



# Unacceptable Behaviour Policy

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## 1. Purpose

This policy describes Highstone Housing Association's (HHA) approach to being responsive in dealing with customers behaviours that become unacceptable.

HHA believe that everyone has a right to be heard, understood and respected. Occasionally, the behaviour or actions of customers who receive a service from us impacts upon our ability to deliver services effectively and to a high standard and may therefore be deemed unacceptable. This could involve abuse of our staff, contractors, and specialist engineers working on behalf of the association.

Under this policy we will treat customers fairly, honestly, consistently and appropriately and have due regard for an individual's medical conditions and vulnerabilities such as mental health issues and learning disabilities recognising the impact that these can have on behaviours.

HHA appreciate that customers may act out of character in times of trouble or distress. There may have been upsetting or distressing circumstances that lead to a customer's behaviour becoming unacceptable. We will not deem behaviour to be unacceptable without seeking to understand any relevant circumstances involved.

HHA will not tolerate any form of violence or abuse towards our staff or unacceptable behaviour or actions that result in unreasonable or excessive demands on our service that may prevent our staff and representatives from carrying out their duties effectively.

This policy applies to all areas of our work and to all methods of contact including telephone, face-to-face, letters, e-mails and website communications.

## 2. Definition of Customers

In respect of this policy a customer refers to:

- Current or former HHA tenants
- Applicants for HHA properties
- Visitors to HHA properties
- Friends, relatives, carers, and advocates acting on behalf of current or former tenants
- Members of the general public enquiring about HHA services

## 3. Behaviour HHA consider as unacceptable.

### **Aggressive or abusive behaviour**

Any violence or abuse towards staff will not be tolerated. We consider anger that escalates into aggression towards staff, and any instances where staff suffer harm unacceptable.

Violence is not restricted to acts of aggression that may result in physical harm, it includes behaviour or language (written or verbal) that may cause staff to feel offended, afraid, intimidated, threatened or abused.

HHA will judge each situation individually and appreciate the circumstances surrounding individuals who we come into contact with who may be upset. While we accept our customers may at times feel angry, it is not acceptable to shout or swear at HHA staff and their representatives.

Examples of unacceptable behaviour include:

- Offensive, derogatory or patronising remarks
- Physical violence against a person
- Physical violence against objects, such as kicking, defacing or destroying property
- Persistent shouting
- Persistent swearing
- Offensive or rude gestures
- Threats made to a person
- Discriminatory remarks or actions, including racist, sexist, homophobic, or transphobic comments
- Allegations that individuals have committed criminal, corrupt or perverse conduct without any evidence

We may decide that comments aimed at third parties are unacceptable because of the effect that listening or reading them may have on our staff. Examples include rudeness, offensive comments, derogatory remarks, making inflammatory statements, or raising unsubstantiated allegations made towards these 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.

### **Unreasonable Demands**

HHA consider demands to be unreasonable when they impact substantially on the work of staff, for example by taking up an excessive amount of time which is disproportionate to the issue. This is likely to disadvantage other customers as it can impact on the service that can be provided to them.

Examples of this behaviour include:

- Repeatedly demanding responses within an unreasonable timescale
- Insisting on seeing or speaking to a particular member of staff, when that is not possible
- Repeatedly changing the substance of a complaint or raising unrelated concerns

## **Unreasonable levels of contact**

Sometimes the volume and duration of contact made to our services by a customer can be problematic. This can occur over a short period of time, for example, a number of calls in any one day or hour.

This may also occur over the lifespan of a complaint 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.

We consider that the level of contact has become unacceptable when the amount of time spent engaging with a customer on the telephone, or responding to, reviewing and filing emails or written correspondence, impacts on our ability to deal with their or another customer's concerns or requests

## **Harassment**

HHA staff and their representatives have the right to carry out their duties free from harassment or threats of harassment. We expect all customers to respect staff that are delivering our services and who communicate information on behalf of HHA.

Examples of behaviours we consider to be harassment include:

- Recording telephone discussions and publishing the information online such as through YouTube, Vimeo or Twitter
- Contacting staff or HHA representatives using their personal details or social media presence such as Facebook, Twitter or LinkedIn
- Publishing personal, sensitive or private information about staff or HHA representatives online or other public domains such as noticeboards or newsletters
- Using intimidating behaviour against staff or HHA representatives

## **Unacceptable or excessive demands**

A demand becomes unacceptable to HHA when it starts to (or when complying with the demand would) impact substantially on the work of HHA. 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 complaint from being dealt with quickly.

