



CODE OF CONDUCT

Policy on Handling Unacceptable Behaviour

SECTION A: BACKGROUND

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 The Northern Ireland Police Fund (NIPF) believes that staff should be able to conduct their business in a safe and non-threatening environment and recognises the potential for verbal abuse, threatening behaviour or physical assault from those who might engage with NIPF, and the detrimental effect this can have on staff. The NIPF will take the strongest possible action against offenders, including legal action where appropriate when clients display unacceptable behaviour towards members of staff.

1.2 The NIPF aims to provide a service that is accessible to everyone who is entitled to it. However, on occasions individuals may make unreasonable demands that could affect the service we provide to others, or communicate with the Office in a manner which causes offence to staff. NIPF reserves the right to manage contacts in an appropriate manner to protect our staff and to maintain the effectiveness of our service to other users.

1.3 This policy sets out the approach which will be taken on the rare occasions where the actions or behaviour of an individual are considered unacceptable.

Policy Aims

2. This policy aims to:

2.1 Support the provision of a service that is accessible to all those who engage with NIPF whilst asserting the right, where it considers an individual's actions or behaviour to be unacceptable, to restrict or change access to that service.

2.2 protect staff (as at 1 above); and with the requirements of the Health and Safety at Work (Northern Ireland) Order 1978 and associated legislation including the Human Rights Act 1998 (HRA 1998); recognising NIPF's responsibility as an

employer for providing a safe and healthy workplace and, as far as is reasonably practicable, a risk free working environment for all its staff.

2.3 Support staff in intervening early in any interaction where an individual is verbally abusive or is behaving unacceptably. This is with a view to addressing the situation at the earliest stage, altering the tone of the communication and where possible averting the need for full application of the measures contained in this document.

2.4 ensure that those who engage with or contact NIPF do not, by their behaviour or conduct, disadvantage other service users or place unreasonable demands on NIPF staff.

2.5 under the HRA 1998, protect the human rights of those who make contact with the Office.

2.6 The personal safety of staff is paramount, they are therefore instructed not to accept or tolerate any violent, threatening or abusive behaviour directed towards them. The NIPF also recognises its responsibilities and aims to promote an understanding of the reasons for the range of behaviours which may be directed at staff.

3. Policy Scope

3.1 The NIPF endeavours to treat everyone with respect and courtesy and works hard to provide individuals with the best service we can.

3.2 The NIPF understands that stress can manifest in behaviours that are out of character.

3.3 The Board decision is final with a redress to the Public Service Ombudsman Office if the client feels that procedure has not been adhered to.

3.4 At times individuals will not or cannot accept that NIPF is unable to assist them further with eligibility or grants and may persist in disagreeing with the decision

taken. If the client displays behaviour that is vexatious, unreasonably or excessively persistent, harassing and/ or disruptive to the organisation or an individual staff member, it should be reported to the line manager who will take action with the CEO to address the issue. The member of staff should record all relevant telephone conversations in the client file on the Gifts (database) and if warranted an alert will be placed for future reference (this can include a dual visit alert). (*Examples of Unacceptable Behaviour Annex 1*)

3.5 Restrictions which NIPF may include but are not limited to:

- Restricting contact to a single, named staff member who will deal with future calls, visits and correspondence;
- Require the individual to make an appointment to see a named member of staff before visiting the premises;
- Restricting contact to written correspondence only (eligibility);
- Alert warning placed for a dual visit on the client database;
- Refusal to acknowledge or deal with further correspondence in respect of a specific issue/ request and will return any documents.
- The NIPF holds the view that it is the behaviour that is unacceptable, not the individual, and will seek to understand the reasons for the displayed behaviour.

4. Defining Unacceptable Behaviour

4.1 It is accepted that individuals may act out of character in times of difficulty or distress, as they may have encountered upsetting or distressing circumstances prior to contacting NIPF. NIPF does not necessarily view behaviour as unacceptable simply because an individual is assertive or emotional. However, angry, demanding, or persistent behaviour, may result in unreasonable demands on the Office, and an unacceptable impact on staff.

Aggressive or Abusive Language or Behaviour

4.2 Staff can expect to be treated courteously and with respect. Violence or abuse towards staff is unacceptable. Staff understand that people can become angry or frustrated when they feel that matters about which they feel strongly are not being dealt with as they expect. Where that anger escalates into aggression

towards staff, this is unacceptable. Such aggression may include behaviour or language (whether oral or written) that may cause staff to feel afraid, threatened or abused.

4.3 Specific examples of actions or behaviours which fall under this heading, but not limited to, include threats, physical violence, personal verbal abuse, derogatory remarks, and rudeness, regardless of the method of communication.

4.4 NIPF also considers that inflammatory statements and unsubstantiated allegations may be regarded as abusive behaviour. This can include inappropriate use of social or other media.

Unreasonable Demands

4.5 Complainants or others contacting NIPF may make what NIPF considers to be unreasonable demands due to the amount of information they seek, the nature and scale of service they expect, or the number of contacts made. What amounts to unreasonable demands will always depend on the circumstances and context for the behaviour, as well as the seriousness of the issues raised by the individual.

