

Unacceptable Behaviour Policy

1. Introduction

- 1.1 Onward recognises that most customer interactions are conducted in a positive and respectful manner. However, there are occasions when behaviour can become unacceptable, and this policy outlines the procedures we will follow in such circumstances. Our priority is to ensure that communication between customers and colleagues takes place within a safe and respectful environment.
- 1.2 This policy details the behaviours deemed unacceptable, the potential actions Onward may take in response, and our ongoing commitment to fairness and legal compliance, in line with our organisational values and relevant legislation.

2. Policy Aim

- 2.1 Onward is committed to treating all customers and suppliers with fairness, honesty, and consistency. Every customer deserves to be heard, understood, and respected, and our approach is guided by our corporate values.
- 2.2 We have a duty to protect our colleagues, and we do not expect them to tolerate any unacceptable behaviour. This policy sets out our approach if such circumstances emerge.
- 2.3 Onward considers behaviour that may be perceived as abusive, offensive, or threatening to be unacceptable. Additionally, customers whose persistence, conduct, or actions consume disproportionate amounts of time may also be regarded as engaging in unacceptable behaviour.
- 2.4 It is important to distinguish between customers who make multiple complaints because they remain dissatisfied with the service they have received, or because they encounter multiple longstanding issues, and customers whose behaviour or conduct is intentionally unreasonable or disruptive.
- 2.5 We understand that customers may occasionally exhibit behaviour that is inconsistent with their usual demeanour due to anxiety, frustration, or distress. Each instance of unacceptable behaviour is evaluated on its own individual merits.
- 2.6 Onward recognises that unacceptable behaviour may sometimes be linked to underlying factors such as stress, anxiety, mental health conditions, communication difficulties, or other personal circumstances. Before determining whether behaviour is intentionally unreasonable, colleagues will consider any relevant context and explore whether the customer requires additional support. Where appropriate, colleagues may:
 - 2.6.1 Identify underlying causes by sensitively exploring whether the customer is experiencing challenges such as health issues, bereavement, financial hardship, disability, or other vulnerabilities that may be impacting their communication style.
 - 2.6.2 Offer support pathways, including signposting to advocacy services, referral to third-party support organisations (with consent), or access to Onward's own specialist teams.
 - 2.6.3 Apply reasonable adjustments in line with the Equality Act 2010, ensuring customers with disabilities or vulnerabilities are supported to communicate effectively.

- 2.6.4 Utilise enhanced empathy skills, ensuring they demonstrate patience, active listening, emotional awareness, and trauma-informed approaches when engaging with customers who may be in distress.
- 2.7 These considerations help ensure that the behaviour is managed fairly, proportionately, and with an appreciation of the customer's circumstances. They also reinforce Onward's commitment to compassionate and respectful communication while maintaining a safe working environment for all colleagues.
- 2.8 This policy reflects the requirements of the Equality Act 2010 regarding the medical conditions, disabilities and/or vulnerabilities of customers.

3. Definition

- 3.1 The Housing Ombudsman encourages landlords to have a policy in place to help manage customers who present unacceptable behaviours.
- 3.2 Onward has adopted the definitions provided by the Housing Ombudsman. These are:
 - 3.2.1 unreasonable demands (e.g. requesting large volumes of information, asking for responses within a short space of time, refusing to speak to an individual or insisting on speaking with another)
 - 3.2.2 unreasonable persistence (refusing to accept the answer that has been provided, continuing to raise the same subject matter without providing any new evidence, continuously adding to or changing the subject matter of the complaint)
 - 3.2.3 verbal abuse, aggression, violence (this is not just limited to actual physical or verbal abuse but can include derogatory remarks, rudeness, inflammatory allegations and threats of violence)
 - 3.2.4 overload of letters, calls, emails or contact via social media (this could include the frequency of contact as well as the volume of correspondence received as well as the frequency and length of telephone calls)
- 3.3 Unreasonable and unreasonably persistent complainants are those complainants who, because of the nature or frequency of their contacts with an organisation, hinder the consideration of their, or other people's, complaints.
- 3.4 Unreasonable customer behaviour and unreasonably persistent customers are those customers who, because of the frequency or nature of their contact, hinder Onwards ability to maintain normal service.
- 3.5 Unreasonable complaints are those complaints made without sufficient grounds but made specifically to cause annoyance or disruption. Examples include the way or frequency that a customer raises their complaint with colleagues, or how a customer responds when informed of a decision about their complaint.

4. Managing Unacceptable Behaviour

- 4.1 We ensure that all customers are treated in a courteous, fair, and consistent manner and that complaints are investigated in accordance with Onwards Complaint Resolution policy.
- 4.2 Where we determine unacceptable customer behaviour is evident, the manager of the relevant service area may contact the customer to discuss the concerns, provide an explanation as to which aspects of behaviour are deemed to be unacceptable, and attempt to resolve matters informally.

