



## Offering our community more than a home

### Customer Engagement Policy (formerly unacceptable behaviour policy and procedures)

Management Committee submission:	August 2023
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#### CHA Objectives:

- To manage the houses provided, in a professional and cost-effective manner, for the benefit of our local community and the environment.
- To provide a first class maintenance service which offers value for money and ensures the comfort and safety of our residents while achieving high levels of satisfaction.
- To ensure local decision making and community control, we will encourage our tenants and other customers to influence our policy and participate in decisions, which may affect them.
- To ensure that our resources are adequate to deliver our objectives by investing in our people, increasing digitalisation, demonstrating value for money and through robust procurement practices.
- To promote social inclusion by applying principles of equality and diversity to everything we do.

#### Regulatory Standards:

- The governing body leads and directs the RSL to achieve good outcomes for its tenants and other service users.
- The RSL manages its resources to ensure its financial well-being and economic effectiveness.
- The governing body and senior officers have the skills and knowledge they need to be effective.

*This policy can be made available on request in a variety of different formats, such as on audio CD or USB, in large print and translated into other languages.*

## Overview

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## Why we need a policy

1. Clydebank Housing Association (CHA) has customer service standards which reflect our commitment to offering a high-quality service and ensuring we treat everyone with dignity and respect. They set out what standards people can expect from us.
2. We aim to support everyone engaging with us to do so positively to help us provide them with the best possible level of service. In some circumstances, we need to take action to protect our staff or service from types of engagement which impact our ability to provide a service or the well-being of our staff. This policy sets out how we identify and respond to those types of engagement.

## Who is covered by this policy?

3. This policy covers anyone who engages with CHA including service users, sales agents, tenants, stakeholders, contractors, advocates and elected representatives. Different processes may be appropriate for our work with individuals or organisations who provide services to us under contract, but the standards of engagement we support are the same for all.
4. Engagement includes all forms of contact including verbal (over the phone, in person, etc.), written (letters, emails, online forms, etc.) as well as contact at CHA events, training sessions and online. Online comments about the CHA or individual staff members, which are shared publicly or in a forum or way that means they are not private, count as engagement even when they are not shared directly with CHA.

## **Supporting Positive engagement**

5. We support positive engagement and will let people know how they can engage positively with us by providing information about how they can access our service and request adjustments, make complaints, and explaining clearly what we need from them to provide the best possible service.
6. Supporting positive engagement includes supporting people to express concerns about our office and services in a constructive manner by ensuring:
  - 6.1. we apply our customer complaints process fairly and openly when individual concerns are raised;
  - 6.2. we provide information to help ensure concerns can be made about our service without putting our staff or our need to provide the service at risk; and
  - 6.3. people understand what stage they are at in our complaint or customer service complaint process and, what options they have for challenging decisions both during and at the end of our investigation. When our action has concluded we will clearly outline what measures we have taken or provide reasons for not upholding a complaint.

## **Providing additional support**

7. We understand that people who come to us may be upset or have specific needs and requirements. We will ensure our staff have appropriate training to identify where additional support may be needed and are supported to treat our users with kindness, empathy and compassion.
8. We will seek to defuse and de-escalate situations. We regularly signpost to organisations who can provide independent advice and support.

## **Making reasonable adjustments to our service**

9. We are committed to ensuring that all people have an equal opportunity to access our services. We do this actively by considering accessibility when designing the way we provide our service. We try to anticipate our users' requirements and encourage all users to tell us if we need to adjust the way we deliver our service for them. If we decide we need to manage engagement with an individual, we will consider whether they have accessibility needs that we should consider when doing so.

## **Our approach to managing engagement**

10. While we will work to support positive engagement, there are some situations that we need to respond to or manage because of the negative impact on the wellbeing of our staff and our ability to provide a service. We also accept that individuals may be upset and distressed when they contact our office, and we want to support them to engage with us.

