



Title of policy:	Unreasonable Customer Behaviour and Persistent Complaints Policy
Version:	2
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By:	Head of Customers

1. Introduction

North Star is committed to providing excellent services that meet the standards agreed with our customers. Where we do not meet these standards, we are keen to understand and learn from these and improve the services we deliver.

We recognise that on rare occasions customers make complaints that are deemed as vexatious. We expect all staff to be treated in a respectful manner. We will not tolerate behavior, which is deemed unacceptable, threatening, abusive or unreasonably persistent.

North Star has developed a RESPECT Standard for its staff and contractors working on behalf of North Star. The standard sets out action and language staff can use when dealing with customers whose behaviour is not acceptable.

We will always take great care and have clear evidence before recommending action to be taken for unreasonable, intensive, and vexatious complainants.

Any course of action will always be our last attempt after trying to resolve a situation.

2. Purpose

The purpose of this document is to:

- Explain what we consider to be unreasonable customer behavior.
- Explain what we consider to be unreasonable or persistent complainants.
- Explain what actions we may take.

3. What is Unreasonable Customer Behaviour and Persistent Complaints

3.1 People may act out of character in times of trouble or distress. They may have upsetting or distressing circumstances leading up to them contacting North Star. We do not view behaviour as unacceptable just because a person is forceful or determined. In fact, we accept that being persistent can be a positive advantage when pursuing a request or complaint.

3.2 However, the actions of customers who are angry, demanding, or persistent may result in unreasonable demands or unacceptable behaviour towards our staff. It is these actions that we consider unacceptable and aim to manage under this policy. We have grouped these actions and behaviours under the three broad headings:



Aggressive or Abusive Behaviour

- Violence is not restricted to acts of aggression that may result in physical harm. It also includes behaviour or language (whether oral or written) that may cause staff to feel frightened, threatened or abused.
- Examples of these behaviours include threats; physical violence; personal verbal abuse; derogatory remarks; and rudeness. We also consider that inflammatory allegations can be abusive behaviour.
- We expect our staff to be treated with respect. Violence or abuse towards staff is unacceptable. North Star understands the difference between aggression and anger. The anger felt by many customers involves the subject matter of their complaint or need. However, it is not acceptable when anger escalates into aggression.

Unreasonable Demands

- Customers may make what we consider unreasonable demands through the amount of information they seek, the nature and scale of service they expect or the number of approaches they make. What amounts to unreasonable demands will always depend on the circumstances surrounding the behavior and the seriousness of the issues raised by the customer.
- Examples of actions grouped under this heading include demanding responses within unreasonable timescales, insisting on seeing or speaking to a particular member of staff, continual emails, phone calls, social media posts or letters, repeatedly changing the substance of the complaint or raising unrelated concerns.
- We consider these demands as unacceptable and unreasonable if they start to impact substantially on our work, such as taking up an excessive amount of staff time to the disadvantage of other customers or services.

Unreasonable Persistence

- We recognise some people will not or cannot accept that we are unable to assist them further or provide a level of service other than that provided already. Customers may persist in disagreeing with the action or decision taken in relation to their complaint or contact North Star persistently about the same issue.
- Examples of actions grouped under this heading include persistent refusal to accept a decision made in relation to a complaint; persistent refusal to accept explanations relating to what North Star can or cannot do; and continuing to pursue a complaint without presenting any new information. The way in which these complainants' approach North Star may be entirely reasonable, but it is their persistent behaviour in continuing to do that which is not.
- We consider the actions of persistent customers to be unacceptable when they take up what North Star regards as being a disproportionate amount of time and resources.

4. Managing Unacceptable Actions

4.1 There are very few customers whose actions we consider unacceptable. How we aim

to manage these actions depends on their nature and extent. When we consider that someone's behaviour is unacceptable, we will tell them why we find their behaviour unreasonable, and we will ask them to change it. If their behaviour continues, we will take action to restrict their contact with our offices. Any incidents of unacceptable behaviour should be recorded on North Star's Near Miss Register.

4.2 The decision to restrict access to our offices requires approval by a senior manager. Any restrictions imposed must be appropriate and proportionate. The options we are most likely to consider are:

- Requesting the customer uses only one way to contact us for example, in writing only.
- Requiring contact to take place with a named officer.
- Restricting telephone calls to specified days and times, and/or
- Asking the person to enter into an agreement about their conduct.
- Contact may be via a third party such as solicitor

4.3 North Star recognises people can demonstrate unacceptable behaviour towards its staff on the telephone and by email and social media. It will not tolerate such abuse. If a member of staff receives a telephone call where the caller's behaviour is unreasonable, aggressive or abusive they should advise the caller they believe their behaviour is unacceptable and if it continues, will terminate the call. This should then be noted on a file note/computer records and a copy sent to the relevant manager.

If a member of staff receives an email where they consider the content to be unacceptable they should forward it to their manager who will then take action to have the email address barred from sending further emails.

In all cases we will write to the customer to tell them why their behaviour is unacceptable, what action we are taking and the duration of that action. We will also tell them how they can challenge the decision if they disagree with it. At the end of the initial duration of any restrictions the case will be reviewed by the relevant manager. If they feel that the restrictions should continue, we will explain our reasons and give another review date.

4.4 Where the behaviour is so extreme that it threatens the immediate safety and welfare of North Star staff the matter will be reported to the Police and legal action may be considered. In such cases, we may not give the complainant prior warning of that action.

4.5 Legal advice may be undertaken if this behaviour is deemed as a breach of their Tenancy Agreement should the complainant be a tenant or reside in a North Star property.

5. Equal Opportunities and Access to Services

5.1 This document has been developed in accordance with North Star's Equality and Diversity Strategy to ensure equality of treatment for all our staff and customers. We aim to meet the diverse needs of all our tenants in a customer focused and sensitive manner.



- 5.2 North Star opposes all forms of discrimination, which cause a person to be treated unjustly including on the grounds of race, ethnic origin or nationality, disability, gender, sexuality, age, income, appearance, faith or religious belief or non-belief and responsibility for dependents.
- 5.3 We aim to gain a detailed understanding of the diverse needs and preferences of all our staff and customers so that we can continue to shape our services to meet their needs. In doing so, we may look at individual cases where it may be prudent to exercise positive action to ensure that certain groups are provided with the appropriate services.
- 5.4 We are constantly looking at ways to make access to our services easier. Some of the ways we can help support staff and customers include:
- Providing information and responses in alternative ways when this will be helpful such as large print, translated into another language
 - Allowing extra time to respond in timescales
 - Arranging for an interpreter to explain our written information.
 - Providing additional support for customers with physical/mental health conditions
 - Arranging appointments around times of the week or periods that may be culturally sensitive for religious reasons.
 - Arranging to speak to a member of staff who is of the same gender.
 - Monitoring customer access and satisfaction in all areas
 - Arranging home visits to staff and customers who are unable to access our offices.

