

# Delivering Safe Customer Service

A procedure for managing  
unacceptable customer  
behaviour

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WE LISTEN | WE CARE | WE ARE AMBITIOUS | WE ARE GOOD VALUE FOR MONEY



## Contents

<b>1. Purpose.....</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>2. Introduction .....</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>3. Equality, Diversity and Inclusion .....</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>4. What is unacceptable behaviour?.....</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>5. Managing unacceptable behaviour .....</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>6. Employee training, support and wellbeing.....</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>7. Monitoring and Reporting.....</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>8. Customer Record Management.....</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>Annex A.....</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>Annex B.....</b>	<b>12</b>
<b>Annex C.....</b>	<b>13</b>
<b>Annex D.....</b>	<b>14</b>

## 1. Purpose

North Tyneside Council (the Authority) deals with hundreds of thousands of customer contacts every year quickly, effectively and without incident. Our Customer Promise – we listen and we care, sets out a clear commitment to all customers and lets them know the standards they can expect from the Authority.

The Authority understands that some customers require help and support at very challenging times in their lives. We take care and invest time to ensure our teams are skilled and equipped to provide the very best support, whilst maintaining their own wellbeing.

Restricting or limiting the contact our customers have with us, is rare, however, threatening, bullying, discriminatory or abusive behaviour towards our employees, will not be accepted. Similarly, we may take action when contacts or behaviour which, because of their frequency, repetition, duration or content, unreasonably hinder our ability to deliver our work safely and effectively.

This document has been written to:

- help all employees understand what unacceptable customer behaviour is, to take steps to manage or resolve it and, if necessary, to understand the processes and policies the Authority has to manage or restrict contact with a customer, and
- explain to all customers, including those who are previous occupiers of council homes, what the Authority views as unacceptable behaviour and what actions will be taken, depending on the type and extent of the behaviour.

The Authority will always make every effort to ensure that our services are accessible to all of our customers. Any restrictions on a customer's contact with us, described in this guide, will only be made in exceptional circumstances and where all reasonable efforts have been made to find an alternative solution.

(\* Please note, where this guidance uses the term employees, this also applies to others carrying out work on behalf of the Authority. This includes agency workers, contractors, volunteers and Elected Members etc. except in cases where this is superseded by their own organisation's policies or procedures.)

## 2. Introduction

The Customer Promise, 'we listen, we care', is the articulation of the Authority's commitment to all of its customers and sets out what they can expect from North Tyneside Council.

[Annex A](#) shows our Customer Promise and also asks our customers to support the Authority to keep our promise to them.

The Authority's People plans set out the enabling framework to support, plan and prepare the Authority's workforce to deliver its overall ambition and provide great

customer service. These plans also set out the Authority's commitment to its greatest asset – our people , and how we will ensure they are supported in their roles..

The Authority has a clear legal and moral responsibility to provide a safe and secure environment for everyone who delivers and uses its services. We ask customers to help us do that, by treating employees, buildings and other customers politely and with kindness and respect.

Where customers interact with us in a way that does not show that kindness and respect, and / or their behaviour puts the wellbeing of our employees at risk, this will be challenged and where necessary action taken. When considering the appropriate actions to take we will, as ever, reach a balanced view which takes into account the circumstances of the individuals involved, including that this may be at a particularly hard time in our customer's life or be happening during a period when they are dealing with difficult and complex issues.

### **3. Equality, diversity and inclusion**

The Authority works hard to ensure all services are accessible and that our employees are able to deliver great customer service to all of our customers.

All customers will be dealt with fairly, honestly, consistently and appropriately, including those whose actions are considered unacceptable.

If a customer's behaviour is unacceptable, we will consider whether this may be caused by any personal difficulties or characteristics they have, which may be making our services more difficult to access or use. It is understood, however, that a customer who has rights under the Equality Act 2010 may still be considered to be acting in an unacceptable manner. (See section 4 for a list of the characteristics protected under the Act)

Where unacceptable behaviour arises in these circumstances, we will take the time to fully understand the individual needs and circumstances of the customer when determining the best course of action. We also ask customers to let us know if they have any specific needs and how we may better support them.

