



Co%ownership



INTRODUCTION

1. Co-Ownership is dedicated to delivering outstanding service to all our customers and treating our customers with respect. Its customer promises detailed below, outline what customers can expect from its services.

- a. *Doing the right thing*

This means we will

- Act with integrity and take responsibility
- Listen to you, take time to understand your needs and respond to them
- Agree actions with you and follow through on them
- If we have to say no we'll explain why and signpost you to next steps

- b. *Get it right first time*

This means we will

- Aim to get it right first time
- When things go wrong, we will apologise and learn from it
- Be clear about how you make a complaint
- Follow our complaints process fairly

- c. *Communicate with you*

This means we will

- Communicate, where possible, using your preferred communication channel
- Use Plain English and avoid jargon
- Listen to your feedback and use it to improve our service
- Make sure that our team are well trained

2. In return, we anticipate everyone who interacts with our staff to treat them with respect. We ask customers to be:

- Be considerate and polite to our team
- Be open and honest and give us accurate information on your circumstances

3. As accredited members of the Institute of Customer Service, we endorse the Service with Respect campaign and the new legislation to protect our customer-facing colleagues.

4. We also have a duty of care to provide a safe working environment for our staff.

PURPOSE OF THE POLICY

5. Whilst our customers express high levels of satisfaction with our services. We understand that there may be instances where this is not the case.
6. In challenging situations, people may behave in ways that are not typical for them. Even though we try our best to help, there is a chance that a small number of individuals may still act in a manner that does not meet our standards.
7. The purpose of this policy is to enable us to manage unacceptable customer behaviour consistently and fairly. It sets out what we consider unacceptable and the steps we may take to deal with such behaviour.
8. In the development of this policy, as a responsible business we have considered the UN sustainable development goals and how our policy aligns with these. This policy promotes the health and wellbeing of our staff.

SCOPE OF POLICY

9. This policy applies to everyone who accesses our services who displays unacceptable behaviour, as defined below. To help us protect our staff from abuse and harm.

OBJECTIVES

10. The objective of this policy is to outline Co-Ownership's approach to unacceptable behaviour and how we will respond to incidents of unacceptable behaviour.

DEFINITION OF UNACCEPTABLE BEHAVIOUR

11. Unacceptable behaviour means acting in a way that is unreasonable, regardless of the level of someone's stress, frustration or anger. It may involve acts, words or physical gestures that could cause another person distress or discomfort.

AGGRESSIVE, OFFENSIVE OR ABUSIVE BEHAVIOUR

12. This is behaviour or language (written or spoken) that could cause our staff to feel afraid, threatened, or abused. This includes threatening emails, telephone calls, meetings, or other communication channels and also comments on social media or elsewhere.
13. Examples:
 - Insulting, abusive or degrading language, including inappropriate banter, innuendo or malicious allegations
 - Any form of physical violence or threats of physical violence
 - Derogatory racist, sexist, ageist, or homophobic remarks

- Comments relating to disability, perceived gender, religion, belief, or any other personal characteristic

Unreasonable demands and vexatious complaints

14. Customers may make requests that we cannot reasonably accommodate, including but not limited to:

- The amount of information they seek
- The nature and scale of service they expect
- The volume of correspondence they generate
- A remedy or outcome that cannot be achieved

15. We accept that someone who is persistent is not necessarily displaying unacceptable behaviour. What is seen as an unreasonable demand will depend on the circumstances of each case. We will always consider each complaint on its own merits.

16. However, the behaviour of someone who persistently contacts Co-Ownership about the same issue, when that issue has been dealt with in line with our usual processes, can, in some circumstances, amount to an unreasonable demand. Such behaviour takes up a disproportionate amount of our time and resources and can affect our ability to provide a service to others.

