



 sport aberdeen
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Respectful Engagement Policy

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1 Purpose

- 1.1 Sport Aberdeen is committed to providing high-quality, inclusive and accessible services. We value feedback and complaints and recognise that people may contact us when they are upset, frustrated, distressed or dissatisfied.
- 1.2 This policy sets out how Sport Aberdeen will support respectful engagement between customers, visitors, representatives and employees. It also explains how Sport Aberdeen may manage engagement where behaviour, contact or communication becomes unreasonable, unacceptable, unsafe or has a disproportionate impact on employees, services or resources.
- 1.3 The aim of this policy is not to prevent people from raising concerns or making complaints. Its aim is to support constructive communication, protect employees and customers, ensure fair access to services, and allow Sport Aberdeen to use its resources proportionately.
- 1.4 As a charitable organisation, Sport Aberdeen has a responsibility to make the best possible use of its resources in delivering benefit to the communities it serves. This policy helps ensure that resources remain focused on delivering services while maintaining fair and accessible arrangements for customer engagement and complaint handling.

2 Scope

- 2.1 This policy applies to all contact with Sport Aberdeen, including contact in person, by telephone, email, letter, live chat, social media, online forms or through a third party or representative.
- 2.2 It applies to:
 - customers and members;
 - service users and programme participants;
 - parents, carers and guardians;
 - visitors to Sport Aberdeen venues;
 - representatives acting on behalf of another person, including relatives, friends, advocates, elected officials, MPs, MSPs and councillors;
 - contractors, partners or others engaging with Sport Aberdeen services;
 - employees, workers and volunteers who are involved in managing engagement with customers or the public.
- 2.3 This policy should be read alongside Sport Aberdeen's complaints handling procedure, safeguarding procedures, health and safety arrangements, data protection policies, equality commitments, customer terms and conditions, venue rules and any relevant HR procedures.

3 Principles

3.1 Sport Aberdeen will apply this policy in line with the following principles:

- Everyone has the right to be treated with dignity, courtesy and respect.
- Customers have the right to raise concerns, provide feedback and make complaints.
- Employees have the right to work without abuse, harassment, intimidation, threats or violence.
- We will listen, respond fairly and explain decisions clearly.
- We will focus on the behaviour, communication or situation causing concern, rather than labelling the person.
- We will act proportionately and use the least restrictive approach that is likely to manage the issue.
- We will consider whether reasonable adjustments are needed to support access to services or the complaints process.
- We will keep clear and factual records of decisions made under this policy.
- Restrictions will be reviewed where appropriate and will not normally prevent a person from raising a new complaint, safeguarding concern, data protection request or other matter requiring a statutory response.

4 Expected Standards of Engagement

4.1 Sport Aberdeen expects everyone engaging with its services to:

- communicate respectfully with employees and other customers;
- provide information clearly and honestly;
- engage with reasonable requests for information;
- allow Sport Aberdeen reasonable time to respond;
- follow venue rules, health and safety instructions and service terms and conditions;
- avoid abusive, discriminatory, threatening, intimidating or offensive language or behaviour;
- avoid excessive, repetitive or circular contact that prevents Sport Aberdeen from responding effectively;

- use the appropriate process where a complaint, appeal, information request or safeguarding concern needs to be considered.

4.2 Sport Aberdeen employees are expected to:

- remain professional, courteous and calm;
- listen to concerns and seek to understand the issue being raised;
- explain processes, timescales and decisions clearly;
- set appropriate boundaries where needed;
- seek support from a manager where engagement becomes difficult, unsafe or unreasonable;
- record concerns accurately and factually;
- consider reasonable adjustments where required.

5 Supporting Positive Engagement

5.1 Sport Aberdeen will seek to support positive engagement wherever possible. This may include:

- explaining what we can and cannot do;
- confirming the process and expected timescales;
- agreeing the main point of contact;
- clarifying the issue being raised and the outcome sought;
- helping the person understand how to make a complaint or request support;
- offering reasonable adjustments where these are needed;
- responding in a clear and accessible format;
- giving early guidance where the level or nature of contact is becoming difficult to manage.

5.2 Where engagement is starting to become difficult, employees should raise this early and in a neutral way. This should focus on the situation and the impact it is having, rather than making assumptions about the person or their reasons for acting in a particular way.

5.3 The purpose of these actions is to support effective communication and constructive engagement wherever possible, rather than to restrict access to services or the complaints process.

6 Behaviour or Engagement That May Need to be Changed

- 6.1 Sport Aberdeen recognises that people may act out of character when they are upset, distressed or frustrated. However, some behaviour or patterns of contact may need to be managed where they affect the safety of others, the ability of employees to do their work, or Sport Aberdeen's ability to provide services fairly.

