

# Citizen Interaction Policy

Approved by Staff Governance Committee on  
20XX with an implementation date of 20XX

<b>Policy Number</b>	POL-CS-0021
<b>Policy Author/s and Owner</b>	Lucy McKenzie
<b>Approval Authority</b>	Staff Governance Committee
<b>Scheduled Review</b>	May 2027
<b>Date and Changes:</b> V1 April 2025	

DRAFT

## Table of Contents

1.Why does the Council need this Policy? .....	4
2.Application and Scope Statement.....	4
3.Responsibilities .....	5
4.Supporting Procedures and Documentation .....	6
5.About this Policy .....	7
5.1We CARE Charter and Commitments .....	7
5.2Zero Tolerance Pledge .....	7
5.3Taking a Zero Tolerance Approach .....	8
5.4Managing Citizen Interaction.....	9
5.5Support for Employees Facing Social Media Harassment .....	10
5.6Children and Young People.....	10
5.7Elected Members .....	11
6.Risk.....	12
7.Environmental Implications .....	13
8.Policy Performance .....	13
9.Design and Delivery .....	13
10.Housekeeping and Maintenance .....	14
11.Communication and Distribution.....	14
12.Information Management .....	14
13. Appendix .....	15

## **1. Why does the Council need this Policy?**

- 1.1 As a local authority, our objective is to be open and accessible to everyone. It is important that we provide clarity and reassurance for citizens, employees and Elected Members on how we interact with citizens accessing our services. This policy sets out what citizens can expect from us when receiving our services, and what we expect from citizens.
- 1.2 This policy aims to support employees in encouraging positive engagement with citizens and it also signposts to procedures to support employees when interactions become challenging or a 'zero tolerance' approach needs to be taken. This includes how we handle violent, aggressive and/or abusive behaviour from citizens making verbal, written or physical contact with us. Aberdeen City Council is committed to providing a safe working environment for our employees.
- 1.3 All members of the community have the right to fair and equal access to Council services, and this policy does not interfere with the need to ensure that any service provided is accessible to all on an equal basis. While we strive for positive interactions, there may be instances where the behaviour or actions of individuals using our services necessitate action to protect our employees and our ability to provide services.

## **2. Application and Scope Statement**

- 2.1 This policy applies to all employees<sup>1</sup> (including agency workers and volunteers) and Elected Members who interact with citizens.
- 2.2 This policy covers any citizens that interact with the Council. This includes citizens as service users, including children and young people, parents or carers of a school child, consultees or constituents to elected members. The standards of engagement we support are the same for all. However, it does not apply to children or young people in schools or care settings, where other policies and guidance are to be followed (See Section 5.6 below).
- 2.4 Where an employee is the victim of violence, aggression or unacceptable actions involving a colleague or manager, the Council's Dignity and Respect at Work Policy should be referred to for information and advice. The Member Officer Relations Protocol would be referred to for any actions of this nature by an Elected Member.

---

<sup>1</sup> Employees" in this policy refers to anybody engaged in work for Aberdeen City Council, including relief / casual workers, agency workers, interns, apprentices and volunteers. Employees of the Aberdeen City Health and Social Care Partnership will also use documentation approved by the Integrated Joint Board (IJB)

- 2.5 This policy also incorporates guidance for Elected Members who may face similar challenges due to the nature of their roles. It does not include harassment or intimidation connected to an elected member's official duties. Such incidents should be referred to Police Scotland under Operation Ford.

### **3. Responsibilities**

- 3.1 The Council is responsible for delivering accessible services to citizens. The Council must also establish a safe and supportive working environment for its employees, clearly define unacceptable behaviour for citizens interacting with employees, and outline expectations for employees. Additionally, it sets out the behaviour standards expected of employees.
- 3.2 Elected members are responsible for providing leadership and encouraging organisational compliance with the policy.
- 3.3 The Chief Officer, People and Citizen Services is responsible for managing this policy.
- 3.4 Chief Officers and Directors are responsible for applying this policy within their service area.
- 3.5 All managers are responsible for:
- ensuring employees are aware of and understand the contents of this policy, and to apply this policy when interacting with citizens.
  - embedding the We CARE Charter and Commitments within their service area and commit to providing the best service we can to our citizens.
  - ensure that risk assessments are undertaken and that resources are in place to sufficiently mitigate the risk of unacceptable actions.
  - understanding how to respond to unacceptable actions.
  - taking appropriate action against unacceptable behaviour towards an employee whilst they are at work.
  - supporting their employees and colleagues who may have experienced an incident.
  - providing support and training for employees to put boundaries in place safely and consistently.
  - carrying out a de-brief with their employees after any significant incident.
  - recording incidents on the corporate reporting system
  - sharing information on service users where required to reduce the risk to employees with other Services in accordance with Data Protection and Human Rights Legislation.
- 3.6 All employees have responsibility for:

