



Coronavirus Health & Safety Policy

March 2024

POLICY IMPLEMENTATION CHECKLIST	
Policy Guardian:	PAUL MURPHY
Author:	EVH
Approved by Director:	19 March 2024
Effective From:	27 March 2024
Date of Next Review:	March 2029
Diversity compliant:	YES
Equality Impact Assessment:	LOW
Data Protection compliant:	YES
Health & Safety compliant:	YES
Procedure implemented:	YES
SDM system changes made:	N/A
Training Completed:	
Posted on Sharepoint:	
Posted on website:	

COVID-19 Generic Policy Statement:

Although we will always endeavour to abide by our policies and procedures we may be unable to do so due to the COVID-19 global pandemic. The organisation will follow all Government guidance implemented to mitigate transmission of the COVID-19 virus. This could effect over service delivery and protocols contained within this policy.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Forgewood Housing Co-operative aims to provide an excellent service to our tenants and customers and always try to resolve issues if they are dissatisfied. We are open, approachable and responsive when dealing with complaints.

In the vast amount of cases these interactions are positive and productive for all parties. However, we recognise that, at times, things can go wrong or that tenants or other customers can make it impossible for us to continue any constructive engagement. In this small number of cases we have to consider taking steps to protect our staff or to ensure that our ability to work effectively is not undermined.

This policy sets out the Co-operative's approach to the relatively few tenants or other customers whose actions or behaviour we consider unacceptable when engaging with us.

We believe that all correspondents and complainants have the right to be heard, supported, understood and respected. We also believe that our staff have the same rights.

This Policy refers to dealings with our staff but can be equally applied to our Management Committee members, contractors, consultants and agents.

We have a zero tolerance towards physical and verbal abuse of our staff. This Policy sets out the approach of the Co-operative to tenants and customers whose action or behaviour we consider unacceptable.

2.0 POLICY AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

We aim in all our dealings to:

- Make it clear to tenants and customers what we consider to be unacceptable actions by them. In doing so, we aim to be clear and open about the potential consequences for people who act in an unacceptable manner;
- Be open and not raise expectations that we cannot meet;
- Deal fairly, honestly, consistently and appropriately with everyone, including those whose actions we consider unacceptable.
- Operate in a way that is accessible to all;
- Provide a service that is accessible to all. However, we retain the right, where we consider actions to be unacceptable, to restrict or change access to our services;
- Ensure our staff and other people who use us do not suffer any disadvantage from people who act in an unacceptable manner.

3.0 LEGAL REQUIREMENTS, REGULATORY FRAMEWORK AND GOOD PRACTICE GUIDANCE

The development and implementation of this policy is applied within the context of legal, regulatory and other requirements.

3.1 Legal - Equality & Diversity

We will ensure that we meet the Equality Act 2010 by being committed to equal and fair treatment for all and opposed to any form of unlawful discrimination. In implementing this Policy, we will provide a fair and equal service to all people. No-one will be treated differently or less favourably than others because of any of the protected characteristics as listed in the Equality Act 2010:-

- Age
- Disability
- Gender Reassignment
- Marriage and Civil Partnership
- Pregnancy and Maternity
- Race
- Religion or Belief
- Sex
- Sexual Orientation

Legal - Housing (Scotland) Act 2010 – Scottish Social Housing Charter

Outcome 1: Equalities

Social landlords perform all aspects of their housing services so that every tenant and customer has their individual needs recognised, is treated fairly and with respect, and receives fair access to housing and housing services.

Outcome 2: Communication

Social landlords manage their businesses so that tenants and other customers find it easy to communicate with their landlord and get the information they need about their landlord, how and why decisions are made and the services it provides.

3.2 Regulatory

Standards of Governance and Financial Management - Standards 2 (2.1, 2.2)

The RSL is open about and accountable for what it does. It understands and takes account of the needs and priorities of its tenants, service users and stakeholders. Its primary focus is the sustainable achievement of these priorities.

3.3 Other Relevant Policies

We have adopted the Model Complaints Handling Procedure by the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman (SPSO) which was revised in 2020.

We have also taken account of the SPSO's Unacceptable Actions Policy in compiling this Policy.

4.0 POLICY STATEMENT

4.1 Support

This policy explains how we will deal with situations involving those we come into contact with in the course of our work and always aiming to respond in a way that aligns to our values. Therefore, in our interactions, if we are aware that someone has existing involvement with an external agency, we may contact them directly to advise of what action we are considering. In other cases we may signpost someone to a support service where we feel this may benefit the person and positively impact on the outcome.

5.0 DEFINITION OF UNACCEPTABLE ACTIONS

We understand that people may act out of character in times of trouble or distress. There may have been upsetting or distressing circumstances leading up to a service request or complaint being raised with the Co-operative. We do not view behaviour as unacceptable simply because a person is demanding or unduly persistent.

In fact, we accept that being persistent may sometimes be a positive advantage when pursuing a complaint.

