



Hadleigh Town Council

The Guildhall,
Market Place,
Hadleigh,
IP7 5DT

Tel: 01473 823884

Persistent Communicator Policy

Introduction

Hadleigh Town Council does not tolerate bullying, harassment or intimidation, in any form, of any of their employees or Councillors. This applies to such behaviour from members of the public and Town Council employees/Councillors alike. A small percentage of people may correspond with, or complain to Hadleigh Town Council in a way that could reasonably be described as obsessive, harassing, bullying, intimidating or abusive

Harassment

Under the Protection from Harassment Act 1977 S1(1) a person must not pursue a course of conduct a) which amounts to harassment of another, and b) which a person knows or ought to know amounts to harassment of the other. Such action can be physical, verbal or non-verbal conduct.

Bullying

The Council defines bullying as a pattern of offensive, intimidating, malicious, insulting, humiliating behaviour intended to undermine an individual or group, gradually and as a consequence eroding their confidence and capability and this will not be tolerated.

Such behaviour from a minority of individuals may also be designed to annoy and/or to create extreme workload for the Town Council by taking up a disproportionate amount of limited council resources and can affect the Town Council's ability to do its work and provide a service to the community and can result in unacceptable stress for employees and Councillors.

Such behaviour might also be designed to cause extreme distress.

Defining Persistent Communicators

Persistent communicators can be characterised in the following ways:

- Behaviour which is obsessive, persistent, harassing, prolific, repetitious and/or
- Behaviour which is designed to cause extreme distress, bully, humiliate and intimidate specific individuals and the Corporate Body and/or
- Frequent correspondence timed to cause the council maximum disruption and workload and/or
- Behaviour which displays an insistence on pursuing unmeritorious issues, trivial points and/or unrealistic outcomes beyond all reason and/or
- Displays an insistence upon pursuing issues in an unreasonable and abusive manner and/or
- Repeated and/or frequent and/or simultaneous requests for information, whether or not those requests are made under the access to information legislation, and/or
- Behaviour where ex-employees are contacted to try to undermine councillors & council staff and/or
- Behaviour which has the effect of hindering the council's ability to go about its democratic business due to the extreme workload generated and/or
- Behaviour where the aim is character assassination and/or
- Behaviour characterised by a refusal to accept that issues raised are not within the power of the Council to investigate, change or influence

Use of this Policy

Town Council employees and Councillors are able to refuse to deal with correspondence if they believe the communication is persistent in nature. Employees (except the Town Clerk) must consult with their Line Manager regarding their refusal before a response is sent to the persistent communicator.

The Chair will be notified by the Town Clerk when a refusal has been sent.

If the behaviour persists and employees or Councillors continue to identify behaviour that they think



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exhibits the characteristics listed above they should refer it to the Town Clerk for discussion at a Full Council meeting under closed session.

In advance of the meeting a report will be written which contains details of all the correspondence received including who it was addressed to, who it was copied to and the response from the Town Council.

If the council agrees with the assessment, it should prepare a brief statement of why it considers the correspondence to be persistent, including its effect upon employees and Councillors and/or the town.

Sanctions can include:

- Being allowed to only communicate with one nominated member of the council or staff (who will forward correspondence to the relevant person if deemed appropriate);
- Being allowed to only communicate in a specific way such as letter rather than email or telephone;
- Receiving no response to further enquiries and communications on the same matter if no substantive new issue is raised;
- Receiving no responses to all enquiries and communications made to the council for 3 or 6 months if no substantive new issue is raised
- Extending a previous sanction or receiving a new sanction after a 3, 6 or 12 month review.

Residents of the Town

If the complainant is a local resident of the town, the notification letter should state which sanction the council has imposed. They should be advised that the decision will be reviewed in three or six months from the date of the letter advising them that their correspondence has been determined to be persistent. There is no route of appeal against the decision that correspondence is persistent. The District and County Councillors will be informed that a constituent has been designated as an unreasonably persistent communicator.

Review of Sanction

At the following Full Town Council meeting which occurs six months after the correspondent has been advised that their correspondence is persistent, that decision should be reviewed. The council should consider whether there has been any improvement in the persistent behaviour over that time. The Clerk should write to the correspondent advising them of the outcome of the review. If the behaviour has improved, future correspondence can be treated in the normal way. If there has not been a significant improvement, the correspondence will continue to be treated as persistent and will be reviewed annually.

A review may take place after 3 months if the communication remains persistent and further sanctions may be applied.

Non-residents of the Parish

If the persistent communicator does not reside in the town, they will be advised that all future correspondence will be ignored and left unread. There is no route of appeal against the decision that communication is persistent.

Persistent communication on the same matter from multiple complainants

If the persistent communication on one matter is from 2 or more complainants, rather than from one complainant, the Clerk or Councillors identifying the behaviour will draft a standard response to all further communications on that matter. As no sanctions are being imposed, this action can be triggered without approval at a full council meeting.

Approved by Full Council on 20th June 2024