

City of York Council – Restricted Customer Contact Policy and Procedures

Policy statement

The Council aims to deliver excellent service in a manner which is respectful to its customers. Council staff and Members equally have the right to be treated with respect. The effective administration of the Council cannot be allowed to be curtailed through customer's actions. The Council wishes to be open about the steps it will take to manage these situations Accordingly the Council has published the following procedures.

Introduction

1. On rare occasions the City Council may need to restrict the ways we allow individual customers to communicate with us. This may be because a customer has behaved in an abusive, harassing or aggressive way towards a member of staff, or it may be because a customer's actions seriously impede effective public administration. An example of this may be because a customer who, repeatedly sends e-mails about the issue, perhaps to numerous members of staff despite having been given a response, or been told when they will receive a response.
2. Behaviour which is abusive, aggressive or which seriously impedes effective public administration is unacceptable. These procedures set out how such unacceptable behaviour should be addressed.
3. On occasions the activities of a customer may amount to a criminal offence of harassment. If you believe this may be the case then you can seek advice from legal services who will consider whether the case ought to be referred for police investigation or some other legal action. This should be a last resort. Most cases should be capable of being addressed within these procedures.

Specific categories of Customer

4. Some customers may contact the Council at times of great stress and on occasions their behaviour may be inappropriate, particularly on the telephone. It is not intended that these procedures should be used to deal with incidents of this kind.
5. The Council also has dealings with people who have mental health or other problems which can affect their behaviour. Such problems do not make unacceptable behaviour acceptable. However, if you are aware that you are dealing with a customer who has such problems and you are aware that they are receiving support services then efforts should be made to involve support workers in securing a solution.

Process for restricting contact

6. Unacceptable behaviour should normally be addressed in the first instance with a polite warning given by the staff member dealing with the contact.
7. If unacceptable behaviour continues then it may be necessary to restrict the contact from the customer. This may include the number of people that the individual is allowed to contact and or to restrict the volume or times of contact that the Council will accept.

This should initially be confirmed in writing explaining, who the customer can contact, how and when and the reasons for this. If the customer then continues to make contact with people outside these arrangements they should be reminded of the appropriate way of contact and the call correspondence passed to the correct person and where appropriate the call politely ended.

8. In the most serious cases where this fails to be effective the Council may decide to prevent a Customer from using a particular access channel to the Council such as telephone or e-mail.
9. It is not essential that the Council has put in place other measures to restrict contact before reaching that stage but use of such measures must have been considered.

10. A decision to implement restricted contact must be approved by the Director of Customer and Business Support Services (Ian Floyd) or the Assistant Director Governance and ICT (Andy Docherty). If authorised to do so the Council's ICT team will make arrangements to ensure that any e-mail sent to a Council e-mail address is automatically forwarded to the relevant manager or, where appropriate, blocked from the Council's systems. The decision to take this action, the reasons for it and its effect must be communicated to the customer in writing by the authorising officer. Any representations made by the Customer will be considered by the authorising Officer in considering whether the restriction should be maintained.

Recording and review of restrictions

11. A central log of those who have restricted contact with the Council will be maintained and reviewed annually by the Director of Customer and Business Support Services. Services who have requested a block must also advise the authorising officer if circumstances have changed justifying a lifting of existing restrictions.

Contact with elected Members

12. A decision to restrict e-mail contact will impact on the Customer's ability to make direct contact with their Councillor. Where this is known to be an issue consideration must be given as making appropriate alternative arrangements to ensure that the customer is able to make contact with their Councillor.
13. A Councillor may decide that they no longer wish to have contact with a particular member of the public. In such cases consideration should be given to whether the use of a Junk Mail folder is the best option.