

## Preventing Aggression and Violence at Work

Tolerating abusive or discriminatory behaviour is not part of anyone's job.  
Please report any incidents. We **will** support you.

We all have the right to be treated with consideration, dignity and respect at work, and no-one should experience violence, aggression, or discrimination when doing their job. We have a duty of care for our employees and are committed to doing all that we can to keep you safe at work, both physically and psychologically.

Working in public services brings us into contact with people in many different circumstances, including people who are facing difficult and challenging situations. We will make sure that you have access to the training to equip you with the skills to deal with potentially difficult interactions and support you if you experience these. We will not tolerate verbal or physical abuse towards any of our colleagues.

This guidance applies to all our directorates. It details the important preventative measures that must be put in place by all teams to minimise the risk of colleagues experiencing violence, aggression and discrimination from anyone other than a colleague. It also gives guidance on what you should do if an incident occurs and explains how we will support you if that happens, the reporting process that applies and how we will take action to prevent something similar happening again. If the concerns relate to the conduct or behaviour of another employee of the Council the Respect@Work Policy applies.

There are several flowcharts that accompany this guidance please see appendix 1.

### 1. Policy statement

We believe that our customers have a right to be heard, understood, and respected. We also believe that our colleagues and councillors have the right to work in a safe environment, free from any abuse, discrimination, or harm. We expect our colleagues and customers to always treat each other with courtesy and respect.

Being assertive or determined does not automatically result in unacceptable behaviour. The actions of customers are unacceptable when they involve abuse of our colleagues and councillors and/or our processes. There are a range of actions we consider to be unacceptable, which we have grouped as follows:

- Aggressive, abusive, or discriminatory behaviour and/or language either written or verbal.
- Unwanted sexual or personal attention.
- Excessive demands and/or unreasonable levels of contact, including contact outside of work in person or online.

We will not tolerate any of the actions above, and we support and encourage our colleagues to report any such incidents.

### 2. Working with others

Work related aggression and violence is the term we use for any actual or threatened incident where you feel/are abused, threatened, intimidated, or physically harmed while at work or in connection with your work. You should not experience any of the following types of behaviour:

- abusive or aggressive language, either written or verbal

- discriminatory language or behaviour
- sexual harassment and violence
- offensive language or gestures directed towards you in person or on the phone/during video calls etc
- threats made towards you or others
- physical assault
- receiving messages that are offensive or threatening – by email, text message, letter, any cyber channels, or social media
- intentional damage to your property
- hate crime

This list is not exhaustive. These behaviours may interact with each other - they do not have to be seen in isolation. You should not have to experience or tolerate these behaviours at work.

The important factor is the impact that any incident has on you. If you felt threatened, intimidated, or upset by an incident you should report it. Following any incident your manager will ensure that you are fully debriefed and supported and will respond appropriately.

#### **Working with colleagues and other teams**

The standards of behaviours expected from us all are defined in our [Respect@Work Policy](#) and [Code of Conduct](#). If you experience unacceptable behaviour from a colleague or elected member the Respect@Work policy outlines how you can address this. Managers are responsible for addressing any incidents of unacceptable behaviour within their team.

#### **Working with partner organisations**

Our [Respect@Work policy](#) includes information on what to do if you experience unacceptable behaviour from someone in a partner organisation.

#### **Interaction with customers**

Our [Customer Service Charter and Standards](#) outline what the public can expect from us and our expectations of the public in our interactions with them. We expect everyone to treat us with courtesy and respect. The customer service charter states that we will not tolerate the use of physical or verbal abuse in any form.

Customer service issues or delays can lead to people becoming frustrated which can result in challenging interactions. You should be clear with customers/service users the process and timescales which apply to their situation – this will help manage their expectations. Where there is a delay in dealing with an issue you should let the customer/service user know this and advise when they should expect to hear from you. If you are struggling to manage a particular customer or situation, you should proactively highlight this to your line manager who will identify how to support you.

### **3. Mitigation to reduce the likelihood of an incident occurring**

#### **Policies**

The following policies give information about how we protect you when undertaking different types of activities.

- [Lone working guidance](#) and associated [lone working risk assessments](#) – details the steps that teams and individuals must follow to remain safe when lone working
- [Customer Handling Policy](#) - details the process that needs to be followed to put in place restrictions on how an individual interacts with us, the evidence gathering required, the decision-making process and details how we explain the arrangement to the individual.

- [Respect@Work](#) – this applies to interaction between colleagues and also gives guidance on situations involving third parties such as elected members and contractors.

