

### **Purpose of this policy**

This policy means we can manage unacceptable behaviour by third-parties consistently and fairly. It sets out clearly what we consider to be unacceptable and the steps we may take to deal with such behaviour. It applies to everyone who accesses our services to help us protect staff from abuse and harm.

### **Definition of third-party harassment**

Third-party harassment occurs when one of our workforce is subjected to harassment by someone who is not part of our workforce but who is encountered in connection with work. This includes our clients, candidates, suppliers and members of the public.

### **Definition of unacceptable behaviour**

Unacceptable behaviour means acting in a way that is unreasonable, regardless of the level of someone's stress, frustration or anger. It may involve acts, words or physical gestures that could cause another person distress or discomfort.

### **Aggressive or abusive behaviour**

Unacceptable behaviour includes aggressive or abusive behaviour. This is behaviour or language (written or spoken) that could cause our staff to feel afraid, threatened or abused. This includes threatening emails, telephone calls, meetings, and comments on social media or elsewhere.

For example:

- being personally abusive or verbally aggressive towards staff dealing with their issue
- insulting or degrading language, including inappropriate banter, innuendo or malicious allegations
- any form of physical violence or threats of physical violence
- derogatory racist, sexist, ageist, or homophobic remarks
- comments relating to disability, perceived gender, religion, belief, or any other personal characteristic

### **How we will respond to incidents of unacceptable behaviour**

We do not expect our employees to tolerate unacceptable behaviour when communicating with third-parties. When this happens, our employees have the right to:

- place callers on hold
- end the call
- not reply to an abusive email, letter or electronic message
- ask the individual to leave the premises
- refuse entry to our premises

Before taking such action, we will always warn third-parties that they are behaving in an unacceptable way to give them the chance to change their behaviour. However, a warning will not be given in extreme cases to protect our staff, for example, when a physical threat is made.

Where these circumstances arise, we will take the following steps:

- we'll ask third-parties to modify their behaviour and explain why
- if the behaviour continues to be unacceptable, our employees will remove themselves from the situation. If the communication is by telephone, the caller will be told that the call will be ended
- if the third-party is on our premises they will be asked to leave immediately, if they refuse to leave the police will be called for assistance
- the employee will inform their manager who will keep a record of the incident. In all cases a manager will investigate the situation and decide what action to take. This could include limiting a third-parties' contact with us
- if the third-party is a client or supplier we'll refer to the complaints procedure of the organisation they represent and initiate a complaint
- we'll refer the matter to the police where a criminal offence has been threatened or committed

### **Review**

We will regularly review any decision to restrict communications and when appropriate we may lift some or all restrictions.

### **Preventative measures**

To prevent third-party harassment from occurring we have:

- publicised this policy on our website and other publications
- put up signs in our offices advising of our zero tolerance to abusive behaviour toward staff
- made callers aware of our policy on our telephone on-hold message and record all calls
- trained staff on conflict resolution techniques

### **How we will take account of our duties under the Equality Act 2010**

We make sure that we meet the requirements of the Equality Act 2010. This includes making sure we consider adjustments for people with protected characteristics.

Some people may have difficulty expressing themselves or communicating clearly and/or appropriately. We will always consider the needs and circumstances that we have been made aware of, before deciding how best to manage the situation. This will include making reasonable adjustments. However, this does not mean we will tolerate abusive language, shouting, or other unacceptable behaviour or actions.

If an individual with a protected characteristic becomes the subject of restriction under this policy, we will consider whether the restriction may affect them more than someone without that characteristic. If this is the case, we may make different arrangements so they can still access the service.