****

**UNACCEPTABLE ACTIONS POLICY**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Version Number** | 2 |
| **Revision Date** | June 2025 |
| **Department** | Governance & Transformation |
| **Author** | Performance and Transformation Manager |
| **Reason for Policy Creation/Revision** | Planned Review |
| **Data Protection** | This policy complies with our Data Protection Policy & Procedures. |
| **Equalities** | This policy ensures that we have equal protection in place for both employees and customers. |
| **Sustainability** | N/A |
| **Proof Read By** | ELT, SMT, OMT, P&T Officer |
| **Date Approved** | 4 July 2025 |
| **Approved By** | SMT |
| **Next Review Due** | 4 July 2028 |
| **Audience – Training and Awareness Method** | Need to arrange briefing sessions with all customer facing teams as well as an awareness email out to all employees. It will also be published on our website for Customers as part of our FOI Guide to information. |
| **Effective Date** | 7 July 2025 |
| **Internal References – Policies & Procedures *(Located on The Hub)*** | Challenging Behaviour PolicyComplaints PolicyComplaints Handling ProcedureCustomer Alerts ProcedureUnacceptable Actions ProcedureTenancy Agreement |
| **External References** | Online Safety BillSPSO Model Complaints Handling Procedures |

**Unacceptable Actions Policy**

1. **Policy Purpose**
	1. This policy sets out Hanover’s approach to the relatively few customers whose actions or behaviour we consider unacceptable and is in line with the model complaints handling procedures as set out by the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman (SPSO).
2. **Policy Scope**
	1. As outlined in our Complaints Policy, we believe that customers have a right to be heard, understood and respected. Hanover employees will make every effort to be open and accessible at all times. However, occasionally, the behaviour or actions of some customers make it very difficult for us to deal with them effectively. In a small number of cases the actions become unacceptable because they involve inappropriate treatment or abuse of our employees, equipment or processes.
	2. When this happens, we have to take action to protect our employees and our property. We must consider the impact of such behaviour on our ability to do our work and provide the best service to others.
	3. Hanover aims to make it clear to all customers, throughout their dealings with our employees, what we can or cannot do in relation to our services and in dealing with any complaint they may have. (These Guidelines are contained in our Tenant Handbook and in our Complaints Handling Procedure information included on our website as well as in hard copy). In doing so, we aim to be clear and open, so that we do not raise hopes or expectations that we cannot meet.
	4. We will 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 believe that Hanover employees have the same rights.
	5. We will provide a service that is accessible to all customers. However, we reserve the right, where we consider customer actions to be unacceptable, to restrict or change access to our service.
	6. We will ensure that other customers and Hanover employees do not suffer any disadvantage from customers who act in an unacceptable manner. Any unacceptable behaviour between tenants would be covered by our Anti-Social Behaviour policy.
3. **Employee Responsibility**
	1. The author has overarching responsibility for this policy, but individual employees are responsible for the documents linked to it including other policies, procedures, etc.
4. **What is an unacceptable action**
	1. 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 coming to Hanover with a suggestion or complaint.
	2. We do not view behaviour as unacceptable just because a customer is being forceful or determined. In fact, we accept that being persistent can be a positive advantage when pursuing a complaint.
	3. We need to show due regard for an individual’s medical condition and vulnerability such as mental health issues and learning disabilities.
	4. It is important to consider if there are other individuals that may be able to represent the customer in the handling of their complaint, for example a family member, friend or support worker. It is also important to consider if a multi-agency approach is necessary when the individual is receiving support from other bodies such as social services.
	5. However, the actions of customers who are angry, offensive, demanding or persistent may result in unreasonable demands or unacceptable behaviour towards Hanover employees. It is these actions that we consider unacceptable and aim to manage under this policy. We have grouped these actions under the following headings:

 **Aggressive or abusive behaviour**

* 1. We understand that many complainants are angry about the issues they have raised in their complaint. If that anger escalates into aggression towards Hanover employees, we consider that unacceptable. Any violence or abuse towards our employees (whether face-to-face, by phone, email, social media or other means) will not be accepted. Any such actions will be recorded in our systems and will be reported regularly to our Senior Management Team and to the Audit Performance & Risk Committee.
	2. 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 employees to feel afraid, threatened or abused.
	3. Examples of behaviours grouped under this heading include:
* Threats.
* Physical violence.
* Personal verbal abuse.
* Derogatory remarks.
* Rudeness.
* Inflammatory allegations.
* Inappropriate comments made through social media.
	1. We will judge each situation individually and appreciate customers who come to us may be upset. Language, which is designed to insult or degrade, is racist, sexist or homophobic or which makes serious allegations that individuals have committed criminal, corrupt or perverse conduct without any evidence is unacceptable. We may decide that comments aimed not at us but at third parties are unacceptable because of the effect that listening or reading them may have on our employees. Harassment of other customers online will be treated under our Anti-‑Social Behaviour Policy.

