



GREAT DUNMOW TOWN COUNCIL

Policy on dealing with abusive, persistent or vexatious complaints and behaviour

Version	Date Adopted	Minute Reference	Date For Review
1	05/10/2023	GDTCFC62	05/10/2024
2	04/09/2025	FC75viii	September 2028

1. Introduction

Great Dunmow Town Council recognises that residents, members of the public, and councillors have the right to raise concerns, ask questions, submit complaints, or otherwise make contact with the council. The majority of interactions are handled professionally and with mutual respect.

Occasionally, individuals may behave in a way that is unreasonable, persistent, vexatious, or abusive. This can result in significant resource burden, stress to council employees, councillors or members of the public, and disruption to services. This policy sets out how such behaviour will be managed.

The council has a duty of care to protect the health, safety and wellbeing of its employees, councillors, and members of the public and to ensure fair access to services for all.

This policy applies to all individuals who engage with the council via any channel, including in person, by telephone, post and email, and via social media and website forms. It applies equally to councillors, employees, and members of the public.

This policy applies to all forms of contact and engagement with the council, not only those related to complaints, questions, or formal queries.

This includes—but is not limited to—routine correspondence, informal communications, feedback, public meetings, and contact initiated through social media. The policy ensures consistent standards of respectful communication in all contexts.

This policy may be applied retrospectively where a clear pattern of vexatious, persistent, or unacceptable behaviour is identified in past conduct. Decisions to apply this policy retrospectively will be made with care, supported by documented evidence, and in line with the principles of fairness, proportionality, and protection of employee and public wellbeing.

2. Purpose of the policy

The purpose of this policy is to:

- define vexatious, unreasonable, and unacceptable behavior
- outline how the council will manage such behavior

- ensure employees, councillors, and members of the public are protected
- ensure fair treatment of all individuals while protecting public resources

3. Definitions

3.1 The definition of unreasonable or vexatious behaviour includes but is not limited to:

- repetitive, obsessive, or harassing contact
- persistent refusal to accept outcomes, documented evidence, or legal or policy constraints
- making complaints or contact solely to cause disruption or annoyance
- demanding unrealistic outcomes or immediate responses
- abusive, racist, or otherwise offensive language
- the sharing with third parties of conversations or the content of conversations recorded without the consent of participants either to the recording or to the subsequent sharing (except in the event that said recordings are lawfully requested by law enforcement or other agencies)
- using social media to harass or defame councillors, employees, or members of the public.
- scattergun approaches (multiple officers or bodies contacted simultaneously)

Examples of such behaviour include:

- refusing to specify the grounds of a complaint despite offers of help
- repeated requests for information already provided or addressed
- refusing to accept that issues are outside the council's remit or control
- failing to cooperate with a complaint process while continuing to demand resolution
- changing the substance or basis of a complaint during the investigation
- introducing irrelevant or trivial information and insisting it be considered
- denying statements made earlier in the process
- harassing individual officers through excessive emails, calls, or visits
- using foul or offensive language, including racist, sexist or other discriminatory remarks

- repeatedly seeking to have employees replaced or dismissed without grounds
- publishing defamatory content about employees or councillors on social media
- contacting multiple bodies simultaneously about the same issue (for example, MPs, auditors, police, councillors, the Ombudsman and so on)
- recording conversations or meetings without consent for the purpose of sharing those recordings or the content thereof with third parties without the consent of participants either to the recording or to the subsequent sharing (except in the event that said recordings are lawfully requested by law enforcement or other agencies)
- persistently complaining about historic, irreversible decisions

3.2 The definition of unacceptable behaviour includes but is not limited to:

- verbal abuse or threats
- physical aggression
- inappropriate comments on race, gender, sexuality, disability or religion, as well as any other protected characteristics, and appearance
- deliberate falsification of information

4. Initial Action

The Town Clerk (or delegated officer) will first ensure the matter has been reviewed fairly and thoroughly.

If behaviour is identified as potentially vexatious or unacceptable, the Town Clerk will:

- issue a warning outlining concerns and asking the individual to modify their behavior
- provide a copy of this policy

If the behaviour continues or is deemed to be severe and as having an immediate impact on the wellbeing of employees or members the Town Clerk will escalate the matter to the Chair who will agree appropriate restrictions. Where a councillor is involved, the matter may also be referred to the Monitoring Officer. If the Town Clerk or the Chair is involved in vexatious behaviour, the Deputy Town Clerk or the

Vice-Chair will seek to appoint an independent officer from a neighbouring council to preside over the matter.

5. Potential Restrictions

Depending on the severity and persistence of the behaviour, some or all of the following restrictions may be imposed:

- all contact with the council will be via a single officer or email address
- removal of council-issued communication systems
- contact with the council will be limited to specific times or days
- telephone contact will be prohibited and all contact with the council will be by written correspondence only
- in-person visits will be by appointment only and with a third party present at the discretion of the affected officer(s) or member(s)
- refusal to respond to repeat communications where no new information is provided
- blocking or reporting users on social media
- denial of access to council buildings except where access is granted by statute, for example for the attendance of meetings of the council by councillors (for the duration of the meeting only)
- legal action or reporting to the police when appropriate
- sanctions specific to councillors displaying such behaviours may include being reported to the Monitoring Officer or referral to the relevant standards committee

6. Review Process

All restrictions will be proportionate, time-limited, and reviewed regularly. The Town Clerk, in conjunction with the Chair, will review restrictions every 3 to 6 months (depending on severity), and may:

- lift restrictions if behavior has improved
- continue the restrictions for a further period
- refer the matter to the General Appeals Panel for further advice

Individuals will be notified in writing of the outcome of any review.

7. New Complaints from Restricted Individuals

New complaints or communications from individuals previously deemed vexatious or persistent, or upon whom restrictions are in force at the time of the communication, will be assessed on their merits. Existing restrictions may remain in place if the behaviour continues, but no valid issue will be ignored solely based on previous status.

8. Data Protection and record keeping

Records of all decisions made under this policy will be securely stored, including:
name, contact details and other identifying information
nature of the behavior in question
warnings and restrictions issued.
review dates and outcomes.

Data will be managed in accordance with the Data Protection Act 2018 and the UK GDPR.

9. Equality and accessibility

This policy will be applied fairly and transparently. The council will work with relevant professionals or advocates to ensure fair treatment where appropriate.