



Limited Contact Policy

2022-2024

Limited Contact Policy

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Contact Officer:	Corporate Head of Customers
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Policy Links:	Equality and Diversity Policy Complaints Policy Reasonable Adjustment Policy Code of Conduct for colleagues, Board Members and Involved Customers Anti-social Behaviour Policy Performance Management and Assurance Framework

Brief Policy Summary:

This Policy has been designed to support our approach to effectively managing and learning from our complaints and aligns to the Complaints Policy.

Occasionally, the behavior or actions of individuals using the Complaints Service makes it very challenging for LHP colleagues to deal with their complaint. In a small number of cases the actions of individuals become unacceptable because they involve abuse of our colleagues or our process.

When this happens, we will take action to protect our colleagues. We will also consider the impact of the behaviour on our ability to do our work and provide services to others. We will also consider the best recourse based on customer needs or vulnerability

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Purpose

1. To provide a framework to support colleagues to decide whether the Limited Contact Policy should be applied and when applied, delivered fairly and consistently and to inform customers of where and when it may be applied.

Objectives

2. This policy is intended to provide a clear and straight forward explanation of the Limited Contact Policy to support colleagues to invoke this policy where all other avenues have been exhausted and therefore there is no other alternative.
3. The complaints process itself and how to access the service is comprehensively advertised, however in some instances where a complainant behaves inappropriately, uses foul language and generally abuses their position as a valued customer, LHP will invoke the Limited Contact Policy.
4. This policy will only be used with the permission and comprehensive review of rationale to invoke by the Executive Director of Customers.

Scope

5. LHP recognises that in a minority of complaint cases, complainants can pursue their complaints in a way which can impede the investigation of their complaint, distract from the main concern and on occasion can abuse colleagues endeavouring to address their complaint.
6. LHP does not tolerate unacceptable and abusive behaviour by complainants or any other customer contacting the business.
7. LHP will take appropriate action to protect colleagues from this type of behaviour and ensure that a complaint is addressed within the advertised time scales by invoking this policy whilst continuing to address a complaint through the measured approach identified within the two stages of the Complaints Policy.
9. Colleagues will be encouraged to report incidents of unacceptable behaviour to their line manager. If required, this will be escalated to the customer experience manager and Executive Director of Customers for consideration of action through the limited contact policy.
10. Colleagues affected by threatening, aggressive or abusive behaviour will have the support of their line manager to ensure they are safe to continue in their duties. A risk assessment will be completed where necessary, with a potential flag marker being added to the customer's account to inform the rest of the business.

Actions that LHP considers unacceptable

11. LHP recognises that 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 using the complaints service.
12. We consider actions that result in unreasonable demands on our service or unreasonable behaviour towards LHP's colleagues to be unacceptable. It is these actions that we aim to manage under this Policy.

Criteria	Behaviour
Unacceptable and abusive behaviour	Using abusive or foul language on the telephone, face to face or by any written channel
	Threatening to or the use of violence
	Consistently sending multiple emails demanding feedback
	Consistently leaving multiple voice mails demanding feedback
Language which is:	Insulting or degrade
	Is racist
	Sexist, homophobic or transphobic;
	Makes serious allegations that individuals have committed criminal, corrupt, or perverse conduct without any evidence
Unreasonable demands	Repeatedly demanding response within an unreasonable timescale
	Insisting on seeing or speaking to a specific colleague, when that is not possible
	Repeatedly changing the substance of a complaint or raising unrelated concerns
	Disadvantages other customers and prevents their own complaint from being dealt with quickly.
Unreasonable levels of contact	Volume and duration of contact made to our complaints service
	Inundates LHP with copies of information that has been sent already or that is irrelevant to the complaint.
	When time spent talking to a customer on the telephone, or responding to, reviewing and filing emails or written correspondence impacts on our ability to deal with that complaint, or with other customers' complaints.
Unreasonable refusal to cooperate	Not agreeing the substance of a complaint which we will be investigating and understanding the expected outcomes
	The provision of further information, evidence or comments on request
	Help us by summarising your concerns.
Unreasonable use of the complaint policy	The effect of the repeated complaints is to harass, or to prevent LHP from pursuing a legitimate aim or implementing a legitimate decision.