### Operational guidance

Individual teams will also have guidance and support relevant to each service area. Managers must ensure that all existing and new members of the team, are aware of:

- The risk assessments that are in place for their area of work that specifically consider the risks of violence, aggression, and discrimination and have control measures in place to minimise these risks. Advice on undertaking risk assessments is available from the Health and Safety team.
- The customer services processes that apply in your area of work.
- Any customer handling arrangements that are in place.
- The processes that they should follow to minimise the risks of experiencing aggression and violence.
- The requirement to undertake a specific risk assessment before meeting an individual that is known to pose a high risk.
- How to report any incident that occurs and the next steps that will be taken following an incident using our incident reporting system.

If a new team member will undertake any lone working, their induction should explain the lone working procedures and they should undertake lone working training. Health and Safety recommend that existing employees undertake lone working training every 3 years to ensure that their knowledge is up to date. Managers should also consider if team members should undertake Personal Safety and Conflict Management training. This training is bookable via Our Development using the icon on your desktop – if no sessions are showing please contact [healthandsafetyteam@cambridgeshire.gov.uk](mailto:healthandsafetyteam@cambridgeshire.gov.uk) to discuss your team's training requirements.

### Communicating expectations

We have posters available that can be display in our public facing buildings that explain to members of the public that we expect them to treat colleagues respectfully ([External Facing Poster](#)). A poster is also available for areas that are not accessed by the public that emphasises that you are not expected to tolerate abusive or disrespectful behaviour ([Employee Facing Poster](#)).

Services should ensure that invitation letters and written communications that you use includes wording that outlines our expectation that people treat our colleagues respectfully.

### Working together

It is important that we work together to keep each other safe. You should never knowingly leave another employee in a risky situation. Teams must highlight risks and share information with other teams where this relevant. For example:

- Consider reception colleagues when planning a meeting with a person that poses a high risk in a CCC building i.e. include reception colleagues in the risk assessment and share this with them before the planned meeting.
- Ensuring that customer handling arrangements are shared with other teams that an individual may contact.

## 4. Action following an incident

If an incident occurs, it is important for the line manager to follow up urgently and appropriately. Guidance for managers on further action to take is outlined below, but as a minimum the following should take place immediately after the incident:

- Debrief with the employee to understand what has happened and what support they need.
- Consider whether an investigation is needed – wherever possible this should include speaking to the customer.
- Ensure the incident is recorded using the [Incident Reporting System](#).

The follow up action required will be proportionate to and dependent on the nature of the incident that has occurred, and some examples are provided below.

#### **Harassment, discrimination and threatening behaviour**

It is not acceptable for you to experience any form of harassment or discrimination at work. For example racist, sexist, ableist, transphobic or homophobic comments or abuse (this list is not exhaustive). Discrimination will not be tolerated. Incidents can happen face to face or via emails, text message or phone calls.

If a service user, customer or member of the public has behaved in a discriminatory way, for example using racist language and you feel able to challenge this safely then you could explain that what they have said is not acceptable, their language is offensive, and ask them to moderate their behaviour or language. This may address situations where a person did not realise what they were saying was unacceptable and gives them a chance to correct their behaviour.

However, it is not your responsibility to challenge this behaviour if you don't feel comfortable or safe to do this. Instead, please report it to your line manager as soon as possible. Your line manager is accountable for following up with the person concerned.

In other situations, it may not be safe to challenge behaviour in the moment or you may not feel able to do this. For example, if a person is being aggressive or using abusive language. In this situation tell the person that you are going to end the discussion because their language is offensive and leave the situation or ask the person to leave.

If you receive a threat of violence via email or text message you should alert your manager to this straight away. What action is taken will depend on the nature of the message and whether there is a pattern of behaviour e.g. contact the police or determining if we need to consider putting a customer handling arrangement in place. You should tell your manager what has happened straight away. If your manager is not available, you should contact the most senior person on duty at the time or seek further guidance from the Health and Safety Team. The incident should also be reported via the [Incident Reporting System](#).

If an individual keeps sending you unacceptable emails or text messages, you should tell your line manager about this. Your line manager will follow up appropriately.

#### **Abuse via cyber channels and on social media**

You are advised not to show your job title or employer on social media and to have a private profile. Publishing this information can make it easier for members of the public to identify and contact you.

There are instances where abusive messages are left on the County Council's social media channels – these are handled by the Communications Team.

If you receive an abusive message via social media in relation to your work or your role with the Council, you should inform your line manager and block the person that has contacted you.

