

## Unacceptable Customer Behaviour Policy

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The majority of individuals who contact us communicate with us in a polite and considerate manner. This policy is aimed at how we manage the few individuals, whose actions we consider unreasonable.

We recognise that times of distress may cause people to act out of character. We do not view assertive behaviour (for example, putting forward your case in a persuasive manner) as unreasonable. However, any behaviour that is aggressive or abusive, or which places unreasonable demands on our staff will be dealt with under this policy.

We believe that when you contact us to make enquiries, provide information or raise a complaint you should be listened to by our staff and should have an opportunity to explain your query, case or complaint. We believe that you should be treated with courtesy and respect by the our firm and its staff.

Our staff members have the same rights and we expect you to treat all of our staff with courtesy and respect.

If you have particular communication needs, for example if you have a disability, condition or illness, we will accommodate these where appropriate.

This policy is available on the ACORN SOLICITORS LLP website, and referred to in our Terms of Business or is available on request.

### ***Purpose of the policy***

Our aims and objectives are to set out the behaviours that we deem unacceptable, to ensure that individuals who behave in an unreasonable manner do not compromise our staff's ability to carry out their work, to ensure our staff have a safe working environment and are not exposed to unnecessary stress and to empower our staff to deal effectively with unreasonable behaviour

### ***Unacceptable behaviour***

Unacceptable behaviour is behaviour or language (whether verbal, i.e. face to face, by telephone, or written) that may cause staff to feel intimidated, threatened or abused. Examples of unacceptable behaviour are:-

- abusive or offensive language or gestures
- threats

- shouting
- verbal abuse
- racist and sexist language
- derogatory remarks
- bullying or intimidating behaviour
- raising unsubstantiated allegations
- rudeness
- making inflammatory statements

Whilst we accept that individuals may feel upset and angry when they contact us, it is not considered acceptable when that anger becomes aggression directed towards staff.

### ***Unreasonable requests and communication***

Our resources, including staff time, have to be used where they can be most effective. This might mean that we cannot respond to every complaint/issue in the way a person would like, if in doing so it would take up what we regard as being a disproportionate amount of time and resources.

We ask you to recognise that, due to the volume of work which we deal with, we may not be able to respond immediately to your requests. This does not mean that your concerns are any less important to us. If we have asked for your patience but you continue to pursue your concerns, we may consider such behaviour to be unreasonable.

The following are examples of unreasonable requests:-

- requesting responses within unreasonable timescales
- insisting on speaking with a certain member of staff when it is not necessary
- contacting several staff members on the same topics
- continually contact us while we are in the process of looking at a matter
- make a number of approaches about the same matter without raising new issues
- refuse to accept a decision made where explanations for the decision have been given
- continue to pursue complaints/issues which have no substance
- continue to pursue complaints/issues which have already been investigated and determined
- continue to raise unfounded or new complaints arising from the same set of facts

### ***Managing unreasonable behaviour***

All staff at our firm have the authority to manage unreasonable behaviour.

If a member of staff experiences unreasonable behaviour over the telephone they are entitled to terminate the call. The caller would be informed how their behaviour is considered to be unreasonable and the call will be ended if the unreasonable behaviour continues.

We have a zero-tolerance position on violence and threats against our staff and in certain circumstances we may report incidents to the police.

### ***Options to restrict contact***

We will only restrict communication with you if we have informed you that your behaviour is unreasonable and have asked you to modify your behaviour. We will explain what action will be taken if the warning is ignored and, if you do not modify your behaviour, we will take steps to restrict communications with you.

If we decide a restriction is appropriate, we will decide what level of restriction to apply, ensuring the restriction is proportionate, taking into account the nature, extent and impact of your behaviour on our ability to do our work.

We will be transparent and explain to you what restriction we are putting in place, our reasons for doing so and how long the restriction will apply.

The following restrictions (or a combination of these restrictions) may be applied:-

- Limit contact, requiring you to contact a named staff member(s) only or restricting telephone calls to specified days and times, as agreed with you
- Terminate our instructions and cease acting for you
- Terminating telephone calls if you persistently raise issues which we have already responded to in full. We will politely explain that we are unable to comment further on the matter and will ask if there are any other issues you wish to raise. If no new issues are raised and you persist in raising issues which we have already addressed, we will tell you so before ending the call. A written warning will then be sent, with a view to limiting future communication to written communication only
- Terminating telephone calls if you are aggressive, abusive or offensive. We will politely ask you to modify your behaviour, but if the behaviour continues we will tell you again that your behaviour is unacceptable and end the call. The manager of the member of staff involved will then send you a written warning, with a view to limiting future communication to written only
- Restricting the issues we will correspond on if we have already fully explained our reasons for a decision and you have exhausted the procedure to request a review of that decision, we will decline to respond to further correspondence which does not raise new issues. The correspondence will be read and filed but we will not acknowledge your correspondence unless you provide significant new information or evidence relating to the matter
- We will block your emails if the number and length of emails sent causes difficulties

- We will not respond to correspondence which is abusive or offensive and we will block emails that are abusive or offensive
- If you make a large number of reports to us which prove to be unfounded, we may ask that in future any further allegations you submit are supported by an independent third party such as the Citizens Advice Bureau, a legal representative or an advocate, to ensure that in future our staff resources are spent in a proportionate way
- Physical violence, verbal abuse, threats or harassment against our staff will not be tolerated and will be reported to the police, who may decide to prosecute

### ***Equality and Diversity***

If an individual has a disability/mental health issue where it is difficult for them to communicate clearly and appropriately, we will consider the individuals's need and our staff before deciding on how best to manage the situation.

### ***Appealing our decision***

If we impose restrictions or cease acting, we will inform the person of the decision in writing.

You must request an appeal within 10 working days of the decision to restrict contact. Your appeal should be made in writing to our Senior Partner, J David Sinclair or if he cannot deal with it to Jill E H Sinclair and should set out why the decision is unreasonable.

While the appeal is being considered, the restricted contact arrangements will remain in force.

The outcome of the appeal will be notified to the individual in writing within 10 working days of receipt of the letter and you will be advised either that the restricted contact arrangements still apply or a different course of action may be agreed.

If the Partner dealing with the complain is not able to respond within this timescale, the Partner will tell you why, and will let you know when they will be able to respond fully.