- awareness of and compliance with the contents of this policy.
  - encouraging positive engagement with citizens and upholding the principles outlined in the We CARE Charter and its commitments.
  - understanding how to appropriately respond to unacceptable actions including reporting any incidents to line management.
  - recognising that their role can be crucial in providing assistance or support to those in need.
  - undertaking relevant training so that they are able to put boundaries in place safely and consistently.
  - assisting in the prevention and reporting of workplace violence and aggression.
- 3.7 External and partner organisations should have their own arrangements in place for managing unacceptable actions.
- 3.8 Any instances of non-compliance with the policy should be reported to the Service Manager of the relevant service in the first instance.
- 3.9 Any feedback or suggestions for improvement of this policy should be communicated to the Customer Feedback Team. The Customer Feedback Team's contact details can be found externally on the website and internally on the intranet.

## **4. Supporting Procedures and Documentation**

- 4.1 The policy should be read in conjunction with the following supporting corporate policy and procedures:
- [Our Guiding Principles](#)
  - [We CARE Charter and Commitments](#)
  - [Zero Tolerance Pledge](#)
  - [Managing Citizen Interaction Procedure](#)
  - [Social Media Guidance](#)
  - [Complaints Handling Procedure](#)
  - [Dignity and Respect at Work Policy](#)
  - [Member Officer Relations Protocol](#)
  - [Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Policy](#)
- 4.2 There are references to other sources of relevant supporting guidance within the above procedures.
- 4.3 Local procedures may be developed by individual Clusters and Functions to support this corporate policy. This may include how they will align to the We CARE Charter, and/or manage the risks of unacceptable actions.

## 5. About this Policy

### 5.1 We CARE Charter and Commitments

- 5.1.1 Aberdeen City Council's vision is for Aberdeen as a place where all people can prosper. This means all people being able to access our services, regardless of their background and circumstances, so that we help all people, families, businesses and communities to do well, succeed and flourish in every aspect.
- 5.1.2 [Our Guiding Principles](#) guide the way we work, the way we behave with each other and make sure we all have the same understanding of what it means to work here. The [We CARE Charter and Commitments](#), aligned with the organisation's vision and values, is an external pledge to our citizens about what they can expect from us.
- 5.1.3 The [We CARE Charter and Commitments](#) sets out what all citizens can expect when they engage with us as a council. The CARE acronym within the Charter represents four key responsibilities - Connected, Accessible, Responsive, Empowered, with an overarching message that we care about our citizens, which is central to the Target Operating Model.
- 5.1.4 Our employees are committed to supporting positive engagement and providing excellent customer service. We are here to help and support citizens and we ask them to work with us in making this possible. This includes ensuring people have an equal opportunity to access our services and providing information about how they can request adjustments in the way we deliver our service for them. We also explain clearly what we need from them to provide the best possible service.
- 5.1.5 We understand that people who come to us may have experience of trauma, or have specific needs and requirements. We will ensure our employees have appropriate training to identify where additional support may be needed and always treat our citizens with empathy and understanding.

### 5.2 Zero Tolerance Pledge

- 5.2.1 The We CARE Charter outlines the standards citizens can expect when engaging with our services, while our [Zero Tolerance Pledge](#) specifies the standards we expect from citizens.
- 5.2.2 We recognise that some of our citizens will come into contact with the Council at difficult times in their lives or when experiencing challenging circumstances, and that this may cause them to act in ways that are out of character. At the same time, our employees are entitled to be treated with respect as they carry out their roles and it is important to recognise situations that are unacceptable or inappropriate in a professional environment.