In cases where unacceptable behaviour from customers is directed towards an employee or another customer as a result of, or in connection with, that person's protected characteristic this will be taken seriously, and appropriate action taken. (See sections 4 and 5).

### **4. What is unacceptable behaviour?**

Unacceptable behaviour will differ depending on the individuals involved and the particular circumstances of the interaction. We categorise unacceptable behaviour into two general areas:

- threatening, bullying, discriminatory or abusive behaviour or
- contact that, because of its frequency, repetition, duration or content, unreasonably hinders our ability to deliver our work effectively.

[Annex C](#) provides more detail as to the definitions for each of these.

There are no circumstances where aggressive, abusive, or offensive behaviour will be tolerated by the Authority. Violence is not restricted to acts of aggression resulting in physical harm. Behaviour or language (written or spoken) that may cause employees to feel distressed, threatened or abused are also included.

Unacceptable behaviour also includes discrimination based on any of the 9 protected characteristics covered in the Equality Act 2010.

- Disability
- Sexual Orientation
- Gender Reassignment (Transgender individuals)
- Race
- Religion/Belief
- Sex
- Age
- Marriage/Civil Partnership
- Pregnancy/Maternity

It also includes Hate Crimes or Hate Incidents based upon the first 5 protected characteristics listed above.

Persistent behaviour can manifest itself in different ways. Customers can become preoccupied with one department, with the council as a whole or with a specific person. They can also raise the same issues repeatedly under different guises.

We care about our customers, and as part of our customer promise we keep them informed with up-to-date information, we put them in contact with the right person and tell them how long it will take to solve their query. On occasion, customers may make unreasonable demands through the amount of information they seek, the nature and/or scale of service they expect or the number and frequency of approaches they make.

We are committed to giving straightforward and clear advice about the services we provide. Some customers may not or cannot accept that we are unable to assist beyond the level of service that has already been provided. This includes scenarios such as continued, repeated contact about the same issue, or persistent disagreement with the action or decision taken. The method or tone of the communication may not in itself be unreasonable; however, it is the persistent behaviour in continuing to contact us contrary to the advice that has been given, that is unacceptable under this policy.

## 5. Managing unacceptable behaviour

Our Customer Promise sets out the practical steps we take to ensure that we demonstrate and meet that commitment in our interactions with customers.

1. We display information across all our Customer First Centres and Libraries asking customers to work with us and to show respect and kindness to our employees, our buildings and our other customers and visitors. These posters explain how our employees will support customers who visit us and how we will manage unacceptable behaviour. Managers can display these posters in public access areas of their buildings where necessary. [Annex B](#) provides examples of these posters.
2. Our teams receive training and support to help them manage behaviour that is unacceptable, as well as a range of other skills to help them support customers. E-learning courses are available on Learning Pool and tailored courses can be delivered by the Health and Safety Team. The type and depth of training should be determined by the risk profile of the public interface and the outcomes of risk assessment.
3. We have a series of policies and procedures which support employees to manage unacceptable behaviour and risks. [See Annex D](#)
4. Our buildings are risk assessed and these risk assessments are updated on a regular basis to keep our employees and customers safe.
5. If a customer displays unacceptable behaviour, our employees will talk to them and ask them to moderate their behaviour (if they feel safe to do so). If the customer's behaviour is related to something we haven't done (or haven't done as they expected) our employees will work to find a resolution, whilst being clear that the unacceptable behaviour cannot continue.
6. Incidents involving threats or physical violence against an individual employee or Elected Member should be reported to a line manager and the individual employee will consider informing the Police. In some circumstances the service team manager may decide to inform the Police without the individual employees' agreement. All physical violence can be reported to the Police, but it will be discussed with the employee (if they are well enough) first, and the relevant service team manager, where there is time given the severity of the incident (i.e., in cases of serious assault the matter should be reported to the Police immediately). Any kind of threat, physical or verbal, should also be reported on the NTC online Incident Reporting System.
7. The council, as an employer, has legal responsibilities to have effective arrangements in place to manage health and safety including the reporting of accidents and incidents which also include incidents of physical and non-physical violence experienced by employees in connection with their work

whether they are based at one of our sites or working away from our premises on council business. Employees and managers should record incidents of physical and non-physical violence (see section 4 for details) including Hate Crimes or Hate Incidents using the council's online Incident Reporting System. Information recorded by employees will be escalated to management and to the Health & Safety Team who will support managers with investigations and the implementation of necessary measures, including liaison with the link HR Business Partner.