How this is followed up will depend on the nature of the message. For example, you may agree with your line manager that they will speak to the person on your behalf to make it clear that their

message is not appropriate and will not be tolerated. In serious cases your manager may be able to support you to contact the Police.

### **Guidance for managers following an incident**

The exact follow up action that you as a manager will take will depend on the specifics of the incident that has occurred. In some cases, it may be appropriate to engage a more senior manager to follow up on the actions.

If appropriate and possible, speak to the customer or service user (in person, on the phone or via video call wherever possible), to explain that their behaviour was not acceptable, explain the impact of their behaviour and to make it clear that we expect future interactions to be respectful and follow up this discussion in writing. The letter or email should summarise the conversation that has taken place (see suggested wording in appendix 2).

You should ensure that you record details of the incident, any evidence that has been received e.g. emails, and the follow up action taken on the customer/service users record within your service. This information will be referred to later as evidence if we are considering putting in place a customer handling arrangement.

A full investigation may not be needed, but you may still deem it appropriate to contact the individual to explain why their behaviour was not acceptable.

You also need to consider reviewing any operational risk assessments/procedures/service practices to see if these need to be updated to stop a similar incident happening again.

Further guidance can be provided to managers by the Health and Safety Team.

## **5. Support following an incident**

Experiencing aggression, violence or discrimination at work is likely to be upsetting and we understand that people will in most cases need support from their manager following an incident. The level of support put in place will be guided by the circumstances and what you feel that you need, however the following support should be considered:

- Debrief with your manager or a colleague following a difficult visit, meeting or phone call.
- Providing information on the Employee Assistance Programme – the EAP can provide access to counselling if needed.
- Providing information about the Mental Health First Aiders.
- Providing support to report an incident to the police and during a Health and Safety investigation.

Support needs to be tailored to the situation. In some incidents these measures may not be appropriate e.g., if an event has been particularly traumatic/violent/discriminatory. Managers can seek advice on appropriate support measures from their Strategic HR Business Partner (see contact details [here](#)).

The impact of repeatedly having difficult conversations can build up over time. While each individual exchange may not have been particularly challenging, the cumulative effect can have a negative impact on us and it is important to be aware of this. Monthly discussions about wellbeing as part of the Our Conversations approach are a good opportunity to regularly discuss how you are feeling and any emerging concerns.

Support should also be offered to other team members who have been affected or witnessed an incident.

## 6. Monitoring and Review

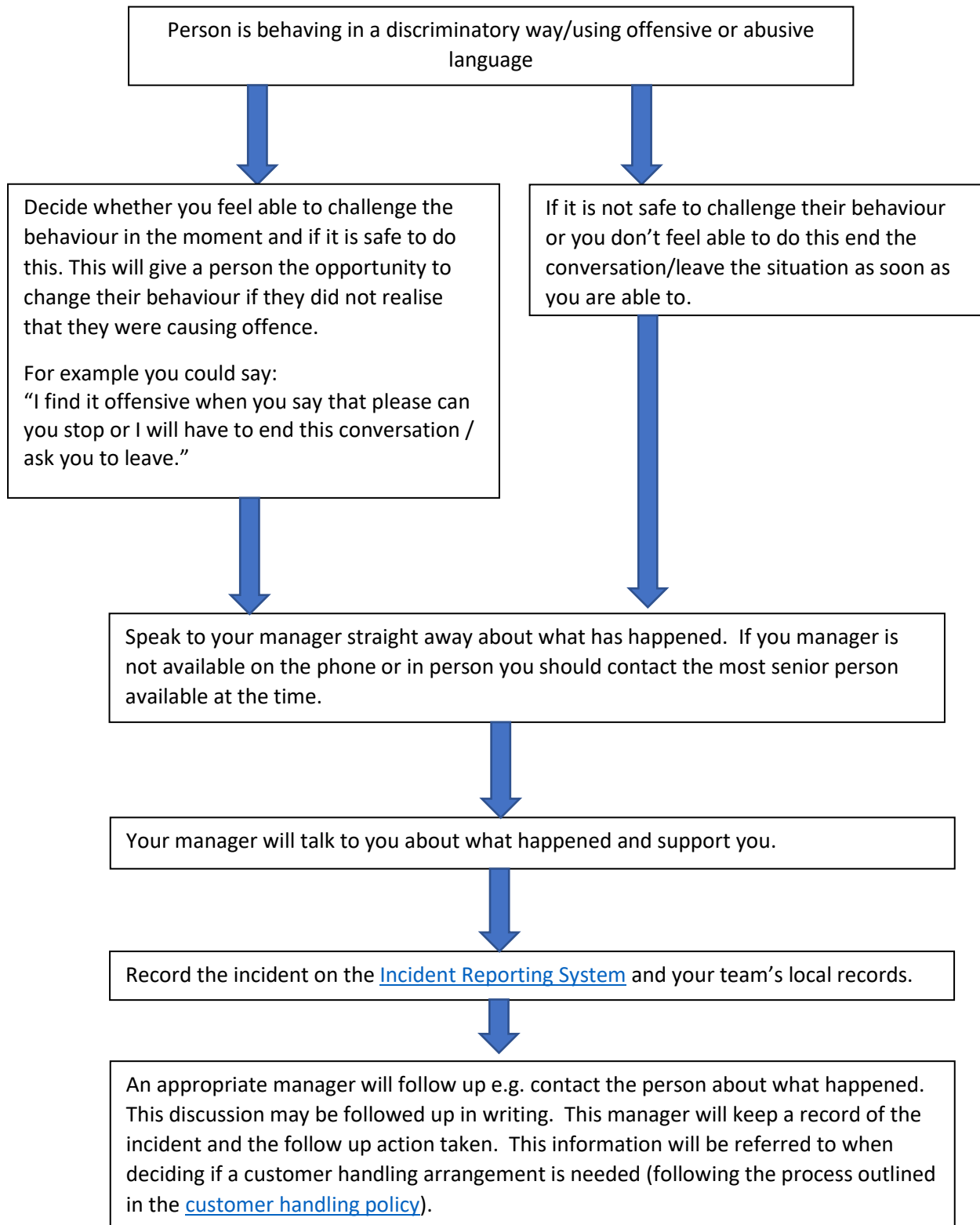
The number and type of incidents recorded are reported to the Corporate Leadership Team monthly for monitoring of trends and action required.

