

**Withdrawal and Refusal of Service**

**Policy and Procedure**

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**Policy:**

**Introduction**

Age UK Leeds is committed to providing services to all clients and to providing an ‘environment’ *[Note: By ‘environment’ Age UK Leeds also includes staff working in a person’s home or another community-setting, the same principles apply]* that is safe and acceptable to all clients, paid staff and volunteers.

There may be occasions when, after careful consideration, services are refused, withdrawn or limited for individual clients. This policy outlines the circumstances in which this may be appropriate.

**Principles**

Refusal or withdrawal of services will only be instigated as a last resort.

Age UK Leeds aims to provide an environment that is safe for all clients, visitors, paid staff and volunteers.

Every effort will be made to resolve a situation informally. If this is not successful or appropriate, in the first instance efforts will be made to limit services rather than refuse or withdraw them.

**Specific guidance**

The circumstances that may lead to limitation, withdrawal or refusal of service include:

* breach of the Age UK Leeds Equality, Diversity and Inclusion policy
* request for collusion with fraud or illegal activity
* client is threatening or using violence, or being verbally abusive
* inappropriate or excessive use of Age UK Leeds resources
* report/referral from another agency raises concerns

This list is intended only as a guide for both clients, paid staff and volunteers. If an instance occurs that is outside these guidelines, which indicates that following the exploration of all other reasonable options it is in neither party’s interest for service use to continue, Age UK Leeds reserves the right to refuse service.

**Equality Diversity and Inclusion**

Age UK Leeds embraces equal opportunities and diversity and has a zero tolerance policy in relation to discriminatory language, behaviour and harassment. We aim to provide services in an environment that is acceptable and accessible to all clients, visitors, paid staff and volunteers and that enables all parties to be treated with dignity and respect.

At the point of informal resolution, the client should be informed that further breaches of the Age UK Leeds Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Policy may result in refusal of service.

If a client’s behaviour (including unacceptable language/discriminatory references) is assessed as being in conflict with a safe environment, and informal measures do not rectify their behaviour, Age UK Leeds will consider alternative ways to deliver services

to the client if appropriate, such as arranging/offering appointments via telephone or email.

**Illegal or Fraudulent Activity**

Paid staff and volunteers must not knowingly assist clients with fraudulent applications or illegal activities.

If a paid staff member or volunteer identifies a client who might knowingly or unknowingly be committing, or about to commit, a criminal offence, they must make the client aware of their legal obligations, the implications of their action and the steps they should take to rectify the situation.

If the client is unwilling to follow this advice, Age UK Leeds cannot continue to advise or represent them on this particular issue (other than to reiterate obligations and implications etc). Where it is assessed as appropriate paid staff and volunteers may continue to work with the client on unrelated issues.

Such cases should be discussed with the Operations Manager in the first instance and any decision to limit service provision should be clearly explained to the client (in writing where assessed as appropriate) and recorded in the case notes.

**Inappropriate Behaviour** (including threatening or verbally abusive language and behaviour)

Where a client’s behaviour (including unacceptable language/discriminatory references) is assessed as being in conflict with a safe environment, and informal measures do not rectify their behaviour, Age UK Leeds will consider alternative ways to deliver services to the client if appropriate, such as arranging/offering appointments via telephone or email.

If effective alternative service delivery is impossible and informal measures to deal with a situation do not rectify the behaviour of a client, Age UK Leeds may refuse or withdraw services in order to maintain an environment acceptable to other clients, visitors, paid staff and volunteers. This decision will only be taken where appropriate informal actions have been pursued without success.

Age UK Leeds will give due consideration to all mitigating factors including stressful personal circumstances, traumatic life experience, neurological or mental health difficulties that might be contributing to a client’s behaviour. If such factors appear to be relevant, appropriate advice, support, alternative service provision or external referral should be considered.

**Inappropriate or excessive use of resources**

Age UK Leeds has limited resources and aims to provide equal access to services to all clients. Resources in terms of paid staff time, volunteer resources and expertise are not unlimited. The following actions may lead to withdrawal or limitation of services offered:

* Persistent requests for paid staff and volunteers to undertake actions which they deem the client to be able to take themselves
* Requests for advice or services that are not within the remit of the service or exceed the expertise or competency of paid staff or volunteers
* Long term support requirements that require substantial paid staff or volunteer time which then has a detrimental effect on the ability to provide an acceptable level of service to other clients
* Refusal to pursue referral to other sources of support deemed to be more appropriate alternatives to services offered by Age UK Leeds.

**Awareness and policy review**

All paid staff and volunteers to read and become familiar with this policy during their induction (to include an overview within the staff and volunteer induction programme).

Regular one to one supervision and team meetings ensure that awareness of this policy is maintained, and allow early detection of situations that might need to be dealt with under the policy.

Paid staff and volunteers will receive training appropriate to their role around managing difficult situations

Clients are made aware of this policy via:

* A notice in our public facing areas (Bradbury Building and St James’ University Hospital)
* Copies available from our Information Support Staff by emailing info@ageukleeds.org.uk or by request at public facing areas
* Policy available on Age UK Leeds website (‘About Us’ section)
* All new clients advised at the commencement of services

This policy is reviewed regularly by the Operations Director in consultation with the operational management team and staff.

**Procedure:**

If paid staff members have concerns about a client, the details should be discussed and actions agreed with their line manager in the first instance. Likewise, if volunteers have concerns relating to an individual that they are supporting these should be raised with their link member of staff.

Within the workplace (including at the person’s home, in a vehicle or in another community-setting) if the paid staff member or volunteer working directly with a client is unable to resolve a situation effectively, the paid staff member (or volunteer) should alert other colleagues and managers and appropriate, safe steps should be taken to resolve the incident.