13. We understand that many customers may be angry about the issues they have raised in their complaint. If that anger escalates into aggression towards LHP colleagues, we consider that unacceptable. Any violence or abuse towards colleagues will not be accepted.
14. 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 colleagues to feel offended, afraid, threatened or abused.
15. A demand becomes unacceptable when it starts to (or when complying with the demand would) impact substantially on the work of the complaints service.
20. We consider it is unreasonable to bring a complaint to us and then not respond to reasonable requests to support our investigation.
21. Individuals with complaints about LHP's service have a right to pursue their concerns through a range of different routes. They also have the right to complain more than once about the services they receive from LHP if subsequent incidents occur.
22. We consider access to a complaints service very important, and it will only be in exceptional circumstances that we would consider such repeated use is unacceptable – but we reserve the right to do so in such cases.

Reasonable adjustments

23. LHP understands that some of our customers have mental health, physical or learning disabilities which may make it difficult for them to express themselves or communicate clearly, especially when they are anxious or upset.
29. We also recognise that some disabilities can make it difficult for customers to understand the impact that their behaviour might have on other people.
30. We will always consider making reasonable adjustments for a disabled customer if we are asked to do so or hold the information that informs us that an individual has a condition or a requirement for greater support for example:
 - We would use different methods of communication to meet customer needs such as liaising with a next of kin, family friend or support worker
 - Agree with the complainant to give clear warnings when we feel that a customer's behaviour is unacceptable so that they can change it
 - We would not consider it to be reasonable to expect our colleagues to accept being subjected to aggressive, offensive, or abusive actions, language, or behaviour.
31. We may still use the policy if there are actions or behaviours which are having a negative effect on our colleagues or our work.

32. LHP also recognise that there may be occasions where it is difficult to distinguish whether a complainant's behaviour is persistent or is a case of Anti-Social Behaviour (ASB). If unsure we will address concerns through our ASB Policy and use the sanctions within the Tenancy Agreement.

Imposing Restrictions

33. LHP will ensure that the complaint has or is being investigated thoroughly following the Complaints Policy.
34. If the disruptive behaviour continues, the Corporate Head of Service in consultation with the Executive Director of Customers will issue a second letter to the complainant advising them that the way in which you contact us in the future will be restricted. This decision and the restrictions will be advised, along with the period that any restrictions will apply to the complainant in writing by the Executive Director of Customers.
35. The letter will explain:
- Why we have taken this decision
 - What precisely is the action that we are taking
 - The duration of the restriction
 - The review process of this policy and a copy of the policy
 - The complainant's right to contact the Housing Ombudsman regarding having the limited contact policy applied to them.
36. Restrictions will be reviewed quarterly from the date of the second letter and the complainant updated regarding the outcome of the review.
37. Restrictions will be appropriate and proportionate and tailored to address individual circumstances. This may include but is not limited to:
- Disallowing the complainant from making contact by telephone and / or email except through an agreed third party and requiring that they only make contact by letter.
 - Access to our offices may be stopped
 - Restricting contact to named colleagues only
 - Restricting telephone calls to specific days, times and duration
 - Personal contact to take place with appropriate witnesses' present
 - Advising the complainant that we will no longer acknowledge or reply to further contact from them on specific topics of a complaint in which case a designated colleague will be identified who will read future correspondence and advise outcomes accordingly.

38. Should the restrictions applied to the complainant not be adhered to and challenging behaviour continue, the Executive Director of Customers may decide to refuse all contact with the complainant and may even stop the investigation into their complaint.
39. Where the behaviour is so extreme, or it threatens the safety and welfare of LHP's colleagues we will consider taking further action including contacting the police or taking legal action.

New Complaints

40. New complaints from customers who have had this policy applied to them will be treated on their merit by the Executive Director of Customers to ensure that genuine service requests and complaints are not being ignored.

Delivery and monitoring

41. Comprehensive records will be retained by the Customer Experience Manager which will include details of the imposed restrictions and their start and end dates.
42. The Board will be provided within an annual complaints review, of the number of times this policy has been used along with the rationales for implementing the policy.

Review cycle

43. This policy will be reviewed biannually in line with the Complaint Policy.

EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT

Limited Contact Policy			
Provide a brief summary of the aims and main activities of the initiative (bullet points):			
<p>When customers are complaining about LHP or its services, sometimes their behaviour or actions creating challenging situations</p> <p>These actions include abusive or threatening behaviour towards colleagues or other customers and/or high levels of contact through any of our communication channels.</p> <p>This can be disruptive to colleagues in their duties to investigate and resolve the issue or complaint and our ability to do our work and provide services to others.</p> <p>This policy states what LHP categorises as these types of behaviour, how it will be address and the considerations we will make to resolve and support the customer where necessary.</p>			
Completed By:	Corporate Head of Customers	Date:	24 November 2022

Guidelines: Things to consider

- Where a negative (i.e. adverse) impact is identified, it may be appropriate to make a full EIA (see Stage 2), or, as important, take early action to redress this – e.g. by abandoning or modifying the initiative. NB If the initiative contravenes equality legislation, it must be abandoned or modified.
- Where an initiative has a positive impact on groups/community relations, the EIA should make this explicit, to enable the outcomes to be monitored over its lifespan.

EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT

- Where there is a positive impact on particular groups, does this mean there could be an adverse impact on others, and if so can this be justified? - e.g. Are there other existing or planned initiatives which redress this?
- It may not be possible to provide detailed answers to some of these questions at the start of the initiative. The EIA may identify a lack of relevant data, and that data-gathering is a specific action required to inform the initiative as it develops, and also to form part of a continuing evaluation and review process.
- It is envisaged that it will be rare for full impact assessments to be required. Usually, where there are particular problems identified in the screening stage, it is envisaged that changing the approach at this stage, and/or setting up a monitoring/evaluation system to review a policy's impact over time will tackle the problem.

STAGE 1: SCREENING

This stage establishes whether a proposed initiative will have an impact from an equality perspective on any particular group of people or community – i.e. on the grounds of race, religion/faith/belief, gender (including transgender), sexual orientation, age, disability, or whether it is “equality neutral” (i.e. have no effect either positive or negative).

Q 1. Who will benefit from this initiative? Is there likely to be a positive impact on specific groups/communities (whether or not they are the intended beneficiaries), and if so, how? Or is it clear at this stage that it will be equality ‘neutral’ i.e. will have no particular effect on any group? *Please consider all aspects of Diversity including as a minimum: Age, Disability, Gender/Transgender, Race/Ethnicity, Religion/Faith/Belief, Sexuality*

It is expected that this policy is equality neutral

Q 2. Is there likely to be an adverse impact on one or more minority/under-represented or community group as a result of this initiative? If so, who may be affected and why: Or is it clear at this stage that it will be equality ‘neutral’? *Please consider all aspects of Diversity including as a minimum: Age, Disability, Gender/Transgender, Race/Ethnicity, Religion/Faith/Belief, Sexuality*

No, this policy is considered equality neutral as there are clear guidelines on when the approach needs to be one of support and multi-agency where customers have vulnerabilities or needs such as mental illness or learning disabilities. The approaches will be decided on a case by case basis.

Q 3. Is there sufficient data on the target beneficiary groups/communities? Are any of these groups under or over represented? Do they have access to the same resources? What are your sources of data and are there any gaps? *Please consider all aspects of Diversity including as a minimum: Age, Disability, Gender/Transgender, Race/Ethnicity, Religion/Faith/Belief, Sexuality*

The policy has been designed to provide a framework for the delivery of a fair and consistent response to complaints and designed to manage those instances when contact with LHP should be limited. The policy guides on how customer needs and vulnerabilities should be considered

EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT

ahead of any action to ensure it is fair and proportionate

Q 4. Outsourced services – if the initiative is partly or wholly provided by external organisations / agencies, please list any arrangements you plan to ensure that they promote equality and diversity. Please consider all aspects of Diversity including as a minimum: Age, Disability, Gender/Transgender, Race/Ethnicity, Religion/Faith/Belief, Sexuality

Whilst there are no outsourced services named, it is understood that where a multi-agency approach is required to suit a customer's vulnerability or need, LHP will work in partnership with support services, health teams, social workers or any other agencies, as well as family advocates to find a resolution that will work for the individual.

Q 5. Is the impact of the initiative (whether positive or negative) significant enough to warrant a full impact assessment – see guidance? If not, will there be monitoring and review to assess the level of impact over a period of time? Please consider all aspects of Diversity including as a minimum: Age, Disability, Gender/Transgender, Race/Ethnicity, Religion/Faith/Belief, Sexuality

This policy has been enacted less than 10 times over the last 2 years. Due to this low volume, it is not deemed that a full impact assessment would be required.

Q 6. To be completed at six monthly review Detail actions taken to assess the level of impact over a period of time, or to address any gaps in data. Please consider all aspect of Diversity including as a minimum: Age, Disability, Gender/Transgender, Race/Ethnicity, Religion/Faith/Beilief, Sexuality

Impact over the past 2 years has been positive and has helped to provide support for customers who require it to resolve their issues, or to halt behaviours that are abusive and threatening to colleagues. There have been no complaints from those that have had this policy implemented