

Rotherham Council
Unreasonable Behaviour Policy
September 2026

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1. Our commitment to you

Regardless of the reason someone needs our help, or the way they make contact with us, we want them to have a positive experience.

We aim to be a Council that:

- Makes it easy for you to deal with us
- Keeps you informed
- Gets it right

Sometimes though, things don't go quite to plan, and this can leave people feeling frustrated or unhappy with something we did or didn't do.

All customers have a right to be heard, understood and respected, and we will do all we can to help anyone with legitimate queries, comments, complaints, or challenge.

Most interactions with our customers are reasonable and respectful. People can however sometimes behave in a way we believe is unreasonable or inappropriate, and on rare occasions, even threatening.

First and foremost, as a public sector organisation we are here to support people to access the services they need. If someone is behaving unreasonably, we will ask them to modify their behaviour and give them the opportunity to adjust their actions so we can help them.

We will always take into account someone's diversity and individual needs, circumstances and vulnerability; in particular, where we believe a customer may be acting unreasonably due to an underlying health condition, or because their neurodiversity makes it harder for them to communicate with us or express themselves in a way they feel understood.

As a responsible employer, we also have a duty to make sure our employees, customers, councillors and contractors have a safe environment in which to work. We will not tolerate deceitful, abusive, offensive, threatening or other forms of unacceptable behaviour and will take proportionate action to protect the wellbeing of our staff and others.

The Council is committed to ensuring that residents can access services. This policy will only be used in exceptional circumstances and as a last resort. We will not restrict or refuse access to services unless there is no reasonable alternative available.

2. Policy statement

This Policy explains what we consider to be ‘unreasonable behaviour’ and outlines the way we will manage customers if they behave in an unacceptable way or make excessive demands on our services to the extent that our staff cannot carry out their duties.

This policy applies to anyone communicating with the Council, regardless of the reason for contact, the nature of their enquiry, or the way with which they choose to speak to us or make comment about.

It is applicable to anyone who contacts or visits our properties, premises, or offices, and includes relatives, friends, acquaintances, or representatives of customers, as well as representatives from external organisations.

The Policy has been developed:

- in line with best practice guidance provided by the [Housing Ombudsman](#) and [Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman](#);
- in consideration of other relevant legislation and regulations including:
 - The Human Rights Act 1998;
 - Equality Act 2010;
 - The Data Protection Act 2018;
- to compliment other Council policies and procedures, such as [Anti-Social Behaviour Policy](#), [Complaints Policy](#) , [Customer Access Strategy](#);
- to work alongside the Tenancy agreement and ‘Guide to Your Home’ which are issued to Council tenants; particularly regarding Nuisance and Anti-Social Behaviour and behaviour towards Council staff and contractors.

3. Unreasonable behaviour

3.1 When someone acts or behaves unreasonably it:

- Can cause distress, harm, or risk to others;
- Makes it hard for us to help them with their enquiry or deal with their issues;
- Takes up a disproportionate amount of staff time;
- Affects our ability to help other people;
- Causes delays to support or actions being taken.

Unreasonable behaviour can occur over a short period of time or over the lifespan of a service request, complaint, or enquiry.

It can involve inappropriate acts, words or physical gestures, and can be deceitful, abusive, offensive, threatening, demanding or unreasonably persistent.

There are many ways in which someone could behave unreasonably including (but not limited to) the following examples:

Unacceptable behaviour can include:

- Behaviour, physical gestures or language (verbal or written) that may cause our staff to feel offended, afraid, threatened, or abused;
- Making derogatory or discriminatory remarks; including racist, sexist, disablist, homophobic, or transphobic comments;
- Using insulting or degrading language verbally or with body language;
- Making serious allegations against us or others without any evidence;
- Submitting false or misleading statements or documents;
- Using Generative Artificial Intelligence (AI) to create enhanced imagery or unverified claims with a view to increasing the urgency of an enquiry or complaint, or misleading the Council;
- Publishing information about employees online including social media;
- Recording and publishing telephone discussions with employees that are taken without their consent;
- Specific to complaints:
 - Refusing to explain what the complaint is about, or continuously changing the details of the complaint;
 - Refusing to engage with the complaint investigation;
 - Insisting on the complaint being handled in ways that do not follow our policy and procedures;
 - Repeatedly changing the substance of a complaint or using the complaints process to raise unrelated matters;
 - Raising the same complaint with multiple organisations at the same time;
 - Submitting a new complaint which is an old complaint with only minor changes;
 - Refusing to accept a final decision and continuing to argue the same points without new evidence;
 - Continuing to raise issues that fall outside the complaints process.

Unreasonable demands can include

- Repeatedly demanding a response within a timescale outside of normal timescale agreements;
- Refusing to accept a decision when explanations for the decision have been given;
- Asking a large amount of detailed questions and/or making requests for large volumes of information;
- Submitting unverified AI generated information to the Council and requesting a response to all points raised;
- Insisting on being provided with something we are not able to provide.

