

CITIZENS ADVICE REIGATE AND BANSTEAD: COMPLAINT HANDLING: UNACCEPTABLE COMPLAINANT CONDUCT POLICY

1. Introduction

Citizens Advice Reigate and Banstead believe that people have the right to complain, to be respected and if necessary, supported when making a complaint. We work hard to be open and accessible. This policy refers to clients, volunteers and third parties who are making complaints.

Sometimes, the behaviour or actions of a person who is making a complaint make it difficult for us to deal with their complaint. In some cases, the actions become unacceptable because they involve abuse of our staff / volunteers or of our process.

When this happens we will take action to protect our staff, volunteers and other people. Abusive behaviour has a negative effect on our ability to do our work and provide a service to others.

We understand that people may be angry or upset when they make a complaint. We do not think that someone is acting unacceptably just because their complaint is emotional or they are frustrated.

Actions that result in unreasonable demands on our office or unreasonable behaviour to Citizens Advice Reigate and Banstead staff and volunteers are unacceptable.

2. Unacceptable complainant conduct:

2.1 Aggressive or abusive behaviour

If a complainant's anger turns into aggression towards Citizens Advice Reigate and Banstead staff or volunteers, we consider that unacceptable. Abuse will not be tolerated.

Violence includes verbal or written behaviour or language that may cause staff or volunteers to feel afraid, threatened or abused. We consider threats, personal verbal abuse, derogatory remarks, intimidation and rudeness to be unacceptable.

We also consider inflammatory statements to be abusive behaviour.

We will look very carefully at unsubstantiated allegations to make sure they are not malicious.

2.2 Unreasonable demands

A demand is unacceptable when it impacts substantially on the work of the office; such demands take up an excessive amount of staff/volunteer time and in doing so cause disadvantage to other complainants or clients. For example:

- repeatedly demanding responses within an unreasonable timescale.
- insisting on speaking to a particular person when that is not possible.
- repeatedly changing the complaint or raising unrelated concerns.
- asking for further reviews because the complainant disagrees with a decision but without making a case for one.
- demanding sensitive or confidential information that it is not permitted to disclose.
- offering to drop the complaint in return for something e.g. a reference.

2.3 Unreasonable level of contact

The amount of contact made to Citizens Advice Reigate and Banstead by a complainant could cause problems if it is excessive.

Excessive contact can occur during a short period, for example a number of calls or emails in one hour. Or it may happen over the duration of the complaint when a complainant repeatedly makes long phone calls, sends large quantities of written information which has been sent already or that is not relevant to the complaint or contacts different people in the organisation in the hope of getting a different outcome.

We consider that the level of contact becomes unacceptable when the amount of time dealing with the contact impacts on our ability to deal with the complaint itself or with other people's complaints.

3. Dealing with unacceptable conduct

3.1 Aggressive or abusive behaviour

Citizens Advice Reigate and Banstead will not accept correspondence which contains offensive or abusive material. The correspondence will be returned to the complainant who will be asked to remove the offensive or abusive content before we will deal with their complaint.

In extreme situations we may advise a complainant that we will no longer correspond with them and will file letters or emails from them without responding.

Citizens Advice Reigate and Banstead staff or volunteers will end telephone calls if they consider the caller aggressive, abusive or offensive. Staff or volunteers have the right to make this decision, and to tell the caller that their behaviour is unacceptable and end the call if the behaviour persists.

3.2 Other unreasonable behaviour

When unreasonable behaviour affects the functioning of our office, Citizens Advice Reigate and Banstead will take action. We aim to do this in a way which still enables us to deal with the complaint.

We will take into account relevant personal circumstances including the seriousness of the complaint and the needs of the complainant.

We may decide to:

- limit telephone contact with the complainant to set times on set days.
- return documents to the complainant.
- file documents with no response.
- take any other action that we consider appropriate.

In exceptional cases, we may refuse to deal with a complaint. We will take into account the impact on the complainant and also whether there is another reason why we should consider the complaint further.

Relationship with complainant

Each complaint will be treated sensitively in relation to its own facts.

For client complainants, we will do our best to continue to provide an advice service at the same time as dealing with the complaint.

For volunteer complainants, we will carefully consider whether we should ask the volunteer to take a break from Citizens Advice Reigate and Banstead whilst we deal with their complaint.

We will always tell the complainant what action we are taking and why.