

# **Anglian Water**

## **Unacceptable Customer Conduct Policy**

### **1. Purpose**

- 1.1 Anglian Water customers have a right to be heard, understood and respected. We work hard to be open and accessible to everyone and treat all customers fairly and impartially.
- 1.2 Occasionally, the behaviour or actions of individual customers makes it very difficult for us to help them or to deal with their matter. In a small number of cases the actions of individual customers become unacceptable because they involve abuse of our staff or our processes.
- 1.3 When this happens we have to take action to protect our staff and our ability to do our work and provide a service to others.
- 1.4 Where this policy refers to customers, this also includes persons who are not a customer of Anglian Water.

### **2. Policy Statement**

- 2.1 We expect customers to display courtesy and respect when dealing with our staff.
- 2.2 We understand that some customers may feel frustrated or angry due to our actions. We recognise that people may act out of character in times of trouble or distress. Our staff dealing with customers strive to be sensitive to these responses and to be helpful in resolving matters.
- 2.3 We do not view an action as unacceptable just because a person is forceful or determined. However, we do consider actions that result in our staff being or feeling offended, afraid, threatened or abused to be unacceptable; as do we actions that result in unreasonable demands on our staff. It is these actions that we aim to manage under this policy.

### **3. Aggressive or Abusive Behaviour**

- 3.1 Unacceptable behaviour includes behaviour or language (whether verbal or written) that may cause staff to be or to feel offended, afraid, threatened or abused and may include physical violence, threats, personal verbal abuse, derogatory remarks and rudeness. Language which is designed to insult or degrade, is racist, sexist or homophobic or which makes serious allegations that individuals have committed criminal, corrupt or perverse conduct without any evidence is unacceptable.
- 3.2 Any physical violence, aggressive or abusive behaviour towards staff will not be accepted as our staff have the right to work in a safe environment, free from any abuse or harm caused by others.

### **4. Unreasonable Demands**

- 4.1 Individual customers can make unreasonable demands on our resources by the nature and scale of the service they expect. Examples of such behaviour include repeatedly demanding responses within an unreasonable timescale, placing unreasonable conditions on staff, insisting on speaking to a particular member of staff even when it isn't possible, refusing to accept that Anglian Water cannot provide a particular service or action a particular issue, or repeatedly changing the exact nature of the complaint or issue they are raising or raising unrelated concerns.
- 4.2 Dealing with such behaviour requires a disproportionate amount of time and diverts an unreasonable proportion of our financial and human resources away from our statutory functions. This can also be difficult and stressful for staff to deal with.

### **5. Unreasonable Levels of Contact**

- 5.1 Sometimes the volume and duration of contact made with our staff by an individual customer can cause problems. This can occur over a short period, for example, when a large number of calls or emails are received from the same person in one day or this may occur when a person repeatedly makes

long telephone calls to us or inundates us with emails or copies of information that have been already sent or that are irrelevant to the substance of the complaint or enquiry.

- 5.2 We consider that the level of contact has become unacceptable when the amount of time spent talking to an individual or responding to emails or written correspondence impacts on our ability to deal with the matter, or on our responsibility for carrying out other legal activities.

## **6. Managing Aggressive or Abusive Behaviour**

- 6.1 The use or threat of physical violence or harassment towards our staff will be reported to the police. Such behaviour is likely to result in a termination of all direct contact with a customer. We may also take any other action that we consider appropriate in the circumstances.

- 6.2 Where verbal communications are abusive to staff or contain allegations that lack substantive evidence, we will inform the customer that we consider their language offensive, unnecessary and unhelpful and ask them to stop using such language. If the behaviour persists we will terminate the telephone call. Our staff have the right to make the decision to terminate a call which they consider to be aggressive, abusive or offensive. If the behaviour is repeated thereafter all direct contact will be terminated.

- 6.3 Where written communications are abusive to staff or contain allegations that lack substantive evidence, we will ask that the sender edit their correspondence to remove any offensive text and resend it, otherwise it will not be responded to.

- 6.4 When a decision is made to terminate all direct contact with a customer, we will inform the customer in writing. All future contact will be limited to written communications or communications through a third party such as the Citizens Advice Bureau or other independent adviser.

## **7. Managing Unreasonable Demands or Levels of Contact**

7.1 Where an individual customer repeatedly telephones, visits our offices, raises the same issue or sends us large numbers of documents about which the relevance is not clear, we may decide to:

7.1.1 limit the contact to telephone calls from the customer at set times on set days;

7.1.2 restrict contact to a nominated member of staff who will deal with future calls or correspondence;

7.1.3 restrict contact to written correspondence only;

7.1.4 refuse to deal with further correspondence and return any documents or, in extreme cases; advise the customer that further irrelevant documentation will be destroyed; or

7.1.5 take any other action that we consider appropriate to the circumstances.

7.2 Where we consider continued correspondence on a wide range of issues to be excessive, we may tell the customer that only a certain number of issues will be considered in a given period and ask them to limit or focus their requests accordingly.

7.3 Where a customer repeatedly demands a response on an issue on which they have already been given a clear answer, we may stop responding to enquiries from that customer.

7.4 We will always tell the customer in writing what action we are taking and why.

## **8 Decisions Under this Policy**

8.1 All decisions to invoke this policy when managing unacceptable customer conduct will be made in consultation with our Legal Department who will assess the customer conduct, apply this policy as appropriate to the circumstances and notify the customer of any decisions made in the ongoing management of their conduct.

Dated – June 2019