- 5.2.3 Our Zero Tolerance pledge of violence, aggression and abuse towards our employees and elected members is published on our website. Signage, developed in collaboration with Trade Unions, is also prominently displayed in public buildings where citizens may visit and engage with Council employees, to communicate our Zero Tolerance Pledge. The signage promotes positive interactions and reminds everyone of their right to a safe and respectful environment.

### **5.3 Taking a Zero Tolerance Approach**

#### **5.3.1 When should interaction not be tolerated?**

Our employees deserve a safe and respectful place to work. While it is not possible to produce a comprehensive list of actions that would be considered inappropriate, any act of abuse, either physical or non-physical aggression such as assault, threats or name calling to an employee in the course of their duties may fall into the 'zero tolerance' category.

For employees, it is important that they know and understand that if they feel threatened and at risk, they do not need to maintain contact simply because a direct threat has not been made.

#### **5.3.2 Consistency is important and each Service Manager should ensure that all employees within their team:**

- can clearly explain and understand, what their boundaries are.
- are given support and training to put boundaries in place safely and consistently.
- know how to deal with zero-tolerance behaviour should it occur.

#### **5.3.3 What actions are considered to fall within the zero tolerance category?**

Zero tolerance incidents includes any behaviour or language, oral or written, that may cause employees to feel afraid, threatened or abused. This includes:

- Threatening or intimidating behaviour
- Personal verbal abuse
- Derogatory remarks and rudeness
- Inflammatory statements
- Unsubstantiated allegations
- Any abuse or negative comments related to a protected characteristic under the Equality Act (2010). This includes both verbal and non-verbal behaviours such as comments, snubs or inappropriate questions that negatively target aspects of a person's identity or create hostility.

#### **5.3.4 Aberdeen City Council has a duty of care towards members of the public that come onto its premises. On occasion, the nature of citizens' behaviour may compromise this duty. The following types of behaviours also fall within the zero tolerance category; however, this is not an exhaustive list:**

- Behaviour which is distressing towards other citizens while on Council premises
- Damage to Council property
- Disruptive physical behaviour that prevents the efficient and effective delivery of services to other citizens. This category includes such behaviours as:
  - being noticeably under the influence of alcohol and/or drugs
  - distressing other customers, even if there is not felt to be a risk of actual violence
  - inappropriate behaviours
  - refusing to leave premises when formally requested to do so

5.3.5 Incidents may arise at the beginning of contact with a citizen or after a period of positive interaction. The Council will aim to moderate the offending behaviour, in order to allow the individual access to the services they need. Where violence or aggression occurs during an interaction with a citizen, employees should take a zero tolerance approach. They should act immediately and appropriately to deal with the situation.

5.3.6 The [Managing Citizen Interaction Procedure](#) is in place which sets out the actions to be taken to deal with the immediate situation and to ensure the incident is recorded and reported appropriately. It also provides guidance around what training is available to employees and how to support employees impacted by an incident.

5.3.7 Upon completion of the Managing Zero Tolerance Incidents process, the next steps in the Managing Citizen Interaction procedure should be followed, to manage ongoing contact (see Section 5.4 below). See Appendix below for a process flow chart.

## **5.4 Managing Citizen Interaction**

5.4.1 The Council aims to support everyone engaging with us to do so positively, to help us provide them with the best possible level of service. We also accept that individuals may be upset and distressed when they contact us, and we want to support them to engage with us.

5.4.2 Employees should aim to defuse and de-escalate situations where possible. However, there are some situations that we need to respond to or manage because of the negative impact on the wellbeing of our employees and our ability to provide a service. This includes when zero-tolerance incidents occur, as detailed above.

5.4.3 Wherever possible, we will give the individual the opportunity to change their behaviour before a decision to implement the [Managing Citizen Interaction Procedure](#) is taken. This is normally through the issue of a written warning.

5.4.4 Before considering implementing the Managing Citizen Interaction Procedure, we will seek to restore the relationship and communicate as normal whenever possible. However, we will take action and implement restrictions, if the situation becomes

unacceptably challenging, and is resulting in unreasonable demands on our services or unreasonable behaviour towards our employees and/or other citizens.