Tolerating abusive or discriminatory behaviour is not part of anyone's job.  
Please report any incidents. We **will** support you.

## Appendix 1

# What to do if a person behaves in a discriminatory way

This flowchart gives guidance on how to respond to discrimination that you experience from a member of the public/a service user.



## What to do if you receive an aggressive or threatening email or text message

E-mail or text received containing aggressive or threatening content.



Tell your manager that this has happened and forward the e-mail or text on to them.



Discuss the response with your line manager.

For example, you may feel able to respond to the sender yourself.

Alternatively, your line manager or more senior manager (depending on content) will respond to the sender, to inform them that the content/behaviour is inappropriate and will not be tolerated.

If the sender is dissatisfied with a Council Service, the response should include a signpost to the Council's feedback form.



Record the incident on the online [Incident Reporting System](#) and your team's local records. Keep a record of the follow up action that was taken. This information will be referred to when deciding if a customer handling arrangement is needed (following the process outlined in the [customer handling policy](#)).



Manager to provide support e.g. signpost to EAP scheme and reassurance.



## What to do if a phone call becomes aggressive or abusive


A person on the phone becomes aggressive or abusive




Try and deescalate the situation if possible.

For example you could say "I will try to help you, but I need you to stop swearing".


Ask the caller to moderate their language and tell them that you will end the call if they do not do this.




If behaviour continues tell the person that you are you going to end the call.



Following an abusive phone call you should speak to your manager straight away to seek support. If your manager is not available speak to another manger or your head of service. They will talk to you about the incident, provide reassurance and support e.g. signpost to EAP scheme.



Record the incident on the online [Incident Reporting System](#) and your team's local records. The manager will check the team's records to identify if there is a pattern of incidents and follow up on this.



An appropriate manager will follow up e.g. contact the person about what happened. This discussion may be followed up in writing. This manager will keep a record of the incident and the follow up action taken. This information will be referred to when deciding if a customer handling arrangement is needed (following the process outlined in the [customer handling policy](#)).

### **Repeated abusive or persistent contact from an individual**

If you are receiving a high volume of calls/repeated abusive calls from an individual, you must alert your line manager who will follow up appropriately.

Your manager will review the records relating to the individual and their situation and the follow up action taken following previous incidents. The Head of Service to consider whether a customer handling arrangement is needed (following the process outlined in the [customer handling policy](#)).

# Process for Planned Meeting or Visit

This process is for a meeting that is not considered high risk – for high-risk meetings see the process for high-risk meetings process chart

Where will the meeting be held?