11. We will seek, whenever possible to restore the relationship and to ensure we can communicate as normal. However, we recognise there may be need to take action if the situation becomes unacceptably challenging, is resulting in unreasonable demands on our office or unreasonable behaviour towards CHA staff, contractors, and others.
12. When we need to manage engagement in this way, we will ensure responses are proportionate to the behaviour and the impact on CHA and our staff. This guidance gives general advice, but we will, whenever possible explain clearly the reason for any specific decision to the person affected and/or keep a separate documented record if that is not possible or appropriate.
13. When making decisions, it is important to remember that we need to assess behaviour reasonably and consistently. Although at times our resources may be under more pressure than others, any assessment should take into consideration whether we would be able to deal with the behaviour if we were operating effectively and normally. We may also take into consideration whether the issue is due to staff training requirements.
14. At all times, we will work to ensure our response is proportionate and necessary and uses the least restrictive method available.
15. The decision whether or not to take a management approach does not affect the right of any member of CHA staff to end contact they find personally distressing or uncomfortable. This is because it is not appropriate for anyone to continue to engage if they are becoming distressed or it is having other negative impact on them, and this is the case even if we decide that the criteria for further management is not met. There is more information on this in the supporting staff section below.

### **Restorative approaches, recovering the relationship**

16. Where possible, we should seek to act in ways that recovers the relationship.
17. For example, staff may seek to defuse and de-escalate by suggesting breaks if conversations are becoming heated; intervene early before behaviour escalates; make proactive adjustments to our service to help individual users manage the anxiety and stress of engaging with us. Actively managing expectations can help to prevent issues from arising in the first place.
18. Reasonable adjustments should be made when appropriate to help individuals remain actively and positively involved with our service and, in some cases, we may involve appropriate staff from across our service, or seek assistance from outside organisations. This is particularly applicable where we consider a person is vulnerable and restrictions would have a disproportionate impact. This does not however mean that the behaviour is deemed as acceptable.

19. It can be detrimental to positive engagement to continue a conversation which has become circular or repeats statements already made by other colleagues. If this happens, we will end the conversation and seek to re-engage again later, if appropriate.

### **Actively managing behaviour, delivering our service**

20. When restorative approaches are not possible, appropriate or have been tried and failed, an active management approach will be taken. Active management seeks to maintain our ability to deliver our services while minimising the impact of the situation that is causing the disruption. It is important to note that this may not be the fault of an individual, but because of circumstances outwith their control.
21. The approach used should be tailored to the individual and the situation, this could include:
  - 21.1. restricting contact by channel (e.g. phone or email) or limiting to a named person only
  - 21.2. restricting the ability to request recording is paused if call recording is in use
  - 21.3. not providing direct contact details or staff names (when there is a risk this will lead to harassment)
  - 21.4. communicating through a third party such as an advocate rather than direct contact
  - 21.5. restricting time or volume of contact.
22. To ensure consistency, a decision to actively manage a situation needs to be made by a manager, is final, and cannot be appealed. All subsequent restrictions require to be supported by evidence and can be challenged by an appeal to the executive management team.
23. Restrictions are normally subject to review at appropriate intervals while we are providing a service. We retain the discretion to not include a review if the reason for the restriction means that would not be appropriate (for example if it is to protect staff from violence). The timing and circumstances where review would be considered should be explained clearly to the person who is under restriction at the time the restriction is put in place.

### **Protecting our staff and others**

24. There are some situations that we are not able to accept and where we will always take action. We have **zero tolerance** of threats, violent and abusive behaviour towards staff (including contractors). This is to ensure safety and wellbeing and also protects staff and others.

25. There is advice below on identifying situations that we do not find acceptable. Staff always need to take action to respond to, or disengage, when these happen and should always raise with a manager what has happened and any steps they were or were not able to take. It is important to note that in some situations, the only appropriate action is to end contact immediately.

