



**ongo's**

# **Unacceptable behaviour policy**

**July 2015**

<b>Led by:</b>	Karen Cowan, Head of Customer Support
<b>Written by:</b>	Emma Garland, Policy & Research Officer
<b>Agreed on:</b>	13 July 2015
<b>Agreed by:</b>	Community Voice
<b>To be reviewed:</b>	July 2018

## **Contents**

		<b>Page</b>
1.	Our policy is...	2
2.	It applies to...	2
3.	Because we want to...	2
4.	We will...	2
5.	Making sure we do what we say...	6
6.	Other things to bear in mind...	6
7.	We'll look at this again...	6



## **1. Our policy is...**

- 1.1 To deal fairly, honestly, consistently and appropriately with all customers, including those whose actions we consider unacceptable. We believe that everyone who approaches us has the right to be heard, understood and respected. We also consider that our staff have the same rights.
- 1.2 To provide services that are accessible to all customers. However, we retain the right, where we consider a customer's actions to be unacceptable, to restrict or change such access.

## **2. It applies to...**

- 2.1 All areas of the ongo Group.
- 2.2 It sets out our approach to the very few customers whose actions or behaviour we consider unacceptable. The term customer includes anyone acting on behalf of a customer or anyone who contacts any member of ongo staff in connection with a complaint.

## **3. Because we want to...**

- Clarify what we consider to be unacceptable behaviour and what action we may take;
- Ensure that other customers and our staff do not suffer any disadvantage from customers who act in an unacceptable manner.

## **4. We will...**

### **4.1 Tell customers what we consider to be unacceptable actions**

- 4.1.1 People may act out of character in times of trouble or distress. For example, there may have been upsetting or distressing circumstances leading up to a complaint. We do not view behaviour as unacceptable just because someone is forceful or determined. In fact, we accept that being persistent can be a positive advantage when pursuing a complaint.
- 4.1.2 However, the actions of customers who are angry, demanding, or persistent may result in unreasonable demands on, or unacceptable behaviour towards, staff. It is these actions that we consider unacceptable and aim to manage under this policy.



4.1.3 We have grouped these actions under three broad headings:

**a) Aggressive or abusive behaviour**

- Violence is not restricted to acts of aggression that may result in physical harm. It also includes behaviour or language (whether oral or written) that may cause staff to feel afraid, threatened, or abused.
- Examples of behaviours grouped under this heading include threats, physical violence, personal verbal abuse, derogatory remarks, and rudeness.
- We expect our staff to be treated courteously and with respect. Violence or abuse towards staff is unacceptable. Customers may be angry if they have cause to complain for example, but it is not acceptable if this escalates into aggression directed towards our staff.

**b) Unreasonable demands**

- Customers may make what we consider unreasonable demands on us through the amount of information they seek or provide, the nature and scale of service they expect, or the number of approaches they make. What amounts to unreasonable demands will always depend on the circumstances surrounding the behaviour and the seriousness of the issues raised by the customer.
- Examples of actions grouped under this heading include demanding responses within an unreasonable timescale; insisting on seeing or speaking to a particular member of staff, continual phone calls, emails, letters, or use of social media; repeatedly changing the substance of a complaint or raising unrelated concerns.
- We consider these demands as unacceptable and unreasonable if they start to impact substantially on our work, such as taking up an excessive amount of staff time to the disadvantage of other customers or functions.

**c) 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. Customers may persist in disagreeing with the action or decision taken or contact us persistently about the same issue.
- Examples of actions grouped under this heading include persistent refusal to accept a decision made in relation to a complaint, persistent refusal to accept



explanations relating to what we can or cannot do, and continuing to pursue a complaint without presenting any new information.