**Informal Resolution:**

Every effort will be made to resolve a situation informally. Steps to achieving an informal resolution will include a discussion with the client making it clear to them that their actions/behaviour is not appropriate and is breach of the Policy.

The client will be reminded of what is acceptable behaviour and advised that any further actions on their part that are considered to be in breach of the Policy may lead to services being withdrawn. This discussion will be followed up in writing and must be clearly recorded in Charity Log following the Recording Risk procedure.

**Formal Resolution:**

If steps to reach an informal solution are not successful or appropriate, in the first instances efforts will be made to limit services rather than refuse or withdraw them. **Refusal or withdrawal of services will only be instigated as a last resort.**

Where a potential limitation, withdrawal or refusal of service is agreed as appropriate, the client must be made aware of the reason for this decision in relation to the procedure in this policy and be offered a copy of the policy. This decision must be clearly recorded in Charity Log following the Recording Risk procedure.

Where it is safe to do so the decision to limit the service offered must be communicated verbally to the client and should include a clear explanation of why the decision has been made and details of alternative service providers. This discussion will be followed up in writing and must be clearly recorded in Charity Log following the Recording Risk procedure.

In extreme cases (where it is assessed that there is an imminent risk of harm to paid staff members, volunteers, other clients or visitors) or unresolved cases (where it is assessed that there is an irreparable breakdown in the relationship).

Clients must be notified in writing by the relevant Operations Director/Operations Manager, or their nominee, of any decision to withdraw or refuse a service. Written decisions should include:

* a clear explanation of why the decision has been made
* advice that the client has a right to complain about this decision under the Complaints Policy
* details of alternative service providers if appropriate
* details on client`s right to a review of the decision after 12 months. Such requests must be notified by the client to the relevant Operations Director / Service Manager in writing for consideration by the Chief Executive.

This decision must be clearly recorded in Charity Log following the Recording Risk procedure.

**Report/referral from another agency raises concerns**

Age UK Leeds liaises with many different agencies over client work, with specific consent for sharing of information gained for this at commencement of service. Where it is assessed (based upon objective evidence) that there is **a quantifiable and imminent risk of harm** this may lead to a disclosure to another organisation/service e.g. that a particular client should not be visited alone because they pose a risk to staff or volunteers.

Paid staff and volunteers are required to raise concerns with their line manager or supervisor prior to sharing information with other agencies/services.

Any relevant objective information received from other agencies will be taken into consideration as part of the risk assessment and will be noted on client records.

Appropriate steps to ensure the safety of paid staff, volunteers, other clients and visitors will be identified, agreed, recorded and put in place with a view to ensuring that services can be provided.

Accurate case notes must be kept in Charity Log of all discussions, advice and decisions

**Wellbeing of Staff and Volunteers**

A decision to refuse, withdraw or limit services must be reported to all relevant Age UK Leeds staff; this will be done by an email sent from the relevant Senior Manager who has approved the decision. A record of the decision to refuse, withdraw or limit services must be noted on the clients’ record in Charity Log, this will include a summary of the reason why this decision has been made and a date when this will be reviewed (review periods to be determined by the Senior Manager responsible at the point decision to withdraw/refuse/suspend service is made).

Appropriate support will be offered to paid staff or volunteers who are required to implement this decision and an action plan on how to manage communication with the client will be agreed e.g. agree who will advise the client, what to say/how to advise the client affected; make sure the Operations Manager or a member of Senior Management Team is present in the building and available to back up the decision as required.

Paid staff and volunteers should raise concerns about unacceptable incidents or working conditions with their line manager or supervisor in the first instance. Age UK Leeds is committed to providing a healthy and safe work environment where paid staff and volunteers are treated with dignity and respect and where harassment of any kind is unacceptable. If paid staff or volunteers feel that their concerns have not been satisfactorily addressed by their line manager, they should contact a member of the Senior Management Team and/or their trade union for advice and support

**Appendix: Tips for handling challenging or difficult clients**

**Listen**

When you really listen to what clients are trying to tell you, you are simultaneously showing concern and gaining insight into the issue they are having which helps you to find a solution. Avoid talking over them, even to provide them with good news.

**Provide validation to the client or caller**

Avoid talking down to clients and telling them to calm down. Instead try saying, ‘I understand that this is a problem for you, and we are going to find a solution.”

**Don’t react emotionally**

Try to separate yourself from their emotion and treat the situation objectively as a problem to be solved. If you react angrily, this will only exacerbate the situation.

**Find the root of the problem**

Listening and gathering information, enables you to start ascertaining the root of the problem which is key to solving it.

**Offer multiple solutions**

Offer a single, definite solution if you have one, but it is possible, offering a variety of solutions for a difficult issue is helpful because clients can then decide for themselves how they would like to proceed.

**Be honest, avoid vague terms, and don’t make promises that you cannot guarantee**

Avoid telling clients what you think they want to hear to get them off the phone or to conclude the visit/contact as quickly as possible. It’s better to tell them in definite terms what you know, and if you don’t, simply tell them that you don’t have a solution, but you will find the answer for them.

**Express empathy**

Do not collude but try to show empathy as this can be very calming and may diffuse the situation.

**State your boundary clearly:**

Calmly and assertively tell the client their behaviour is inappropriate and must stop. For example, say, "I find that comment inappropriate; please stop," or "I cannot continue this conversation if you use that tone".

**If all else fails, just hang up or terminate the visit**

If a client refuses to calm down or is being rude, abusive, or threatening then it may be appropriate to put the phone down or terminate the visit/contact. You may want to warn them first that you may need to do this to give them an opportunity to change their approach to the meeting or call.