 **Unreasonable demands**

* 1. Customers may make what we consider unreasonable demands on Hanover through the amount of information they seek, the nature and scale of service they expect, and 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.
	2. Examples of actions grouped under this heading include:
* Demanding responses within an unreasonable timescale.
* Insisting on seeing or speaking to a particular employee.
* Continual and repetitive phone calls, e.g., numerous calls a day on the same issue, letters, emails or social media or any other communication method.
* Repeatedly changing the substance of a complaint.
* Raising unrelated concerns.
	1. We consider these demands as unacceptable and unreasonable if they start to impact substantially on the work of Hanover. This could mean taking up an excessive amount of employee time to the disadvantage of other customers or functions (for example making repeated calls in one day about an issue).

 **Unreasonable persistence**

* 1. We recognise that some customers are unable to accept that Hanover is unable to assist them further or provide a level of service other than that already provided. Customers may persist in disagreeing with the action or decision taken in relation to their suggestion or complaint or contact Hanover persistently about the same issue.
	2. Examples of actions grouped under this heading include:
* Persistent refusal to accept a final decision made in relation to a complaint.
* Persistent refusal to accept explanations relating to what Hanover can or cannot do.
* Continuing to pursue a complaint without presenting any new information.
	1. The way in which these customers approach Hanover may be entirely reasonable, but it is their persistent behaviour in continuing to do that which is not as we run the risk of using up excessive amount of resource and/or raising expectations that the continual complaint is still under consideration/investigation.
	2. We consider the actions of persistent customers to be unacceptable when they take up what Hanover regards as being a disproportionate amount of time and resources.
	3. This list is not exhaustive but is intended to give a flavour of what would be considered unacceptable.
1. **Managing Unacceptable Actions**
	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 our level or method of customer contact to manage the unacceptable action. Guidance on how to do so can be found within the Unacceptable Actions Procedure.
	2. Implementing the Unacceptable Actions Policy should be carried out in conjunction with agreement from a member of the Senior Management Team (SMT) to ensure an appropriate level of approval.
	3. If the customer whose actions we consider unacceptable under the Unacceptable Actions Policy and Procedure has raised a complaint under our Complaints Handling Policy and Procedure, we will implement the policy in a way that allows a complaint to progress to completion through our complaints process.
	4. We may restrict contact in person, by telephone, letter or electronically, or by any combination of these. We will try to maintain at least one form of contact. In extreme situations, we may tell the customer in writing that their name is on a ‘no personal contact’ list. This means that they must restrict contact with Hanover to either written communication or through a third party.
	5. The threat or use of physical violence, verbal abuse or harassment towards Hanover employees is likely to result in the ending of all direct contact with the customer. Incidents may also be reported to the Police and other external agencies such as social work. This will always be the case if physical violence is used or threatened.

We will not deal with correspondence (letter or electronic) that is abusive to employees or contains allegations that lack substantive evidence. When this happens, we will tell the customer that we consider their language to be offensive, unnecessary and unhelpful. We will ask them to stop using such language and state that we will not respond to their correspondence untilthey stop. We may require future contact to be through a third party.