## **4.2 Managing unacceptable actions by customers**

- 4.2.1 There are very few customers whose actions we consider unacceptable. How these are managed depends on their nature and extent. The individual circumstances of the customer will also be taken into consideration.
- 4.2.2 If a customer's behaviour adversely affects our ability to do our work and provide a service to others, we may restrict their contact with us in order to manage this. We may restrict contact in person, by telephone, fax, letter or electronically or by any combination of these, but we will try to maintain at least one form of contact.
- 4.2.3 In extreme situations, such as the threat or use of physical violence, verbal abuse, or harassment towards our staff, we may:
- a. Restrict contact with us to either written communication or through a third party. In this case, we will tell the customer in writing that their name is on a 'no personal contact' list.
  - b. In the case of Ongo Homes customers, take appropriate action for breach of tenancy and pursue any legal remedies that can be taken in the civil courts under the Anti-Social Behaviour Crime and Police Act 2014.
  - c. Report incidents to the Police if physical violence is used or threatened.
- 4.2.4 We will not deal with correspondence or other forms of communication which is abusive to staff or contains allegations that lack substantive evidence. When this happens we will tell the customer that we consider their language to be offensive, unnecessary, and unhelpful. They will be asked to stop using such language and told that we will not respond if they do not stop. We may require future contact to be through a third party.
- 4.2.5 Our 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.
- 4.2.6 When someone repeatedly telephones, visits the office without appointment, sends irrelevant or duplicate documents, or raises the same issues already considered, we may decide to:

- 
- Only take telephone calls from the customer at set times on set days, or put an arrangement in place for only one member of staff to deal with calls or correspondence from the customer in the future;
  - Require the person to make an appointment to see a named member of staff before visiting the office, or that the customer only contacts the office in writing;
  - Return the documents to the person or, in extreme cases, advise them that further irrelevant documents will be destroyed;
  - Take other action that we consider appropriate. We will, however, always say what action we are taking and why.

4.2.7 When a customer continues to correspond on a wide range of issues, and this action is considered excessive, then we will tell them that only a certain number of issues will be considered in a given period, and ask them to limit or focus their requests accordingly.

4.2.8 Customer action may be considered unreasonably persistent if all internal and external review mechanisms have been exhausted and the customer continues to dispute our or any Ombudsman's decision made in relation to a complaint. We will tell the customer that no future phone calls will be accepted or interviews granted concerning that complaint. If the customer insists in contacting us about the same issue, their communication will be read and filed, but only acknowledged or responded to if it provides significant new information relating to the complaint.

### **4.3 Deciding to restrict customer contact**

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

4.3.2 With the exception of such immediate decisions taken at the time of an incident, decisions to restrict contact with us are only taken after careful consideration of the situation by a Director. Wherever possible, we will give a customer 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.

4.3.3 A customer can appeal a decision to restrict contact. A Director 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.

4.3.4 We record all incidents of unacceptable actions by customers. Where it is decided to restrict customer contact, an entry noting this should be made in the complaint itself and on QL. The Senior Customer Service Officer should be notified to ensure all cases are logged and reviewed appropriately.

4.3.5 A decision to restrict customer contact may be reconsidered if the customer demonstrates a more acceptable behaviour. A Director (or their nominated deputy) will review the status of all customers with restricted contact arrangements at least every six months or on the prompt of the Senior Customer Service Officer.

## **5. Making sure we do what we say...**

5.1 We record all incidents of unacceptable actions by customers. Where it is decided to restrict customer contact, an entry noting this should be made in the complaint itself and on QL. The Senior Customer Service Officer should be notified to ensure all cases are logged and reviewed appropriately.

5.2 A decision to restrict customer contact may be reconsidered if the customer demonstrates a more acceptable behaviour. A Director (or their nominated deputy) will review the status of all customers with restricted contact arrangements at least every six months or on the prompt of the Senior Customer Service Officer.

## **6. Other things to bear in mind...**

6.1 Are our policies on complaints, anti-social behaviour and vulnerable persons.

## **7. We'll look at this again...**

7.1 In three years time or sooner if anything changes.