



Zero-Tolerance Approach to Abuse Policy

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Introduction

Durham County Council is committed to ensuring that our elected members and employees are able to carry out their duties and work in an environment which is free of violence, harassment, and abuse.

This zero-tolerance abuse policy will outline our expectations for interactions between our elected members, employees and members of the public. The policy is not intended to stifle democratic debate or public interaction with the Council but to ensure that interactions with and between our elected members, employees and members of the public are respectful.

Any allegations that our employees or elected members have failed to comply with the provisions of the policy will be considered under our relevant procedures.

Expectations of Behaviour

The safety of our elected members and our employees should never be compromised.

We expect our elected members, employees, and members of the public to engage in an appropriate manner with one another and one which underpins mutual respect.

Any incident where an elected member or an employee is abused, threatened, or assaulted in circumstances relating to their elected duties or their work, is unacceptable and will not be tolerated.

Examples of Unacceptable Behaviour

Abusive behaviour can take place in person, but it can also occur over the telephone, via written communication or via technology such as social media and email. Aggressive or abusive behaviour includes verbal and physical abuse.

The following is a non-exhaustive list of examples of abusive behaviour (which may amount to a criminal offence) that will not be tolerated:

- Physical violence
- Hostile or aggressive behaviour
- Racial abuse
- Distribution of misinformation
- Being stalked, followed, or loitered around

- Sexual harassment or sexual assault
- Discriminatory abuse
- Threats or threatening behaviour
- Harassment
- Malicious allegations

Reporting Abusive Behaviour

When abusive behaviour occurs, we would encourage all elected members and employees to disengage with the perpetrator(s). Where there is any immediate danger, we would encourage that the Police are contacted by calling 999 in the first instance.

Elected members can report any abuse or incidents of concern even if they consider them to be 'minor' to the Member Services team. Member services will liaise with the council's corporate health and safety team to ensure such incidents are captured on the corporate incident and accident reporting system. This enables us to keep a record of the incident, undertake appropriate monitoring and recommend any further advice and guidance as appropriate. Contact with the police will be made if necessary and individual risk assessments undertaken by our corporate health and safety team where appropriate.

Any employee who receives any abuse should report this to their immediate manager and our corporate health and safety team via our online incident report form in the first instance so that advice on the appropriate action. The Council's corporate health and safety team will assess each report and determine if an entry onto the potentially violent persons register (PVPR) is required in accordance with the Council's PVPR policy. If you are an employee and you feel you are unable to, or that you do not feel it is appropriate to raise your concerns with your immediate manager, you should follow our Confidential Reporting Code.

It may also be appropriate for incidents of abuse to be reported to the Director of Legal & Democratic Services to consider whether there is any legal action that the Council can take in response to the abuse and if it is necessary and proportionate and in the public interest to do so.

Elected members and employees are encouraged to keep their own record of any abuse. Emails, social media posts or letters should be copied, screen shot or saved. Where a telephone call or face-to-face

discussion has taken place, a written note of the exchange should be prepared as soon as possible after the incident or recorded.

Where abuse is serious but not serious enough to warrant a 999 call, it may be appropriate for the incident(s) to be reported to the Police by calling 101. Even where the Police decide to take no action, having the incident(s) logged may be used in evidence to demonstrate a pattern of behaviour.

Our Response to Abusive Behaviour

Where abusive behaviour has occurred, action will be taken by the Council to stop or prevent the unacceptable behaviour.

The following actions may be taken against the perpetrator(s):

- Being asked to leave and/ or be removed from Council buildings or events.
- Be placed on our potentially violent person's register.
- Invoking our habitual and vexatious persons policy, which includes implementing measures such as single points of contact.
- Reporting the incident and perpetrator(s) to the Police.
- Civil proceedings (e.g. applying for an injunction)

We recognise that abusive behaviour can have a serious impact on a person's mental health and wellbeing. A wide range of wellbeing support is therefore available for our elected members and employees which can be found on our internal Intranet.

Various courses which offer tailored training and development are also available for elected members and employees on the internal Durham Learning and Development Site.

You may also find zero-tolerance posters displayed in our buildings. If any of our services wish to display these, they can be found on our internal Intranet.

Other Documents and Resources

- [Corporate Complaints Policy](#)
- [Councillor Code of Conduct and Standards Committee](#)
- [Protocol on Member Officer Relations, Part 5C Constitution](#)
- [Support for Councillors](#)