



North Warwickshire
Borough Council

Environmental Health and Private Sector Housing Enforcement Policy

June 2024

Contents

1. Introduction
2. Legal status of the Enforcement Policy
3. Scope and meaning of 'Enforcement'
4. How to obtain a copy of the Policy and make comments / complaints
5. General Principles
6. Notifying Alleged Offenders
7. Deciding what level of enforcement action is appropriate
8. Determining whether a Prosecution or Simple Caution is viable and appropriate
9. Who decides what enforcement action is taken
10. Liaison with other regulatory bodies and enforcement agencies
11. Considering the views of those affected by the offences
12. Protection of Human Rights
13. Review of the Enforcement Policy

1.0 Introduction

- 1.1 Local Authority Regulatory Services, including Environmental Health and Private Sector Housing, play a key role in supporting local economic prosperity and community health and wellbeing. These services ensure that well-run, legally compliant businesses are supported and that consumers, workers and the environment are protected from harm.
- 1.2 This enforcement policy provides guidance to all stakeholders* (Members, officers, proprietors, licence holders, employers, employees, statutory and voluntary agencies, partner agencies and members of the general public) on the range of options that are available to achieve compliance with legislation enforced by North Warwickshire Borough Council services.

* The term “stakeholder” is used in this document to refer to all persons or organisations who may be affected by, or have an interest in, this Policy.

- 1.3 The policy covers all areas of the Environmental Health and Private Sector Housing Service’s work where enforcement of legislation may be involved, including:-

- Licensing (taxi / private hire, alcohol, street trading, gambling etc.);
- Private Sector Housing (conditions in rented properties, including multi-occupied houses, and mobile homes);
- Food hygiene in shops, restaurants, pubs, schools, hospitals and care homes;
- Environmental protection (dog fouling, littering, fly tipping, land, air and noise pollution);
- Public health (filthy properties, accumulations of rubbish, pest infestations etc.);
- Health and safety at work in a wide range of commercial workplaces;
- Smoke-free laws.

- 1.4 The primary objective is to achieve regulatory compliance and we do this mainly through advice and information. Where it becomes necessary to take formal action this will be done. There is a wide range of tools available, and this Policy aims to ensure that a sanction that is relevant and proportionate to the offence or contravention will always be chosen.
- 1.5 The policy explains the objectives and methods for achieving compliance and the criteria considered when deciding what the most appropriate response is to a breach of legislation.
- 1.6 All decisions will have regard to current statutory guidance and codes of practice, particularly the [Regulators’ Code](#) the [Code for Crown Prosecutors](#) and the Human Rights Act.

1.7 Stakeholders will be notified of this policy through the Council's website.

2.0 Legal Status of the Enforcement Policy

2.1 North Warwickshire Borough Council approved consultation of this Policy in June 2024.

2.2 This policy is intended to provide guidance for all stakeholders as identified in paragraph 1.1 above. It does not affect or fetter the discretion of the Council, or Officers, to take legal proceedings, or any other course of action, where this is considered to be in the public interest.

3.0 Scope and Meaning of 'Enforcement'

3.1 This Policy applies to all legislation enforced by the Environmental Health and Private Sector Housing Services.

3.2 'Enforcement' includes all actions taken by officers aimed at ensuring legal compliance. This is not limited to formal enforcement action such as prosecution, but includes spoken and written requests to comply with legislation.

3.3 In certain circumstances we will seek to raise awareness and increase compliance levels by publicising unlawful trade practices or criminal activity. Where appropriate the results of specific court cases may also be published.

4.0 How to get a copy of the Policy, make comments or complaints

4.1 This Policy is available on the Council's website or via the link below:
[The Council's complaints procedure | Compliments and or Complaints | North Warwickshire Borough Council \(northwarks.gov.uk\)](#)

If you would like a paper copy of the Policy and/or you would like to comment on the Policy, or if you have a complaint about the way in which the Policy has been applied please contact us at the following address:

North Warwickshire Borough Council
South Street
Atherstone
Warwickshire
CV9 1DE

Tel: 01827 715341

E-mail: environmentalhealth@northwarks.gov.uk
privatesectorhousing@northwarks.gov.uk

