

Unacceptable Customer Behaviour Policy (UCB)

1. Introduction

Severn Trent aims to provide excellent service to all customers in our goal to be the most trusted water company. However, if a customer feels that our service falls below this standard, we want them to contact us about their issue.

We are committed to dealing with all complaints impartially, comprehensively, and in a timely manner. We will assess all concerns completely and let the customer know the outcome within agreed time scales.

In certain circumstances, the behaviour or conduct of a customer towards our staff may be considered unacceptable or unreasonable. Where this occurs, the unacceptable customer behaviour (UCB) policy could be initiated by a Team Manager who is trained in the process. Each case will be reviewed by a member of the customer senior management team who is trained in the UCB policy.

The application of this policy will only be implemented when we feel we have to take action to protect the welfare of our staff; this type of behaviour may have a negative impact on the wellbeing of our employees. We also have to protect the consistency of our processes; this is to ensure we are delivering fair and excellent service to everyone.

2. Purpose of policy

To provide clear and robust guidelines to follow when;

Situations are identified where a customer's behaviour might be considered as being unacceptable or unreasonable; and to ensure we are fair and consistent in responding to such situations.

3. Unacceptable and unreasonable behaviour

We understand that our customers may feel frustrated or upset with something we have done and we are fully committed to investigate and respond to these issues. However, there may be situations where a customer's behaviour is deemed unacceptable or unreasonable.

A customer's behaviour may be regarded as being **unacceptable** if;

- The customer uses language (including both verbal and written) that may cause our member of staff to feel abused, threatened or scared. Such language includes, but is not limited to; profanity, rudeness, racist comments, homophobic comments and sexist comments.
- Any form of physical, hostile or abusive behaviour to our staff.
- Unauthorised recording(s) of face to face/ telephone communication or meeting(s); without the prior agreement and knowledge of all parties involved.

A customer's behaviour may be regarded as being **unreasonable** if;

- The duration and/or the frequency of contacts (phone call, e-mail, and letter) made by the customer to our staff is excessive or disruptive. Examples include when a customer repetitively contacts us on the same day or when a customer repeatedly inundates us with long calls or long letters / e-mails when it is deemed a satisfactory response has already been provided.
- The customer changes the substance of their complaint or continually raises new issues without reasonable cause. In addition, they may prolong contact by continually raising further concerns or questions. Please note: we will always ensure care is taken to guarantee we do not miss any points, which are significantly different and may therefore need to be addressed separately.

- Sending unjustified complaints specifically about our staff who are trying to deal with any concerns raised in accordance with our policies and procedures.
- The customer has unreasonable demands or expectations and fails to accept these may be unreasonable. Examples include; demanding responses within unachievable time scales and; insisting that they speak to a particular member of staff even if they are unavailable.

4. Handling unacceptable or unreasonable customer behaviour

When a Severn Trent member of staff considers a customer's behaviour to fall into the category of unacceptable or unreasonable, the case will firstly be reviewed by a team manager trained in the use of the UCB policy. If decided to implement the UCB policy, a member of the customer senior management team who is trained in the UCB policy will also initiate a final review of the case.

During the review we will take into account every customer that is in a vulnerable situation and their specific requirements so that they are not unfairly impacted by this policy and will manage their specific requirements with consideration and respect.

The following explains how Severn Trent respond to different types of **unacceptable** or **unreasonable** customer behaviour:

- Where verbal communication towards our members of staff is unacceptable, we will politely ask the customer to stop using language that is offensive, obstructive or unhelpful (please see section 3 for further examples). If such language persists, the customer could be escalated to a team manager trained in the UCB process who will undertake a review and agree the necessary actions. We will always strive to sustain an open line of communication with the customer. However, in cases where issues in customer behaviour continue, all direct communication may be restricted.
- Where written forms of communication sent to our members of staff are unacceptable, we will politely ask the sender to amend their correspondence to a more acceptable level. If the behaviour persists, the customer will be escalated to a team manager trained in the UCB process, in order to be reviewed and appropriate action may be taken. For example, our typical level of response could be restricted.
- If a customer continues to communicate with Severn Trent or its member of staff in an unacceptable or unreasonable manner, the customer will be escalated to a team manager trained in the process in order to be reviewed and necessary actions to resolve may be taken.
- Where we consider contact to be excessive, one or more of the following actions will be taken as decided by a team manager trained in the UCB process;
 - Contact could be limited to one particular form, i.e. restrict to just written correspondence only.
 - Restrict contact to a nominated member of staff at specific days/times.
 - Case could be managed through an externally designated person. For example; a solicitor or support worker.
- Depending on its severity, the aggressive use of violent and threatening behaviour by a customer may be reported to the local police. After review by the Head of Customer Strategy & Experience such behaviour could result in restricted contact with Severn Trent. The police may also take further action if they consider it appropriate.

In the situation that a Team Manager trained in the UCB process recommends a sanction to be imposed on a customer for unacceptable behaviour, the decision will be reviewed by a senior manager prior to being enacted. When we have made a decision to restrict channels of contact with a customer, we will always notify

them in writing to clearly explain the implications for future contact with Severn Trent and subsequent next steps.

5. Monitoring and Quality Assurance

Adequate records will be retained by the appropriate manager of the details of any cases and the actions that have been taken. The records will be reviewed at least annually by the manager to ensure the application of the policy is still relevant. The application of this policy in a case does not affect an individual's other rights as a customer of Severn Trent.

The application of the UCB policy to a customer may be withdrawn when the case has been reviewed. We will exercise discretion when reviewing cases to ensure we consider any changes in behaviour or circumstance. For example; a more reasonable approach from the customer. We will notify the customer in writing if the status of UCB is withdrawn.

In addition a central record will be maintained setting out:

- The name and address of each customer whose behaviour has been categorised as unacceptable or unreasonable.
- When the restriction comes into force and culminates.
- What the specific restrictions are.
- When the customer and departments were advised of the restrictions.

To ensure transparency and fairness throughout this policy, a team independent to the case will carry out regular checks and audits on randomly selected cases. These will guarantee that we are following the right processes to implement this policy and to ensure its appropriate use across the organisation.

If a customer is dissatisfied with the use and/or the implementation of this policy then the customer can contact the Consumer Council for Water for further advice. A customer can contact the Consumer Council for Water by writing to them at:

Consumer Council for Water

1st Floor,

Victoria Square House,

Victoria Square,

Birmingham

B2 4AJ

Alternatively, they can go to ccwater.org.uk or call them on **03000342222**, weekdays only.