On CCC premises: Advise reception that you are expecting a visitor and provide your contact details.

In the community e.g. a person's home or non-Council premises.

- Before the meeting check that the individual is not considered to be a high risk.
- Clearly mark in your Outlook Calendar who you are meeting so colleagues know where you are.
- Have a means of contacting a colleague/your manager if needed – e.g. a charged mobile phone (check that you have sufficient signal).
- Consider where you sit so that you can easily exit the room where needed – familiarise yourself with the room's exit points.
- Stay alert for any signs of potential aggressive or violent behaviour.

- Check if the individual that you are meeting poses a high risk (If they do, please refer to [high risk meeting chart](#)).
- Clearly mark in your Outlook Calendar who you are meeting and the time and location of the meeting.
- Have a means of contacting a colleague/your manager if needed – e.g. a charged mobile phone (check you have sufficient signal) or a SoloProtect Device.
- Plan your route to/from the meeting.
- If driving, park in a way that allows you to leave easily.
- Make sure that you are not carrying a lot of items that will make it hard to leave quickly.
- Ensure you are familiar with the exit points and have a clear path to leave.
- Check in with a buddy when you arrive at the meeting location and again when you leave.
- Stay alert for any signs of potential aggressive or violent behaviour.

Individual you are meeting starts to demonstrate aggressive or violent behaviour.

Trust your instincts.

Try to de-escalate the situation if it is safe to do so.

Warn the individual you will end the meeting if the behaviour continues.

End the meeting if you feel unsafe and leave the meeting room/location where you are meeting or ask the person to leave.

Call for help from your buddy, line manager or the police on 999.

Tell reception or another colleague who is onsite if you have left a member of the public in a meeting room/office - consider if two people are needed to escort the person off the premises.

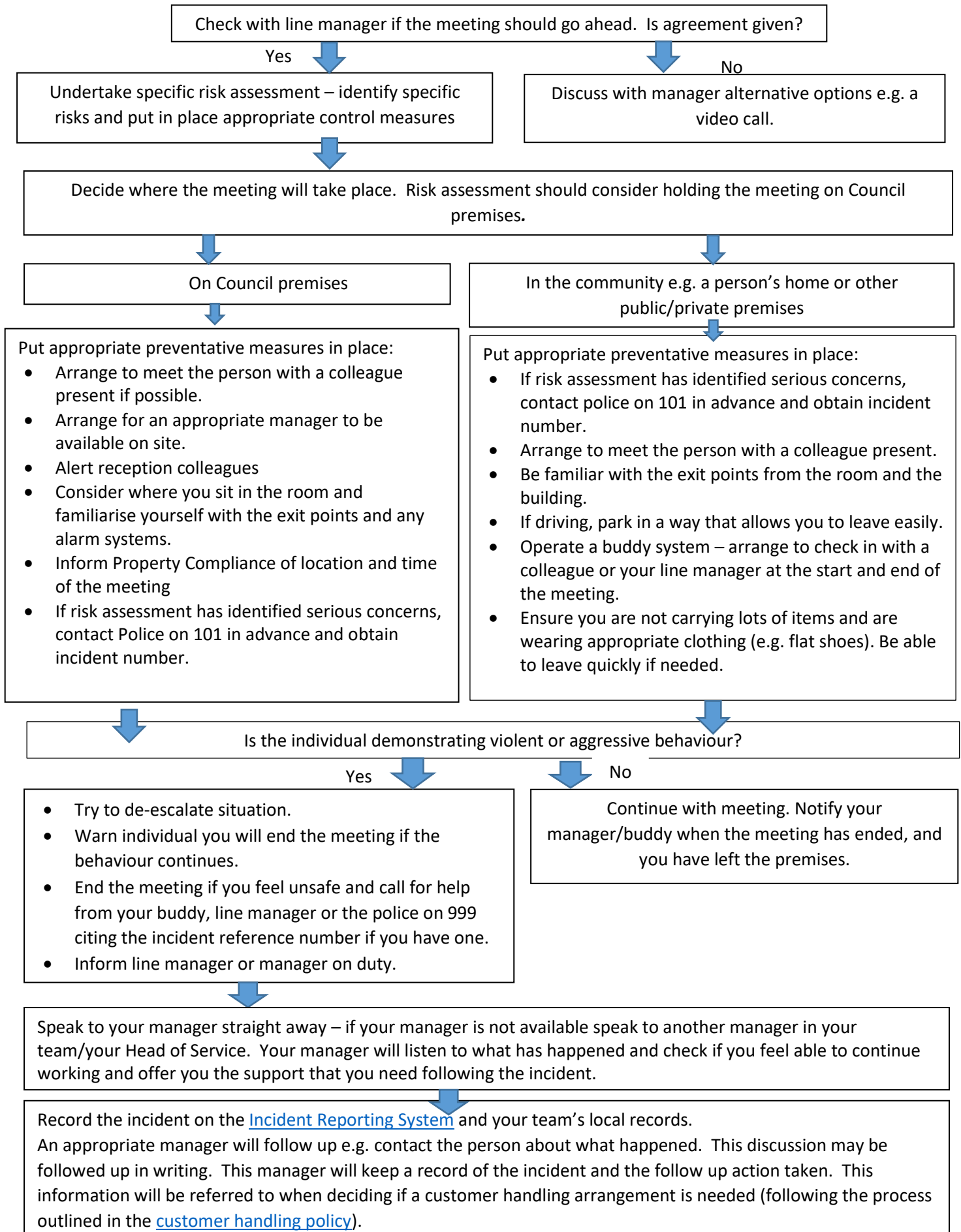
Speak to your manager straight away – if your manager is not available speak to another manager in your team/your Head of Service. Your manager will listen to what has happened and check if you feel able to continue working and offer you the support that you need following the incident.

