



## **MANAGING CUSTOMER CONTACT POLICY**

<b><u>Document Control</u></b>	
Version Number	1.0
Author (Name, Job Title)	Nicola Warren, Public Response Co-ordinator
Date Approved	29 <sup>th</sup> November 2019
Approved By	Sian Curley, Chief Executive
Superseded Version	N/A
Date of Next Review	December 2023

## Version Control

<b>Version</b>	<b>Date</b>	<b>Amended By</b>	<b>Reason for Issue/Amendment</b>
0.1	26/11/19	Joanne Regan, Head of Assurance and Compliance	Draft policy updated for publication on the OPCC website. Chief of Staff amended to Chief Executive and Version control table included.
1.0	29/11/19	Joanne Regan, Head of Assurance and Compliance	Consultation with and final approval by the Chief Executive.

# **Managing Customer Contact Policy**

## **Introduction**

The Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner (OPCC) is committed to providing a consistent, fair and accessible service to anyone that comes into contact with the organisation. This policy determines how the department manages customer contact with the relatively few customers whose actions or behaviour are considered unacceptable. We are accountable for the proper use of public money and must ensure that money is spent wisely and that the work of the office is not disrupted to the detriment of other service.

## **Aim of policy**

- To deal honestly, fairly, consistently and appropriately with all customers.
- To reserve the right to manage access to its services in order to provide a fair and accessible service to all customers by not tolerating what it considers to be unacceptable behaviour towards OPCC staff and where it considers customers' behaviour is impacting office functionality.

## **Unacceptable behaviour**

The OPCC understands people may act out of character in times of trouble or distress. The OPCC does not view behaviour unacceptable simply because a customer is forceful or determined. However, the behaviour of customers who are angry, demanding or persistent may result in unreasonable demands being placed on staff. It is these actions that the OPCC aims to manage under this policy.

Behaviours covered by this policy:

- Aggressive or abusive behaviour

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

- Unreasonable behaviour

Customers may make what the OPCC considers unreasonable demands on its service through the volume of information they seek, the nature and level of service they expect or the number of times they approach the organisation. What amounts to unreasonable behaviour or demand will always depend on the circumstances surrounding the behaviour and the seriousness of the issues raised by the customer.

The OPCC considers these demands and behaviour to be unacceptable and unreasonable if they begin to impact substantially on the work of the OPCC – for

example, taking up an excessive amount of staff time to the detriment of other customers or functions, for example, continual phone calls, letters or e-mails.

- Unreasonably persistent

The OPCC recognises that some customers will not or cannot accept that the OPCC is unable to assist beyond a level of service provided already. New complaints from customers to whom this policy has been applied in the past will be considered. However, the policy may be invoked immediately where it is evident that these new complaints are in fact the same as previous complaints from the customer or there is persistent refusal to accept a decision made in relation to a case or persistent refusal to accept explanations relating to what the OPCC can or cannot do despite having information explained and clarified.

The actions of persistent customers are considered unacceptable when they take up what the OPCC deems to be disproportionate amounts of time and resources.

### **Managing unacceptable behaviour**

The approach taken to manage unacceptable behaviour depends on its nature and extent. If it adversely affects the OPCC's ability to do its work and provide a fair service to others, it may need to restrict contact with the customer. Wherever possible, the OPCC aims to do this in a way that still allows access to its service and will advise customers prior to putting any restrictions in place.

### **Reasons for restricting customer contact**

If a member of OPCC staff experience unacceptable behaviour over the phone he or she has right to either place callers on hold or end the telephone call.

Staff also have the responsibility to report any instances of unacceptable behaviour to their manager in order to ensure fairness and consistency of approach when the Chief Executive is taking a decision to manage contact. With the exception of ending a telephone call, decisions to restrict contact with the OPCC can only be authorised by the Chief Executive with careful consideration given to the circumstances of the situation. A customer will be advised in writing that their behaviour is considered to be unacceptable.

They will also be advised that the OPCC may take steps to manage communication in order to handle their contact with the OPCC. Wherever possible, the OPCC will give a customer the opportunity to adapt their behaviour or action before a decision is taken. It may be necessary to apply restrictions if all internal review mechanisms have been exhausted and the customer continues to display unacceptable behaviour that is impacting on the work of OPCC staff. A manager can request authorisation to restrict

contact from the Chief Executive. However, the Chief Executive should be satisfied the following criteria has been considered before any action is taken:

- Whether a concern is being, or has been, considered and addressed properly.
- Communication with the customer has been adequate and the customer is not providing any significant new information that might affect the consideration of the case.
- All efforts have been made with the customer to dispel misunderstandings and move matters towards a resolution.
- Any specific access requirements and appropriate solutions have been considered to ensure that the customer is not being denied access to the OPCC.
- Whether a suitable gateway organisation, such as a Citizens Advice Bureau, has been considered – or the customer has been urged to seek legal advice.

Where a customer continues to display unacceptable behaviour the OPCC will exercise its right to restrict contact. The precise nature and action will be appropriate and proportionate to the nature of the unacceptable behaviour. It may decide to:

- Place time limits on telephone conversations
- Restrict communication to one method of contact
- Arrange for the customer to communicate with one specific point of contact only – where appropriate to do so.
- Read and file future correspondence, but acknowledge or respond to it only if the customer provides new information or is making a new complaint.
- Refuse to consider demands to re-open a closed case. Take other action that it considers appropriate – in severe circumstances this may include blocking telephone numbers and/or email addresses.

The Chief Executive will always inform the customer what action he/she is taking and why. He/she will write explaining the reasons for managing future contact, describing the restricted contact arrangements and, if relevant, clarifying how long these restrictions will be in place.

Where the behaviour in question is considered to be harassment/aggressive, or in situations where it threatens OPCC staff safety and welfare, police involvement or legal action may be necessary. In such cases, the OPCC may not give the customer prior warning of this action. If a restriction has been put in place and a customer breaks its conditions, staff have the right not to engage in conversation or respond to requests as appropriate.

### **Record keeping and reviewing a decision to restrict contact**

The OPCC will record all decisions to restrict contact with customers. Accurate details will be noted on the relevant case file. A decision to restrict customer contact may be reconsidered if the customer demonstrates a more acceptable approach.