

Stanley and Stanley Common Parish Council

Vexatiousness Policy

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ACCESS TO COUNCIL SERVICES & DEALING WITH VEXATIOUS PERSONS

1. Rights of Public Access

- 1.1. The Council recognises that, in the absence of good reasons to the contrary, members of the public have a right of access to the Council to seek advice, help or services that the Council offers.
- 1.2. Criticism of, and complaints against, the Council or its employees are a welcome, legitimate and necessary part of the relationship between the Council and the local community. They are a valuable means of reflecting on the operations of the Council and improving both those operations and the quality of the Council's relationship with its local community.
- 1.3. Nobody, no matter how much time and effort is taken up in responding to their complaints and concerns, shall be unconditionally deprived of the right to have those complaints or concerns addressed.
- 1.4. However the Council also has an obligation to use its resources efficiently and effectively and has obligations to its members and, as an employer, to its employees.
- 1.5. Accordingly, the Council has decided that there are circumstances in which it will limit the nature and scope of its responses.

2. Vexatious Behaviour

Categories of vexatious behaviour include:

- 2.1 Persons **who cannot let go**, e.g.
 - make excessive phone calls, or
 - seek to exercise excessive personal contact, or
 - engage in over-lengthy correspondence
- 2.2 Persons **who cannot be satisfied**, e.g.
 - cannot/will not accept that the Council is unable to assist them, or
 - cannot/will not accept that the Council cannot provide any further help beyond that provided already, or
 - continue to disagree with the action the Council has taken in relation to their complaint or concerns
- 2.3 Persons **who make unreasonable demands**, e.g.
 - the amount of information they seek, or
 - the value and scale of services they seek, or
 - the number of approaches they make
- 2.4 Persons **who are rude and abusive**, e.g.
 - engage in personal abuse, or
 - make inflammatory statements or comments, or
 - make statements or comments clearly intended to intimidate.

3. Aggressive behaviour

The Council has a zero-tolerance approach to violence and aggressive behaviour. The Council has a duty to ensure that, as far as is practically possible, it reduces the risk of violence, aggressive or threatening behaviour towards its employees during the course of their work. The Council affords the same protection to its members.

4. Guiding principles on limiting access

The Council will limit the nature and scope of access in the following circumstances:

- Where full access would be likely to compromise the Council's obligations as an employer

- Where full access would be likely to compromise any statutory obligations to which the Council is subject
- Where full access would be likely to be wasteful of the Council's resources whether through excessive contact or use of services
- Where full access would be likely to encourage or allow rude and abusive behaviour

5. Limiting access in particular circumstances

5.1 Not replying to written communications

Where the Council receives a written communication that contains substantial and clearly inappropriate content, such as abusive or threatening language or adverse personal reflections on individuals, a written notification will be sent to the author of the written communication asking that they reframe the communication so as to exclude the inappropriate content.

The author of the communication will be advised that, in the event that a further substantial and clearly inappropriate communication is received by the Council, the Council will not give a substantive reply, other than to the extent that such communication provides evidence of, or alerts the Council to, any criminal act, maladministration, a failure to comply with a legal duty or other malpractice by, or on behalf of, the Council.

5.2 Terminating phone calls

Where a caller uses inappropriate language such as abusive or threatening language or casting adverse personal reflections on individuals, then the caller will be warned that unless the caller is prepared to speak in a different way, the call will be terminated. If the caller then continues to use inappropriate language the call may be terminated, provided that it is made clear that the caller may call back if the caller is then prepared to speak in a different way.

In cases of persistent callers using inappropriate language, a written notification shall be sent to the caller advising that, in the event that any further telephone call is made and the caller uses inappropriate language, not only will the call be terminated but also that, for a specified period, all future business will only be transacted in writing or through a nominated and agreed intermediary.

5.3 Limiting face-to-face contact

When, during a personal attendance, a person uses inappropriate language or behaves inappropriately, the person will be notified that, unless the person is prepared to speak or behave in a different way, the personal attendance will be terminated. If the person then continues to use inappropriate language or behaves inappropriately, the personal attendance may be terminated provided that it is made clear that another personal attendance may be arranged by appointment if the person is prepared to speak or behave in a different way. Any further personal attendances shall be in the company of a member of the Council. Such arrangement shall be for such specified period as the Council thinks necessary, provided that the arrangement shall be reviewed in any case where such arrangement is in place for a period in excess of 6 months and not less frequently than once every 6 months. The person shall be notified in writing accordingly.

In cases of persistent personal attendances where the person uses inappropriate language or behaves inappropriately, a written notification shall be sent to the person advising that, in the event that any further personal attendance takes place and the person uses inappropriate language or behaves inappropriately, not only will the personal attendance be terminated but that also, for a specified period, all future business will only be transacted in writing or through a nominated and agreed intermediary.

5.4 Excessive access

Where a person

- makes excessive phone calls, or
- make excessive personal visits, or
- engages in excessive written communications, or
- raises the same issues with different staff

the Council may nominate a member of the Council to deal with all contact with the person for a specified period and shall inform the person in writing accordingly.

Where a person or a group contacts the Council on a wide range of issues all at once or in a selective way or in a constant stream, the Council may notify the person or group in writing either that only significant and serious issues will be addressed by the Council or that only a certain number of issues will be addressed by the Council in any given period, provided always that such arrangements shall not prevent the exercise of any statutory right of a person to access the Council's services.

5.5 Abusing the right to information

Individuals or groups might place excessive demands on the resources of the Council by making continual and extensive demands for information such as sending large numbers of letters, each containing detailed requests for information, or being unwilling to accept documented evidence to support an adequate response.

If the Council is satisfied that the resource demands in responding to such contacts are excessive it may place limits on the manner and/or degree to which the Council will respond to such demands (but not so as to prevent the exercise of any statutory rights of the public to information).

5.6 Declining to investigate complaints further

Where, having exhausted the Council's Complaints Procedure, a complainant remains dissatisfied with the outcome of a complaint, the Council will inform the complainant, in writing, that the Council will decline to respond to any further attempted contact or communication concerning the issues raised by the complainant unless significant new information or new issues are raised which, in the opinion of the Council, warrants action.

If the Council believes that a complainant is deliberately providing fresh information in a selective way, the Council will advise the complainant in writing immediately to pass on all relevant material to the Council and will also advise the complainant that, if such material is raised later, that the Council will, before agreeing to consider that material, require a satisfactory explanation as to why the material was not supplied earlier.

5.7 Miscellaneous

Other circumstances in which it may be appropriate to limit access include:

- where a person is unwilling to accept that the matter raised by them is not within the remit of the Council
- where a person displays unreasonable demands or expectations and fails to recognise that these are unreasonable, such as insisting on responses to be made more urgently than the Council's response time.

6. Persons under a disability

Where it appears that a person may have an impaired mental capacity, no action or decision under this Policy will be taken without first considering as to whether there is any other way of dealing with the proposed limitations on access that is less restrictive of the person's freedom of action, such as securing continued access through a relative, friend, carer or other professional. However it should always be remembered that the person has a right to confidentiality and may not want certain persons to be involved.

7. Persons under the age of 18

In the case of a person who is under the age of 18, one form of contact - generally by means of written communication - must always be maintained. It may be possible to arrange to deal with such a person through their parent or guardian, provided that written consent of both the person and their parent or guardian is first obtained.

8. Recourse to law by Council or its employees or its Members

Nothing in this Policy shall operate so as to impede the right of the Council or an employee or a member to have recourse to the civil and/or criminal law where such recourse is available to the Council or employee or member in any particular case.