* 1. Where a customer has used social media to correspond with Hanover or Hanover’s followers in an unacceptable way, Hanover will delete their comments and may block them from making future comments on our posts or remove them from Hanover Scotland Groups. We will inform the customer that we have taken this action through a private message or email/letter as appropriate. All social media posts should be in line with our social media usage policy. Users who persistently make negative or harmful comments will be blocked as well as any further pseudonyms, aliases or anonymous identities which can be connected with the user.
	2. Another form of unacceptable actions is Trolling – the word ‘Troll’ is defined as a person who deliberately starts arguments on the internet with the aim of provoking an individual or group into a reaction. This would form part of unacceptable actions and would furthermore be covered by the Online Safety Bill. [Online Safety Bill: factsheet - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk)](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/online-safety-bill-supporting-documents/online-safety-bill-factsheet)
	3. Hanover employees will politely terminate telephone calls if the caller is considered aggressive, abusive or offensive. The employee 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. Where a customer repeatedly telephones, visits Hanover’s office(s), sends irrelevant documents, or raises the same issues again and again, 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 employee to deal with calls or correspondence from the customer in the future.
* Establish a Single Point of Contact within Hanover and require the customer to make all contact to Hanover through that person (or mailbox) who will pass on the correspondence as required.
* Ask the customer to make an appointment to see a named employee before visiting the office, or stipulate that the customer contacts the office in writing only.
* Return the documents to the customer and, 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.
	1. If we consider that any issues being caused by the customer are due to an illness we will try, where possible, to work with the customer and, where appropriate, external agencies such as social work, to provide the best possible support.
	2. Where a customer continues to correspond on a wide range of issues, and this action is considered excessive, then the customer will be told that only a certain number of issues will be considered in a given period, and they must limit the focus oftheir requests accordingly.
	3. Customer action may be considered unreasonably persistent if all internal review mechanisms have been exhausted and the customer continues to dispute Hanover’s decision relating to their complaint or demands on our services. The customer will be told that no future telephone calls will be accepted, or interviews granted concerning their issue. Any future contact by the customer on this issue must be in writing. Future correspondence will be read and filed, but only acknowledged or responded to if the customer provides significant new information.
1. **Responding to Unacceptable Actions**
	1. Responding to unacceptable actions will require an individualised response.
	2. Where a Hanover employee feels that a customer’s actions are unacceptable, the Head of Governance & Transformation should be informed. The Head of Governance & Transformation will complete the Unacceptable Actions Register and issue a warning letter, enclosing a copy of the Unacceptable Actions Policy.
	3. If the unacceptable behaviour continues, the Head of Governance & Transformation should again be notified. An appropriate response will be agreed upon and documented in the Unacceptable Actions Register. An unacceptable actions letter will be issued, outlining Hanover’s planned response. The date of issue of this letter indicates the date the Unacceptable Actions Policy is invoked.
	4. Further contact with the customer should follow the agreement in the Unacceptable Actions Register. The register will be reviewed by the Head of Governance & Transformation every quarter.
	5. Any restrictions imposed should not be set indefinitely and a review period should be agreed at the outset.
	6. 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 should be provided as to why the restriction will remain in force for a further period pending the next agreed review date.
	7. Where the customer is dissatisfied with this or the complaints process, and wishes to appeal, they are entitled to contact the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman (SPSO). Details are available on their website: [www.spso.org.uk](http://www.spso.org.uk).
2. **Monitoring and Evaluation**
	1. The Chief Executive is responsible for ensuring all employees and Board Members comply with this policy. The Head of Governance & Transformation is responsible for:
* Ensuring that this policy is distributed and made known to all employees through the relevant management structure.
* Ensuring that this policy is publicised as widely as possible to all customers, using the website, intranet and customer newsletter etc.
	1. The Head of Governance & Transformation is also responsible for monitoring the implementation of this policy, and ensuring it is followed in conjunction with the Complaints Policy.
	2. We will record all incidents of unacceptable actions by customers in the Unacceptable Actions Register, managed by the Performance & Transformation Team. Where it is decided to restrict customer contact, an entry noting this will be made on the appropriate records.
	3. A decision to restrict customer contact may be reconsidered if the customer demonstrates a more acceptable approach (and provides commitments towards this aim). The Head of Governance & Transformation will review the status of all customers with restricted contact arrangements on a quarterly basis, as part of routine complaints monitoring and reporting.
1. **Reporting & Monitoring Unacceptable Actions**
	1. Unacceptable Actions are reported to SMT on a quarterly basis within our Customer Insight Report and to Audit Performance and Risk Committee in the Quarterly Compliments and Complaints report.
2. **Policy Review**
	1. This policy will be reviewed every three years or earlier as required.

**Revision History**

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Version Number**  | **Revision Date**  | **Approval Date**  | **Approved by**  | **Review Reason**  |
| 1  |  June 2022 | 26.7.2022  |  Audit, Performance and Risk Committee |   |
| 2  |  June 2025 |  4 July 2025 | SMT  | Planned review  |
| 3  |   |   |   |   |
| 4  |   |   |   |   |
| 5  |   |   |   |   |
|    |    |    |    |   |
|    |    |    |   |   |