However, we do consider actions that result in unreasonable demands on our business or unreasonable behaviour towards our staff as unacceptable.

We consider comments made on social media, that could be viewed as personally or professionally disparaging to staff or the organisation, as unacceptable.

It is these actions that we aim to manage under three broad heading within this Policy.

5.1 Aggressive or Abusive Behaviour

Any violence or abuse towards our staff will not be tolerated. We understand that people feel passionate about the issues they discuss but if those feelings escalate into aggression, we consider that unacceptable.

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

This may not always be made directly to a member of staff, even statements made outside the workplace, or directed towards friends or family of a staff member, may be unacceptable in terms of this policy.

Examples of behaviours grouped under the heading include threats, physical violence, personal verbal abuse, derogatory remarks and rudeness. Language which is designed to insult or degrade, is racist, sexist, sectarian or homophobic is unacceptable or which makes serious and unsubstantiated allegations can be abusive behaviour.

The Co-operative expect our staff to be treated courteously and with respect. Violence or abuse towards our staff is unacceptable and will never be tolerated. Our staff understand the difference between aggression and anger. It is recognised that the anger is felt by people is usually directed towards the subject matter of their complaint. However, it is not acceptable when anger escalates into aggression directed towards the Co-operative staff.

5.2 Unreasonable Demands

Individuals may make what we consider as unreasonable demands on the Co-operative by the scale of the service they expect. What amounts to unreasonable demands will always depend on the circumstances surrounding the behaviour and the seriousness of the issues raised.

Examples of actions grouped under this heading include:-

- Demanding responses within an unreasonable timescale;
- Insisting on seeing or speaking to a particular staff member when that is not possible;
- Continual phone calls, letters or emails;
- Placing unreasonable conditions on a member of staff;
- Refusing to accept that we cannot carry out a particular request;
- Refusing to engage with the Co-operative to resolve things e.g. refusing to clarify things or provide additional information;
- Repeatedly changing the substance of the enquiry or raising unrelated concerns.

The Co-operative considers these demands as unacceptable and unreasonable if they start to impact substantially and require a disproportionate amount of time diverting resources away from our core functions i.e. such as taking up an excessive amount of staff time to the disadvantage of other tenants and customers.

This can be difficult and stressful for staff to deal with when it is impossible to find common ground or a realistic approach to the issues being raised.

5.3 Unreasonable Persistence

The Co-operative recognises that individuals have the right to complain more than once as they have a continuing relationship with the Co-operative and subsequent incidents may occur.

We also recognise that some individuals will not or cannot accept that the Co-operative is unable to assist them further, or provide a level of service other than that provided already. They may persist in disagreeing with the action or decision taken in relation to their enquiry or contact the Co-operative persistently about the same issue.

Examples of actions grouped under this heading include:-

- Persistent refusal to accept a decision made in relation to an enquiry or complaint;
- Persistent refusal to accept explanations relating to what the Co-operative can or cannot do;
- Contacting the Co-operative repeatedly about the same or closely related issues and without presenting any new information.

The way in which these individuals approach the Co-operative may be entirely reasonable, but it is their persistent behaviour in continuing to do that which is not.

We consider the persistent actions of individuals to be unacceptable when they take up what the Co-operative regards as being a disproportionate amount of time and resources. We have the right to assess whether someone's persistence of approaches over time has reached the point of disrupting our ability to undertake our work, or is amounting to harassment or unreasonable treatment of our staff.

6.0 MANAGING UNACCEPTABLE AND UNEASONABLE BEHAVIOUR

There are likely to be relatively few individuals whose actions we consider unacceptable. How we aim to manage these actions depends on their nature and extent.

6.1 Unacceptable Behaviour

The Co-operative will aim to ensure that an individual is warned immediately if their actions are tending towards unacceptable, and what will follow if they persist. We will do so in a way calculated to defuse the situation, and the aim will be to bring the tone of communication back to a more reasonable level.

We will not tolerate any threat or use of physical violence against, or verbal abuse or harassment of, our staff. It is likely to result in the ending of all direct contact with the individual. Such actions may be reported to the police, and will always be reported if physical violence is used or threatened.

Staff will end telephone calls if the caller is considered aggressive, abusive or offensive. The staff member talking the call has the right to make this decision, tell the caller the behaviour is unacceptable and end the call if the behaviour does not stop.

The same principle applies to an individual who visits the offices and during home visits. Staff have the right to terminate interviews and require the person to leave the office, and to terminate a home visit and leave immediately. We may decide that there is a need for two of our staff to be present during any personal contact. The Police may be called in circumstances where a threat is made or physical violence used. We may restrict contact in future or only deal through a third party.

Where we receive correspondence or a communication that is:-

- Abusive towards staff;
- Contains allegations that lack substantive evidence;
- Contains language which is discriminatory, offensive, or which makes clearly unreasonable demands.

