

## **MANAGEMENT OF UNREASONABLE CUSTOMER BEHAVIOUR POLICY**

**Head of Service/Contact:** Amardip Healy, Chief Legal Officer  
**Urgent Decision?(yes/no)** No  
**If yes, reason urgent decision required:**  
**Annexes/Appendices (attached):** **Annex 1** - Draft Management of Unreasonable Customer Behaviour Policy  
**Other available papers (not attached):**

### **Report summary**

The policy is to protect staff and councillors from unreasonable customer behaviour which could hinder the handling of a customer's complaint or request. It also reminds customers that the Borough Council has a zero tolerance towards unacceptable behaviour.

### **Recommendation (s)**

#### **The Committee is:**

- (1) requested to resolve that the Management of Unreasonable Customer Behaviour Policy (attached at Annex 1) be agreed with immediate effect;**
- (2) to delegate to the Chief Legal Officer in consultation with the Chairman and Vice Chairman of the Committee to any updating of the Policy which may be necessary to reflect good practice.**

### **1 Implications for the Council's Key Priorities, Service Plans and Sustainable Community Strategy**

- 1.1 The policy supports the cross cutting theme of supporting our communities and managing our resources as residents are required to behave in an acceptable way in order to access services and information.

# Strategy and Resources Committee

## 30 July 2019

### **2 Background**

- 2.1 The Council has a corporate complaints policy and process. Unfortunately a small number of customers sometimes behave in an unacceptable way when they make a complaint including making frequent contact on the same issue, treating staff in a disrespectful and potentially threatening way.
- 2.2 Currently the Council does not log the number of incidents of unreasonable customer behaviour across the organisation. However, the trend over the last 18 months has been of increase in unacceptable customer behaviour towards staff. This has taken the form of abusive and threatening at one end of the scale, to persistent and constant complaints following a refusal to accept final decisions on matters, at the other. The effect on organisational time and resources has been substantial and is no longer sustainable.
- 2.3 It is standard for the public sector to have clear policies in terms of approach to unreasonable customer behaviour. Such a policy sits within a framework of dealing with customer complaints, and allows a process of referral by the Council to the Local Government Ombudsman, on those cases where it would be in the best interests to refer the matter early to the LGO. It is important to ensure all those who represent and or work for the Borough Council are protected from poor behaviour.
- 2.4 Currently the process for managing corporate complaints and vexatious customers is set out across various documents available to staff, not within a single written policy document.
- 2.5 The purpose of this report is to address this lack of a written policy thereby mitigating the risk of a lack of clarity around what action can or cannot be taken.

### **3 Proposals**

- 3.1 It is important to ensure that the ability of staff or councillors to conduct business is not adversely affected by those few individuals who behave in an unreasonable manner.
- 3.2 It is also important to ensure staff and councillors have a safe working environment and are not exposed to unnecessary stress due to the unacceptable behaviour of others.
- 3.3 Bringing forward a Policy dealing with unreasonable behaviour allows both staff and councillors to deal confidently and effectively with unreasonable behaviour.
- 3.4 The new Management of Unreasonable Customer Behaviour Policy has been developed to support both officers and Councillors to ensure they are able to conduct their work free from unreasonable and or unacceptable behaviour.

# Strategy and Resources Committee

## 30 July 2019

- 3.5 The draft Policy has been the subject of wide consultation and consideration by Leadership Team, by service departments and also by the Staff Consultative Group. The draft Policy has received overwhelming support from officers across the Council. A clear statement from the Council on what is and is not acceptable and how the Council will deal with issues, is central to the support it has received from staff. Comments made have been taken into account in the drafting of the policy.
- 3.6 The policy will be supported by a practice guidance note and signage at all Council buildings will be updated to reflect the new policy. Training for managing unreasonable customer behaviour will be provided to all staff and Members to ensure both awareness of the policy and support in how to operate the policy proportionately.

### **4 Financial and Manpower Implications**

- 4.1 There are no financial implications of proposed action.
- 4.2 **Chief Finance Officer's comments:** None for the purposes of this report.

### **5 Legal Implications (including implications for matters relating to equality)**

- 5.1 The policy helps to minimise the risk to staff and councillors of abusive behaviour by customers. The particular needs of customer groups will be taken into consideration when dealing with unreasonable customer behaviour.
- 5.2 **Monitoring Officer's comments:** none arising from the contents of this report.

### **6 Sustainability Policy and Community Safety Implications**

- 6.1 None

### **7 Partnerships**

- 7.1 None

### **8 Risk Assessment**

- 8.1 By having a dedicated policy will help to manage the risk to both staff and councillors.

# Strategy and Resources Committee

## 30 July 2019

### **9 Conclusion and Recommendations**

- 9.1 In cases of bad or poor behaviour, it is important for an organisation to be able to point to a policy document to support the course of actions it may wish to take. Limiting access to services or even withdrawing services must be a measured and proportionate response to the behaviour engaging a corporate reaction. Having a clear policy which sets this out is a key step in ensuring duties of care are discharged carefully and considerately.

**Ward(s) affected:** (All Wards);