



## Portishead Town Council Behaviour Policy

Portishead Town Council ('the council') is committed to providing an accessible service. It believes that everyone has the right to express their views and ask questions about the council's priorities, strategies, activities, and service delivery. This is essential to ensure the whole community is at the heart of activity. Most of the time these interactions are constructive with respectful behaviour, sharing opinions and questioning decisions with evidence and fact. This enables us all to work together and satisfies the council's duty of care to its employees, councillors, and delivery partners. Finding an acceptable balance; enabling freedom of speech and community engagement whilst adopting a respectful approach is vital. Councillors, employees, delivery partners and residents must always behave in an acceptable manner, adhere to standing orders, policies, and national regulations.

We understand that people's communication and behaviour can be affected in difficult times, or when people are passionate or determined. However, all of us: councillors; employees; residents; business owners; visitors; delivery partners, contractors and family and friends must always be treated with an acceptable level of respect. This policy sets out the council's approach and the actions to address incidents when people do not behave or communicate in an acceptable manner. The policy covers all forms of communication and interaction including face to face; at meetings; written; emails; telephone; social media; in the media and online. The policy is designed to expand and enhance, rather than replace other policies and standing orders including the following: Code of Conduct for Members; Complaints, Social Media and Filming of Council and Committee Meetings policies; Member and Officer Protocol; Staff Protection (Vexatious Complaints) Policy; Committees' Terms of Reference; and Standing Orders

### Unacceptable behaviours can take many forms, including 1 or more of the following:

- **Abusive, bullying, or offensive behaviour:**

- Defined as any action or communication which seeks to intimidate or cause offence, even if meant in jest.
- Includes:
  - Bullying (any offensive, intimidating, malicious or insulting behaviour that undermines, humiliates, seeks to undermine, denigrate, or injure the recipient).
  - Any abusive, bullying, or offensive communication which targets named or identifiable employees, councillors, residents, delivery partners, or family and friends.
  - Personal comments, innuendo, attacks or the spreading of malicious rumours.
  - Abusive or offensive language, gestures or shouting.
  - Disorderly conduct or nuisance, congregating or obstructing spaces; entering buildings without permission.
  - Filming of council meetings (with prior notice to the Clerk) is permitted if non-disruptive. If made public, the film must not be edited or recorded to misinterpret proceedings or infringe Council's core values including to cause ridicule or lack of respect to the subjects.

- **Excessive demands on the service and persistent contact:**

- Includes frequent and excessively demanding requests for information or response, perhaps with unrealistic timescales, or creating significant workload, a persistent focus on one issue or person, or repetitive requests, even after being given reasonable explanations or decisions.
- The council understands that this behaviour may be driven by acceptable motives so each case will be assessed individually.
- However, if demands are excessive, this can feel overly forceful and lead to a feeling of being harassed.

- **Violence, aggression, damage, or threatening behaviour:**

- Any violence or behaviour which makes the recipient, or their property feel threatened or under attack will be reported to the police immediately.

## The Council's response process to unreasonable behaviours

If considered proportionate we will start the process at stage 3 or 4. Restrictions will be reported to the Staffing & Finance Committee.

### Stage 1: 1st warning

The person will be informed that their behaviour is unacceptable and asked to amend their behaviour.

If they continue to behave unacceptably, the call will be terminated, or they will be asked to leave the meeting / event or we will stop responding to this line of email / written enquiry. We will ask them to remove any offensive online posts.

### Stage 2 : 2nd warning

If they continue to behave unacceptably or the behaviour is repeated within 6 months, they will be given a 2nd warning and we will inform them that if they continue we will move to the 3rd stage. This can be appealed in writing under the PTC Complaints Policy.

The council will carefully review the person's behaviour and possible rationale e.g. personal difficulties in accessing services, possibly with an independent partner. We will ensure that we comply with the Public Sector Equality Duty.

### Stage 3: Restricted access

If unacceptable behaviour continues, they will be asked not to contact the council, its employees, councillors or delivery partners other than for a genuine reason, then it must be via a specific email address to the Clerk or recorded phone call to an agreed number. We will respond if the request is reasonable.

They will be asked not to visit premises, calls will be terminated, emails and letters will go unanswered (other than above), and they will be asked not to attend future meetings / events or post offensive comments.

A record will be made and kept for future reference, a copy is available on request.

### Stage 4: Review

A review will take place after a reasonable time and we will contact the person to inform them of the review decision.

If unacceptable behaviour continues, the restricted period will extend.

If this does not improve behaviour, the council may need to consider legal actions e.g. an injunction under the Anti Social Behaviour, Crime and Policing Act 2014 or Protection from Harrassment Act 1997.

If considered proportionate; a report will be made to the police immediately if any behaviour is found to be against the law e.g., homophobic, racist, or other discriminatory remarks or is making the recipient feel unsafe