Unreasonable persistence can include:

- Refusing to accept the answer that has been provided and continuing to raise the same subject matter on an ongoing basis;
- Making repeated contact over a short period, or making excessive contact by phone, letter, email, social media or other means;
- Unnecessarily or excessively copying the Council into emails to other parties or sending 'scatter gun' emails to a wide range of people;
- Repeatedly contacting us about issues/events that have already been dealt with.

Unreasonable harassment can include:

- Contacting employees using their personal details or their social media presence (eg. Facebook, Instagram, TikTok), and/or publishing their personal, sensitive or private information in the public domain;
- Sending abusive texts, messages, or images to individuals;
- Spreading malicious rumours about individuals;
- Making repeated, unwanted contact or continuously trying to gain unnecessary attention.

Refusing to co-operate with reasonable requests can include:

- Refusing to provide information or doing what we ask so we can help resolve the issue;
- Not responding to clear and appropriate instructions or requests;
- Refusing to communicate with us to discuss something that needs to be resolved;
- Refusing to provide essential information or documentation

4. Managing unreasonable behaviour

4.1 First steps

Wherever possible, we will always aim to give someone the opportunity to adjust their behaviour before any action is taken. We will:

- Explain which behaviour is causing concern and ask them to change it;
- Give warning that we may take action if the unreasonable behaviour continues;
- Always try to be fair, and before taking any further action make sure we have:
 - explained things clearly;
 - done all we can to answer someone's enquiry and/or properly investigated their complaint;
 - offered extra support, adjustments, or advocacy;

- taken into account someone's health, disability, distress, or personal circumstances and how that might be affecting their behaviour.

Having a disability, being diverse/neurodiverse, or having any other vulnerability will never in itself lead to us restricting someone's access to services. But we will not tolerate aggressive, offensive, threatening, or abusive actions, language, or behaviour.

4.2 Formal Action

In the absence of very good reasons to the contrary, all residents have a right to access public services.

However, if someone continues to behave unreasonably, we may take further action; for example, restricting the way/frequency with which someone can contact us or access services.

If formal action is needed, we will:

- Write to the individual to let them know that their behaviour is unacceptable, and provide them with a copy of this policy.
- Our letter will include examples of their unreasonable behaviours and will explain:
 - Details of any restrictions that have been put in place and the reason for the decision;
 - What the restrictions mean in terms of future contact with the Council
 - How long any restrictions will last, and;
 - What the customer can do to have the decision reviewed.

Examples of restrictions we may impose include (but are not limited to):

- Limiting non-emergency contact to a single form eg. writing, email or telephone only;
- Restricting contact to specified days and limited times;
- Allowing visits to the office by appointment only;
- Requiring any face-to-face contact to be arranged in the presence of a third party; and/or any personal contact to only take place in the presence of an appropriate witness;
- Requiring contact to take place only with a named officer(s);
- Requesting that someone only communicates with us via a representative;
- Stopping all communication with a customer concerning a specific issue;
- Where appropriate notifying other relevant public authorities;
- Declining to give any further consideration to an issue unless any additional evidence or information is provided;
- Deciding not to investigate a complaint on the basis that it has been pursued in a way that is unacceptable;

- Requiring the customer to enter into an agreement about their future behaviour before we provide further help or support, or investigate their complaint;
- restricting all access to the Council.

4.3 Process for approval of formal action

We will always consider someone's individual needs and circumstances and choose the least restrictive option possible that is proportionate to the situation.

Before recommending that restrictive measures are taken against someone, we will carefully consider:

- the impact of the proposed restriction on the individual and the Council (eg. resources, finance, other services);
- the individual's health, vulnerability and communication needs and any reasonable adjustments previously put in place;
- the number of previous warnings given and extent to which conversations alone are no longer considered to be having a positive impact.

A senior manager will be appointed to review the information above so they can determine whether or not the circumstances justify the actions to be taken.

If a decision is made to put restrictive measures in place we will:

- Record details of the decision taken and the reason why this was considered necessary;
- Send a letter to the customer explaining the restrictive measures we will be taking as detailed in 4.2;
- Review any restrictions put in place at least once every six months. If the customers' behaviour has improved, restrictions may be reduced or removed;
- We will inform the customer of the outcome of the review in writing.

4.4 Right of appeal

If someone disagrees with the reason we have decided to take restrictive measures, they can ask for the decision to be reviewed.

Wherever possible, this review will be conducted by a different senior manager to the person who initially made the decision to put restrictive measures in place.

5. Safety Measures

If someone's behaviour is so extreme that it threatens the immediate safety and welfare of the Council's staff, we may report the matter to the Police or consider taking legal action.

In such cases, it may not be possible to give the customer prior warning.

We also reserve the right in some circumstances, not to notify a customer of a decision we have made regarding actions we will take.

We may also add a safety alert to our records, for example advising colleagues not to speak with or visit a person or property, or only to visit in pairs or with another agency.

Departments are responsible for recording this information appropriately and for regular reviewing any measures that have been put in place so that the details of the individual can be removed once they no longer pose a risk.

6. Monitoring, Compliance and Effectiveness

We will review this Policy on an annual basis to ensure it remains fit for purpose and our management of unreasonable behaviour remains compliant with the policy and any statutory regulations or ombudsman requirements.