

## **Acceptable engagement policy**

---

How Water Plus deals with unacceptable behaviours from challenging individuals

**At Water Plus we deal with thousands of customer contacts every year promptly, effectively and without issue. Our teams are trained to deal with people in a professional, courteous manner in line with our business values.**

**Unfortunately, like many other suppliers and service providers, we sometimes come across challenging customers or intermediaries who use a range of behaviours or tactics that are unacceptable. This can include challenging, abusive, bullying or discriminatory behaviour towards our staff, negative or defamatory posts on social media or online, and other steps intended to increase leverage and score points. In such circumstances, we need to take action to protect our business and staff. This policy is intended to clarify how we will respond in these circumstances.**

### **Customer, Third Party Intermediary (TPI) contact**

We must ensure that we only deal with appropriate individuals or customers when discussing customer accounts. Normal identification and verification checks must be completed, and account information discussed only when those checks have been passed. This could be checks on the customer account, an appropriate officer of that customer or a TPI with a valid Letter of Authority (LOA). If an individual holds a valid LOA, we will respond to them in line with that authority. We reserve our right to always speak directly with our customers to act in their best interests.

There will be times when some customers, TPIs or suppliers exhibit challenging behaviours, either on the phone, in letters, email communications or social media posts. It is important that we always remain professional and work to identify the substantive issue that needs resolution. Our teams are briefed to be clear about our actions and next steps when responding to customers and other contacts to progress a solution or explain our position. This also includes a willingness to apologise on behalf of Water Plus where this is warranted.

### **Abusive and threatening behaviour**

We expect the highest level of professionalism and courtesy from our staff. In return, our staff should not be subject to abusive or threatening behaviour from customers, TPIs or other external contacts and will be supported by Water Plus in terminating communications with individuals behaving in such a way.

Such behaviour will not be tolerated, and steps may be taken to modify how future communications from that individual can be made, including via written communication only. Where we have call recordings, we may use these in support of our investigations into unacceptable behaviours. Where these are not available we will refer to the Water Plus member of staff's notes and account of the interaction, the query or dispute, the nature of the customer or external contact's behaviour and any follow-up actions.

## **Technical challenge**

Where the nature of the customer or TPI challenge is not abusive but is complex, has licence or legal elements to consider, or similar, and is outside of the experience or knowledge base of the individual to respond, we would expect good notes to be taken and the customer offered a call back or written answer to their query. Customers and TPIs can be robust in their approach and range from expert to unreasonable or uninformed in making technical challenges. Regardless of this, we will always respond professionally and courteously, reserving the right to seek guidance before responding either on the call or through follow up communications.

## **Persistent unreasonable behaviour**

If a customer or TPI persists in being abusive, threatening or in other ways unreasonable then their case should be escalated to an appropriate manager so that we can consider whether we insist on future communications being in writing only, and/or for Water Plus to communicate directly with the customer's organisation or the TPI to challenge the unreasonable behaviour of their people or agents. We take a zero-tolerance approach to persistent unreasonable behaviour and reserve our rights to take appropriate action in such cases.

## **Media and social media**

Customers and other individuals may choose to share their views through social media and sometimes through conventional media such as press, TV, radio. Our External Communications team maintain a watch on social media and will respond on behalf of Water Plus as appropriate on a case by case basis.

The External Communications review all cases and manage the responses by reviewing and reiterating the Water Plus position, challenging inaccuracies and coordinating off-line investigation and resolution where needed. Sometimes we may decide that no response is appropriate.

Defamatory, misleading or inaccurate statements made by customers or other individuals will be treated seriously, as they have the potential to cause harm to the business, its staff and to our customers. Such statements will be escalated to the Legal team and appropriate action will be taken, including issuing legal proceedings where appropriate.

Where unwelcome media or social media comment is personal, applied to an individual Water Plus employee's account (eg. LinkedIn, Facebook, etc), or is because of them working at Water Plus our External Communications team will review the situation and agree an effective or appropriate response. Abusive behaviour to our staff via social media or otherwise will not be tolerated.