THE LAW SOCIETY OF NORTHERN IRELAND

Unacceptable Behaviour Policy

1. Introduction

1.1 At the Law Society of Northern Ireland, we believe that all individuals have a right to be heard, understood and respected. We aim to treat everyone who contacts us courteously and professionally.

1.2 We also believe that our staff have the right to work in a safe environment, free from any abuse or harm caused by others. We expect all individuals to treat our staff with courtesy and respect at all times. We maintain a zero-tolerance policy toward any form of abusive, threatening, demeaning, or offensive behaviour, whether communicated verbally or in writing.

1.3 Sometimes the best help that we can offer does not meet the needs of the person who has contacted us. For example, they may want advice that we are not in a position to give, or they may want an outcome that we cannot provide.

1.4 We will always try to signpost individuals contacting the Society for assistance more appropriately and explain why we cannot provide the information or outcome they expect. There may be occasions when there is nothing further that can reasonably be done to assist.

1.5 In a small number of cases the actions of some individuals become unacceptable because they involve abuse of our staff and/or our processes.

1.6 We do not view an action as unacceptable, just because a person is forceful or determined. However, we do consider actions that result in unreasonable demands and/or abusive behaviour to be unacceptable. There are a range of actions we consider to be unacceptable, including:

- Aggressive or abusive behaviour; and
- Unreasonable demands and/or unreasonable levels of contact.

1.7 The purpose of this policy is to explain the appropriate action the Society will take when people are displaying unreasonable or unacceptable behaviour which can distress our staff or strain our resources with persistent and unrealistic demands.

2. Aggressive or abusive behaviour

2.1 We understand that people who contact us may for various reasons be frustrated, stressed or upset. They can also feel angry about their situation. If this escalates into aggression or abuse towards our staff, we consider this unacceptable.

2.2 At the same time, we appreciate that people may have a range of circumstances, including health circumstances or disabilities, which may affect their behaviour or the way they express themselves. We will support people who may need reasonable adjustments to help them interact with us.

2.3 Aggressive or abusive behaviour includes language (whether verbal or written) that may cause staff to feel seriously distressed, afraid, threatened or abused. This may include shouting down or repeatedly talking over, personal verbal abuse, derogatory remarks, rudeness, intimidating behaviour, threats and harassment. We also consider inflammatory statements, remarks of a discriminatory nature and unsubstantiated allegations to be abusive behaviour.

2.4 Where an individual is aggressive or abusive, we may decide to:

- Advise the individual that we consider their actions inappropriate, unnecessary or unhelpful and ask them to stop;
- End telephone calls without further warning;
- Terminate all direct contact with the individual;
- Notify the police. This will always be the case if physical violence is used or threatened against the staff or other parties, or we feel the caller may harm themselves; or,
- Take any other action that we consider appropriate to the circumstances.

3. Unreasonable demands and/or levels of contact

3.1 A demand becomes unreasonable when it starts to impact excessively on the work of our staff, or when dealing with the matter takes up an excessive amount of time and in so doing, disadvantages others.

3.2 This includes repeatedly contacting us in person, by phone, email etc., contacting various staff members about the same issue, raising the same issue repeatedly, or sending us large numbers of documents about which the relevance is not clear.

3.3 It also includes submitting repeated issues or complaints after the relevant process has been exhausted or insisting that matters are dealt with in ways which are incompatible with our processes or our role and remit.

3.4 Where an individual is unreasonably demanding, we may decide to:

- Limit contact to telephone calls from the person at set times on set days;
- Restrict contact to written correspondence only;
- Restrict contact to a nominated member of staff who will deal with future calls or correspondence;
- Restrict the issues we will correspond on;
- Accept contact only via another nominated person or third party;
- Apply “read only status” to the communications and refuse to deal with further correspondence and return any documents;
- Advise the person that further irrelevant documentation will be destroyed; or,
- Take any other action that we consider appropriate to the circumstances.

4. Taking action

4.1 Before we take action, we will generally give the individual the opportunity to modify their behaviour. If the behaviour continues, we will take action as set out in this policy.

4.2 Where the behaviour is so extreme or it threatens the immediate safety and welfare of staff, we may not give prior warning of the action we will take.

4.3 Individuals will in most instances be told why a decision has been made, what the alternative arrangements will be and the length of time that these restrictions will be in place.

November 2026

[ENDS]