



MUNICIPALITY OF THE DISTRICT OF CLARE

VERBAL ABUSE POLICY

DEALING WITH DIFFICULT MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC POLICY

1.01 PURPOSE

The Municipality and employees have a shared responsibility to create and maintain a safe and healthy workplace. This Policy was developed to provide consistency in dealing with members of the public when they become “difficult” and to provide staff with support when dealing with these situations. This policy pertains to interactions with members of the public in person as well as communication through email, phone, and social media.

Although the Municipality’s purpose is to serve the community, employees are not to be recipients of or tolerate any form of abusive behaviour from members of the public. The Municipality is committed to:

- Healthy, safe, and abuse-free workplaces;
- Continuous improvement in supporting its employees;
- Providing great customer services to members of the public; and
- Ensuring that employees are aware of the procedures and responsibilities when dealing with “difficult” members of the public.

1.02 SCOPE

This policy applies to all Municipal employees, elected officials, volunteers, and contractors performing work on behalf of the Municipality.

1.03 DEFINITIONS

“Difficult” interactions refer to interactions that are:

- Physically and/or verbally aggressive;
- Rude, abusive, demeaning and/or harassing;

“Difficult” members of the public are individuals who:

- Cannot be satisfied despite the best efforts of staff;
- Constantly raise the same issue with different staff; and/or
- Makes unreasonable demands on the Municipality

1.04 APPLICATION

Difficult Interactions

If a member of the public’s interactions, in the opinion of the employee, meets the definition of “difficult” as described within this Policy, the employee will remain calm and respectful, hear out the concerns, and try to help if possible.

If an employee has attempted to the best of their ability to help the member of the public’s issue and they remain “difficult”, the employee will refer the matter to their manager or supervisor. When referring a “difficult” member of the public, the employee will immediately provide all the necessary information, including a summary of the interactions to date, to the manager or supervisor.

Members of the Public Who are Aggressive, Abusive, Rude, Demeaning and/or Harassing.

The Municipality will not tolerate or condone intimidating or offensive behaviour toward its employees by members of the public under any circumstances. This behaviour may include, but is not limited to, rude or otherwise vulgar noises, gestures or expressions, verbal abuse of a personal or general nature, threatening or offensive behaviour, physical violence against property or physical violence against a person.

Any employee who is the victim of intimidating or offensive behaviour from a member of the public may, at their own discretion, report the matter to their immediate supervisor for further action. Any employee who is the victim of physical violence from a member of the public may, at their own discretion, report the matter to the police. If an employee reports behaviour described within this Policy to the Police, they must advise their manager or supervisor and need to fill out the necessary paperwork to document the incident.

Phone Calls or Face-to-Face Interactions

Any employee who is victim of rude, abusive, or aggressive comments or statements over the phone or in a face-to-face conversation with a member of the public may:

- Respectfully advise the member of the public that their behaviour is unacceptable and that if it continues, they will have no choice but to end the discussion;
- Respectfully end the conversation if the rude, abusive, or aggressive behavior continues after a warning has been given.

If an interaction with a member of public contains discussions surrounding perpetrated violence, damage to property or threatening behaviour, the employee should report this interaction with their immediate supervisor/manager. The supervisor/manager may report this communication to Police depending on the severity of the actions or threats in the correspondence.

Correspondence (Letters, Emails, and Social Media)

Any correspondence that contains rude, abusive or aggressive comments or statements from a member of the public directed to an employee or the Municipality shall be kept on file with the Municipality. If the correspondence contains any information surrounding perpetrated violence, damage to property or threatening behaviour the employee should report this communication to their immediate supervisor/manager. The supervisor/manager may report this communication with the Police depending on the severity of the actions or threats in the correspondence.

Aftermath of Difficult Interactions

When a difficult interaction is referred to a manager or a supervisor, it is expected that they will investigate the interaction and contact the members of the public as required. Support from the CAO may be requested at any time.

The Municipality may place a restriction on the way its employees communicate with a member of the public, for example, restricting face-to-face contact to within the Municipality's buildings, requiring more than one employee to be present at any meeting or partner agency offices, limiting contact to written formats only.

Where a correspondence is found to be abusive received, the Municipality will inform the sender that it considers the communication offensive and ask them to stop being abusive. The Municipality will then ask that the sender edit their correspondence to remove any abusive material and resend it, otherwise the Municipality will not respond to the letter.

Documenting and Reporting:

Adequate records must be kept and maintained when an employee is faced with a "difficult" member of the public or engage in a "difficult" interaction. This is done to ensure that the Municipality is able to keep proper records surrounding the "difficult" individual's behaviour

towards its employees. A record of a difficult interaction with a member of the public should include, but is not limited to, the following:

- Date and time of the incident;
- Name of member of the public;
- Name of the primary employee involved in the difficult interaction;
- List of any employees who witnessed the interaction;
- Name of manager or supervisor whom the incident was escalated to;
- Brief summary of the incident that outlines the topic of the discussion, a description of the “difficult” behaviour, and any actions that the employee took to try and resolve the issue; and
- Brief summary of any actions that the employee took after the “difficult” interaction.
- Whether police were contacted.