#### *Phone or face-to-face contact*

26. During phone or face-to-face contact, staff should issue a warning before ending contact, if it is safe and they consider it appropriate to do so. A warning is not required if it would be unsafe to do so, or where the language is intense, deeply upsetting or extreme.
27. Staff may also, if call recording has been paused, issue a warning that the recording will resume if the behaviour continues.
28. If staff are informed that they are being recorded for later use in public, or are being live-streamed, they need to end contact politely but immediately. Recording is acceptable for personal use, and we can support that, but only limited staff are able to speak publicly on behalf of the organisation. As noted below, depending on the surrounding circumstances, this could also come under the category of harassment.

#### *Written or email correspondence to CHA*

29. If we receive violent or abusive correspondence, the sender should be informed this is unacceptable. This could be done by the Customer & Corporate Services team, a manager or appropriate person, or from an account that is not linked to an individual (e.g. @info, @maintenance etc), if this is more appropriate.
30. We should not respond directly to the correspondence, or any service related information within it. In some cases, particularly if there is an indication of a risk to health or safety or a public interest, we may use evidence that is supplied with the correspondence, but that should not be the default position. See below for specific advice on how to store any abusive correspondence that may need to be kept for evidential purposes.
31. The decision that correspondence is unacceptable should be made by a manager to ensure consistency. Where this behaviour is repeated despite warnings, or an individual instance is regarded as at the higher end of abusive, we may need to take steps to restrict methods of contact, which could include blocking email accounts or similar.

#### *Online, web and social media*

32. This is a fast-moving and changing area; nevertheless, the principles outlined in this policy will still apply. CHA will follow the best practice advice available at the time of any incident and note and record the reasons for our decisions. Actions may include:
  - 32.1. blocking accounts or using other technical options available on the relevant platform to minimise exposure

- 32.2. using the relevant social media platform's own reporting mechanisms to seek to have the content removed
- 32.3. limiting contact with the individual through other channels to reduce risk to staff – this could include ensuring the person is not provided with contact details
- 32.4. direct threats on social media should be dealt with like any physical threat (see below).

### *Physical threats*

- 33. When a physical threat is made, we will normally report it to the police, and comply fully with any criminal proceedings brought about thereafter.
- 34. It should be noted that deciding to contact the police is a matter of judgment and in some cases may not be appropriate (if, for example, the threat is immediately withdrawn and was clearly flippant). However, this is an important safeguard and the person who receives the threat, and particularly anyone who has been personally threatened, should not make a decision to not inform the police alone. It should be made by a manager who should clearly record the decision. The manager should take into account not only the views of the staff member, but also consider the impact on other staff who may come into contact with the individual. If other staff have witnessed the event, they should all be asked to put this on record.

## **Identifying types of engagement we need to manage**

- 35. It is important we are consistent when we take approaches to manage engagement, and below are examples of when we may need to use one of the approaches above. This list is not exhaustive, and we can manage types of engagement or behaviour not listed if it is impacting negatively on individuals or our ability to provide a service.

## **Violence**

### **Violence towards staff or others will not be tolerated**

- 36. Violence is not restricted to acts of aggression that may result in physical harm. It also includes actions or language (whether verbal or written), that would reasonably cause someone to feel offended, afraid or threatened.

## **Abuse**

### **Abuse of staff or others will not be tolerated**

37. Abusive language includes all language that is designed or could be perceived as designed to insult or degrade, is racist, sexist or homophobic, or which makes serious allegations that individuals have committed criminal, corrupt or perverse conduct without any supporting evidence.
38. Language which makes unfounded allegations about an individual's professional ability or capability or seeks to belittle or besmirch them personally is also unacceptable.
39. Violent or abusive comments sent to CHA which are not aimed at us but at third parties are still unacceptable because of the effect that listening or reading them may have on our staff.
40. Comments made about CHA, or CHA staff on social media, which are designed to be, or which it is reasonable to assume may be, shared or made public are also covered for the same reason, even if they are not shared directly with us.