Hate Crimes should also be reported to the Police in line with the considerations above <https://beta.northumbria.police.uk/advice-and-info/personal-safety/hate-crime/>

In addition to the above, the council has a duty under the Reporting of Injuries, Diseases and Dangerous Occurrences Regulations (RIDDOR) to report certain types of accidents and incidents to the enforcing authorities, i.e. the Health and Safety Executive.

Advice and guidance on incident reporting and the use of the online incident reporting system is available here:

<http://intra.northtyneside.gov.uk/category/382/accident-incident-reporting>

Recording the number and type of accidents/incidents is one way of monitoring the success of our health and safety management systems. They are also an indicator of areas where more work may be required to reduce the number or severity of incidents.

8. If a customer displays unacceptable behaviour our employees will consider relevant action based on the individuals, the situation and the behaviour in each case. [Annex D](#) lists the policies and procedures which may be relevant.

Actions include:

- carrying out a dynamic on-the-day risk assessment to establish if there is immediate danger or threat and taking action to protect employees and others.
- contacting a line manager and asking for support and advice
- line managers should speak to the employee(s) about their support needs in relation to their health and wellbeing and put in place support measures where this has been affected - see section 6
- recording the behaviour / incident on relevant systems - see point 7 above and section 7
- liaising with colleagues and services across the Authority to better understand the customer's needs; this helps with fact finding and understanding more about the customer and their circumstances, but

also provides intelligence for other services that may be working with them

- carrying out further relevant risk assessments e.g. lone working
- making physical adjustments, if necessary, to the workplace or workspace that protect employees and customers; and
- looking at the building risk assessments which should advise of safe practice and procedures.

9. If a customer carries out a single act of serious unacceptable behaviour or consistently displays unacceptable behaviour over a period of time or across a range of services (and where efforts to encourage the customer to change their behaviour have failed), there are further actions that should be considered by team or service managers:

- discuss the situation with the Health and Safety Team and refer to policies/procedures and guidance for possible actions that can be taken
- contact the customer to:
  - discuss their behaviour and explain why it is unacceptable
  - explain what we will do if they don't moderate it, and
  - understand if they need referral/ support from another agency.
- restrict customer access to services in line with the [Unacceptable Behaviour - Restricting Access](#) document available on the intranet. The procedure for restricting access must be followed, this may involve restricting how they contact individuals, services or the council as a whole. It may also restrict their access to council buildings. In such instances we will restrict contact with the individual on the particular issue(s) but not necessarily from contact with other parties in their business or at their address unless there is a clear need to do so.
- The council will ensure that action is reasonable and in accordance with relevant legislation, including but not limited to:
  - Health and Safety at Work Act 1974
  - Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999
  - Human Rights Act 1998
  - Crime and Disorder Act 1998
  - The Equality Act 2010
  - General Data Protection Regulations 2018 and



- Data Protection Act 2018, and
- Crime and Disorder Act 1998 and section 66 of the Sentencing Act 2020.

## 6. Employee training, support and wellbeing

We care about our employees. As an organisation, we are committed to working together as a team, providing mutual support and respect for each other. We recognise that employees may be adversely affected by the behaviour of a customer which they feel is unacceptable. Whilst a wide range of services within the council can result in employees dealing with challenging customer behaviour, as an employer we have a desire and responsibility to ensure the correct support is in place for employees to deal with these incidents.

