

# HAMPSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

## Report

<b>Committee:</b>	Employment in Hampshire County Council
<b>Date:</b>	8 November 2024
<b>Title:</b>	Zero Tolerance Statement and Framework Update
<b>Report From:</b>	Jac Broughton, Director People and Organisation

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### Purpose of this Report

1. The purpose of this report is to update the Employment in Hampshire County Council Committee (EHCC) on the steps the County Council is taking to further embed its' Zero Tolerance Statement and associated resources and guidance.

### Recommendation

2. That EHCC note the steps being taken to embed the County Council's Zero Tolerance statement and enhancements being made to existing resources and guidance in place, intended to support staff to manage and report incidents when they arise.

### Executive Summary

3. The County Council is totally committed to its stance on Zero Tolerance. Through its Zero Tolerance statement and accompanying framework, HCC wholeheartedly believes that staff should be free from receiving abuse or being subject to inappropriate behaviour when carrying out their roles. Earlier this year, the Staff Engagement Survey demonstrated that the majority believed the organisation demonstrates a zero-tolerance approach to unacceptable behaviours at work. The County Council provides a number of resources to support its staff including dedicated Zero Tolerance guidance pages which form part of our broader Inclusion, Diversity and Wellbeing guidance and information.
4. Hampshire County Council's stance on Zero Tolerance is described in the statement below, clearly setting out the organisation's principles and

approach on how we expect our staff to be treated:

*"Hampshire County Council is a diverse organisation. We take pride in promoting, valuing and celebrating diversity as an inclusive employer. As a public body serving Hampshire, we seek to ensure zero tolerance of harassment, discrimination, bullying and abuse and will respond promptly to any incidents of these. We are committed to advancing equality and inclusion in all our responsibilities – as an employer, as a provider and commissioner of services, and as a partner in the local economy. All County Council staff, as well as staff delivering services we have arranged, are entitled to be treated with respect by those they work with or for."*

5. However, during 2023 it became clear to Officers that the approach adopted for raising Zero Tolerance concerns varied across the organisation. Additionally, the Chief Officers' Group (COG) noticed an increase in the number of examples of 'incidents' of unacceptable behaviour from customers towards County Council staff, mostly across 'front-line' services. This was further reinforced by feedback from staff, via a staff survey in 2021, noting that incidents of unacceptable behaviour by members of the public have been increasing. In addition, the number of Customer Contact Restrictions issued to member of the public has shown an increase this financial year so far, compared to 2023/24, and this is particularly apparent in frontline facing directorates.
6. In response, in early 2024, a review was undertaken of the example Zero Tolerance incidents identified, aligned to the existing Zero Tolerance framework. This work was completed by a task and finish Zero Tolerance Working Group, under the direction of Jac Broughton, Director People and Organisation and included looking at examples or scenarios gathered by directorates, the majority of which related to unacceptable customer behaviour or action towards County Council staff.
7. The findings of the review were taken to the Corporate Management Team (CMT) in March 2024, who agreed there was a need for a more refined, clear, consistent and one-organisational approach to supporting staff to address Zero Tolerance incidents.
8. Central to these improvements is the refinement of the current guidance on unacceptable behaviour by our customers, which covers anyone who is not a fellow member of staff. The intention is for this updated guidance to become a formal Policy. Once finalised, the new Policy will describe what unacceptable behaviour is, and clearly set out immediate actions in response to aggressive or abusive behaviour, as well as setting out the decision process for restricting customer contact.
9. The new Policy and its alignment with relevant supporting HCC policies or guidance, will form part of a new Zero Tolerance Framework. This Framework

will incorporate clear principles on reporting routes depending on the nature of the incident and will be supported by a communications plan to inform and raise awareness with staff about the range of resources, guidance and support available, particularly for those working in 'front-line' services.

### Contextual information

10. During 2023 it became clear that the approach adopted for raising Zero Tolerance concerns varied across the organisation, and additionally, our Chief Officer Group (COG) noticed an increase in reports of 'incidents' of unacceptable behaviour from customers towards County Council staff, mostly across 'front-line' services.
11. As a result, the Corporate Management Team (CMT) asked Directorates to gather information on incidents of unacceptable behaviour by customers, to support understanding on emerging themes and trends. This work was supported by a task and finish Zero Tolerance Working Group, who carried out a review under the direction of Jac Broughton, Director People and Organisation.
12. The review looked at incidents and examples of unacceptable behaviour by customers, as well as examining relevant HCC policies and guidance currently in place to support staff and managers, and an evaluation of the routes and mechanisms to report incidents.
13. The Zero Tolerance Working Group firstly reviewed the examples of incidents gathered by Chief Officers Group (COG) alongside examples previously gathered from across the organisation. These examples showed the wide-ranging nature and differing scenarios of unreasonable customer behaviour that our staff experience through their work, often on a regular basis, either over the telephone, online (social media and email), at a County Council site, at public locations or a member of the public's private property. Several key themes emerged from the examples identified at that time, the majority of which related to customer behaviour or action towards a member of staff.

