

Reasonable Behaviour Policy

Board/EG Approval:	August 2024	Responsible Board:	Ocean Housing Group Ltd
Next Review:	August 2027	Responsible Executive:	Managing Director of Ocean Housing Ltd

1.1 Policy Statement

- 1.2 All customers should be dealt with fairly, honestly, consistently, and appropriately including those whose actions are considered unacceptable.
- 1.3 We want to balance the needs of all of our customers appropriately, support them in challenging and complaining about services legitimately and provide clarity about the support and engagement that Ocean will provide.
- 1.4 Occasionally, the behaviour or actions of individuals makes it very difficult for us to deal with the issues that they have raised. In a small number of cases, the actions of individuals become unacceptable because they involve abuse of our staff or our process.
- 1.5 When this happens, we have to take action to protect the health and wellbeing of our staff who have a right to do their jobs without fear of being abused or harassed. We also have to consider the impact of the behaviour on our ability to do our work and provide a service to others.
- 1.6 This policy explains how we will approach these situations and applies to all areas of our work and to all methods of contact including telephone, face-to-face, letters, emails, social media and other digital channels.

2.1 Defining unreasonable actions by customers

- 2.2 This policy promotes reasonable behaviour by defining what is unreasonable and explaining how we will act when this is the case.
- 2.3 People may act out of character in times of trouble or distress. There may have been upsetting or distressing circumstances leading up to a customer approaching Ocean Housing. We do not view behaviour as unreasonable just because someone is forceful or determined, and understand that all customers have a right to be heard, understood and respected.
- 2.4 The actions of customers who are angry, demanding, or persistent may result in unreasonable demands on, or unreasonable behaviour towards Ocean Housing staff. It is these actions that we consider unacceptable and aim to

manage under this guidance. The actions are grouped under four broad headings:

2.5 **Aggressive or Abusive Behaviour**

2.6 We understand that customers may be upset and angry about the issues they have raised. If that anger escalates into aggression towards Ocean Housing staff, we consider that unacceptable. Any violence or abuse towards staff will not be tolerated.

2.7 Violence is not restricted to acts of aggression that may result in physical harm. It also includes behaviour or language (whether verbal or written) that may cause staff to feel offended, afraid, threatened or abused.

2.8 We will judge each situation individually. While we accept that those who contact us may feel angry, it is not acceptable to shout or swear at Ocean Housing staff.

2.9 Unacceptable language is that which:

- is offensive, derogatory or patronising,
- is discriminatory in any way, including racist, sexist, homophobic or transphobic comments; or
- makes allegations that individuals have committed criminal, corrupt or perverse conduct without any evidence.

2.10 We may decide that comments aimed either at Ocean Housing or others are unacceptable because of the effect that listening or reading them may have on our staff. Examples include rudeness, offensive comments, derogatory remarks, making inflammatory statements, or raising unsubstantiated allegations about individuals or third parties.

2.11 Threats against staff will be taken very seriously and if staff feel scared or threatened at any point during a conversation with a customer, the interaction may be ended at any time.

2.12 Exactly what constitutes abuse, a threat of physical violence or harassment will be defined by the staff member at the time it takes place. They will be required to complete a Report of Violence and explain why they felt the behaviour was abusive to their Line Manager or Supervisor.

2.13 Any abuse or aggression that relates to any of the protected characteristics of staff, as defined in the Equality Act 2010 is explicitly within the scope of this policy.

2.14 **Unreasonable Demands**

2.15 A demand becomes unacceptable when it starts to (or when complying with the demand would) impact substantially on the work of Ocean Housing.

2.16 Examples of this behaviour include:

- repeatedly demanding a response within a timescale outside of service level agreements,
- insisting on, or refusing to, speak to a particular member of staff
- repeatedly changing the substance of a complaint or raising unrelated concerns,
- Making repeated and unnecessary contact during the course of us dealing with a complaint or carrying out an investigation,
- Refusing to accept a decision where explanations for the decision have been provided.

2.17 An example of such impact would be that the demand takes up an excessive amount of staff time and in doing so disadvantages other customers and prevents their own issues or complaint from being dealt with.

2.18 **Unreasonable Levels of Contact**

2.19 Sometimes the volume and duration of contact made to Ocean Housing by an individual can become unreasonable. This can occur over a short period, for example, multiple calls in one hour or a day.

2.20 It may occur over a longer period when a customer repeatedly makes long telephone calls to us or inundates us with information that has already been received or that is irrelevant to the issue(s) being raised.

