



The Office of the Northamptonshire Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner

And

Northamptonshire Police

Managing Service User Contact Policy

1 Introduction

Both the Office of the Northamptonshire Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner (OPFCC) and Northamptonshire Police are committed to providing a fair, consistent and accessible service to all of their service users. This Policy sets out the joint approach to managing service user contact with a small minority of service users whose actions or behaviour are considered unacceptable, and impact on the work of our staff. A service user is defined as anyone who comes in to contact with either organisation.

Both the OPFCC and Northamptonshire Police deal with large numbers of people each year. In the majority of cases these interactions are dealt with satisfactorily and without concern. However, both organisations have a responsibility to provide a safe working environment for their staff and to ensure that our service is cost effective and delivered fairly to all. Therefore, we reserve the right to manage service user contact where necessary.

Both the OPFCC and Northamptonshire Police recognise that certain forms of mental illness or disability can make it difficult for people to express themselves or communicate clearly. We will always aim to make reasonable adjustments to meet the needs of the individual whenever we are advised of any access requirements – but may still need to manage contact in these circumstances when considered necessary.

Under the Equality Act 2010 we are legally required to make provision to enable those with disabilities easier access to our services. Should you wish to make a request for reasonable adjustments, this should be submitted to the Customer Service Team, either by calling 01604 888881 or by emailing customerservice@northantspfcc.pnn.gov.uk. Your request will be considered by the Customer Service Team Manager in consultation with the managers of any other department whose service will need to be altered to accommodate the request for adjustment. A decision will be communicated to the requestor in writing and will provide explanation for any decisions taken.

2 Policy Aims

The OPFCC and Northamptonshire Police aim to deal fairly, honestly, consistently and appropriately with all service users. We believe service users have the right to be heard, understood and respected. We also consider that our staff have the same rights. Therefore, we will not tolerate what we consider to be unacceptable behaviour towards our staff. Where we consider service users' behaviour to be unreasonable, we reserve the right to manage access to our services in order to provide a fair and accessible service to all service users.

Both the OPFCC and Northamptonshire Police will endeavour to treat all service users:

- with courtesy;
- fairly and transparently;
- with the intention to provide reasonable explanations and remedies, within a timely fashion.

As the OPFCC and Northamptonshire Police work together to deliver policing services across Northamptonshire, it is important that we adopt a joint policy to ensure that service users are treated consistently by both organisations.

3 Defining unacceptable behaviour

The OPFCC and Northamptonshire Police understand people may have experienced frustrating or distressing circumstances leading up to making contact with our organisations and we do not view behaviour to be unacceptable just because a service user may be frustrated or angry. Being subject to unreasonable demands or aggressive, abusive or repetitive behaviour or demands is unacceptable and it is these actions that we aim to manage under this Policy. We have grouped these actions under 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 (written or oral) that may cause staff to feel distressed, harassed, threatened or abused.

Behaviours grouped under this heading include threats, physical violence, personal and verbal abuse, derogatory remarks and rudeness, for example:

- Swearing, threatening and abusive words or behaviour;
- Racial, religious or sexual abuse;
- Making personal comments about the individual;
- Shouting or intimidating (both in person or by telephone);
- Making threats against staff or others.

Unreasonable behaviour

Service users may make what we consider unreasonable demands on our service because of 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 behaviour or demands will always depend on the circumstances surrounding that behaviour, and the seriousness of the issues raised by the service user.

Some actions and behaviour of unreasonable and unreasonably persistent complainants and correspondents are provided below:

- Incivility
- Refusing to specify the grounds of a complaint or the purpose of their correspondence, despite offers of assistance.
- Refusing to cooperate with the complaints process while still wishing their complaint to be resolved or correspondence to be answered.
- Adopting false identities or forging documents.
- Refusing to accept that issues are not within the remit of a complaints or correspondence policy, despite having been provided with information about the Policy's scope.
- Insisting on the complaint or correspondence being dealt with in ways which are incompatible with the complaints and correspondence policy.
- Making what appear to be groundless complaints about the staff dealing with the complaint(s) or correspondence, and seeking to have them replaced.
- Changing the basis of the complaint as the investigation proceeds or changing the reason behind the correspondence, and/or denying statements made at an earlier stage.
- Introducing trivial or irrelevant new information which the complainant or correspondent expects to be taken into account and commented on, or raising large numbers of detailed but unimportant questions and insisting they are all fully answered.
- Making inflammatory statements and unsubstantiated allegations.
- Electronically recording meetings and conversations without the prior knowledge and consent of the other persons involved.
- Adopting a 'scattergun' approach: corresponding, or pursuing a complaint or complaints with the Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner and his office and, at the same time, with others such as government ministers, members of parliament, local councillors, the Independent Office for Police Conduct, ombudsmen, or an authority's monitoring officer or internal audit function.
- Making unreasonably excessive demands on the time and resources of staff while a complaint or correspondence is being investigated; for example by excessive telephoning or sending emails to numerous people, writing lengthy complex communications every few days and demanding immediate responses.

- Submitting repeat complaints or correspondence, after proper processes have been completed, essentially about the same issues, with additions and/or variations which the complainant or correspondent insists make these 'new' complaints or inquiries, which should be put through the full complaints procedure and/or require a response.

4 Unreasonably persistent

The OPFCC and Northamptonshire Police recognise that some service users will not or cannot accept that we are unable to assist beyond the level of service provided already, or that some issues are not within the remit of the police service to address. Service users may persist in disagreeing with actions or decisions taken in relation to their case, or may contact us repeatedly about the same issue, instead of pursuing more appropriate remedies, such as instructing a solicitor.