4.6 Examples of actions which may be considered an unreasonable demand include:

- demanding responses within an unreasonable timescale
- demanding responses from several members of staff on the same subject.
- insisting on seeing or speaking to a particular member of staff who is unavailable or not involved in their case.
- attempting to prematurely escalate demands for responses to higher levels of NIPF management; thereby by passing the relevant staff member before (s)he has had reasonable and adequate opportunity to resolve the matter.
- Insisting on seeing or speaking to a senior member of staff not actively involved in the consideration of their case.
- continual phone calls or letters.

- repeatedly changing the substance and focus of the issue/complaint, or raising unrelated concerns.
- Such demands may be considered unacceptable and unreasonable if they start to impact substantially on the work of NIPF, i.e. taking up an excessive amount of staff time to the disadvantage of other complainants or functions.

Unreasonable Persistence

4.7 NIPF recognises that some individuals will not, or cannot, accept that NIPF is unable to assist them further or provide a level of service other than that provided already. These individuals may persist in disagreeing with the action or decision taken in relation to their engagement/complaint or contact NIPF persistently about the same issue.

4.8 Examples of actions which may be considered unreasonable and/or persistent include:

- vexatious complaints (see further at Annex1),
- persistent refusal to accept a decision made in relation to a complaint
- persistent refusal to accept explanations relating to what the Office can or cannot do, and
- continuing to pursue a complaint without presenting any new information.
- Any act of written or verbal abuse, including those of a discriminatory nature;
- Threatening behaviour;
- Intimidation;
- Vexatious, unreasonable, or excessively persistent complaining;
- Serious or persistent harassment;
- Swearing or the use of foul language;
- Rudeness including derogatory remarks;
- Inappropriate cultural, racial, or religious references;
- The possession or display of items that may be perceived as threatening, or have potential to cause physical harm or cause psychological distress;
- Deliberate damage to property;
- Behaviour that causes staff to feel upset, threatened, frightened, or physically at risk;

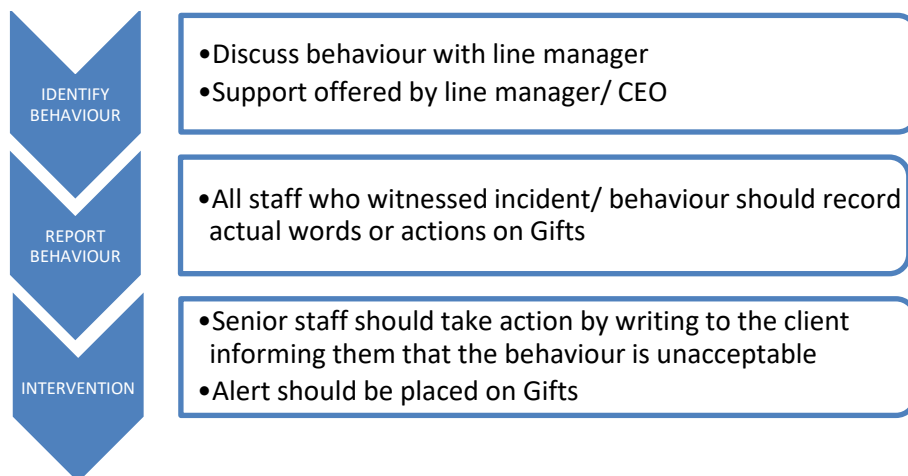
- An actual or attempted physical assault;
- Engaging the media to record interactions with NIPF staff without prior agreement;
- Directing dissatisfaction with the organisation at an individual employee.

5. Legal Requirements

5.1 Under the Health and Safety at Work (Northern Ireland) Order 1978 the NIPF is required to ensure so far as is reasonably practicable the health, safety and welfare of its staff.

5.2 If staff are threatened face to face by a person at the NIPF office they should be asked to leave by that member of staff and line management should be informed immediately. If they refuse to leave the premises the PSNI should be asked to provide assistance (if the staff member is wearing/ carrying the lone worker fob this can be activated if they feel under threat, G4S can listen into the conversation and determine the threat level and contact the PSNI on their behalf). *All NIPF clients are advised that the Fund does not operate on a drop in basis, if planning on calling to the office; clients should telephone in the first instance to arrange a suitable time with the assigned member of staff.*

4. Process



5. Engaging on Behalf of NIPF

5.1 The following points should be noted by NIPF staff when dealing with those who engage with NIPF:

Do

- Treat all people courteously and impartially, in a professional and polite manner.
- Be sensitive to the people's needs and concerns.
- Recognise that some people may have physical, mental or personal problems which may influence their behaviour and that this should be taken into account when dealing with them.
- Explain things clearly and simply, do not use abbreviations or jargon to avoid misunderstanding.
- Prepare properly for meeting.
- Be honest and frank – if you are not sure the information you are giving is accurate, check and inform the client that you are doing so.
- Refer to a line manager if your explanation is rejected.
- Always remain calm and do not allow yourself to be provoked.
- Call for assistance immediately if a client becomes aggressive and make sure that you can get away quickly if necessary.
- Ensure that you are always in possession of the lone worker device when visiting a client at home. Inform your line manager if a client exhibits unacceptable behaviour or you have reason to believe that they are potentially violent.

