

**Dealing with Unacceptable Client**

**Behaviour**

**Introduction**

At Whitehead Monckton, we believe that our clients have a right to be heard, understood and respected.

We also believe that our staff have the right to work in a safe environment, free from any abuse or harm caused by others. We expect all clients to treat our staff with courtesy and respect at all times.

In a small number of cases the actions of some clients become unacceptable because they involve abuse of our staff and/or our processes. We do not view an action as unacceptable just because a person is forceful or determined. However we do consider actions that result in unreasonable demands and/or abusive behaviour to be unacceptable.

There are a range of actions we consider to be unacceptable, which can best grouped as follows:

* aggressive or abusive behaviour; and
* unreasonable demands and/or unreasonable levels of contact

**Aggressive or Abusive Behaviour**

We understand that people can become angry when they feel that matters about which they feel strongly are not being deal with as they wish. If that anger escalates into aggression or abuse towards our staff, we consider that unacceptable.

Aggressive or abusive behaviour includes language (whether verbal or written) which may cause our employees to feel intimidated, offended, bullied or harassed, for example:

* threatening emails and telephone calls
* inappropriate comments on social media
* inappropriate banter which includes innuendo
* malicious allegations
* any form of physical violence or threats of physical violence
* derogatory racial, sexist, ageist or homophobic remarks
* comments relating to disability, perceived gender, religion or belief

Where a client is aggressive or abusive we may decide to:-

* advice the client that we consider their actions offensive, unnecessary and unhelpful and ask them to stop;
* End telephone calls/appointments/meetings or terminate all direct contact with the client;
* Notify the police. This will always be the case if physical violence is used or threated; and
* Take any other action that we consider appropriate in the circumstances

**Unreasonable Demands and/or Unreasonable Levels of Contact**

A demand becomes unacceptable when it starts to impact excessively on the work of our staff, or when dealing with the matter takes up an excessive amount of time and in so doing, disadvantages other clients.

Where a client is unreasonably demanding, repeatedly contacts us in person, by phone, email etc, contacts various members of staff about the same issues, raises the same issue repeatedly, or sends us large numbers of documents about which the relevance is not clear, we may decide to:-

* Limit contact to telephone calls from the person at set times on set days;
* Restrict contact to a nominated member of staff who will deal with future calls or correspondence;
* See the person by appointment only;
* Restrict contact to written correspondence only;
* Refuse to deal with further correspondence and return any documents;
* Advise the person that further irrelevant documentation will be destroyed; and
* Take any other action that we consider appropriate to the circumstances

**Taking Action**

Before we take any action, we will give the client the opportunity to modify their behaviour. If the behaviour continues, we will take action as set out in this document.

Clients will be told in writing why a decision has been made, what the alternative arrangements will be and the length of time that these restrictions will be in place.

If our staff are ever faced with any such a scenario, they must maintain their professionalism and work towards a resolution using the following guidance.

* **Manner**

Always maintain a polite and professional manner during any exchange with a client. If you are sworn at or exposed to personal attacks on your character, resist the urge to retaliate with abuse.

* **Explain**

Ask the abusive caller to calm down in a respectful manner and explain that you are there to help. Explain to them that it will be more difficult to resolve the issue while tempers are flared and that you will be better able to address any concerns that they have if the conversation is conducted in a civilised fashion.

* **Empathise**

Explain to the client that you understand their frustrations and that you are there to help them and resolve the situation where possible.

* **Honesty**

Be honest with the client about what you can do. If you are unsure about how to deal with their complaint, do not bluff your way through the situation. This could serve to upset them further and potentially cause you trouble further down the line. Explain to the client that you are unsure of how to deal with their complaint and that you will speak to a colleague who is able to help them.

* **Escalate**

If it becomes clear that you are unable to deal with an abusive caller effectively, do not be afraid of passing them onto your Manager or a colleague who is more experienced and able to negotiate with angry clients.

* **Issue a Warning**

If the client repeatedly uses bad language and/or threatens you, advise them that you do not have, nor will you, tolerate being spoken to in such a manner. Explain again that you are there to help but warn them that you will terminate the call if you their behaviour persists.

* **Silent Treatment**

Do not try to talk over or interrupt an abusive caller when they are in mid flow. This is only likely to make them angrier. Let them finish what they are saying. Remain silent for a few seconds after they have finished speaking and then state your position. If the caller interrupts, tell them that you have listened carefully and would be grateful if they could extend the same courtesy to you.

* **State Your Position**

If the discussion is going nowhere, state your position firmly but politely and advise the client to make an official complaint in line with our Complaints Policy.

* **Terminate the Conversation**

If all else fails and you are unable to get through the client, end the discussion. If you are on the phone, explain politely that you feel you can no longer continue with the conversation and that you will be hanging up the phone.