Examples include, but are not limited to:

6.2 **Abusive, threatening or discriminatory behaviour**

This may include:

- physical violence or attempted violence;
- threats of violence or harm;
- aggressive or intimidating behaviour;
- shouting, swearing or abusive language;
- discriminatory, degrading or offensive comments;
- harassment of employees, customers or others;
- behaviour that causes staff or customers to feel unsafe;
- recording, filming or photographing employees or customers in a way that is intimidating, intrusive or contrary to venue rules.

6.3 **Unreasonable levels of contact**

This may include:

- excessive calls, emails, visits, letters, social media messages or live chat contacts;
- contacting multiple employees, venues or teams about the same issue;
- repeatedly copying in employees, board members or external contacts where this does not help progress the matter;
- using board members' separate work email addresses, staff personal email addresses or other non-public contact details to raise, escalate or progress a complaint, particularly where this bypasses Sport Aberdeen's published complaints routes or may place the complainant's personal information outside Sport Aberdeen's usual systems and controls;
- sending large volumes of information that are repetitive, irrelevant or already provided;

- making repeated contact before Sport Aberdeen has had a reasonable opportunity to respond.

6.4 Unreasonable persistence

Sport Aberdeen recognises that people are entitled to disagree with decisions and to pursue issues that matter to them. Persistence alone is not unacceptable.

However, engagement may need to be managed where the person repeatedly:

- raises the same issue after Sport Aberdeen has provided its final response;
- seeks to reopen a concluded complaint without new and relevant information;
- reframes the same issue as new complaints, enquiries or requests for clarification;
- uses multiple routes to pursue the same matter in a way that creates circular correspondence;
- seeks to prevent Sport Aberdeen from implementing a legitimate decision or outcome;
- continues to ask Sport Aberdeen to review a matter after it has been considered by the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman.

6.5 Unreasonable demands

This may include:

- demanding responses outside agreed or reasonable timescales;
- insisting on a particular outcome Sport Aberdeen cannot provide;
- insisting on contact with a specific employee where this is not appropriate;
- refusing to engage with the appropriate process;
- repeatedly changing the substance of a complaint or expanding it in a way that prevents it being addressed;
- requiring a level of resource that is disproportionate to the issue being considered.

6.6 Unsafe or disruptive behaviour in venues or services

This may include:

- refusing to follow reasonable instructions from employees;
- disrupting activities, programmes or services;

- behaviour that affects the safe operation of a venue;
- behaviour that creates risk to employees, customers, participants or the individual themselves;
- breach of venue rules, membership conditions or programme requirements.

7 Managing Persistent Contact After a Complaint is Concluded

- 7.1 Where Sport Aberdeen has completed its complaints procedure and issued a final stage 2 response, the customer will be signposted to the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman if they remain dissatisfied.
- 7.2 Sport Aberdeen may provide clarification where this is helpful. However, if the customer continues to disagree with the decision, Sport Aberdeen will not normally continue correspondence on the same matter unless new and relevant information is provided.
- 7.3 Where the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman has considered a complaint and made no recommendations for Sport Aberdeen, Sport Aberdeen will not normally reopen the matter or provide repeated responses about the same issue.
- 7.4 This also applies where the customer seeks to revisit the same complaint through a third party or representative, including elected officials, MPs, MSPs, councillors or Scottish Ministers. Sport Aberdeen may provide factual clarification where appropriate, but will not operate a parallel or repeated complaints process.

8 Contact from Representatives, Elected Officials and External Bodies

- 8.1 Sport Aberdeen will respond appropriately to enquiries received from representatives, elected officials, MPs, MSPs, councillors, Scottish Ministers or external bodies. Where contact relates to an open complaint, it will be handled in line with the complaints handling procedure and subject to appropriate consent, authority or another lawful basis where personal information is involved.
- 8.2 Where the complaint has already completed Sport Aberdeen's complaints procedure, and where applicable has been considered by the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman, Sport Aberdeen will not normally reopen the matter unless new and relevant information is provided.
- 8.3 In these circumstances, Sport Aberdeen may provide a factual summary of the complaint status, confirm that the process has concluded, and signpost to the appropriate external route where relevant.
- 8.4 Customers should use Sport Aberdeen's published complaints routes to raise or progress a complaint. This helps ensure the complaint is managed fairly, consistently and within Sport Aberdeen's usual systems and controls, including where personal information is involved.