Examples of behaviour grouped under this heading include: persistent refusal to accept a decision made in relation to a case, repeated requests to reverse a decision, persistent refusal to accept explanations relating to what we can or cannot do despite having information explained and clarified. The way in which these service users approach either organisation may be entirely reasonable – however, their persistent behaviour in continuing to do so is not.

Where a complaint has been dealt with and the review process has been exhausted, should the service user persist in making repetitive complaints, they may be subject to a communications plan which may state that any repetitive complaints will not be recorded.

5 Managing unacceptable behaviour

The approach taken to manage unacceptable behaviour depends on its nature and extent. If it adversely affects the ability to work and provide a fair service to others, we may need to restrict contact with the service user. Wherever possible, we aim to do this in a way that still allows access to our services, and we will always notify service users prior to putting any restrictions in place.

The service user will be advised that the OPFCC and Northamptonshire Police may take steps to manage communication in order to handle their contact with us - a copy of this Policy will be provided to give further explanation. Wherever possible, and depending on the degree of unacceptable behaviour exhibited, the OPFCC and Northamptonshire Police will give a service user the opportunity to adapt their behaviour or action before such a decision is taken.

It may be necessary to apply restrictions if all internal review mechanisms have been exhausted and the service user continues to display unacceptable behaviour that is impacting on the work of our staff. When authorising a request to restrict contact with a service user, the senior manager should be satisfied the following criteria have been considered before any action is taken:

- The matter – whether it be a complaint / case / query / request – is being, or has been, considered and properly addressed.
- Any case-related decision reached as a result of an investigation is the right one.
- Communication with the service user has been adequate and the service user is not providing any significant new information that might affect the consideration of the case.

- All efforts have been made with the service user to dispel misunderstandings and move matters towards a resolution.
- Any specific access requirements and appropriate solutions have been considered to ensure that the service user is not being denied access to the service.
- Putting the service user in touch with a suitable gateway organisation, such as a Citizens Advice Bureau, has been considered – or the service user has been urged to seek legal advice.

Where a service user continues to display unacceptable behaviour the OPFCC and Northamptonshire Police will exercise the right to restrict contact.

A service user will be issued with a 'communication plan' and advised in writing (or an alternative accessible format) that their behaviour is considered to be unacceptable.

The precise nature and action will be appropriate and proportionate to the nature of the unacceptable behaviour. We may decide to (this list is not exhaustive):

- Place time limits on telephone conversations and personal contacts (for example, one call on one specified morning/afternoon of any week).
- Restrict communication to one method of contact (telephone, letter, email, etc).
- Arrange for the service user to communicate with one specific point of contact only – where appropriate to do so.
- Record or monitor telephone calls.
- Read and file future correspondence, but acknowledge or respond to it only if the service user provides new information or is making a new complaint.
- Refuse to consider demands to re-open a closed case or case decision.
- Take other action that it considers appropriate – in severe circumstances this may include blocking telephone numbers and / or email addresses.

The 'communication plan' will set out how the service user should communicate with both the OPFCC and Northamptonshire Police. The plan will also set out the service they can expect to receive in return.

We will always tell service users what action we are taking and why. The 'communications plan' will explain the reasons for managing future contact, describing the restricted contact arrangements and, if relevant, clarifying how long these restrictions will be in place.

Where the behaviour in question is considered to be harassment/abusive, or in situations where it threatens staff safety and welfare, police involvement or legal action may be necessary. In such cases, the service user may not be given prior warning of this action. If a restriction has been put in place and a service user breaks its conditions, staff have the right not to engage in conversation or respond to requests.

We are committed to ensuring we comply with our duty to offer adjustments (reasonable adjustments) to those individuals who may need additional support. Where this Managing Service User Contact Policy is utilised, and we are aware of any requests for reasonable adjustments, these will be duly considered.

6 Accountability for restricting service user contact

OPFCC and Northamptonshire Police staff who experience unacceptable behaviour over the telephone have the right to either place callers on hold or end telephone calls if the call is considered aggressive, abusive or offensive. Staff are accountable for their actions and are required to log all instances where calls have been terminated, noting the reason for ending the call. Staff also have the responsibility to report any instances of unacceptable behaviour to their manager in order to ensure fairness and consistency of approach.

With the exception of ending a telephone call, decisions to restrict contact with the OPFCC or Northamptonshire Police can only be authorised by a senior manager with careful consideration given to the circumstances of the situation. Where possible, the OPFCC and Northamptonshire Police will adopt a joint approach and decisions to restrict contact will be taken jointly in order to ensure consistency across both organisations.

7 Disputing a decision to restrict contact

A service user can raise any concerns or disagreements against a decision to restrict contact through the OPFCC Customer Service Team complaints procedure. You can contact the Customer Service Team by emailing customerservice@northantspfcc.pnn.gov.uk

8 Record keeping and reviewing a decision to restrict contact

The OPFCC and Northamptonshire Police will record all decisions to restrict contact with service users. Accurate details will be noted on the relevant case file and any limits put in place will be reviewed as a minimum annually.

A decision to restrict service user contact may be reconsidered if the service user demonstrates a more acceptable approach. The annual review should indicate whether the restriction still applies or advise otherwise.

10 Data Protection

The OPFCC and Northamptonshire Police will retain records of the contact made by individuals in order to deal with their complaint or correspondence and to review the application of this Policy. These will be retained for six years after the complaint has been finalised or their correspondence answered, before being destroyed or deleted.

SIGNED:

Chief Constable

DATE:

SIGNED:

Police, Fire & Crime Commissioner

DATE: