

My casework service is supported by two members of staff. We're a small team of dedicated staff who work hard to support as many people as possible, as quickly as possible.

I recognise that there may have been upsetting or distressing circumstances leading up to a constituent approaching my office.

However, behaviours and actions which threaten or intimidate me or my staff are unacceptable, as are excessive demands that prevent them or me from carrying out our duties effectively.

It is these behaviours and actions that I aim to manage under this Policy.

Aggressive or abusive behaviour

Any violence or abuse towards my team will not be tolerated.

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

Unacceptable language is that which:

- is offensive, derogatory or threatening,
- 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.

I may decide that comments aimed not at my team but at third parties are unacceptable because of the effect that listening or reading them may have on my team.

Examples include rudeness, offensive comments, derogatory or disrespectful remarks, making inflammatory statements, or raising unsubstantiated allegations made towards these third parties.

All threats against either myself or my team will be taken extremely seriously and if my team feel scared or threatened at any point during a conversation with a constituent, the interaction may be ended at any time and the Police may be contacted.

Unreasonable demands

A demand becomes unacceptable when it impacts substantially on the work my staff carry out on my behalf.

Examples of this behaviour include:

- repeatedly demanding a response 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.

An example of such impact would be that the demand takes up an excessive amount of time and in doing so disadvantages other constituents and prevents their own case from being dealt with quickly.

Unreasonable levels of contact

Sometimes the volume, frequency and duration of contact made to my office by an individual causes problems. This can occur over a short period, for example, a number of calls in one day or hour, or frequent and persistent emails on a vast range of issues which take up a disproportionate amount of staff time.

It may occur over the life-span of a complaint when a constituent 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 complaint.

I consider that the level of contact has become unacceptable when the amount of time spent talking to a constituent on the telephone, or responding to, reviewing and filing emails or written correspondence impacts on my office's ability to deal with that complaint, or has a detrimental impact on our ability to deal with other constituents' cases.

Harassment

My team has the right to carry out their duties free from harassment or threats of harassment. I ask everyone to respect that my team are delivering a service on my behalf and therefore this may not reflect their own views or preferences.

Examples of behaviours I consider to be harassment against my office include:

- recording telephone discussions and publishing the information online such as through YouTube, Vimeo or Twitter;
- contacting staff using their personal details or social media presence such as Facebook, Twitter or LinkedIn;
- publishing personal, sensitive or private information about staff online or other public domains such as noticeboards or newsletters.

Refusal to co-operate.

When looking at a complaint, my office will need to ask the individual who has contacted us to work with us. This can include agreeing with us:

- the complaint we will look at,
- to provide us with further information, evidence or comments on request, or
- help us by summarising their concerns.

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

However, it is unacceptable to bring a complaint to my office and then not respond to clear and appropriate requests by my team.

I may not be able to assist further where, after obtaining a final response to representations made on a constituent's behalf, the constituent does not follow the instructions or advice provided in that response, or the additional guidance I offer when sharing it. I also may be unable to continue supporting a case where the constituent's behaviour towards the organisation involved - such as the local council, a housing association, or their representatives - prevents the agreed solution from being put in place. This can include situations where aggressive or abusive behaviour leads the organisation or its agents to stop engaging with the constituent for their own safety or wellbeing.

Reasonable adjustments

I understand that some constituents may find it difficult to express themselves or communicate clearly, especially when they are anxious or upset. In order to do this, we ask that they explain what adjustments they're looking for and how this will ensure they can access the service my office offers.

My office will always consider making reasonable adjustments for a constituent when 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 constituents to opportunity to modify their behaviour before ending a call.

I 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.

Actions I may take:

When my office experiences behaviour or demands which are unacceptable, I may consider taking more formal action. The actions I will consider may include the following:

- Warning the constituent about their behaviour and requesting that the constituent modifies their behaviour in future contact with us.
- Appointing a specific point of contact for the constituent
- Communicating only in writing or via a representative
- Deciding not to investigate a complaint on the basis that it has been pursued in a way that is unacceptable.
- Restricting or limiting contact
- Stop all communication with a constituent
- Your telephone number and email may be automatically blocked from our systems.
- Reporting an individual to the Police.

Where it is decided that formal action must be taken a note may be placed on our records to this effect.