2.21 We consider that the level of contact has become unacceptable when the amount of time spent talking to a customer, or responding to, reviewing and filing emails or written correspondence impacts on our ability to deal with that issue, or with other customers'.

2.22 Unacceptable or persistent levels of contact include:

- Continuous contact whilst we are in the process of considering a matter, without adding any new information
- Repeated telephone calls over a short period, for example, a high number of calls in one day or week,
- Lengthy telephone calls repeating the same points,
- High volumes of information provided by email or post referencing the same issues.
- Unnecessarily or excessive copying us into emails to other parties.

2.23 **Harassment**

2.24 Ocean staff have the right to carry out their duties free from harassment or threats of harassment. We ask all customers to respect that staff are delivering services on behalf of Ocean Housing.

2.25 Examples of behaviours we consider to be harassment against our staff include:

- Recording and/or filming discussions and publishing the information online through websites, forums and social media channels
- contacting staff using their personal details or social media presence such as Facebook, Twitter or LinkedIn;
- publishing personal, sensitive or private information about staff online or in other public domains such as noticeboards or newsletters.

3.1 Reasonable Adjustments

3.2 We will consider making reasonable adjustments for a customer if we are asked to do so in accordance with our Reasonable Adjustments Policy. Examples of adjustments we may consider are:

- using different methods of communication;
- providing written communication in large print, coloured text, or in translation;
- communicating through a third-party representative who has authority to discuss

3.3 We acknowledge that there may be other individuals that are able to represent the customer in the handling of their complaint, for example a family member, friend or support worker. We may also consider if a multi-agency approach is necessary when the individual is receiving support from other bodies such as social services.

3.4 We may still use this policy if there are actions or behaviours which are having a negative effect on our staff or our work even where a reasonable adjustment has been made.

4.1 Managing unreasonable actions by users – Pre Action

4.2 Before implementing this policy, when we experience behaviour or demands which are unacceptable, we will try and reach a voluntary (informal) arrangement with the customer before taking formal action. This is to allow the individual time to consider and adjust their behaviour. Mediation or advocacy through third parties may be considered to try and improve the situation.

4.3 If this informal approach fails, we may find it appropriate to issue a warning to the customer before taking any formal steps. A warning will include examples of where the individual's behaviour has been considered unacceptable with reference to what formal steps may be taken if the behaviour continues.

5.0 Applying the policy

- 5.1 If behaviour does not improve and/or unreasonable behaviour continues, we may apply this policy and take formal action. The actions we will consider can include the following:
- appointing a single point of contact
 - limiting contact to a single form i.e. to writing, email or telephone only
 - limiting contact to certain times or to a limited number of times per week or month
 - declining to give any further consideration to an issue unless any additional evidence or information is provided
- 5.2 In extreme cases such as physical violence or harassment towards an employee, actions could include involving the police, taking legal action and ending direct contact with the customer.
- 5.3 All requests to apply sanctions under the Reasonable Behaviour Policy will be considered by the Head of Neighbourhood Services and Head of Customer Experience.
- 5.4 Where it is decided that formal action must be taken, we will inform the customer of the decision in writing. This will include details of why we have taken the decision, the period for which restrictions will be in place, and details of the appeal process.
- 5.5 A flag will be placed on our system to highlight the restrictions in place.

6.0 Appeals and reconsideration

- 6.1 A customer can appeal a decision to restrict contact. A senior member of staff who was not involved in the original decision will consider the appeal within 10 working days of receipt. They will advise the customer in writing either that restricted contact arrangements still apply or that a different course of action will be taken.

7.0 Review

- 6.2 If the individual's behaviour has improved at the point of review, consideration can be given to lifting the restriction. If it has not improved, an explanation will be provided as to why the restriction will remain in force for a further period pending the next agreed review date.
- 6.3 If a decision has been reconsidered, the customer will receive confirmation that the restriction has been lifted in writing and the flag will be removed from our housing management system.

7.0 Confidentiality

- 7.1 It is important that customers know how information about themselves, particularly with regard to medical information, will be treated. We will comply

with the collection, storage, access to, provision and disclosure of data in accordance with the Data Protection Act 2018.

8.1 Responsibilities and Monitoring

8.2 All members of staff have a responsibility to familiarise themselves with this policy, follow it and ensure any member of staff who reports to them does the same.

8.3 Ocean will review this policy annually to ensure that it remains relevant and in line with best practice.

9.1 Equality and Diversity

9.2 We will apply the Reasonable Behaviour Policy consistently and fairly and will not discriminate against anyone regardless of their age, gender, gender reassignment, disability, religion or belief, sexual orientation, race or ethnicity, marital status or with regards to pregnancy or maternity.