- 8.5 Customers should not use board members' separate work email addresses, staff personal email addresses or other non-public contact details to pursue a complaint, as these routes are not provided for complaint handling and may place personal information outside Sport Aberdeen's control. Where this happens, the contact may be redirected to the appropriate complaints process. Repeated use of these routes, particularly after the appropriate route has been explained, may be considered as part of a wider pattern of unreasonable or persistent contact.

9 Immediate Action and Zero Tolerance Situations

- 9.1 Some situations require immediate action. Employees are not expected to continue contact where they feel unsafe, threatened, abused or unable to manage the situation safely.
- 9.2 Employees may end a call, meeting, live chat, social media exchange or in-person interaction where:
- the person is abusive, threatening, discriminatory or intimidating;
 - the person refuses to stop behaviour after being asked to do so;
 - the contact creates a risk to employees, customers or others;
 - the person's behaviour prevents the interaction from continuing constructively.
- 9.3 Where there is immediate risk, employees should follow local emergency and health and safety procedures. Police Scotland may be contacted where there is violence, threat of violence, criminal behaviour or immediate risk to safety. Any serious incident must be recorded and reported to the relevant manager as soon as possible.

10 Actions Sport Aberdeen May Take

- 10.1 Sport Aberdeen will normally use a graduated approach unless immediate action is required due to safety or serious behaviour concerns.
- 10.2 Actions may include:
- explaining the expected standard of engagement;
 - asking the person to change their behaviour or communication;
 - clarifying the process and what Sport Aberdeen can and cannot do;
 - agreeing a communication plan;
 - identifying a single point of contact;
 - limiting contact to a particular method, such as email or letter;

- limiting the frequency of contact;
- requiring contact to be arranged by appointment;
- ending calls, meetings or online exchanges where behaviour is unacceptable;
- declining to respond to repeated correspondence on a matter already answered;
- restricting contact with named employees;
- restricting access to one or more venues, programmes or services;
- issuing a temporary or longer-term venue, programme or service exclusion;
- contacting Police Scotland or another relevant agency where necessary.

10.3 Restrictions must be proportionate to the issue being managed and should be no more restrictive than necessary.

11 Contact Restrictions

11.1 Contact restrictions may be considered where the nature, frequency or pattern of contact has a disproportionate impact on Sport Aberdeen's ability to provide services, respond to the individual, or support employees.

11.2 Examples of contact restrictions include:

- requiring contact to be made only through a named employee or team;
- limiting contact to a specific email address, postal address or telephone number;
- setting reasonable limits on the number of contacts within a defined period;
- requiring written contact only;
- confirming that repeated correspondence on a concluded matter will be filed but not acknowledged or responded to;
- restricting contact with specific employees where necessary.

11.3 Contact restrictions will not normally prevent a person from raising a new complaint, safeguarding concern, data protection request, freedom of information request or other matter requiring a statutory response. These matters will be considered through the appropriate process.

12 Venue, Programme or Service Restrictions

12.1 Sport Aberdeen may restrict access to venues, programmes or services where behaviour presents a risk to employees, customers, participants, the individual or the safe operation of

Sport Aberdeen services.

12.2 This may include:

- a temporary exclusion from a venue, programme or service;
- a longer-term restriction from one or more venue, programme or service;
- withdrawal from a programme or activity;
- restrictions on attending without prior arrangement;
- conditions for future attendance, such as behaviour expectations or contact arrangements.

12.3 A manager may take immediate temporary action where necessary to protect safety or maintain the safe operation of a venue. Longer-term restrictions should be reviewed and approved by an appropriate senior manager.

12.4 Restrictions involving children, young people or adults at risk should take account of safeguarding considerations and the individual circumstances of the case.

13 Decision-making and Approval

13.1 Before applying a restriction, Sport Aberdeen should consider:

- the specific behaviour, communication or pattern of contact causing concern;
- the impact on employees, customers, services or resources;
- whether the person has been told what needs to change, where appropriate;
- whether reasonable adjustments are required;
- whether another policy or process applies;
- the least restrictive option likely to manage the issue;
- the duration of the restriction and review arrangements;
- whether disability, communication needs, neurodivergence, mental health, trauma or other relevant factors indicate that reasonable adjustments should be considered before a restriction is applied.

13.2 Where possible, decisions should be made or reviewed by a manager who has not been directly involved in the immediate incident or complaint. More serious restrictions, including longer-term contact restrictions or venue exclusions, should be approved by an appropriate senior manager.

13.3 Specialist advice should be sought where relevant, including from safeguarding, health and

safety, human resources or data protection leads.

