

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 applies where a customer, or any member of their household or their visitors, behaves in an unacceptable way towards Onward colleagues or contractors engaged by Onward. It explains the types of behaviour Onward may regard as unacceptable, how we will respond, and the safeguards we will apply to ensure decisions are fair, proportionate, and consistent with our values and legal responsibilities.

2. Policy Aim

- 2.1 Onward is committed to treating all customers and suppliers with fairness, honesty and consistency. We want every customer to feel heard, understood and respected, and our approach is guided by our values.
- 2.2 We also have a duty to protect colleagues and contractors and do not expect them to tolerate behaviour that is abusive, threatening, discriminatory or unsafe. This policy sets out how we will respond where this happens.
- 2.3 Onward may regard behaviour as unacceptable where it is abusive, offensive, threatening, discriminatory, or where the nature, frequency or impact of a customer's contact places an unreasonable demand on colleagues or affects our ability to provide services fairly to all customers.
- 2.4 Customers have the right to raise complaints, to remain dissatisfied, and to pursue concerns where issues remain unresolved. Onward will not treat a customer as behaving unacceptably simply because they are persistent, distressed, or unhappy with the service they have received. Action under this policy will only be considered where the manner, frequency, or impact of behaviour becomes unreasonable, abusive, threatening, discriminatory, or unsafe.
- 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 person-centred 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 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 expects landlords to have a clear approach for managing unacceptable behaviour while ensuring customers can still access services and raise legitimate complaints.
- 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 overload of letters, calls, emails or contact via social media (this could include the frequency of contact and/or the volume of correspondence received as well as the frequency and length of telephone calls)
 - 3.2.4 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)
- 3.3 Unreasonable persistence is where the frequency or nature of contact hinders the proper consideration of a complaint or affects Onward's ability to maintain normal service delivery.

- 3.4 Unacceptable customer behaviour is behaviour by a customer, or by any member of their household or their visitors, towards Onward colleagues or contractors which, because of its nature, seriousness, frequency or impact, hinders Onward's ability to maintain normal service, creates an unsafe working environment, or has a detrimental effect on colleagues, contractors or other customers.
- 3.5 Complaint-related behaviour may be considered unreasonable where, for example, a customer makes multiple contacts to different colleagues about the same issue, raises changing or conflicting issues in a way that creates confusion, or continues to pursue a matter without providing new information, such that resolution becomes unnecessarily difficult.
- 3.6 Violent or aggressive behaviour includes behaviour that causes, or is reasonably perceived as likely to cause, harassment, alarm, distress, fear of harm, or risk to the safety and wellbeing of Onward colleagues and contractors.

4. Managing Unacceptable Behaviour

- 4.1 We will treat all customers courteously, fairly and consistently, and complaints will be handled in line with Onward's Complaint Resolution Policy.
- 4.2 Our response to unacceptable behaviour will be based on the seriousness of the behaviour and the perceived risk of harm. For example, a threat of physical violence towards a colleague will be managed differently to unreasonable persistence in pursuing a complaint.
- 4.3 Before applying formal restrictions, we will consider the available evidence, the impact on colleagues and service delivery, whether the issue remains unresolved, any known vulnerabilities or reasonable adjustments, whether the customer has been told what behaviour is causing concern, and whether a less restrictive response could be effective.

5. Unreasonable Demands, Unreasonable Persistence, and Contact Overload

- 5.1 Where appropriate, we will first try to address concerns informally and give the customer an opportunity to change their behaviour. We may also consider supportive measures such as advocacy, mediation, or other reasonable adjustments.
- 5.2 Where behaviour remains unacceptable after informal action, or where the circumstances justify it, Onward may apply proportionate restrictions to protect colleagues and support the continued delivery of services. Any restriction will be reasonable, evidence-based and take account of any known vulnerabilities, medical conditions or disabilities, in line with the Equality Act 2010.
- 5.3 Sanctions that may be applied include, but are not limited to:
 - 5.3.1 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.

- 5.3.2 Restricting communication to a single point of contact, through whom all future correspondence will be managed.
- 5.3.3 Limiting methods of contact, such as restricting communication to email or telephone only.
- 5.3.4 Restricting the frequency or timing of contact, including limiting contact to specific times or a defined number of contacts per week or month.
- 5.3.5 Declining to give further consideration to an issue unless new or additional evidence is provided.
- 5.4 Any restriction imposed will be appropriate, proportionate, time-limited where possible, and based on the individual circumstances of the case.
- 5.5 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.
- 5.6 Decisions to impose such restrictions will always be confirmed in writing and will confirm:
 - 5.6.1 Why we have taken the decision
 - 5.6.2 The specific action being taken
 - 5.6.3 The duration of the restriction
 - 5.6.4 Whether the action applies to all the customer's dealings with Onward, or only to the issue in question
 - 5.6.5 The customer's right to request a review of the decision
 - 5.6.6 How the decision will be reviewed and when it will next be considered
 - 5.6.7 The right of the customer to contact the Housing Ombudsman
- 5.7 The table below summarises the usual approach for unreasonable demands, unreasonable persistence and contact overload. In serious cases, or where there is an immediate risk to safety, Onward may take immediate protective action without following each step in sequence.