## **Harassment**

41. Harassment of staff, whether accompanied or not by violence or abusive comments, is not acceptable.
42. Harassment would include:
  - 42.1. repeatedly contacting or continuing to contact individual staff members when previously asked not to
  - 42.2. contacting staff outside of the office to seek to influence them
  - 42.3. targeting and naming them on public or other easily shared social media.

### *Contact outside the office*

43. Any contact with a customer outside the office should be discussed with a manager who should decide whether this should be recorded. This includes contact via social network sites and includes social contact in public places. This, in part, reflects the need to ensure there is no appearance of bias, and that any conflicts of interest that may not have been apparent are picked up (for example, where there is significant social overlap). Declaration of interest should be made where appropriate.
44. However, it also helps to quickly identify any pattern of the customer seeking direct contact in an inappropriate manner.

### *Naming and targeting staff publicly*

45. We encourage those who wish to criticise CHA online to use the business name rather than any staff details. We will make it clear that our staff are acting on the businesses delegated authority, and the business can be named. Naming of individuals online may lead to restrictions being put in place.

46. Statements that individuals intend to record and use publicly or to live stream, would be regarded as harassment even if there is no directly abusive content to the statement.

### **Demands on our service**

47. A demand becomes unacceptable when it starts to (or when complying with the demand would) impact substantially on the services we provide. An example of such impact would be that the demand takes up an excessive amount of staff time and, in so doing, disadvantages other users/stakeholders and prevents us from providing a service to the person making the demands within a reasonable timescale.
48. Examples of actions grouped under this heading include:
  - 48.1. repeatedly demanding responses within an unreasonable timescale
  - 48.2. insisting on seeing or speaking to a particular member of staff when that is not possible
  - 48.3. repeatedly changing the substance of their issue or raising unrelated concerns.

### **Levels of contact**

49. Sometimes the volume and duration of contact made to our office causes problems. This can occur over a short period, for example, a number of calls in one day or one hour. It may occur over the lifespan of an issue when someone repeatedly makes long telephone calls to us, inundates us with information that has been sent already that is irrelevant to the service we are providing, or sends repeated emails raising the same or similar issues.
50. We consider that the level of contact has become unacceptable when the amount of time spent on the telephone, dealing with emails or written correspondence, or managing the contact, impacts on our ability to provide a service to that person, organisation, or other customers.

### **Refusal to co-operate**

51. We want people to work with us. This can include agreeing with us the service we are providing, the issues we will look at; providing us with further information, evidence or comments on request; or helping us by summarising their concerns or completing a form for us.
52. Repeated refusals to co-operate makes it difficult for us to proceed. We will always seek to assist someone if they have a specific, genuine difficulty complying with a request. However, we consider it is unreasonable to bring a matter to us, or ask us to provide a service, and then not respond to reasonable requests.

## **Use of the customer service complaints process**

53. We support the rights of people and organisations to complain more than once about an issue if we have failed to rectify the situation within our remit.
54. This contact becomes unreasonable when the effect of the repeated complaints is to harass, or to prevent us from pursuing a legitimate aim or implementing a legitimate decision. We consider access to a complaints system to be important, and it will only be in exceptional circumstances that we would consider such repeated use is unacceptable, but we reserve the right to do so in such cases. Such decisions can only be made by a member of the Management Team.

## **Supporting staff (including contractors and partners)**

55. Staff will receive training to defuse and actively manage situations. They are encouraged to seek support if any contact causes them concern or distress.