When this happens we will return the correspondence, where possible, and advise the individual that we consider that their language is offensive, unnecessary and unhelpful, and ask the sender to stop using such language and that we will not deal with the correspondence. However, we may, at our discretion, provide the person with a chance to resubmit their correspondence in a form which is acceptable to the Co-operative.

In extreme situations, we will tell the person in writing that their name is on a "no person contact" list. This means that we will limit contact with them and any future contact will be through a third party.

This policy links to the Co-operative's Anti-Social Behaviour (ASB) Policy that sets out the principles and standards that we aim to follow in the management of our tenancies; recognising the different types of ASB and neighbour nuisance.

6.2 Unreasonable Behaviour

Where a tenant or customer repeatedly phones, visits the office, raises repeated issues, or sends large numbers of documents where their relevance isn't clear or raise the same issues, we may decide to:-

- Limit contact to telephone calls from the individual at set times on set days;
- Require the individual to make an appointment to see named staff member(s) before visiting the office;
- Restrict contact from the customer to writing only;
- Return any documents to the individual or in extreme cases advise them that further irrelevant documents will be destroyed;
- Take any other action that we consider appropriate including, in exceptional cases, refusing to deal with the matter. We will, however, always advise what action we are taking and why.

Where an individual continues to contact us on a wide range of issues, and this action is considered excessive, then the person may be told that only a certain number of issues will be considered in a given period and asked to limit the focus of their requests accordingly.

In the case of an individual making a complaint action will be considered unreasonably persistent if all internal review mechanisms have been exhausted, and the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman has issued a decision. Should the individual continue to dispute the Co-operative's decision relating to their complaint they will be told that no future telephone calls or correspondence will be accepted or interviews granted concerning this complaint. We will only acknowledge or respond to new unrelated complaints.

7.0 DECIDING TO RESTRICT ACCESS

The Co-operative's staff who directly experience aggressive or abusive behaviour from an individual has the authority to deal with immediately with that behaviour in a manner they consider appropriate and in line with this Policy.

With the exception of such immediate decisions taken at the time of an incident, decisions to restrict contact are only taken after careful consideration of the situation by Senior Management. Wherever possible, we will give the tenant or customer the opportunity to modify their behaviour or action before a decision is taken.

8.0 NOTIFICATION OF OUR DECISION

When a staff member makes an immediate decision in response to aggressive or abusive behaviour, the tenant or customer is advised at the time of the incident. When a decision has been made by Senior Management the individual will always be advised in writing explaining the following:-

- Why the decision has been made to restrict future contact,
- The restricted contact arrangements;
- If relevant, the length of time that these restrictions will be in place.

This will ensure the individual has a record of the decision.

9.0 APPEALING A DECISION TO RESTRICT CONTACT

It is important that a decision can be reconsidered. A complainant can appeal a decision to restrict contact. If they do this, we will only consider arguments that relate to the restriction. An appeal could include, for example, an individual saying that:

- Their actions were wrongly identified as unacceptable;
- The restrictions were disproportionate; or
- They will adversely impact on the individual because of personal circumstance.

A senior member of staff who was not involved in the original decision, will consider the appeal. They will have the discretion to quash or vary the restriction as they think best. They will make their decision based on the evidence available to them. The complainant must be advised of the decision in writing that either the restricted contact arrangements still apply or a different course of action has been agreed.

10.0 MEASURES TO PREVENT CONTACT

We will consider using technical measures to block an individual's attempts to contact us if that individual's communications have been judged to be abusive, threatening, or to constitute harassment of our staff. We will consider measures such as seeking to block an individual's telephone number or email address, and we will consider in more extreme cases whether to seek to interdict the individual or take other legal measures in order to protect our staff. Where we decide to implement technical blocking measures, e.g. of an email address, we will not

necessarily make that known to the individual concerned. Whether to inform the individual of the use of technical measures will be a matter of judgement for senior management taking the decision to terminate or restrict contact.

11.0 RECORDING AND REVIEWING A DECISION TO RESTRICT CONTACT

If we make restrictions to how or when someone can contact us under the terms of this policy, we will review these periodically or on request. We will ensure that any restrictions are for set time periods only and that the individual to which they apply is informed of the timescale and the date of review.

At the end of a period when a restriction has been put in place, the restriction will be lifted for a trial period, which lasts for the same amount of time as the original restrictions did if there has been no repeat of unacceptable actions. If the individual continues to act in an acceptable way during the trial period, that is the end of the matter. However, if the acts in an unacceptable way during the trial period the restrictions will be put in place again.

Where it is decided to restrict contact with an individual, we will record that decision and the reasons for it on SDM system. This record will be shared with any colleagues that have either been contacted by the individual or where it is judged possible or likely that the individual may contact the Co-operative.

12.0 POLICY REVIEW

This policy will be reviewed every three years or as required to assess its effectiveness and to consider any changes required in the light of experience, new guidance, good practice, and legislation.