

Procedures for Dealing with Customer Conflict



1.0) Introduction

At certain times we can expect customers to express their anger and frustration to members of staff. Where this becomes threatening or abusive then the Council has a responsibility to protect staff and other customers. It is unlikely that violence and harassment can be avoided completely. This procedure is intended to minimise the risk to staff as much as possible.

The Council is anxious to protect the safety and welfare of its staff and is not prepared to accept intimidating or threatening behaviour from members of staff or the public.

Violence is not confined to physical violence against the person, but includes:

- 1) Damage to the property of the Council, its employees or its agents
- 2) Verbal abuse, including prejudice or harassment

All staff, partners and contractors are instructed not to risk their personal safety in order to defend the Council's property.

All staff are instructed to do everything possible to protect themselves when undertaking external or home visits including carrying a personal attack alarm and following the Council's booking in and out procedures. All staff undertaking home visits in the course of their duties must complete a risk assessment in line with the Council's Health & Safety policy.

Before undertaking an external visit or commencing an interview check the Incident Register must be checked. This holds the names of people likely to repeat certain types of behaviour. Recommendations given in the Register must be followed.

2.0) Types of Conflict

In all cases the Incident Form must then be completed and the Incident Register procedure followed.

Telephone Threats/Abuse

If during the course of a telephone conversation a caller is verbally abusive and threatening, the caller must be told that the terms or tone they are using are offensive and that if it continues the call will be disconnected immediately without further warning.

If the caller continues to be offensive the conversation will be terminated and reported to the line manager.

The manager will discuss the phone conversation with the staff member allowing them to talk about it as much or as little as they wish. The manager will also recommend the services of Core Care. They should find out what practical action the

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staff member would like to see happen (E.g. completion of an Incident Form, special visiting arrangements, training to assist the member of staff in dealing with such incidents in the future).

If the customer calls back, the call should be transferred the line manager or the contact details taken to allow the line manager to ring them back. If it is considered that there are genuine threats of violence or harassment these must be reported to the police.

Face to Face Threats/Abuse

Frontline staff may be open to conflict with the customer face to face. This can happen on the Council's own premises, in the customer's home or on neutral ground.

The Customer Conflict course run by the Council will provide the practical skills for staff to use to prevent aggressive situations developing in the first place. If a staff member feels that they do not have the capabilities to deal with violent and aggressive behaviour speak they must raise this with their line manager.

When on Council Premises

If a staff member is abused or threatened on Council premises the interview with the customer should be terminated immediately and they should be asked to leave the building if appropriate. A staff member should not attempt to escort them off the premises; the priority is for them to withdraw to a secure area.

If need be help may be summoned by pressing the local sounding panic alarms provided in reception areas and meeting rooms or if need be any alarms linked to the intruder alarm that will summon the Police.

When in a Customer's Home

If a customer is abusive or threatening to a member of staff in their own home, and if the staff member is in a position to do so, the customer must be advised that due to the Council's policy the visit can not be continued. The staff member should leave the premises.

Upon return to the office the incident must be discussed and recorded with their line manager. Agreement regarding any practical actions that need to happen so that the service can be delivered should be reached.

If a return visit to the property is required then 2 officers should carry this out.

In the Event of Physical Attack

All staff are advised to get away as fast as they can and to try to move towards a place where there will be people. In offices this could be in a secure area, on external visits this may be to run into the street.

If the attack is to obtain Council property, the item must be handed to the assailant. No one should put himself or herself at risk to defend Council property.

The police and line manager must be advised of the attack immediately. The Council will ensure that the matter is followed up.

As such an attack must be notified to the HSE and an accident form and an incident form must be completed.

3.0) Incident Reporting

Any incidents should be reported to the line manager for discussion. Staff will be allowed to talk about it as much or as little as they wish and an agreement regarding what practical action they would like to see happen will be reached.

An Incident Form should be completed and sent to the Risk Manager for possible inclusion under the Incident Register. If the customer is likely to repeat this behaviour this will ensure other colleagues are warned of any hazard or risk.

Incidents of racial abuse, either personal or witnessed, from customers should be reported via a Customer Relations Officer who will complete a Racial Incident Report Form. Such incident can also be reported to a line manager, or the Customer Service Manager.

Managers are encouraged to take action appropriate to the type of incident reported. Actions may include writing to the person concerned, informing the police, staff training and/or staff counselling.

These procedures are to give staff some idea of what to do in the event of abuse, threat or attack. Clearly every circumstance will be different and will need to be dealt with in different ways. The Customer Conflict training course will give staff skills in how to recognise and hopefully prevent conflict situations from developing.

The Council will support all staff following such an incident. The manager of the member of staff will write to the customer concerning their unacceptable behaviour and under what circumstances future contact with the customer will be made.

Under no circumstances should staff be abusive or threatening towards members of the public no matter what the provocation.

Counselling and advice is available to all staff through Corecare on 0800 317517.