Under this Policy, the Municipality reserves the right to bar someone from Municipality property in a circumstance where a member of the public conduct towards municipal employees is deemed to be adequately inappropriate or threatening. The Municipality will take necessary precautions to prevent abuse towards its employees.

If the CAO decides to limit a member of the public’s access to the Municipality in any way specified in this Policy, the CAO will advise Council as soon as possible of the situation, including the steps taken to limit the member of the public.

1.05 PRINCIPLES

Health and Safety

- To ensure the success and continuous improvement of occupational health and safety, including preventing abuse in the workplace, the CAO, managers, and employees must follow these principles:
- Recognize that the physical environment, workplace culture, and supportive working relationships contribute to overall employee well-being and safe work conditions;
- Provide a proactive and coordinated approach to occupational safety and health that prevents illness and/or injury, optimizes health, and supports rehabilitation;
- Proactively focus on hazard identification, assessment, elimination and control;

- Manage risks associated with the Municipality's activities and ensure appropriate controls are in place to prevent injury, illness, or loss to the Municipality's employees, volunteers, contractors, suppliers, and the public;
- Act quickly to prevent dangerous situations;
- Manage, monitor, and improve the Municipality's occupational health and safety measures;
- Develop and implement measurable health and safety objectives, targets and goals, and communicate through performance reporting;
- Conduct audits, reviews and evaluations to measure progress, identify improvement opportunities, and assess compliance with legislation; and
- Ensure employees understand and meet their safety responsibilities and are monitored for competency and compliance.

1.06 RESPONSIBILITIES

CAO

The CAO is responsible for:

- Ensuring all applicable legislation is followed;
- Assisting in the development and promotion of the Municipality's health and safety programs;
- Providing support to managers and supervisors handling "difficult" interactions from members of the public;
- Advising Council if a member of the public's communication access to the Municipality has been limited due to being "difficult" or being party to a "difficult" interaction;
- Performing regular reviews, in consultation with managers, of existing health and safety programs and practices;
- Ensuring that abusive behaviour in the workplace is identified and risks are assessed and controlled; and
- Providing the resources to managers to eliminate or control abusive behaviour in the workplace.

Managers

Managers are responsible for:

- Knowing the hazards, risks, and regulations related to the work they oversee;
- Identifying, eliminating, or controlling hazards, abusive behaviour in the workplace and unsafe activities or conditions;
- Communicating hazards and risks to employees;
- Advising the CAO if a member of the public's communication access to the Municipality has been limited due to being "difficult" or being party to a "difficult" interaction;
- Providing employees with the information, training, tools, and procedures to do their work safely and protect the safety of others;
- Review employee reports surrounding terminating a "difficult" interaction with a member of the public;
- Demonstrate support to employees when dealing with a "difficult" member of the public;
- Ensuring work procedures, guidelines, standards, and rules are followed; and
- Investigating "difficult" interactions when they are referred to management/supervisor level.

Employees

Employees are responsible for:

- Participating in their own safety, the safety of fellow employees, and the public;
- Identifying and reporting hazards, abusive behaviour in the workplace, unsafe conditions, and actions to their manager;
- Controlling hazards and "difficult" interactions with members of the public that are appropriate for their skill and position;
- Cooperating with the Municipality and fellow employees to protect everyone's health and safety;
- Understanding and following safety related work procedures, guidelines, standards, and rules;
- Providing the necessary reports to managers when a member of the public behaves in an abusive manner or when they terminate a conversation with a member of the public due to abusive behaviour; and

- Ensuring that they communicate and document any abusive behaviour in the workplace, including abusive behaviour from a member of the public, to their manager or supervisor pursuant to the Documenting and Reporting section of this Policy.

1.07 RIGHTS OF EMPLOYEES

Employees have the right to:

- Take part in making the workplace safe and free of abusive behaviour; and
- To feel safe at work.

1.08 CONSEQUENCES OF NON-COMPLIANCE

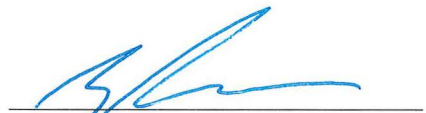
Failure to carry out the responsibilities detailed in this Policy may result in disciplinary action up to and including termination.

Chief Administrative Officer's Annotation for Official Policy Book

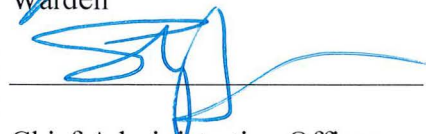
Date of First Reading: July 17, 2024

Date of Passage of Policy: July 17, 2024

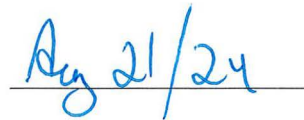
I certify that this Policy was adopted by Council as indicated above.



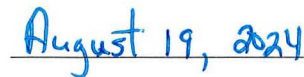
Warden



Chief Administrative Officer



Date



Date