<b>Zero Tolerance Theme</b>	<b>Number of examples/scenarios captured (as set out in 6 March 2024 report to CMT)</b>
Verbal Abuse	2
Threatening Behaviour	3
Physical Aggression and Violence	3
Threats to use power	3
Harassment	2
Unreasonable customer behaviour	4
Discrimination	4
Psychological / Manipulative abuse	3

14. For some Zero Tolerance incidents, the County Council needs to consider if a restriction of contact is required, in order to manage the unacceptable behaviour or action. Incidents can be escalated through an established process to determine if a Customer Contact Restriction (CCR) should be issued.
15. In 2023/24 a total of 11 CCRs were issued, and in 2024/25 a total of 13 CCRs have been issued so far in the first six months of the financial year up to 14 October 2024. The data shows that CCRs have been mainly issued in frontline facing Directorates, suggesting that staff in public facing roles are more likely to experience Zero Tolerance incidents. Whilst these statistics only capture CCRs and not all instances of unacceptable behaviour, it is another good example of the increase being seen across public facing directorates.

<b>Directorate</b>	<b>2023-24</b>	<b>2024 -25 (April to October)</b>
Corporate Services	2	0
Hampshire 2050	0	0
Children's Services	5	9
Adults' Health & Care	1	4
Universal Services	3	0

16. A report was taken to CMT in March 2024 to discuss the findings of the review undertaken by the Zero Tolerance Working Group. CMT agreed that in order to move the County Council towards a consistent and one-organisational approach to supporting and addressing Zero Tolerance incidents, a number of important actions were required. These included:
1. Re-development of the current guidance for staff, managers and directorates on unacceptable actions by customers, particularly for 'in the moment' incidents to enable staff to know how to respond
  2. Removal of any Directorate or Service specific policies or guidance, instead incorporating new content for any gaps into related HCC policies and procedures as necessary
  3. Development of a new overarching Zero Tolerance Framework to strengthen the County Council's stance both internally and externally
  4. Ensuring clear and accessible routes and mechanisms for staff to report breaches of the County Council's Zero Tolerance statement
  5. Provision of training and support for staff as deemed necessary
  6. Ensuring service users and the public are clear about the County Council's stance on Zero Tolerance.

17. The responsibility for delivering these actions through an improved framework and to further embed our Zero Tolerance statement, is being taken forward by the corporate Risk Management Steering Group. A separate task and finish group has been set up to deliver these improvements through a collaborative approach across our People and Organisation directorate, including Organisational Resilience, Public Affairs (Corporate Communications) and HR and OD Services.
18. To ensure the findings of the Zero Tolerance Working Group were reflected accurately in the new Policy on unacceptable actions by customers, a draft was shared for comment with the Working Group (and other relevant stakeholders in the County Council). This draft is now being reviewed by Chief Officers, and once finalised, all related County Council policies, procedures and guidance will be aligned accordingly. This includes the Policy on Resolving Workplace Issues, the Dignity at Work Policy and the Violence and Aggression at Work (Health and Safety) procedure. In addition, the new Sexual Harassment legislation that came into effect on 26 October 2024 will also be considered as part of the new Framework and suite of supporting resources and guidance for staff on Zero Tolerance.
19. It is recognised that the current reporting routes for incidents must remain clear and accessible to staff, to enable a prompt response. Greater awareness of these routes would help to avoid potential for confusion on where to report, and to encourage reporting on Zero Tolerance incidents when they occur. The current reporting routes in place have been reviewed and are considered sufficient. These include raising issues, concerns or incidents with a line manager or supervisor in the first instance and, in the case of incidents of 'Violence and Aggression', where appropriate, reporting this also through Corporate Health and Safety Accident & Incident reporting system. However, it is appreciated that these routes may not be fully known or understood across all parts of the organisation.
20. In some cases, incidents may result in action being taken through the Restricting Customer Contact process, as set out in paragraph 14. This is a formal process which may result in a Customer Contact Restriction, requiring documented evidence and senior level approval within the Directorate concerned. It is important for the County Council to provide clarity to staff on 'when and how' to report an incident. This will be made clearer and more accessible through a new Zero Tolerance Framework.
21. A robust communications plan is being developed, to raise awareness of the resources, support and reporting routes for Zero Tolerance incidents. This should ensure an appropriate level of message reach across staff in the County Council. A quick reference guide for staff and managers will also be available to support a response to 'in the moment' incidents, such as face to face or over the phone scenarios, as well as working outside of County Council premises and incidents occurring between customers. However, it is

expected that for all staff, the quick reference guide must be read in combination with the full Policy, and not in replacement of.

