



## Anglian Water

### Unacceptable Customer Conduct Policy

#### **1. Purpose**

- 1.1 Anglian Water customers have a right to be heard, understood and respected. We work hard to be open and accessible to everyone and treat all customers fairly and impartially.
- 1.2 Occasionally, the behaviour or actions of individual customers makes it very difficult for us to help them or to deal with their matter. In a small number of cases the actions of individual customers become unacceptable because they involve abuse of our staff, our equipment or our processes.
- 1.3 When this happens we have to take action to protect our staff and our ability to do our work and provide a service to others.
- 1.4 Where this policy refers to customers, this also includes people who are not customers of Anglian Water.

#### **2. Policy Statement**

- 2.1 We expect customers to behave with courtesy and respect when interacting with our staff.
- 2.2 We understand that some customers may feel frustrated or angry due to our actions. We recognise that people may act out of character in times of trouble or distress. Our experienced staff interacting with customers strive to be sensitive to these responses and to be understanding, patient and helpful in resolving matters for the customer. But, if anger is actively directed at our staff and/or language becomes abusive, the situation becomes unacceptable.
- 2.3 We do not view an action as unacceptable just because a person is forceful or determined. However, we do consider actions and conduct that result in our staff being or feeling scared, offended, intimidated, threatened, abused or assaulted to be unacceptable; as do we actions and conduct that result in unreasonable demands on our staff. It is this unacceptable conduct that we aim to manage under this policy.



### **3. Unacceptable Conduct: Aggressive or Abusive Behaviour**

3.1 Unacceptable aggressive or abusive behaviour includes behaviour or language (whether verbal or written, face to face, online, over the telephone or any other form of interaction) that may cause staff to be or to feel scared, offended, intimidated, threatened, , abused or assaulted. This includes:

- any form of physical violence, assault, aggression, harassment or abusive behaviour
- threats of violence, aggression, harassment and abuse
- the use of inappropriate language, such as:
  - creating a hostile, degrading or offensive interaction
  - using a bullying tone or language, or making threats
  - using inappropriate religious, cultural or racial comments or insults
  - using language which is designed to insult or degrade
  - making bi-phobic, homophobic or transphobic comments
  - making sexist or other derogatory remarks
  - making unsubstantiated allegations that individuals have committed criminal offences, are corrupt or perverse
  - discrimination against any protected characteristics as defined by the Equality Act 2010

3.2 Aggressive or abusive behaviour will not be tolerated as our staff have the right to work in a safe environment, free from any abuse or harm caused by others.

### **4. Unacceptable Conduct: Unreasonable Demands**

4.1 Individual customers can make unreasonable demands on our resources by the nature and scale of the service they expect. Examples of such behaviour include repeatedly demanding responses within an unreasonable timescale, placing unreasonable conditions on staff, insisting on speaking to a particular member of staff even when it isn't possible, refusing to accept that Anglian Water cannot provide a particular service or action a particular issue, or repeatedly changing the exact nature of the complaint or issue they are raising or raising unrelated concerns.



4.2 Dealing with such behaviour requires a disproportionate amount of time and diverts an unreasonable proportion of our financial and human resources away from our statutory functions. This can also be difficult and stressful for staff to deal with.

## **5. Unacceptable Conduct: Unreasonable Levels of Contact**

5.1 Sometimes the volume and duration of contact made with our staff by an individual customer can cause problems. This can occur over a short period, for example, during an operational visit, or when a large number of calls or emails are received from the same person in one day, or this may occur when a person repeatedly makes long telephone calls to us or inundates us with emails or copies of information that have been already sent or that are irrelevant to the substance of the complaint or enquiry.

5.2 We consider that the level of contact has become unacceptable when the amount of time spent talking to an individual or responding to emails or written correspondence impacts on our ability to deal with the matter, or impacts our responsibility to carry out our core activities.

## **6. Managing Aggressive or Abusive Behaviour**

6.1 Aggressive or abusive behaviour towards our staff may be reported to the police or other appropriate authority. The use or threat of physical violence, harassment or assault will always be reported to the police for appropriate law enforcement action. Such behaviour is also likely to result in the termination of all direct and face to face contact with a customer. We may also take any other action that we consider appropriate in the circumstances.

6.2 Where unacceptable language or behaviour is used, we will inform the customer that we consider their language or behaviour to be unacceptable and politely ask them to stop using such language or behaving in such a way. If the language or behaviour continues, our staff can stop the conversation or remove themselves from the situation. Our staff have the right to make this decision. If the unacceptable language or behaviour continues or is repeated, all direct contact will be terminated.



6.3 Where written communications are abusive to staff or contain allegations that lack substantive evidence, we will ask that the sender edit their correspondence to remove any offensive text and resend it, otherwise it will not be responded to.

6.4 When a decision is made to stop all direct contact with a customer, we will inform the customer in writing. All future contact will be limited to written communications or communication and interaction through a third party (such as the Citizens Advice Bureau or other independent adviser, or an appropriate third party facilitator).

## **7. Managing Unreasonable Demands or Levels of Contact**

7.1 Where an individual customer repeatedly telephones, visits our offices, raises the same issue or sends us large numbers of documents about which the relevance is not clear, we may decide to:

- limit the contact to telephone calls or online communication from the customer at set times on set days;
- restrict contact to a nominated member of staff who will deal with future communications;
- restrict contact to written communications only;
- refuse to deal with further correspondence and return any documents or, in extreme cases advise the customer that further irrelevant documentation will be destroyed; or
- take any other action that we consider appropriate to the circumstances.

7.2 Where we consider continued communications on a wide range of issues to be excessive, we may tell the customer that only a certain number of issues will be considered in a given period and ask them to limit or focus their requests accordingly.

7.3 Where a customer repeatedly demands a response on an issue on which they have already been given a clear answer, we may stop responding to enquiries from that customer.

7.4 We will always tell the customer in writing what action we are taking and why.



## **8 Our Operational Sites and Water Parks**

8.1 Any persons accessing our operational sites without valid authorisation or lawful authority will be trespassing, and will be asked to leave. Anyone found trespassing on Anglian Water sites may be prosecuted. Aggravated trespass will always be reported to the police for law enforcement action.

8.2 Our water park byelaws have been put in place to protect and maintain our parks, and to keep safe our staff, visitors, partners, property, land and the environment. Any contravention of the byelaws is an offence punishable by a fine. Contraventions may also be reported to the police and other law enforcement authorities.

## **9 Decisions Under this Policy**

9.1 All decisions to invoke this policy when managing unacceptable customer conduct will be made in consultation with our Legal Department who will assess the customer conduct, apply this policy as appropriate to the circumstances and notify the customer of any decisions made in the ongoing management of their conduct.

31 August 2023