

Vexatious Complaints Policy

Introduction

This policy sets out how we will deal with vexatious complaints on the part of complainants.

We are committed to excellent customer care and meeting expectations by dealing effectively with complaints and concerns. Most of the contact we have with those looking to complain, either about us, or to us, is constructive. However, in a minority of cases this is not so, and people pursue their requests or complain about us in away that is unreasonable.

Purpose

This document explains:

- How we define unreasonable behaviour;
- How we define a vexatious request;
- Our process for dealing with offensive or abusive comments made on social media;
- Our process for dealing with people who behave unreasonably; and
- Our process for dealing with vexatious requests.

What is unreasonable behaviour?

We define this as behaviour that, because of the nature or frequency of contacts with us, negatively impacts our ability to deal effectively with the matter or with other users' issues or complaints.

Some examples of unreasonable behaviour:

- Causing distress to members of staff, which may include the use of hostile, abusive or offensive language, making threats or unjustified complaints about staff who are trying to deal with issues. This includes racist comments, harassment, personal insults or threat of physical harm;
- Excessive demands on the time and resources of staff with the expectation of an immediate response. Examples of this would be frequent and lengthy telephone calls, emails/correspondence to numerous members of staff every few days;
- Making personal derogatory comments via social media about members of staff;
- Refusing to accept a decision;
- Repeatedly arguing points with no new evidence and not following agreed complaint procedures; or
- Changing the basis of the complaint or request as the matter proceeds.

What is a vexatious request?

We define this as any request likely to cause distress or disruption, without proper or justified cause.

Some examples of vexatious requests:

- Requests for information that has already been provided, or to reconsider issues that have already been dealt with;

- Where complying with the request would impose a disproportionate or significant burden on us in terms of expense and negatively affect our ability to provide services to others; and
- High volume of correspondence or combining requests with accusations and complaints.

What we will consider before taking action

Deciding that someone's behaviour is unreasonable, or to classify a request as vexatious, can result in us limiting the amount and type of contact that they have with us. Before a decision on limiting contact is made, we will make sure that:

- The request or complaint has been dealt with properly in line with our two-stage complaints procedure; and
- Every reasonable effort to satisfy the request or resolve the issue has been made.

A decision to classify a person's behaviour as unreasonable or a request as vexatious will be considered by a senior manager on an individual basis. Options we will consider include:

- Limits on the number and duration of contacts with staff per week or month;
- Offering a restricted time slot for necessary phone calls;
- Limiting the type of contact to one method only, for example telephone or email;
- Restricting contact to one named member of staff;
- Refusal of requests to deal with further complaints/requests about the same matter;
- Contact with staff to be made via a third party such as a lawyer, relative or friend; and
- Barring access to our premises.

Where a decision is taken to treat a person's behaviour as unreasonable or a request as vexatious, a senior manager will write to the person to:

- Explain what action will be taken and why;
- Explain what this means in terms of contact with us;
- Advise how long any restrictions will be in place and when they will be reviewed;
- Enclose a copy of this policy and any relevant procedures; and
- Explain the consequences of not complying with our instructions.

Social Media

We will remove, without notice, offensive or abusive posts from our social media channels. This includes posts that contain swearing or libellous statements. We reserve the right to:

- Take any action we consider necessary where derogatory comments are made about our staff; and
- Remove any personal information for privacy-law purposes.

People who do not comply with acceptable standards of conduct may be blocked from our social media accounts.

New complaints/requests for information

We will not ignore new complaints from people previously classified as unreasonable or vexatious. New complaints or requests will be treated on their merits. A senior manager from the relevant service area will decide if any restrictions which have been applied before are still appropriate or necessary in relation to the new complaint or request.