

Withdrawing service or excluding a client: Policy and procedure

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Contents

1. Definition.....	3
2. Reasons for Exclusion	3
3. Steps Short of Exclusion	3
We may take other steps short of exclusion including:	4
4. In all circumstances all staff and volunteers must follow certain procedures when beginning proceedings which may lead to withdrawal of service or exclusion of a client:.....	4
5. Procedure for withdrawing a service or excluding a client.....	4
4. Appeal Process	5

1. Definition

Withdrawing service may include ending an interview early or a temporary or partial withdrawal of service relating to a particular issue. Excluding a client means deciding no longer to offer any service to a client on a permanent basis or for a set period of time.

2. Reasons for Exclusion

All staff and volunteers at Citizens Advice Westminster work hard to give the best possible advice and support to all clients. Sometimes there are circumstances where managers have no alternative but to withdraw services from a client or exclude them from the charity. These circumstances are:

- The client has been violent, aggressive, threatening or abusive including using discriminatory language or behaviour towards staff, volunteers or other clients;
- The client persistently refuses to follow the advice given;
- The client frequently changes their mind about what help they want from us;
- The client fails to provide the required information, for example about all their debts, or continually changes the information they give us;
- The client lies about their circumstances, or gives us false information;
- We have evidence that the client is attempting to make a fraudulent benefit or other claim;
- The client persistently fails to attend appointments despite repeated reminders, and they provide no valid reason for this;
- Staff and volunteers cannot offer any further assistance on a particular issue because they have exhausted all appropriate sources of advice;
- The client is demanding an unreasonable amount of adviser time and other resources;
- The advice and support required by the client is beyond the expertise or remit of the charity;
- A referral agency has reported that the client has a track record of violent or other abusive behaviour - a risk assessment will be done for each separate referral, and a decision will then be made by the Chief Executive.

3. Steps Short of Exclusion

Ceasing to advise a client is a very serious step for the client and for Citizens Advice Westminster. All staff and volunteers will consider alternative:

- Unless there is an immediate risk of violence, we will always offer a client an opportunity to withdraw an offensive or abusive remark and we will always be clear about the role of the adviser or assessor, to avoid any misunderstanding about our purpose
- If a client ignores clear advice or continually changes their mind, the reasons for this will be discussed to try to overcome any barriers
- If the client is not listening, and a letter would help them to understand, this will be provided

- If there is evidence that the client is withholding information relevant to their case, this will be explained to them
- If the client continually changes their mind or gives conflicting information, we will explain the difficulties this causes.

We may take other steps short of exclusion including:

- ending the conversation
- limiting how much time we spend on the phone with a client
- withdrawing face to face service and restricting support to online
- not reply to all your communications
- send letters and documents back to the client
- only helping a client with certain issues.

4. In all circumstances all staff and volunteers must follow certain procedures when beginning proceedings which may lead to withdrawal of service or exclusion of a client:

- The client will be warned that Citizens Advice Westminster is considering withdrawing the service and why, with specific examples of their problem behaviour, so that they have a chance to put things right
- The decision to withdraw a service will be made by the Chief Executive, and the Chair of Trustees will be informed of this decision
- The Chief Executive will write to the client or their representative to explain that Citizens Advice Westminster's services will not be provided to them, and the reasons for this
- The letter will explain any conditions to the client. If a client has physically assaulted a member of staff, a volunteer, or a client, or their behaviour is deemed to be particularly abusive, the Chief Executive will refer the matter to the Police.
- If Citizens Advice Westminster is withdrawing a service because staff and volunteers consider that a certain issue has been exhausted, the client will be informed of this
- Any client who is excluded will be made aware that they will not be able to seek advice from an outreach session or other Citizens Advice Westminster service.
- If the service is withdrawn on the basis that the charity is unable to help the client any further, the Chief Executive must be satisfied that the client has been signposted to all other relevant local agencies as part of the advice process
- The client will be told that they can appeal against exclusion or service withdrawal by writing to the Chair of Trustees.

5. Procedure for withdrawing a service or excluding a client

Incident records relating to the client will be reviewed first by the duty supervisor and then the Head of Contracts and Services, who will provide feedback to the originator of the incident in every case either directly or via the duty supervisor.

A summary of all incidents will be reported regularly to the CEO.

Withdrawing service or excluding a client procedure

Where there is a recommendation to withdraw service, the CEO will examine the evidence carefully and ensure that there is a strong case for withdrawing the service or excluding a client. The CEO will have to be satisfied that any decision does not conflict with Citizens Advice Westminster's policy on equality, diversity or exclusion.

Citizens Advice Westminster will not exclude a client just because they have made a complaint or claim. However, if a client disrupts the work of the charity, or puts the personal safety and wellbeing of staff, volunteers and other clients at risk, exclusion may be the only option available to the Chief Executive.

In exceptional cases the Chief Executive may have to exclude a client before, during or after their first visit to the charity's premises. In the vast majority of cases, exclusion will be used as a last resort, and Citizens Advice Westminster staff and volunteers will attempt to resolve the client's issues before finally deciding to exclude them.

However, if the Chief Executive deems the client's behaviour to be so aggressive and potentially violent, that there is a risk to people or property, or in the face of a serious threat of violence, then they will notify the Police straight away with a view to having the client removed from the premises immediately, and there will be an immediate withdrawal of service.

4. Appeal Process

If a client complains about the decision to exclude or withdraw a service from them, the Chair of the Trustee Board (or another designated Trustee) will review the Chief Executive's decision and check that it was made properly and is reasonable in the particular circumstances. The Chair's decision will be final.