- 4.3 Before taking formal action, we will allow the customer time to adjust their behaviour, and we may offer additional support interventions such as third-party mediation or advocacy.
- 4.4 Where a customer's behaviour is assessed as unacceptable and does not improve following informal intervention, Onward may apply proportionate actions to protect colleagues and ensure the continued delivery of services. Any action imposed will be appropriate, reasonable, and consider any known vulnerabilities, medical conditions, or disabilities, in line with the Equality Act 2010.
- 4.5 Actions that may be applied include, but are not limited to:
 - 4.5.1 Issuing a formal written warning, confirming that the customer's behaviour has been classified as unacceptable and advising that further action may follow if the behaviour continues.
 - 4.5.2 Restricting communication to a single point of contact, through whom all future correspondence will be managed.
 - 4.5.3 Limiting methods of contact, such as restricting communication to email or telephone only.
 - 4.5.4 Restricting the frequency or timing of contact, including limiting contact to specific times or a defined number of contacts per week or month.
 - 4.5.5 Declining to give further consideration to an issue unless new or additional evidence is provided.
- 4.6 Any restriction that is imposed will be appropriate, proportionate and made in consideration of any medical condition, vulnerability, or disability.
- 4.7 The customer will be advised of the duration of the restriction. In most cases, restrictions will apply for between 3 and 6 months, but in exceptional cases restrictions may remain in place beyond these timescales.
- 4.8 Decisions to impose such restrictions will always be confirmed in writing and will confirm:
 - 4.8.1 Why we have taken the decision
 - 4.8.2 The specific action being taken
 - 4.8.3 The duration of the restriction
 - 4.8.4 Whether the action applies to all the customers dealings with Onward, or whether the action specifically relates to the issue in question
 - 4.8.5 The customers right to appeal the decision
 - 4.8.6 The review process of this policy; and
 - 4.8.7 The right of the customer to contact the Housing Ombudsman
- 4.9 Where the behaviour is extreme, or it threatens the immediate safety or welfare of colleagues, we will consider other options, for example reporting the matter to the police or taking legal action. In such cases, we may not Provide advanced notice of our intended course of action.
- 4.10 The diagram below sets out the approach we will take. In the first instance, we will always try and resolve the concern informally and through an informal agreement.



- 4.10.1 Step 1 – An appropriate colleague will discuss Onwards concerns with the customer and agree a mutually suitable resolution.
- 4.10.2 Step 2 – An appropriate service manager will discuss Onwards concerns with the customer and agree a suitable resolution. This will be confirmed in writing and constitute a formal warning ahead of more specific action.
- 4.10.3 Step 3 – The Head of the relevant service area will notify the customer that their ongoing behaviour has been classified as unacceptable. Any action agreed upon will be formally confirmed in writing, and appropriate steps will be taken to enforce them. The customer’s tenancy record will also be updated in the housing management system.

5. Making a new Complaint

- 5.1 New complaints from customers who have been subject to this procedure will be treated on a case-by-case basis. The Customer Resolutions Manager will decide whether any restrictions which have been applied previously are still appropriate and necessary in relation to the new complaint. Onward will not ignore genuine service requests or complaints.

6. Review

- 6.1 The complainant has the right to request a review of any decision reached in accordance with this policy. Review requests must be received within 28 days of the date of the decision.
- 6.2 Reviews will be undertaken by a Director of Customer Experience and Digital and the outcome will be confirmed in writing.

7. Glossary

Term	Definition
Abusive Behaviour	Any action, statement, or communication that is rude, derogatory, insulting, or aggressively critical towards Onward colleagues or other customers, including but not limited to verbal threats, personal insults, or inflammatory allegations.
Appeal	The formal process by which a customer can request a review of a decision made under this policy, typically within a specified timeframe.
Colleague	Any person carrying out work on behalf of Onward, including directly employed Onward staff and employees of contractors or partner organisations engaged by Onward to deliver services. This includes individuals undertaking repairs, maintenance,

	customer-facing services, or any other contracted activity performed on Onward's behalf.
Complaint	An expression of dissatisfaction about the standard of service, actions, or lack of action by Onward or its staff, requiring a response or resolution.
Disproportionate Contact	Excessive or frequent communication with Onward that goes beyond what is reasonable and impacts the ability to provide services to all customers equally.
Equality Act 2010	UK legislation which protects individuals from discrimination and ensures reasonable adjustments are made for those with disabilities or vulnerabilities.
Formal Action	Steps taken by Onward in response to unacceptable behaviour, including written warnings, contact restrictions, or legal measures.
Housing Ombudsman	An independent body that investigates complaints and disputes between social housing residents and landlords in England.
Informal Resolution	Early intervention and attempts to resolve concerns or issues amicably, before formal action becomes necessary.
Persistent Behaviour	Ongoing conduct or repeated actions that continue after Onward's response or decision, without the presentation of new or relevant evidence.
Proportionate Restriction	A limitation or restriction that is appropriate to the nature of the unacceptable behaviour, taking into account individual circumstances such as medical needs or vulnerabilities.
Proportionate Action	An action or penalty imposed in response to unacceptable behaviour, which may include limiting methods or frequency of contact, or other restrictions.
Single Point of Contact	A designated individual through whom all communication between Onward and a customer will be managed, to ensure clarity and efficiency.
Unacceptable Behaviour	Any action, communication, or conduct that Onward considers abusive, offensive, threatening, or unreasonably persistent, as defined within this policy.
Unreasonably Persistent Complaint	A complaint or series of complaints made in a manner, frequency, or style that disrupts Onward's ability to provide services, or continues after a matter has been resolved.
Vulnerability	A condition or circumstance that may affect a customer's ability to interact with Onward, including but not limited to disability, mental health, or personal crisis.

Linked documents:	Complaint Resolution Policy
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