Examples of this behaviour include:

- Repeatedly demanding a response within a timescale outside of service level agreements
- Insisting on, or refusing to, speak to a particular member of staff, when that is not possible
- Repeatedly changing the substance of a complaint or raising unrelated concerns
- Making repeated and unnecessary contact during the course of us dealing with a complaint or carrying out an investigation

- Refusing to accept a decision where an explanation for the decision has been provided and HHA have explained further escalation routes which may be available

### **Unacceptable and persistence levels of contact**

Sometimes the volume and duration of contact made to our service by an individual can be problematic. This can occur over a short period or over the lifespan of a complaint.

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 that complaint, or with other customers' complaints.

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 excessive copying us into emails to other parties

### **Refusal to co-operate**

When we are looking at a complaint or service issue, we will need to ask the customer who has raised their concerns to work with us in order for us to investigate their concerns fully. This can include:

- Agreeing the specific nature of the complaint we will look at
- Providing us with further information, evidence or comments
- Summarising their concerns

Occasionally, customers can repeatedly refuse to co-operate, and this makes it difficult for us to investigate their complaints or issue effectively. We will always seek to assist a customer if they have a specific, genuine difficulty in complying with a request. However, we consider it as unacceptable to bring a complaint to us and then not respond to clear and appropriate requests by staff in order for us to investigate the complaint.

### **Reasonable adjustments**

We understand that some of our customers may find it difficult to express themselves or communicate clearly, especially when they are anxious or upset. HHA will seek to understand any reasonable adjustments that would make it easier to access HHA services. In order to do this, we may ask individuals explain what adjustments they are looking for and how this will ensure they can access HHA services.

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

- Using different methods of communication
- Communicating in different languages using the support of a translator
- Providing written communication in large print, easy read, coloured text, or in translated text
- Giving clear warnings if conversations become unproductive and allowing customers the opportunity to modify their behaviour before ending a call
- Identifying alternate representation for a customer such as a family member, carer, advocate, support worker or other professional that can communicate in the best interest of the customer

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

We may still use this policy even where a reasonable adjustment has been made if the actions or behaviours of an individual have a negative effect on our staff, our representatives or our work.

#### **4. How will we deal with unacceptable behaviour?**

When we experience behaviour or demands which are unacceptable, we may consider taking more formal action. However, prior to any formal action being taken, HHA will endeavour to take steps to allow a customer the opportunity to correct their behaviour. This could include HHA taking a multi-agency approach, liaising with appropriate professionals e.g., support staff, social workers etc. who could mediate between HHA and the customer and work towards producing an acceptable behaviour agreement. In cases where informal agreements cannot be reached, HHA will escalate to formal actions such as:

- Warning the customer about their behaviour and requesting that the customer modifies their behaviour in future contact with us
- Appointing a specific HHA employee as a point of contact for the customer
- Communicating only in writing or via a representative
- Limiting customer contact with HHA to certain times of the day
- Limiting the number of times per week or month the customer can contact HHA
- Deciding not to investigate a complaint on the basis that it has been pursued in a way that is unacceptable
- Stop all direct communication with a customer

In extreme cases such as physical violence or harassment towards our staff and representatives, HHA may involve the police and take legal action that could result in HHA ending contact with the customer.

Where it is decided that formal action must be taken to manage a customer's behaviour, we will inform them of the decision in writing. Notes will also be placed on our housing management system along with any relevant warning markers to safeguard our employees.

## **5. Review of unacceptable behaviour**

HHA will not set restrictions to service indefinitely, a reasonable review period will be set based on the individual customers circumstances and levels of unacceptable behaviour. Review periods will be discussed with the Managing Director to ensure the review period is balanced, appropriate and without bias.

## **6. Equality and Diversity**

Actions under this policy will ensure that all customers will be treated fairly, with dignity and respect regardless of their age, disability, gender re assignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race (include colour, nationality and ethnic origins, religion and or belief, sex, sexual orientation, social or economic background, or any other inappropriate distinction.

## **7. Confidentiality**

All personal data customers or their representatives provide to HHA will be processed in accordance with our data privacy notice that can be found [on our website](#) and in accordance with data protection laws (including the UK version of the General Data Protection Regulation and the Data Protection Act 2018).

## **8. Right to Appeal**

Customers have the right to appeal the decision of any formal action taken in relation to this policy. HHA will confirm how an appeal can be made once a decision is reached and this is communicated to the customer.