## **Empowering staff to end contact they find distressing**

56. All staff have the authority to end any engagement or interaction which they find personally distressing, or difficult at the point of occurrence. Staff should not feel they need to continue to engage in contact if it is having a negative impact on them, or it is making them feel uncomfortable. This is the case whether or not they consider it meets the zero tolerance criteria. Whenever possible and appropriate, staff should seek to end the engagement professionally and politely. This can include:
  - 56.1. explaining they find the situation uncomfortable or distressing and explaining what they need to happen to be able to continue
  - 56.2. ending a call
  - 56.3. ending an interview/meeting
  - 56.4. not reading an email or other correspondence to the end
  - 56.5. disengaging from CHA social media
57. When this occurs, they should take a note and discuss with their line (or, if not available, other) manager as soon as possible.
58. When a zero tolerance incident has occurred or active management approach has had to be used, all staff involved are encouraged to have a de-brief meeting with their line manager and agreed actions from that discussion noted. This ensures that we are providing support to all staff. Staff will be able to take a short time away from all contact if requested, and may request to no longer have contact with a specific individual.
59. CHA has a number of policies in place to support the wellbeing of staff as well as the Association's health plan and workplace mentors. Staff who experience an incident should be reminded of these options and supported to access them if they wish.

## **Requesting removal from direct contact or issue**

60. Staff can ask for correspondence to be sent in the name of a senior manager or to be removed completely from involvement in engagement in a particular issue or interaction. This may be appropriate if they have concerns about threats; have been or are at risk of being named publicly; or any other factor makes them more vulnerable.

## **Approach to communicating decisions**

61. We provide guidance and support to staff to help them meet our standards to communicate with respect. When communicating that the situation needs to change or an active management technique is being introduced, we should always bear in mind the following:
  - 61.1. Explain the situation neutrally and avoid blame, there may be many reasons why the situation has become difficult. Engaging with difficult customers can be stressful and people's situations, needs and abilities are complex. We may inadvertently trigger a memory of a difficult experience, or engage in a way that is difficult for someone who has different needs or perspectives.
  - 61.2. Look for opportunities to restore the relationship. Try to see the situation from the points of view of all involved. When possible or appropriate, seek ways to help someone demonstrate their needs and perspective rather than asking them to defend their position. This can help move the relationship forward.
  - 61.3. Be clear and straightforward. We can provide access to more information, for example a copy of this policy, but that will not be required in all situations. Instead, a clear statement which focuses on the interaction and explains the position, and why, is sufficient. Provide evidence but avoid dwelling on detail unnecessarily. Ensure the communication type/medium is accessible, inclusive and meets the needs of the person.

## **Recording and sharing information**

### **Recording**

62. It is important that we keep a clear record whenever we have had to
  - 62.1. actively work to restore a relationship to avoid restrictions
  - 62.2. put restrictions in place
  - 62.3. take a zero tolerance approach.
63. This should include storing any online evidence such as screenshots or emails etc.
64. Material that is being stored as evidence may be distressing. This should always be stored in a way that it cannot be accidentally or unintentionally accessed – files should be named to indicate they contain distressing material. Physical documents can be stored inside envelopes. All storage should be in line with up to date data protection legislation and the Associations relevant policies.
65. Individuals can feel shame and distress about situations that have become difficult. While we need to record what has happened, we should do so factually and ensure it can only be accessed by those who need to. Some of the actions we take may need to be highlighted in our system to allow staff to implement decisions or to be aware that steps may need to be taken to manage some interactions. When doing so, we should record the minimum required.

### **Sharing information**

66. There is specific advice in the section on physical threats about sharing with other agencies. Internally, we need to ensure all relevant staff are aware of actions taken and restrictions to make sure our actions are effective. This will vary depending on the action, and decisions on sharing should be noted and recorded. As a minimum:
  - 66.1. Addition to our PDT register should occur, along with details relevant to staff dealing with any contact
  - 66.2. The information should also be added as a warning on our Housing Management systems

### *Recording and sharing when staff named publicly (e.g. online)*

67. If you find that a member of CHA staff has been publicly named in relation to their duties, the following step should be taken:
  - 67.1. An email should be sent to the member of staff's line manager and the Customer and Corporate Services Manager. Where applicable, a link to the relevant webpage should be provided.
68. To minimise impact on the named person, this information should not be shared any more widely than necessary to enable action to be taken.

