

WEST LOTHIAN COUNCIL EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT

1. Policy details

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| Policy Title | 'Challenging Customers' Procedures |
| Policy Lead Officer | Sarah Kelly – Performance and Change Manager |
| Others Involved | Kirsty Young - Quality Development Officer |

2. Summary of policy aims

In October 2016 a Quality Improvement Team was initiated and tasked to review how Housing, Customer and Building Services deal with “Challenging Customers”. “Challenging Customers” being those who can behave aggressively, threateningly or violently.

The review was required due to the rise of both verbal, physical and violent incidents being reported by staff. Concerns about such behaviour was also indicated by staff during the Complaints Training in summer 2016. Staff across the service indicated that a clear set of guidelines was required which outlined what action could be taken against customers who behave aggressively, threateningly or violently.

The review examined Housing, Customer and Building Services processes associated with Warning Flags and Unacceptable Actions and developed an Action Plan aimed at ensuring the safety and protection of staff.

Building Services, Housing Offices, Housing Needs Service, the Safer Neighbourhood Team, Customer Services, Housing Investment Officers and out of hours services were all considered during the review.

The purpose of this review is to examine the proposed process for relevance to equality.

The main proposals of the “Challenging Customers” Review are:-

- Document and formalise a common approach for risk assessment, reporting and acting upon incidents of an aggressive, threatening or violent nature.
- Agree an appropriate and easy to understand set of templates letters which will be issued to customers whose behaviour or language is considered aggressive, threatening or violent.

3. Key issues and judgements

Customers expect council employees to behave in accordance with “The West Lothian Way” and Code of Conduct. These outline the acceptable standard of behaviour for staff. Additionally our own service standards are clear on what customers can expect from us in their dealings with HCBS. The tenancy agreement outlines the same expectations for customers. It must, however, be recognised that customers may be under stress, have health conditions (e.g. Asperger’s Syndrome), or dependency issues which may affect their behaviour. Additionally some customers exhibit different behaviours when meeting face to face from when talking on the telephone.

As is common practice in most large organisations delivering services to the public, the council expects that our staff can carry out their duties free from the threat of verbal abuse, physical violence or aggression. The council expect customers to respect our staff and behave acceptably. It is however recognised that they may have mental health conditions, mitigating stress factors, social personality disorders or dependency issues which may affect their behaviour. Each case will be considered under advisement and discretion may be used for individuals who present with an aforementioned condition.

4. Summary of consultation and involvement

Given the internal nature of the review, no formal consultation was carried out with members of the public. However, all areas of Housing, Customer and Building Services were consulted during the review to ensure consistency in terms of how the service handles customers who behave aggressively, threateningly or violently to ensure staff safety.

5. Key recommendations

The 'Challenging Customers' review outlines a clear process to be employed when physical or verbal behaviour displayed by a customer is considered as aggressive, threatening or violent. Each case will be decided based upon the incident, the customer's behaviour and/or attitude and the threat level posed to staff. Any action taken against the customer will be determined on the severity of the incident and risk level posed to staff. The review also identifies clear guidelines for staff as to the kind of behaviours which customers display which should not be tolerated.

No recommendations have been highlighted through this equality relevance assessment, and the service should implement proposal with no amendments.

For further information or a copy of the full assessment, please contact:

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Assessments are available in alternative formats or languages on request.