



Acceptable Behaviour Towards Staff Policy

COR-POL-29

Version 1.0

Date approved: 17th September 2024

Approved by: Chief Executive

1. Introduction

- 1.1 Southway Housing Trust (Southway) is committed to providing high quality services to our tenants and residents. However, we recognise that employees may face situations where they are at risk of violence, abuse or other unacceptable behaviour during their work. We are committed to the health, safety and welfare at work of all employees, including volunteers and contractors acting on behalf of the Trust.
- 1.2 The purpose of this policy is to clarify the organisation's approach to reducing the risk of abuse against its staff, detail behaviour which is unacceptable and list the sanctions available when it occurs.
- 1.3 We have used the Ombudsman's guide on acceptable behaviour when formulating this policy and considered the Equalities Act 2010, the Data Protection Act 2018 and the Health and Safety at Work Act 1974.

2. Principles

- 2.1 Southway staff will treat all tenants and residents fairly and with courtesy and respect. We will recognise and respect individual preferences and aim to tailor our services to meet these.
- 2.2 Southway is committed to providing a working environment that all staff can enjoy without fear and is responsible for the provision of a safe and healthy working environment for its employees. The organisation will support managers and staff to adopt safe working practices and will provide support to individuals if they are subjected to abuse.
- 2.3 Violence and abuse against Southway's staff is unacceptable, and the organisation accepts its legal and moral duty to do everything reasonably possible to keep its employees from harm and eliminate the danger posed by threats of violence or abuse at work.
- 2.4 If a tenant, customer, or other member of the public exhibits unacceptable behaviour towards staff then Southway will take steps to make them aware that such behaviour will not be tolerated, act where appropriate and prevent it from recurring.
- 2.5 We recognise that sometimes things go wrong, and that people may wish to complain about the services that we provide. We have a Complaints Policy that sets out how tenants and residents can complain and how we will respond.

- 2.6 Southway recognises that excessive contacts can be difficult to respond to and manage. Sometimes this behaviour may be triggered by underlying issues and the person's individual circumstances, and we will always work with these individuals to provide services wherever possible, before we take any action or restrict access.

3. Definitions

- 3.1 We understand that people may act out of character in times of trouble or distress and that there may have been upsetting circumstances leading up to making a complaint. We do not view behaviour as unacceptable just because someone is forceful or determined. However, when tenants become very angry, demanding, or unreasonable towards our staff we will take appropriate and proportionate action.

For the purposes of this policy, the definition of work-related violence is:

Incidents where persons are abused, threatened or assaulted in circumstances relating to their work, involving an explicit or implicit challenge to their safety, well-being or health. This definition is taken to include verbal abuse or threat, threatening behaviour, any assault, and serious or persistent harassment, including any incident related to protected characteristics, and extends from what may seem to be minor incidents to serious assault.

- 3.2 Within this policy, "violence" is used to refer to physical violence, and "abuse" to verbal abuse.

- 3.3 We categorise unacceptable behaviour as follows:

Aggressive or Abusive Behaviour - Violence is not restricted to acts of aggression that may result in physical harm. It also includes threats, personal abuse, derogatory remarks, rudeness and behaviour or language (including oral, written or online through social media) that may cause staff to feel afraid, threatened or abused. In addition, inflammatory statements and unsubstantiated allegations can also be considered abusive behaviour.

Unreasonable Demands - Examples include

- Demanding responses within an unreasonable timescale, continuous phone calls, e-mails or letters,
- Making demands which do not comply with our policies or legislation,

- Repeatedly changing the substance of complaints or raising unrelated concerns.
- Demands which place staff members under duress or stress, impact substantially on the work of staff and/or take up an excessive amount of staff time to the disadvantage of other customers
- Requesting large volumes of information, asking for responses within a short space of time, refusing to speak to an individual or insisting on speaking with another.
- Refusing to accept the answer that has been provided, continuing to raise the same subject matter without providing any new evidence,

Harassment - Examples of harassment include making defamatory allegations, unwarranted criticism, issuing inappropriate information and insulting and abusing staff (oral, written and through social media).

4. Approach

4.1 Southway will follow the Ombudsman's guidance regarding excessive contact, using the following process that includes:

- Attempting to reach a voluntary arrangement first, in line with our service standards.
- Issuing a warning which includes evidence of the behaviour, these should be factual and include date, time, and what was included.
- Reference to what steps may be taken if the behaviour continues.
- The type of restriction that is being imposed.
- How service requests and complaints can be raised during the period of restrictions.
- A clear appeals and review timescale.

4.2 Southway will:

- (a) Minimise the risk to employees by providing a safe and healthy working environment. Particular attention will be paid to Reception and interviewing facilities, and employees carrying out visits to customers in their homes.

- (b) Provide appropriate training for employees who may be at risk of violence or abuse at work. This would include de-escalation and trauma informed training, including refresher training every 3 years.
- (c) Not tolerate verbal, physical, sexual or hate related harassment of its employees, assaults upon employees or their property by tenants, customers, or other members of the public either during or outside of working hours which are a result of their employment by Southway.
- (d) Deal with instances where employees are victim to verbal abuse, threats of or actual physical violence perpetrated by an employee, agency worker, volunteer or contractor acting on behalf of the Trust via the most appropriate HR policy in line with the Violence Against Staff Policy.
- (e) Impose restrictions on the method or frequency of contact that a tenant is allowed. See section on contact restrictions below.
- (f) Provide welfare counselling facilities for employees that have received threats of violence or experienced violence or abuse at work.
- (g) Involve the police or take legal action where appropriate.

5. Contact Restrictions

- 5.1 If appropriate we will attempt to reach a voluntary, or informal arrangement with the tenant before taking formal action, to allow them time to consider and adjust their behaviour. Mediation or advocacy through third parties may be considered, depending on the circumstances, to try and improve the situation and enable us to continue to provide a service.
- 5.2 If this informal approach fails, a written warning may be issued before taking any formal steps. Any warning should include examples of where behaviour has been considered unacceptable with reference to what formal steps may be taken if the behaviour continues.
- 5.3 The relevant Senior Manager will consider the overall impact on their department before sanctioning contact restrictions. Actions may include, but are not limited to:

- (i) Limiting contact to a single point of contact (this doesn't have to be a named person within a team or service areas and could be an email address or mailbox.).
- (ii) Blocking telephone numbers from Officer's mobile phones.
- (iii) Blocking email addresses as per our IT ticketing process.
- (iv) Limiting contact to a single form – writing, email or telephone.
- (v) Limiting contact to certain times or to a limited number of times per week or month.
- (vi) Removing permission to enter Southway premises except in certain circumstances – this is known as removing implied licence.
- (vii) Declining to give any further consideration to an issue unless any additional evidence or information is provided.
- (viii) Only considering a certain number of issues in a specific period.
- (ix) Only providing a response to multiple communications once within our service standard timescale of 10 working days.

5.4 Tenants or Residents will be told in writing why a decision has been made to restrict future contact, the restricted contact arrangements and, if relevant, the length of time that these restrictions will be in place.

5.5 Should the tenant or resident appeal a decision to restrict contact a senior manager who was not involved in the original decision will consider the appeal. They will advise the customer in writing either that the restricted contact arrangements still apply or that a different course of action has been adopted.

POLICY REVIEW HISTORY	
<i>To be completed during each review</i>	
Previous versions (version number – approved by – approval date – title if different) e.g. V1 – Board – 03/09/2009	
Date of last EIA:	22 nd July 2024
Review lead by:	Assistant Director-Corporate Services
Main points or amendments made and reasons	
New policy	
Next review due:	Q2 2027/28
Approval level:	Chief Executive