Do Not

- Engage with a person who appears to be under the influence of drugs or alcohol.
- Keep people waiting longer than necessary.
- Provoke a person through words or actions.
- Retaliate through words or actions.

5.2 When dealing with people who behave in a vexatious or unacceptable manner, you should always remain calm and polite. Make the person aware that their behaviour is unacceptable and you will have to end contact if they continue. If their behaviour continues inform them once again that contact will be ended and inform them how to make a formal complaint if they wish. Give the person one last chance to amend behaviour/ attitude before ending the contact, whether it is ending the phone call or asking them to leave the premises.

5.3 Exceptional cases: Referral to the PSNI: Actual or threatened physical violence and verbal threats of violence will be reported to the PSNI for appropriate action. The report to the PSNI will generate an incident number which should be recorded by the NIPF for future reference.

5.4 If a client persists with vexatious behaviour consistently directed at an individual member of staff and they feel threatened as a result of this, the CEO or line manager may decide to have this concern noted by the PSNI.

6.0 Conclusion

6.1 This guidance covers the requirements for dealing with unacceptable behaviour.

6.2 Any enquires about this guidance should be made to a NIPF member of staff.

7.0 Policy Review

7.1 This policy will be reviewed in 3 years' time, or sooner, if required.

Approved: Kelly Robinson

Date:13 October 2021

CEO

Annex 1 Examples of unacceptable Behaviour

A1.1 Vexatious Behaviour – Identification & Potential Restrictions

Vexatious behaviour can present itself in a number of ways and there is not one feature that can be identified consistently. It can be defined as follows: to persistently harass, destroy, annoy, tease, cause trouble, agitate, disturb or pursue issues excessively. The main indicator is that the presenting behaviour is persistent. Vexatious behaviour can be but is not necessarily physically violent or abusive in nature.

1.2 An individual who contacts the organisation may be deemed persistent and vexatious where previous or current contact with them shows that they meet AT LEAST TWO or more (or are in serious breach of one) of the following criteria:

- Display unreasonable demands or expectations and fail to accept that these may be unreasonable (e.g. insist on responses to enquiries being provided more urgently than is reasonable or recognised practice).
- Seek to prolong contact by changing the substance of an enquiry or request, continually raising new issues and questions while a previous request is still being addressed. New issues may be addressed as separate enquiries or complaints where appropriate.
- Harass, personally abuse or are verbally aggressive on more than one occasion.
- Are known to have recorded meetings or face to face/ telephone conversations without prior knowledge and consent of the other parties involved.
- Persistent in pursuing a complaint where the NIPF complaints procedure has been fully and properly implemented and exhausted.
- Are unwilling to accept documented evidence as being factual.
- Deny receipt of any adequate response despite evidence of correspondence specifically answering their enquiry/ complaint.
- Do not accept that facts can sometimes be difficult to verify for eligibility purposes.

- Do not clearly identify the precise issues which they wish to be investigated or addressed despite reasonable efforts of staff/ or where the enquiry or concerns identified are not within the remit of the NIPF to address.
- Have, in the course of addressing their enquires/complaint, had an excessive number of contacts with the organisation, placing unreasonable demands on staff (e.g. not allowing reasonable time to address the enquiry before getting back in contact).
- The frequency and nature of contacts constitutes organisational harassment in which there is little or no substantial reason for making contact and the individual contacted varies according to the interests of the client at that time.
- Fail to change behaviour and/ or attitude when warned during contact.

1.3 Reasonable allowance will be made for individuals experiencing a high degree of stress, anxiety or distress.

1.4 Dealing with vexatious behaviour from an individual can be distressing but the following should be adhered to:

- Record all contact with the customer (time, date, detail).
- Record pertinent points made during the contact by the client and you.
- Record the incident in the Gifts template and inform your line manager by email.
- Establish staff safety at all times by conducting a risk assessment with the vexatious client at all time.

A2.2 Other Unacceptable Behaviour - Identification & Potential Restrictions

2.1 For the purpose of this guidance, examples of unacceptable behaviour are outlined below with the proportionate restrictions they may incur.

Examples of Unacceptable Behaviour

- Using abusive or foul language on the telephone
- Any form of intimidating or threatening behaviour
- Sending multiple emails
- Leaving multiple voicemails
- Unreasonably persistent or vexatious complaining, disregarding the complaints procedure.
- Threatening, aggressive, intimidating behaviour or language.
- Threat of violence, whether face to face, on the telephone, or in writing.

Potential Restrictions

- Give the person two verbal warnings. If the behaviour persists, terminate the call/contact with the client.
- If the behaviour persists, inform line manager who will ensure that when the client calls to the office in person, there will always be two people sitting in on a meeting.
- Restricting email and telephone contact to the Fund and its staff.
- Refusal by the Fund to acknowledge or deal with further correspondence in respect of a specific issue/request.
- If restrictions are disregarded, the Fund will consider legal action, such as implying for an injunction or court order to prohibit contact/unacceptable behaviour.