Step	Lead	Action
1 Early resolution	Colleague impacted	Discuss concerns with the customer and seek a mutually suitable resolution.
2 Formal warning	Manager	Confirm concerns, expected behaviour and any agreed resolution in writing.
3 Restrictions	Head of Service	Confirm unacceptable behaviour, enforce agreed resolution in writing.

6. Violence and Aggression

- 6.1 Onward considers the use of violence and aggression, or any threatened or perceived threat of violence and aggression, to be unacceptable. Colleagues and contractors should remove themselves from any situation where they believe there is a risk to their safety. The steps below set out how incidents of this nature will be managed.
- 6.2 Incidents of violence and aggression will be reported and logged on our system, which will notify the Safer Neighbourhoods Team. We will categorise the risk of incidents according to their severity as low, medium, or high.
 - 6.2.1 **Low Risk** – inappropriate language, raised voices.
 - 6.2.2 **Medium Risk** – verbal abuse directed towards a colleague, harassing, or intimidating behaviour.
 - 6.2.3 **High Risk** – physical violence, harm, threats of physical harm, criminal behaviour, hate-related incidents motivated by perceived hostility or prejudice towards a person's race or perceived race, religion or perceived religion, sexual orientation or perceived sexual orientation, disability or perceived disability, and any crime motivated by hostility or prejudice against a person who is transgender or perceived to be transgender.
- 6.3 The Safer Neighbourhoods Team will triage reports within 1 working day, in line with our highest priority.
- 6.4 The Safer Neighbourhoods Team will speak to the colleague or contractor and record the details. A risk assessment will be conducted, with appropriate steps taken to ensure all colleagues and contractors remain safe in relation to the incident. For example, other colleagues may be advised to remove themselves from a particular site.
- 6.5 Colleague welfare will always be prioritised, and colleagues will be offered all available support, including from our Employee Assistance Programme. Working arrangements may need to be amended, such as only visiting sites in pairs, or withholding visits from a particular site until the situation is resolved.
- 6.6 An action plan will be developed to set out how Onward will respond to the incident. This may involve legal or non-legal remedies, including a written warning, mediation, an acceptable behaviour agreement, an injunction, possession proceedings, or referral to the police or other agencies where appropriate. The Safer Neighbourhoods Team will record the action taken and update system warnings where required.
- 6.7 The colleague impacted by the incident will be regularly updated throughout this process, and any change in working arrangements will be monitored and amended as needed.

7. Making a new Complaint

- 7.1 New complaints from customers who are subject to this policy will be considered on a case-by-case basis. Previous restrictions will not automatically apply to new issues. The Customer Resolutions Manager will decide whether any existing

restrictions remain appropriate and necessary, and Onward will continue to consider genuine service requests, complaints, emergency reports and safeguarding concerns.

8. Review

- 8.1 A customer may request a review of a decision made under this policy within 28 calendar days of the date of the written decision. A request for review should explain why the customer believes the decision should be reconsidered.
- 8.2 Where possible, the review will be carried out by a senior manager or director who was not involved in the original decision. The outcome will be confirmed in writing, including whether the decision is upheld, amended or withdrawn. Unless stated otherwise, any restriction will remain in place while the review is being completed.

9. Definitions

- 9.1 The glossary below explains key terms used in this policy.

Term	Meaning
Unacceptable behaviour	Behaviour that is abusive, threatening, discriminatory, unsafe, or places unreasonable demands on colleagues or services.
Unreasonable demands	Requests that are excessive, repeated, unrealistic or disproportionate in the circumstances.
Unreasonable persistence	Continuing to pursue the same issue without new information, or in a way that prevents effective resolution.
Contact overload	High volumes or frequency of calls, emails, letters or messages that affect service delivery.
Restriction	A proportionate limit on contact or communication, applied to protect colleagues and maintain services.
Reasonable adjustment	A change to how we communicate or deliver services to support a customer's needs, where appropriate.
Violence and aggression	Behaviour that causes, or could reasonably cause, fear, harm, harassment, alarm or distress.

Linked documents:	Complaint Resolution Policy
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