17. Examples of behaviour which we consider as unreasonable demands and vexatious complaints include but are not limited to:

- Refusing to follow our complaints procedure
- adopting a scattergun approach, including pursuing complaints about the same issue with different members of staff
- Persistently pursuing a complaint where Co-Ownership's complaints procedure has been fully and properly implemented and exhausted, but no appeal has been made to the Ombudsman or after the Ombudsman has considered and concluded the case, making a further complaint on the same issue.
- Contacting us repeatedly and frequently without giving us enough time to respond to previous correspondence.
- Insisting on seeing or speaking to a particular member of staff when a suitable alternative has been offered.
- Visiting our offices without an appointment
- Threatening or using actual physical violence towards staff or their associates.
- Being personally abusive or verbally aggressive towards staff dealing with their issue or their associates.
- Recording meetings or conversations (whether face-to-face or on the telephone) without the prior knowledge or consent of other people involved.

EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY

18. Co-Ownership recognises that there may be an underlying reason for some cases involving persistent contact or unreasonable behaviour and it is mindful of how different

illnesses, disabilities or experiences can affect its customers and occasionally their behaviour.

19. Where a customer is behaving in an unacceptable manner, we will consider whether they have personal difficulties which make our services more difficult to access and whether a reasonable adjustment should be made. However, a customer who has rights under section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act may still be acting in an unacceptable manner under this policy.
20. Where unacceptable behaviour arises in these circumstances, Co-Ownership will consider the individual needs and circumstances of the customer when determining the best course of action. Additional steps will be taken by Co-Ownership in such cases to enable the customer to correspond with it including where the customer's behaviour is causing difficulty.

ACTION UNDER THE UNACCEPTABLE BEHAVIOUR POLICY

21. We do not expect our employees to tolerate unacceptable behaviour when communicating with our customers. When this happens, our employees have the right to:
 - Place callers on hold.
 - Terminate the call.
 - Not reply to an abusive email or letter (or communication through another channel)- we will only review these communications to ensure no new issues have been raised.
22. Before taking such action, we will always warn customers that they are behaving in an unacceptable way to give them the chance to change their behaviour. However, a warning will not be given in extreme cases to protect our staff, for example, when a physical threat is made.
23. Where these circumstances arise, we will take the following steps:
 - We'll ask customers to modify their behaviour and explain why
 - If the behaviour continues to be unacceptable, our employees will remove themselves from the situation. If the communication is by telephone, the caller will be told that the call will be ended
 - The employee will inform their manager who will keep a record of the incident. In all cases a manager will investigate the situation and decide what action to take. This could include limiting a customer's contact with us
 - We'll refer the matter to the police where we believe that a criminal offence has been threatened or committed

COMMUNICATION RESTRICTIONS

24. If customers continue to behave unacceptably, a manager can put in place a temporary or permanent communication restriction on a customer. If we decide to do this, we will tell the customer that we are doing, so setting out:

- why we consider their behaviour unacceptable
- what action we are taking and if there is a time limit on the restrictions

25. If we decide to restrict communication, we will make a note of the limitation in our records.

26. Restrictions may include communication being:

- Limited to being conducted in writing
- Limited to a specific individual
- removed from social media and being blocked from our accounts
- limited in other ways which we consider appropriate in the circumstances, in line with this policy.

27. In addition, we reserve the right to:

- Restrict contact to a nominated employee who will deal with all future calls or correspondence
- Restrict the issues on which we will correspond
- Block emails or telephone numbers if the number and length of communications sent is excessive
- Refuse to consider a complaint or any further contact in exceptional circumstances
- Take any other action which we consider necessary or appropriate to make this policy effective.

28. Where circumstances are serious enough to warrant further restrictions, we may take legal action to: prevent further contact/poor behaviour/protect staff.

29. We will regularly review any decision to restrict communications and when appropriate we may lift some or all restrictions.

SAFEGUARDING AND DISCLOSURES

30. If, in the course of our work, a customer threatens to harm themselves or others, we will consider disclosing this to a relevant health professional. We may also contact the police if others (including our staff) are threatened with harm.

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