

Deeping St Nicholas Parish Council

Zero Tolerance Policy

Purpose

Deeping St Nicholas Parish Council has a duty of care for the health, safety and wellbeing of its staff or councillors and councillors. It also has a legal responsibility to provide a safe and secure working environment, and believes that mental health is as important as physical health. Therefore it will not tolerate the use of abusive or threatening language or behaviour towards its staff (including contractors) or councillors, nor any form of racial abuse or sexual harassment. Neither will the council accept vexatious, persistent or unrealistic demands that cause stress to its staff or councillors.

Scope

This policy applies to all members of the public who contact any member of the council via letter, email, telephone or in person. The council welcomes and encourages the public to access its services when needed, but asks that staff and councillors are always treated courteously and with respect; members of the public are entitled to expect the same treatment and respect from the council.

This policy also applies to any such dealings between councillors, including during meetings. Councillors are expected to adhere to the council's Code of Conduct, in particular point 1.3 X, 'Always treating people with respect, including the organisations and public you engage with and those you work alongside'.

Definitions

Aggressive or abusive behaviour

The council understands that people can become angry when they feel that matters are not being dealt with as they wish. If that anger escalates into aggression towards staff or councillors, that is unacceptable, and any aggression or abuse directed towards them will not be tolerated.

- This includes language (whether verbal or written) that may cause staff or councillors to feel afraid, threatened or abused and includes threats, personal verbal abuse, derogatory remarks and rudeness.
- The use of swear words in written or verbal communication will not be tolerated and these communications will not be responded to. Swearing at members of staff or councillors will not be tolerated.
- Inflammatory statements, remarks of a racial or discriminatory nature and unsubstantiated allegations, are also considered to be abusive behaviour.
- This will also include 'social shaming', where abusive or intimidatory posts are made about staff or councillors on social media or in other ways. Such posts will not be responded to and, with the co-operation of the website owner, the council will seek their removal.

Unreasonable demands

A demand becomes unacceptable when it starts to impact excessively on the work of staff or councillors, or when complying with the demand would do so, or when dealing with the matter takes up an excessive amount of their time and in doing so, disadvantages other members of the public. For example:

- Repeatedly demanding responses within an unreasonable timescale
- Demanding responses from several members of staff or councillors on the same subject
- Insisting on seeing or speaking to a particular member of staff or councillor
- Repeatedly changing the substance of an enquiry or complaint or raising unrelated concerns
- Repeatedly posing a question when a response has already been given, because they do not like the answer they have received.
- Vexatious behaviour, defined as causing or tending to cause annoyance, frustration, or worry, or that which is purely to cause annoyance to the recipient.

Unreasonable levels of contact

Sometimes the volume and duration of contact made to staff or councillors by an individual causes problems. This can occur for example when a large number of calls or emails are received from the same person in one day.

- When dealing with a complaint or enquiry, this may occur when a person repeatedly makes repeated or long telephone calls
- Inundates staff or councillors with emails
- Requests copies of information that have been already sent or that are irrelevant to the substance of the complaint or enquiry
- Contacts staff or councillor directly via social media or personal email instead of through the council's appropriate channels

The council considers that the level of contact has become unacceptable when the amount of time spent talking to a person or responding to emails or written correspondence impacts on its ability to deal with the matter, or on its responsibility for carrying out tasks relating to other members of the public.

Managing behaviour

Abusive or aggressive behaviour

Any member of staff or councillor who directly experiences aggressive or abusive behaviour has the authority to deal immediately with that behaviour in a manner they consider appropriate to the situation and which is in line with this policy.

Staff or councillors will end meetings or telephone calls if they consider the person aggressive, abusive or offensive. Staff and councillors have the right to make this decision, to tell the person that their behaviour is unacceptable and to end the meeting or call if the behaviour then persists.

If the behaviour continues, the council will inform the person that it will not accept any further contact from them. If the behaviour originates from within the council, use of the council's Disciplinary and or Mediation Policies may be considered.

Managing unreasonable demands and levels of contact

Where a member of the public repeatedly phones, writes, emails, raises the same issue repeatedly, or sends large numbers of documents of which the relevance is not clear, the council may decide to:

- Limit telephone calls from the person
- Restrict contact to written correspondence only
- Restrict contact to a nominated member of staff or councillor
- Restrict contact to a certain number of issues in a given period
- Refuse to deal with further correspondence and return any documents

The council will tell the person in writing the action the council is taking and the reasons why.

This is a non-contractual policy and procedure which will be reviewed from time to time.

Date of policy: September 2024

Approving committee: HR Committee

Date of committee meeting: 18th November 2024

Policy version reference: V2300924

Supersedes: V1300924

Policy effective from: 26th January 2026

Policy review date: April 2025

Date for next review: September 2026