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Managing unacceptable service user contact policy

Introduction

The Independent Office for Police Conduct (IOPC) is committed to providing a fair, consistent and accessible service to everyone who uses our service. We always aim to meet our [Service Standards](#).

Our service standards

What you can expect from us:

- We will make sure we understand your circumstances and needs. We will tell you what we can and can't do, and the reasons why.
- We will tell you about other organisations that may be able to help you if we can't.
- We will have a clear and transparent process to handle any complaints or feedback you have about our service.
- We will always treat you with respect and courtesy.
- We will make sure our service is accessible and meets your needs.
- We will ask you how you want to be kept informed about the progress of our work, and how often you want to be contacted.
- We will be open and honest with you about how long we think our work will take. If we think we will take longer than anticipated, we will let you know and explain why.
- We will explain our processes to you and what you can expect from us at every stage of our work.
- We will tell you our finding(s) on your case, which will be independent and based on all the evidence that is available to us.
- We will keep any information we have about you safe and secure and will use it only as described in our [privacy notices](#).

We also have a responsibility to provide a safe working environment for our colleagues, so we deliver a fair service for all. On the rare occasion that we believe the way a person is communicating prevents us from doing this, we may decide to restrict the nature or frequency of their contact.

Meeting the needs of service users and colleagues

We will always consider how to adjust our service to meet the needs of the people who use our service. However, our colleagues deserve to work without receiving abuse or other unacceptable contact, and we will support our colleagues to manage these difficult situations effectively.

We will make reasonable adjustments (relating to a protected characteristic¹), for example provide communications in large text format for someone who is visually impaired, or support people to make complaints over the phone in the way we deliver our services. We may still consider it appropriate to restrict contact with people who have a reasonable adjustment in place. This will be a last resort and will depend on all the circumstances of the case.

While we routinely communicate with people experiencing trauma or distress, occasionally we may consider that a person is particularly vulnerable or at risk. If we believe a person is in immediate danger, we will contact emergency services. Our actions and decisions within this policy will be recorded for the benefit of both people who use our service and colleagues.

Defining unacceptable contact

Contact (by any form of communication) is unacceptable if it is:

- aggressive or abusive, or
- unreasonably persistent, or
- an unreasonable demand

and could cause our colleagues to feel harassed, distressed, threatened or afraid, or reduce our ability to provide our services to any service user, or meet our statutory obligations.

> Aggressive or abusive contact

We will assess each case independently, but as a broad guide, we will not accept and will not handle communications that include:

- threats (implicit or explicit) against another person
- harassment
- continued threats
- persistent shouting, or swearing or other offensive language
- insulting or demeaning any person or group, including anything that targets race, age, sex, gender, religion or belief, sexual orientation, or disability.

Any allegations made directly to the individual colleague **after** the IOPC complaints process has been clearly communicated to the person will be considered unacceptable. Allegations and complaints should be made directly to feedback@policeconduct.gov.uk and not to the colleague.

¹ [Equality Act 2010](#)

Also, we will not tolerate content that we consider unacceptable owing to its nature or presentation (for example, distressing images sent by email). This includes attachments, references and links. We may be required to report such matters to the police.

> Unreasonably persistent contact

We recognise that some people might be unwilling to accept a decision or action we have taken, or that there are some things we simply cannot do.

However, we may consider contact to be unreasonably persistent where we have already fully advised the service user of the decision, explained the decision to them if needed and they continue to contact us to challenge the decision. If this leads to someone making unwarranted allegations against our colleagues, it will not be tolerated.

> Unreasonable demands

Each case will be assessed independently. However, it is likely that the following types of demand will be considered unreasonable:

- timescale demands (other than those we work towards)
- demands for a specific colleague or team to carry out a task
- demands made to more than one IOPC team or colleague (i.e., sending the same request to different colleagues)
- making repeated or multiple demands which are substantially the same
- demands for things we cannot do, whether for practical or legal reasons.
- unreasonable escalation of complaints

Unreasonable amounts of contact may also amount to an unreasonable demand. This includes inundating colleagues with information or repetitive communications, content which is difficult to read or understand (subject to specific needs or adjustments), or material which is not directly relevant to our work.

Managing unacceptable contact

We will do all we can to resolve an issue while abiding by our [Service Standards](#), before putting a restriction in place. We will not remove a person's access to our colleagues without good reason and it will only be a last resort.

To manage a person's contact, we may decide to restrict the nature or frequency of contact in the following ways:

- terminate phone calls (if the caller is being abusive to a colleague for example)
- restrict times, days or durations of permitted contact (for example, if there is excessive and repetitive contact)
- allocate reasonable times to respond (if there is excessive and repetitive contact for example, which impacts our ability to respond to other service users)
- assign a single point of contact to the person (for example, if a person attempts to contact various members of colleague with the same issue)
- limit the ways in which a person may contact us (for example, if a person is abusive or harassing colleague, or making excessive contact via email/phone)
- read but not respond to communications (for example, if there is excessive and repetitive contact and the matter has already been addressed)
- report unacceptable contact to the police (for example, if contact is abusive/threatening)

We will always try to work with people to understand their needs and how they can be met. We will be transparent and inform the person before deciding to put a restriction in place due to unacceptable contact.

We will always attempt to warn a service user that we consider their contact unacceptable before making a restriction decision. However, where the behaviour in question is considered to be harassment/aggressive, or where it threatens an IOPC colleague's safety and welfare, we may not give the service user prior warning of a restriction.

Disputing restrictions

If a person is unhappy with the restriction in place, they can submit a complaint (providing it is not unreasonable contact as mentioned above) by emailing feedback@policeconduct.gov.uk. This will be responded to in line with the IOPC's Complaints and Feedback policy. This, however, is the final stage in the process.

[IOPC Complaints and Feedback policy](#)

[IOPC Service Standards](#)

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We welcome telephone calls in Welsh
Rydym yn croesawu galwadau ffôn yn y Gymraeg

