

# CLYDESDALE HOUSING ASSOCIATION LIMITED

## Policy on Unacceptable Actions by Customers

### 1. Introduction

This Policy sets out Clydesdale Housing Association's approach to the relatively few customers whose actions or behaviour we consider unacceptable.

The term customer includes anyone acting on behalf of a customer or who contacts our office in connection with a housing association matter.

The term staff includes direct employees of the Association, its Management Committee members, contractors, consultants and agents.

### 2. Policy Aims

- 2.1 To make it clear to all customers, both at initial contact and throughout their dealings with our office, what the association can or cannot do in relation to their enquiry. In doing so, we aim to be open and not raise hopes or expectations that we cannot meet.
- 2.2 To deal fairly, honestly, consistently and appropriately with all customers, including those whose actions we consider unacceptable. We believe that all customers have the right to be heard, understood and respected. We also consider that our staff have the same rights.
- 2.3 To provide a service that is accessible to all customers. However, we retain the right, where we consider customer actions to be unacceptable, to restrict or change access to our service.
- 2.4 To ensure that other customers and association staff do not suffer any disadvantage from customers who act in an unacceptable manner.

### 3. Defining Unacceptable Actions by Customers

- 3.1 People may act out of character in times of trouble or distress. There may have been upsetting or distressing circumstances leading up to an approach to our office. We do not view behaviour as unacceptable just because a customer is forceful or determined. In fact, we accept that being persistent can be a positive advantage when pursuing an enquiry. However, the actions of customers who are angry, demanding or persistent may result in unreasonable demands on our office or unacceptable behaviour towards staff. It is these actions that we consider unacceptable and aim to manage under this Policy. The Association has grouped these actions under three broad headings:

#### **Aggressive or Abusive Behaviour**

- a. 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 afraid, threatened or abused.
- b. Examples of behaviours grouped under this heading include threats, physical violence, personal verbal abuse, derogatory remarks and rudeness. We also

consider that inflammatory statements and unsubstantiated allegations can be abusive behaviour.

- c. We expect our staff to be treated courteously and with respect. Violence or abuse towards staff is unacceptable. Clydesdale's staff understand the difference between aggression and anger. The anger felt by many customers involves the subject matter of their complaint. However, it is not acceptable when anger escalates into aggression directed towards Clydesdale's staff.

### **Unreasonable Demands**

- a. Customers may make what we consider unreasonable demands on our office 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 behaviour and the seriousness of the issues raised by the customer.
- b. Examples of actions grouped under this heading include demanding responses within an unreasonable time-scale, insisting on seeing or speaking to a particular member of staff, continual phone calls or letters, repeatedly changing the substance of the enquiry or raising unrelated concerns.
- c. We consider these demands as unacceptable and unreasonable if they start to impact substantially on the work of the office, such as taking up an excessive amount of staff time to the disadvantage of other customers or functions.

### **Unreasonable Persistence**

- a. We recognise that some customers will not or cannot accept that the Association is 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 enquiry or contact the office persistently about the same issue.
- b. Examples of actions grouped under this heading include persistent refusal to accept a decision made in relation to an enquiry or complaint, persistent refusal to accept explanations relating to what this office can or cannot do and continuing to pursue an enquiry or complaint without presenting any new information. The way in which these customers approach our office may be entirely reasonable, but it is their persistent behaviour in continuing to do so that is not.
- c. We consider the actions of persistent customers to be unacceptable when they take up what the Association regards as being a disproportionate amount of time and resources.

## **4. Managing Unacceptable Actions by Customers**

- 4.1 There are relatively few customers whose actions we consider unacceptable. How we aim to manage these actions depends on their nature and extent. If it adversely affects our ability to do our work and provide a service to others, we may need to restrict customer contact with our office in order to manage the unacceptable action. We aim to do this in a way, wherever possible, that allows a complaint to progress to completion through our Complaints Process. We may restrict contact in person, by telephone, fax, letter or electronically or by any combination of these. We try to maintain at least one form of contact. In extreme situations, we tell the customer in

writing that their name is on a 'no personal contact' list. This means that they must restrict contact with our office to either written communication or through a third party.

- 4.2 The threat or use of physical violence, verbal abuse or harassment towards Clydesdale staff is likely to result in the ending of all direct contact with the customer. Incidents may be reported to the police. This will always be the case if physical violence is used or threatened.
- 4.3 We do not deal with correspondence (letter, fax or electronic) that is abusive to staff or contains allegations that lack substantive evidence. When this happens we tell the customer that we consider their language offensive, unnecessary and unhelpful. We ask them to stop using such language and state that we will not respond to their correspondence if they do not stop. We may require future contact to be through a third party.
- 4.4 Clydesdale staff will end telephone calls if the caller is considered aggressive, abusive or offensive. The staff member taking the call has the right to make this decision, tell the caller that the behaviour is unacceptable and end the call if the behaviour does not stop.
- 4.5 Where a customer repeatedly phones, visits the office, sends irrelevant documents or raises the same issues, we may decide to:
- only take telephone calls from the customer at set times on set days or put an arrangement in place for only one member of staff to deal with calls or correspondence from the customer in the future.
  - require the customer to make an appointment to see a named member of staff before visiting the office or that the customer contacts the office in writing only.
  - return the documents to the customer or, in extreme cases, advise the customer that further irrelevant documents will be destroyed.
  - take other action that we consider appropriate. We will, however, always tell the customer what action we are taking and why.
- 4.6 Where a customer continues to correspond on a wide range of issues, and this action is considered excessive, then the customer is told that only a certain number of issues will be considered in a given period and asked to limit or focus their requests accordingly.
- 4.7 Customer action may be considered unreasonably persistent if all internal review mechanisms have been exhausted and the customer continues to dispute the Association's decision relating to their enquiry or complaint. The customer is told that no future phone calls will be accepted or interviews granted concerning this matter. Any future contact by the customer on this issue must be in writing. Future correspondence is read and filed, but only acknowledged or responded to if the customer provides significant new information relating to the enquiry or complaint.

## **5. Deciding to Restrict Customer Contact**

- 5.1 Clydesdale staff who directly experience aggressive or abusive behaviour from a customer have the authority to deal immediately with that behaviour in a manner they consider appropriate to the situation and in line with this Policy.

- 5.2 With the exception of such immediate decisions taken at the time of an incident, decisions to restrict contact with the Association are only taken after careful consideration of the situation by the Depute Chief Executive. Wherever possible, we give a customer the opportunity to modify their behaviour or action before a decision is taken. Customers are 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.

## **6. Appealing a Decision to Restrict Contact**

A customer can appeal a decision to restrict contact. The Chief Executive will consider the appeal. They advise the customer in writing that either the restricted contact arrangements still apply or a different course of action has been agreed.

## **7. Recording and Reviewing a Decision to Restrict Contact**

- 7.1 We record all incidents of unacceptable actions by customers. Where it is decided to restrict customer contact, an entry noting this is made in the relevant file and on appropriate computer records.

- 7.2 A decision to restrict customer contact may be reconsidered if the customer demonstrates a more acceptable approach. The Depute Chief Executive reviews the status of all customers with restricted contact arrangements on a regular basis.

## **8. Policy Availability and Review**

Copies of this Policy are available on request and free of charge from the Association's office. We review this Policy on a regular basis to make sure that the aims of the Policy are being achieved.

November 2005