Customer service training is available to all employees to equip them with the skills and tools to support customers across a range of circumstances and with a range of issues. Additional training is also available for employees to support them to manage difficult situations and in particular challenging or unacceptable behaviour. This training helps our employees to develop their skills around de-escalating situations that may be challenging and how they can diffuse confrontation. It will give them skills in negotiation as well as coping mechanisms when faced with unacceptable behaviour. Training needs for employees should be identified through within their regular supervision with their line manager or through their IPR.

Where an employee has been involved in or affected by an incident, the employee and line manager should meet (in a private 121 meeting held in an appropriate venue) to discuss the incident and to agree the support they need both in relation to managing the situation and in terms of any support they need for their health and wellbeing. Notes should be kept of the meeting and actions required as a result.

There are a range of measures that managers can put in place ranging from informal additional support from them or colleagues (if the employee prefers) through to further measures such as:

- signposting to Mental Health First Aiders
- signposting to the Employee Assistance Programme (EAP) website <https://spectrumhealth.wistia.com/medias/5lzji5lhoc> for confidential advice/support and, if appropriate, counselling.
- **Telephone number:** 0808 196 2016
- **WhatsApp:** Text 'Hi' to 07418 360 780
- **Organisation Code to register** is NTCCCL
- referral to Occupational Health for further advice for the employee and line manager, and

- stress Risk Assessments and In-work Wellness Action Plans which can include reasonable adjustments to support the employee which employees can also record in a Workplace Support Profile if they wish (All guidance and documents available on the Intranet and Learning Pool.

Managers can contact the Health & Safety Team ([HealthandSafetyTeam@northtyneside.gov.uk](mailto:HealthandSafetyTeam@northtyneside.gov.uk)) to discuss appropriate support measures.

We have a series of policies/procedures and guidance which support employees to manage unacceptable behaviour and risks. These can be found in [Annex D](#)

## **7. Monitoring and reporting**

Incidents of unacceptable behaviour should be reported to line management and recorded within services for reference. A record of the incident should also be made on the online incident reporting system as set out in section 5 above.

In some cases, incidents should also be reported to the Police – see Section 5 points 6 and 7.

## **8. Customer record management**

The Authority keeps customers' personal data secure and respects their privacy.

Managers must record, use and retain information in line with Data Protection and the Authority's Information Governance Policies including the service's retention schedule.

## **9. Representation and multi-agency approach**

In managing unacceptable customer behaviour, teams and managers will consider if there are other individuals that may be able to represent the customers at any stage, for example a family member, friend or support worker. They will also consider if a multi-agency approach is necessary when the individual is receiving support from other bodies such as social services.

# We listen, we care: our customer promise to you

We are here to serve you, our residents, businesses and visitors. From bin collections to social care, we strive to deliver excellent customer service to keep North Tyneside a great place to live, work and visit. You have told us what matters to you, and we have developed this customer promise, so you know what you can expect from us, and what to do if things don't go well.

## We listen

- We take time to fully understand and meet your individual needs
- We are open, honest and use clear language in all our communication
- Where appropriate, we prefer to serve you via our website, but if this is not right for you, there are different ways to contact us and use our services
- We use your experiences to design our services and help communities to get involved

## We care

- We put you in contact with the right person and, when possible, tell you how long it will take to solve your query
- We keep you informed with up to date information and explain what we have done
- We treat you with courtesy, politeness and understanding
- We keep your personal data secure and respect your privacy
- We admit when we are wrong, we say sorry, and make every effort to put it right
- We give you straightforward and clear advice about the services that are available to you
- We work together as a team who support and respect each other

## You can help us to keep our promise by:

- Letting us know if you have any specific needs
- Giving us the information we need to deal with your enquiry
- Telling us when we have done a good job
- Treating us politely and with respect
- Telling us how you feel about our service by giving us feedback so we can learn and improve

## Tell us about your experiences

We would love to hear from you. Letting us know when we have got things right or not, can help you and help us improve.