14 Communicating Restrictions

- 14.1 Where Sport Aberdeen decides to apply a restriction, the person should normally be told in writing:
- what behaviour, communication or pattern of contact has caused concern;
 - what impact this is having;
 - what restriction is being applied;
 - how long the restriction will last;
 - how they can make acceptable contact during the restriction;
 - how they can raise a new complaint, safeguarding concern, data protection request or other statutory request;
 - how they can request a review of the decision.
- 14.2 Where immediate action is required for safety reasons, written confirmation should be provided as soon as reasonably practicable.

15 Review and Appeal

- 15.1 A person subject to a restriction may request a review of the decision.
- 15.2 The review will normally be carried out by a senior manager who was not directly involved in the original decision, where this is practicable. The review will consider whether the restriction remains necessary, proportionate and appropriate.
- 15.3 The outcome of the review should be confirmed in writing. Where a restriction remains in place, Sport Aberdeen should explain the reason and the date or circumstances in which it will next be reviewed.

16 Equality, Accessibility and Reasonable Adjustments

- 16.1 Sport Aberdeen will consider whether reasonable adjustments are needed before applying or continuing any restriction. This includes considering whether the person has communication needs, disability-related needs, age-related needs, language needs, mental health needs, distress, trauma or other vulnerability that may affect how they engage.
- 16.2 Employees must not attempt to diagnose or make assumptions about a person's health or circumstances. The focus should be on what adjustment, if any, would help the person access the service or complaints process fairly.

- 16.3 Reasonable adjustments do not require Sport Aberdeen to accept abusive, threatening, discriminatory, unsafe or seriously disruptive behaviour.

17 Freedom of Information, Data Protection and Other Statutory Rights

- 17.1 Sport Aberdeen will consider whether reasonable adjustments are needed before applying or continuing any restriction. This includes considering whether the person has communication needs, disability-related needs, age-related needs, language needs, mental health needs, distress, trauma or other vulnerability that may affect how they engage.
- 17.2 Employees must not attempt to diagnose or make assumptions about a person's health or circumstances. The focus should be on what adjustment, if any, would help the person access the service or complaints process fairly. Reasonable adjustments do not require Sport Aberdeen to accept abusive, threatening, discriminatory, unsafe or seriously disruptive behaviour.

18 Recording and Monitoring

- 18.1 Sport Aberdeen will keep clear, factual and proportionate records of:
- incidents or engagement causing concern;
 - warnings or boundary-setting conversations;
 - decisions to apply restrictions;
 - reasons for restrictions;
 - duration and review dates;
 - any reasonable adjustments considered or applied;
 - any review or appeal outcome.
- 18.2 Records should be factual, neutral and based on observed behaviour, communication or impact.
- 18.3 Employees should avoid subjective labels or unnecessary personal comments. Use of this policy will be reviewed periodically to ensure it is being applied fairly, consistently and proportionately.

19 Support for Employees

- 19.1 Sport Aberdeen recognises that difficult, abusive or threatening engagement can affect employees. Managers should ensure employees are supported following difficult incidents.

Support may include:

- immediate assistance during an incident;
- time away from customer-facing duties where needed;
- a debrief with a manager;
- signposting to employee wellbeing support;
- guidance on future contact arrangements;
- support in preparing factual records or statements.

19.2 Employees should raise concerns with their line manager where they feel engagement is becoming difficult to manage or is affecting their wellbeing.

20 Relationship with the Complaints Handling Procedure

- 20.1 This policy supports, but does not replace, Sport Aberdeen's complaints handling procedure.
- 20.2 Where a person has an open complaint, Sport Aberdeen will continue to consider the complaint fairly wherever possible. Any contact restriction should be designed to support the effective handling of the complaint, not to prevent access to the complaints process.
- 20.3 In rare cases, access to the complaints process may need to be managed or restricted for a defined period. This should only happen where it is necessary, proportionate, approved by an appropriate senior manager, and where the person is told how they may challenge the decision.

21 Policy Review

- 21.1 This policy will be reviewed periodically, or sooner if required due to changes in legislation, SPSO guidance, organisational practice or learning from incidents.

22 Responsibilities

- 22.1 The Chief Executive is accountable for ensuring that appropriate arrangements are in place to support respectful engagement across Sport Aberdeen.
- 22.2 The Customer and Corporate Support Manager is responsible for maintaining this policy and supporting its consistent application in relation to complaints and customer contact.
- 22.3 Managers are responsible for applying this policy fairly, supporting employees, recording decisions and ensuring restrictions are proportionate and reviewed.
- 22.4 Employees are responsible for engaging respectfully, setting appropriate boundaries, seeking support when needed and reporting concerns in line with this policy.

- 22.5 Specialist leads, including safeguarding, health and safety, human resources and data protection leads, are responsible for providing advice where the circumstances require specialist input.



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