- 5.4.5 Interaction encompasses all types of verbal contact (such as phone calls, or in-person conversations) and written communications (including letters, emails and online forms), as well as interactions at Council related events and online. Online comments about Aberdeen City Council or individual employees, which are shared publicly or in a forum or way that means they are not private, also count as engagement even when they are not shared directly with the Council.
- 5.4.6 It is important to ensure our response is proportionate to the behaviour and the impact on our services and employees. The [Managing Citizen Interaction Procedure](#) sets out how we identify and respond to citizen engagement that needs to be managed. The procedures also provide guidance around supporting employees.
- 5.4.7 It is important to note that citizens who are being managed under the Managing Citizen Interaction Procedure cannot be prevented from contacting us about services they need or have a statutory right to. This includes making contact by telephone for emergency matters, submitting complaints under the [Complaints Handling Procedure](#), Freedom of Information requests (FOI) or Subject Access Requests (SARs). If further advice or guidance regarding managing citizen behaviour or complaints is required, please contact the Customer Feedback Team. For advice regarding FOI or SARs, please contact the Access to Information Team. Contact details for the Customer Feedback Team and Access to Information Team are available on our website.

## **5.5 Support for Employees Facing Social Media Harassment**

- 5.5.1 In today's interconnected world, the prevalence of social media has provided a platform for communication and sharing, but it has also opened avenues for harassment and unacceptable actions. Aberdeen City Council has a responsibility to support their employees and ensure a safe and respectful workplace environment. The [Managing Citizen Interaction Procedure](#) provides clear guidance on the support available to employees facing social media harassment.
- 5.5.2 Information about our procedure for engagement on our own social media channels can be found here: [Social Media Guidance](#).

## **5.6 Children and Young People**

- 5.6.1 This policy will primarily be applicable in relation to adults but will also be relevant on occasions where unacceptable behaviour has been experienced from a child or young person, if not in a school or care setting (see Section 5.6.4 below).
- 5.6.2 The approach towards unacceptable behaviour from a child or young person is handled in accordance with the Getting It Right For Every Child (GIRFEC) principles.

The [Managing Citizen Interaction Procedure](#) should be applied to deal with the immediate situation, e.g. unacceptable behaviour from a group of young people visiting a library.

- 5.6.3 If there is a requirement for ongoing management of the child or young person's interactions, then while the Managing Citizen Interaction Procedure still applies, there should be increased focus on restorative actions. Efforts should be made to work with the child/young person's responsible adult or a Council employee that the child/young person trusts and regularly interact with, e.g. a teacher, to try and resolve the matter without restrictions being implemented. More information can be found in the Managing Citizen Interaction Procedure.
- 5.6.4 Where unacceptable behaviour has been experienced from a child or young person in a school or care setting, alternative policies and guidance should be followed.
- 5.6.5 The Education Behaviour Action Plan is approved by Education and Children's Services Committee. The policies and guidance that should be considered in such situations within Education are:
- Individual school level relationship/promoting positive behaviour policies (available from schools)
  - Incident and Near Miss Reporting Guidance
  - Person Centred Risk Assessment Guidance
  - Minimising Exclusion Policy and Guidance
  - Supporting Learners Physical Intervention and Seclusion Guidance

The relevant documents are also available for Education employees here: [Supporting Learners \(sharepoint.com\)](#)

- 5.6.6 Employees in the Children's Residential workforce are part of a specialist, regulated sector. They receive support to enhance their skills and knowledge of child development to effectively prepare for behavioural challenges. As outlined in the Service's Ethos of Care, this includes responding to children by applying Dyadic Developmental Psychotherapy (DDP) in their day-to-day supports. Additionally, all employees undertake Behavioural Support Strategies (BSS) as a complementary behavioural management approach. Practice developments are implemented as required.
- 5.6.7 If you are an employee within a school or care setting and require further support, please contact your line manager to discuss.

## **5.7 Elected Members**

- 5.7.1 While Elected Members will work to support positive engagement, there are some situations that they may not respond to or need to manage because of the negative impact on the ability to provide a service. It is understood that individuals may be

upset or distressed when they contact the Council, and Elected Members want to support them to engage with the Council.