Record the incident on the [Incident Reporting System](#) and your team's local records.

An appropriate manager will follow up e.g. contact the person about what happened. This discussion may be followed up in writing. This manager will keep a record of the incident and the follow up action taken. This information will be referred to when deciding if a customer handling arrangement is needed (following the process outlined in the [customer handling policy](#)).

# Process for a meeting a person that poses a high-risk

Meeting with an individual identified as posing a high risk, e.g. where there is a known history of violence or aggression or where it is anticipated an individual may become aggressive due to the nature/purpose of the meeting.



## Appendix 2 Suggested wording of follow up communication

*Please note: this suggested wording is provided as a basis for a follow up communication with a customer, service user or member of the public following an incident. It needs to be tailored according to the situation that has occurred. You need to have spoken to the individual about the incident before sending a follow up communication – the letter or email summarised the details of your discussion. You need to keep a record of the discussion that you had with the individual and a copy of this communication. These will be referred to if you are considering putting a customer handling arrangement in place.*

*Dear XX*

*I am writing to you following the meeting/discussion that you had with a member of my team, (add name), on (add date).*

*I was advised following the meeting that (add name) was upset/offended by some of the language that you used during that discussion which she/he/they described as (briefly describe).*

*Following this incident (add name) called you/met with you on (add date) to discuss what had happened.*

*Whilst I acknowledge that it may not have been your intent, you did regrettably cause offence, and the Council has a clear policy on protecting our colleagues from any abusive or offensive behaviours. **(if appropriate** - We appreciate that there may have been circumstances that led to you being dissatisfied with the service you have been receiving from the Council, but nevertheless must ask you to treat our staff with courtesy and respect. If you feel you have not been given the service you expect, you have the right to raise a complaint and can do so here (add link to the complaints process).*

*The Council's policy states that we believe our customers have a right to be heard, understood, and respected. We also believe that our colleagues and councillors have the right to work in a safe environment, free from any abuse, discrimination, or harm. We expect our colleagues and customers to treat each other with courtesy and respect. Being assertive or determined does not automatically result in unacceptable behaviour but actions become unacceptable when they involve abuse of our colleagues and councillors and/or our processes.*

*We are keen to work with you to maintain positive relationships that support you and your children/family to thrive at home and in the community (**amend as appropriate to the service that you are delivering**), but we will not accept attitudes or language of this nature towards our staff carrying out their professional duties.*

*Having discussed the matter with you/discussed this with (officer referred to above), I am confident that you now understand the impact that was made through the*

*meeting/conversation you had with (add name) and you have assured me that you will behave respectfully in future interactions with employees of the Council.*

*Or:*

*Having discussed the matter with you I remain concerned about whether you understand the impact that was made through the meeting/conversation you had with (add name) and must ask you to be more aware of your language/behaviour in future interactions with employees of the Council. Please be aware that this kind of behaviour may well constitute a hate crime which could be reported to the police should it happen again.*

*If appropriate briefly summarise any follow up actions/next steps that relate to the individual's issue. This will be different for every situation. There will be some situations where we have done as much as we can to deal with an issue and we will need to explain this.*

*Yours sincerely,*