a breach of their tenancy.

We will take into account any restrictions or measures that may impact on service delivery to that customer or other customers. For example, where any visits to a community need to be attended by multiple members of staff.

Where it is decided that formal action must be taken to manage someone's behaviour, including tenancy enforcement, we will complete an Equality Act Assessment, inform them of the decision in writing, and record the decision on the customers record.

5. Right of review

Customers have the right to appeal the decision we make in relation to unreasonable or unacceptable behaviour or demands and they will be informed how to do this in the formal letter.

Their request for a review will be considered by a member of staff not involved in the original decision and will be responded to within 20 working days.