- 5.7.2 Wherever possible, the reason for managing engagement will be explained clearly to the constituent. Elected Members will work to ensure that their response is proportionate and necessary.
- 5.7.3 The decision whether or not to take a management approach, as outlined in Section 5.4 above, should be taken by the Elected Member and does not affect the constituent's right to request a service from Aberdeen City Council directly or approach another Ward member.
- 5.7.4 It should be noted that the demands or behaviours that led to a management approach being used may result in subsequent measures being put in place by other Elected Members, if they see fit.
- 5.7.5 **Approach to communicating**

Elected Members will be clear and straight-forward when communicating that a situation needs to change, or that engagement will be managed.

a) **Warning**

If appropriate, a warning will be given which explains the engagement that must be managed, and the constituent will be given the opportunity to stop this behaviour. Elected Members will encourage positive engagement, and the decision to provide a warning is at the Elected Members' discretion.

b) **Restrictions**

Where necessary, Elected Members may determine that it is necessary to formally manage or restrict engagement. Elected Members will explain this in writing to the constituent and outline the alternative routes available to them. This includes seeking the services of an Advocate, another Elected Member or contacting Aberdeen City Council services directly.

5.7.6 **Record**

A record of the correspondence will be kept in line with data requirements.

## 6. **Risk**

6.1 This policy and its supporting documentation will manage the following risks:

- **Compliance Risks** – This policy and its supporting documentation will manage the risk of unacceptable actions towards employees whilst at work. This includes

providing training to employees on providing accessible services, dealing with unacceptable behaviours, sharing information on service users where required to reduce the risk to employees, making reasonable adjustments to working practices where necessary and provide debriefing and support after an incident occurs.

- **Financial Risks** – This policy and supporting documentation mitigates the risk of injury and claims being made to/against the organisation. The risk is mitigated through robust processes and procedures such as risk assessments and the combined policy providing clarity to citizens and employees as to what is acceptable.
- **Reputational Risks** – This policy and supporting documentation manages the risk of reputational damage and supports the existing frameworks in place that provide clear customer service standards and guidance. There are robust supporting policies in place, which are easily accessible to provide guidance to managers and employees around how to manage challenging behaviours.
- **Operational Risks** – This policy and supporting documentation assists in mitigating operational risks which may occur should negative interactions impact the operational delivery of council services. If effectively managed, the impact should be minimized and employees effectively supported.

## **7. Environmental Implications**

- 7.1 This policy does not relate to, nor have an impact on, any environmental factors.

## **8. Policy Performance**

- 8.1 The effectiveness of the policy will be determined by each Cluster's monitoring and review process. Incident recording will also be monitored. Corporately, the Customer Feedback Team will monitor situations where the Managing Citizen Interaction Policy has been implemented and identify any inconsistencies.

## **9. Design and Delivery**

- 9.1 The Scottish Public Services Ombudsman (SPSO) have developed an 'Engagement Policy' which helps Local Authorities in supporting positive engagement and managing unreasonable contact with citizens. This policy adheres to this guidance to foster positive engagement and adopts the same methods to manage contact from citizens following instances of unacceptable behaviour. This includes best practice around responding to social media harassment.
- 9.2 This policy is aligned to supporting delivery of the Council's statutory obligations. It is recognised that as a local authority we have an obligation to deliver statutory services and individuals cannot be refused access. This policy provides guidance

around how to ensure this is achieved, by supporting citizens and safeguarding employees.

- 9.2 This policy supports the Prosperous Place Theme within the Local Outcome Improvement Plan (LOIP). Aberdeen City Council's vision is for Aberdeen as a place where all people can prosper. This means all people being able to access our services, regardless of their background and circumstances, so that we help all people, families, businesses and communities to do well, succeed and flourish in every aspect.

## **10. Housekeeping and Maintenance**

- 10.1 The policy will be subject to a biennial review.
- 10.2 This policy replaces the previously separate Violence and Aggression procedure and Unacceptable Actions policy and consolidates into one.
- 10.3 The supporting documentation specified within this policy will be reviewed and updated as and when required. All corporate procedures are consulted on with Clusters and signed off by the Chief Officer – People & Citizen Services.

## **11. Communication and Distribution**

- 11.1 The policy has been consulted on with Trade Unions and all relevant Clusters. It has been made available internally through the intranet and distributed through The Council's Leadership Forum to support awareness. The Customer Feedback Team will promote the consistent implementation of the policy.
- 11.2 The policy will be published externally on the Council website.

## **12. Information Management**

- 12.1 Data generated by this policy will be stored and managed in accordance with the Council's Corporate Information Policy and supporting Handbook of procedures.

### 13. Appendix

The process map below outlines the steps to take when considering managing a citizen's interactions.