69. The member of staff's line manager or the Customer and Corporate Services Manager will inform the member of staff in private of the content of the material. The affected member of staff will have a say in what, if any, action is taken in response.
70. Action to support the member of staff may include an informal discussion and an offer of counselling support through the employee wellbeing mentors or health plan.
71. Any instances of CHA staff being publicly named online (directly or through other means) will be recorded and kept confidentially by the Customer and Corporate Services Manager. We may actively seek to have the person's name removed unless there is a risk that it would escalate the situation is felt to be significant. The incident will be shared with the Senior Management Team by the CCSM. It is for the affected individual and CCSM to determine whether a record is made in the staff member's personal records.

**For Office Use Only – Actions required/completed**

Customer/Staff Consultation Required/Arranged	Yes
Intranet Update	Yes
F Drive Update	Yes
Website Update	Yes
Leaflet change required?	No
Newsletter Promotion?	Yes
Other information updated, e.g. posters, automatic email responses, post cards, answering machine messages, etc.	No
Equality Impact Assessment completed	Yes

## Clydebank Housing Association Equality Impact Assessment Tool

Name of the <b>policy / proposal</b> to be assessed	Customer Engagement Policy	Is this a <b>new policy / proposal or a revision?</b>	New Policy
Person(s) responsible for the assessment	Joe Farrell, Head of Housing Services		
<b>1. Briefly describe the aims, objectives and purpose</b> of the policy / proposal	To set out the standards our customers can expect from us and the standards we expect from them. To be transparent in the type of behaviour acceptable to us. To be transparent on the sanctions we can impose for unacceptable behaviour and how this will be dealt with.		
<b>2. Who is intended to benefit</b> from the policy / proposal? <i>(e.g. applicants, tenants, staff, contractors)</i>	The policy will benefit customers, in that they can be clear on how we will treat them, but also what we will not tolerate and possible sanctions should behaviour not be moderated. Staff will also benefit through this transparency and gain empowerment to carry out their duties in a safe and supported environment.		
<b>3. What outcomes are wanted</b> from this policy / proposal ? <i>(e.g. the benefits to customers)</i>	Identify any potential or real inequalities that result from the application of the customer engagement policy.		

4. Which **protected characteristics** could be **affected** by the proposal? *(tick all that apply)*

- Minority Ethnic   
 Gender   
 Disability   
 Sexual Orientation   
 Age   
 Religion   
 Transgender /Transsexual   
 Marriage /Civil Partnership   
 Pregnancy /Maternity

5. If the policy / proposal is not relevant to any of the **protected characteristics** listed in part 4, state why and end the process here.

	Positive impact(s)	Negative impact(s)
<p>6. Describe the <b>likely positive or negative impact(s)</b> the policy / proposal could have on the groups identified in part 4</p>	<p>There are no specific positive impacts on any individual groups from this policy. The policy is intended to demonstrate fair and equal expectations and treatment.</p>	<p>There could be a negative impact on anyone whose communication is negatively impaired by a disability. Specifically, where the disability results in uncontrollable threatening or aggressive behaviour. This could lead to the policy being applied too hastily or without regard for any such issues. This should not however excuse any threatening or abusive behaviour towards staff.</p>
<p>7. What <b>actions</b> are <b>required</b> to address the impacts arising from this assessment? <i>(This might include collecting additional data, putting monitoring in place, specific actions to mitigate negative impacts).</i></p>	<p>Training will be carried out with all staff during which the above scenario will be highlighted. As part of the associated procedures, staff are required to take account of such disabilities before applying the policy (seek manager advice).</p>	

Signed: Joe Farrell  (Job title): Head of Housing Services

Date the Equality Impact Assessment was completed: 23 August 2023