## **Finance**

22. There are no budgetary considerations required as part of this paper.

## **Performance**

23. Performance of this framework and its more embedded approach will continue to be monitored through the same mechanisms that initiated the review in early 2024, and through oversight of the corporate Risk Management Steering Group. Through the feedback from future Staff Engagement Surveys, the instances of CCR's being issued to customers, the number and severity of instances of unacceptable behaviour reaching COG and we will continue to measure the framework's success and be able to further identify areas which need further development.

## **Consultation and Equalities**

24. An assessment on any potential equality impact considerations is still to be undertaken in relation to the progress work undertaken on the Zero Tolerance framework, however at this stage it is not expected that a full Equalities Impact Assessment (EIA) will be required.

## **Climate Change Impact Assessment**

25. Hampshire County Council utilises two decision-making tools to assess the carbon emissions and resilience impacts of its projects and decisions. These tools provide a clear, robust, and transparent way of assessing how projects, policies and initiatives contribute towards the County Council's climate change targets of being carbon neutral and resilient to the impacts of a 2°C temperature rise by 2050. This process ensures that climate change considerations are built into everything the Authority does.

26. Climate Change Adaptation and Mitigation. The carbon mitigation tool and climate change adaptation tools employed by the County Council were considered and deemed not applicable on this occasion because the decision relates to a strategic programme that will not have an impact on climate change or carbon mitigation.

## **Other Key Issues**

27. There are no key issues to raise in this report.

## **Conclusion**

28. The County Council remains firmly committed to its stance on Zero Tolerance. It is currently enhancing its Zero Tolerance framework to provide clearer, more consistent, and effective support for staff. Key improvements include refining guidance on unacceptable behaviour by customers, which will now become a formal policy. This policy will clearly define unacceptable behaviour, outline immediate actions in response to aggressive or abusive behaviour, and detail the process for restricting customer contact.
29. Additionally, the framework will clarify the appropriate reporting routes, supported by a communication plan which will ensure all staff, especially those in frontline services, are well-informed about the available resources, guidance, and support. These enhancements aim to reduce incidents and ensure a safer, more supportive work environment. Once the framework and suite of resources has been fully communicated to staff, the ongoing impact will be overseen by the corporate Risk Management Steering Group on behalf of CMT.

**REQUIRED CORPORATE AND LEGAL INFORMATION:**

**Links to the Strategic Plan**

<b>Hampshire maintains strong and sustainable economic growth and prosperity:</b>	No
<b>People in Hampshire live safe, healthy and independent lives:</b>	No
<b>People in Hampshire enjoy a rich and diverse environment:</b>	No
<b>People in Hampshire enjoy being part of strong, inclusive communities:</b>	No

**Section 100 D - Local Government Act 1972 - background documents**

**The following documents discuss facts or matters on which this report, or an important part of it, is based and have been relied upon to a material extent in the preparation of this report. (NB: the list excludes published works and any documents which disclose exempt or confidential information as defined in the Act.)**

Document

Location

None



## EQUALITIES IMPACT ASSESSMENT:

### Equality Duty

The County Council has a duty under Section 149 of the Equality Act 2010 ('the Act') to have due regard in the exercise of its functions to the need to:

- Eliminate discrimination, harassment and victimisation and any other conduct prohibited by or under the Act with regard to the protected characteristics as set out in section 4 of the Act (age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex and sexual orientation);
- Advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic within section 149(7) of the Act (age, disability, gender reassignment, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex and sexual orientation) and those who do not share it;
- Foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic within section 149(7) of the Act (see above) and persons who do not share it.

Due regard in this context involves having due regard in particular to:

- The need to remove or minimise disadvantages suffered by persons sharing a relevant protected characteristic that are connected to that characteristic;
- Take steps to meet the needs of persons sharing a relevant protected characteristic that are different from the needs of persons who do not share it;
- Encourage persons sharing a relevant protected characteristic to participate in public life or in any other activity in which participation by such persons is disproportionately low.

### Equalities Impact Assessment:

See guidance at [Equality Impact Assessments \(EIA\) \(sharepoint.com\)](https://sharepoint.com)

Insert in full your **Equality Statement** which will either state:

30. ***why you consider that the project/proposal will have a low or no impact on groups with protected characteristics or***
31. ***will give details of the identified impacts and potential mitigating actions***