- Email your comments to [CorrespondenceUnit@northtyneside.gov.uk](mailto:CorrespondenceUnit@northtyneside.gov.uk)
- Leaving comments at one of the Community Conversation Corners in our Customer First Centres in Wallsend, North Shields, Whitley Bay and Killingworth

North Tyneside Council

## Annex B

The following example poster will be displayed across our Customer First Centres and branch library sites:



# Kindness and Respect at Wallsend Customer First Centre

The centre is a welcoming and safe place for anyone to share and enjoy. We are here to serve you, our residents, businesses and visitors and we strive to deliver excellent customer service to you every day.

## While you're here

We are here to help and support you to make the most out of your time with us. You can help us to do that by:

- treating our teams, the centre and other visitors with kindness and respect, and
- letting us know if you have any specific needs, particularly if you're feeling frustrated or upset, or would welcome some quiet space or more time to talk.

If the way you are behaving or the things you are doing do not show that kindness and respect, we will ask you to stop. If you continue, we will ask you to leave and may restrict your access to your Customer First Centre and the services it provides or take legal action.

We take the safety and wellbeing of everyone in this centre seriously.

## We listen and care

We would love to hear from you. Letting us know when we have got things right or not, can help you and help us improve.

- Email your comments to: [CorrespondenceUnit@northtyneside.gov.uk](mailto:CorrespondenceUnit@northtyneside.gov.uk)
- Leaving comments at one of the Community Conversation Corners in our Customer First Centres in Killingworth, North Shields, Wallsend and Whitley Bay.

North Tyneside Council

## Annex C

Behaviour whether intentional or not	Definition
Threatening	Intimidation or behaviour that causes the individual or group fear of harm or injury
Bullying	Persistent actions, criticism or personal abuse in public or private which humiliate, intimidate, frighten or demean the individual or group or is trying to have that effect
Discriminatory	Failure to afford equal respect to an individual or group on the basis of age, disability, gender, gender reassignment, race, religion or belief, sexual orientation, marriage or civil partnership, and pregnancy and maternity
Abusive	Unwanted and offensive behaviour or language which affects the dignity of the individual or group it is aimed at
Frequency	Extremely regular, persistent contact which interferes without ability to complete tasks and deliver services, particularly when an answer has been given or a timeframe for response made clear.
Repetition	Repeated contacts on the same issue, possibly to different employees or teams, where we have already addressed the issue as far as we are able, have given a date by which we will do so or have exhausted our complaints process.
Duration	Contact on the same issue, or variants of the same issue, over a prolonged period of time where the contact is unnecessarily complex and time consuming, draining resources. This could be with a number of different employees or all to one employee.
Nature	Where the contact is any of the above

## **Annex D**

These links will take Authority colleagues to relevant policies and may not be available to those who do not work for the Authority. If relevant and can be shared, they will be made available upon request to any persons requesting them.:

### **Mental Health and Wellbeing Guidance for Managers and Employees**

<http://intra.northtyneside.gov.uk/category/580/mental-health-and-wellbeing>

### **Health and Wellbeing Workplace Support Tools and Guidance -**

<http://intra.northtyneside.gov.uk/category/765/health-and-wellbeing-workplace-support>

### **Grievance Procedure**

<http://intra.northtyneside.gov.uk/page/3679/grievance>

### **Whistleblowing Procedure**

<http://intra.northtyneside.gov.uk/page/3021/whistleblowing>

### **Health and Safety Policy**

<http://intra.northtyneside.gov.uk/category/381/policy>

### **Accident and Incident Reporting via NTC online Incident Reporting System**

<https://hs.northtyneside.gov.uk/>

<http://intra.northtyneside.gov.uk/category/382/accident-incident-reporting>

### **Risk Assessments**

<http://intra.northtyneside.gov.uk/category/517/risk-assessment>

### **Lone Working**

<http://intra.northtyneside.gov.uk/category/512/lone-working>

### **Unacceptable Behaviour – Restricting Access – Procedure and Guidance**

<https://intra.northtyneside.gov.uk/sites/default/files/web-page-related-files/2023%20Unacceptable%20Behaviour%20Restricting%20Access.docx>