5.0 General Principles

- 5.1 Prevention is better than cure and our role therefore involves actively working with individuals and businesses to advise on, and assist with, compliance. We will always use education and encouragement to achieve compliance where it is possible, and appropriate, to do so.
- 5.2 Where we do consider that formal action is necessary each case will be considered on its own merits. However, there are general principles that apply to the way each case must be approached. These are set out in this Policy, the [HSE Enforcement Policy](#) and in the [Regulators' Code](#)
- 5.3 Enforcement decisions will be fair, proportionate, transparent, independent and objective and will not be influenced by issues such as ethnicity or national origin, gender, disability, religious beliefs, political views or the sexual orientation of the suspect, victim, witness or offender.
- 5.4 Where the subject of the enforcement action is either a juvenile, or a person with special needs, a learning disability, or is otherwise vulnerable, contact will be made with, and advice sought from, appropriate agencies as necessary. In accordance with Council Policy, and for a first offence of littering, an alternative sanction will be offered to Juveniles.
- 5.5 North Warwickshire Council is a public authority for the purposes of the Human Rights Act 1998. We will, therefore, apply the principles of the European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms.
- 5.6 This enforcement policy helps to promote efficient and effective approaches to regulatory inspection and enforcement, which improve regulatory outcomes without imposing unnecessary burdens.
- 5.7 We will have regard to the Regulators' Code and in particular we will:
- Carry out our regulatory activities in a way that supports those we regulate to comply and grow;
 - Provide simple and straightforward ways to engage with those we regulate;
 - Base our regulatory activities on risk;
 - Share information about compliance and risk;
 - Ensure clear information, guidance and advice is available to help those we regulate meet their responsibilities to comply;
 - Ensure our approach to regulatory activities is transparent
- 5.8 We will ensure that any decision to depart from the Regulators' Code, or this Policy, will be properly reasoned, based on material evidence and documented.

6.0 Notifying Alleged Offenders

- 6.1 If we receive information that may lead to enforcement action against a business or individual we will notify that business or individual as soon as is practicable of any intended enforcement action, unless this could impede an investigation or pose a safety risk to those concerned or the general public (for example the need for immediate action to close a food business, or prevent the use of a dangerous process / piece of machinery).
- 6.2 During the progress of enforcement investigations/actions, all stakeholders (businesses, licence holders, employees, complainants etc.) will, as appropriate, be kept informed of progress. Confidentiality will be maintained and personal information about individuals will only be released to a Court when required and/or in accordance with the Data Protection Act 2018 and GDPR legislation.

7.0 Deciding what level of enforcement action is appropriate

A number of factors are considered when determining what enforcement action to take:

7.1 Levels of enforcement action:

7.1.1 There are a large number of potential enforcement options. The option chosen varies from no action through to proceedings in Court.

Examples of the main types of action that can be considered are shown below (not all will apply in all circumstances):

- No action;
- Informal Action and Advice (for example a written warning);
- Fixed Penalty Notices
- Formal Notice;
- Forfeiture Proceedings;
- Seizure of goods/equipment;
- Residential Property Closure or Emergency Remedial Action;
- Rent repayment order applications
- Banning order applications
- Rogue landlord database entry applications
- Management Orders
- Injunctive Actions;
- Refusal/suspension/revocation of a licence;
- Simple Caution;
- Prosecution;
- Civil/Financial Penalty Notices
- Publication Penalties
- Proceeds of Crime Applications.

Note: Availability of the above options is determined by the legislation applicable and the particular circumstances of each case; not all options will be available on all occasions.

7.1.2 In assessing what enforcement action is necessary and proportionate, consideration will be given to:

- The seriousness of compliance failure;
- Past performance and current practice;
- The risks being controlled;
- Legal, official or professional guidance;
- Local priorities of the Council.

7.1.3 Where the law has been contravened, enforcement actions / options will normally be commenced at a low level and escalated until compliance is reached. Exceptions would be where there is a serious risk to public safety or the environment or the offences have been committed deliberately, repeatedly or negligently and / or involve deception.

7.2 No Action

7.2.1 In certain circumstances, contraventions of the law may not warrant any action. This can be where the cost of compliance to the offender outweighs the detrimental impact of the contravention, or the cost of the required enforcement action to the Council outweighs the detrimental impact of the contravention on the community. A decision of *no action* may also be taken where formal enforcement is inappropriate in the circumstances, such as may (*but not always*) be the case where a trader has ceased to trade. In such cases we will advise the offender of the reasons for taking no action.

7.3 Informal Action and Advice

7.3.1 For minor breaches of the law we may give verbal or written advice. We will clearly identify any contraventions of the law and give advice on how to put them right, including a deadline by which this must be done. The time allowed will be reasonable, and take into account the seriousness of the contravention and the implications of the non-compliance.

7.3.2 Sometimes we will give recommendations or advice on 'good practice', but we will clearly distinguish between what *must be done* to comply with the law and what is *advice only*.

7.3.3 Failure to comply could result in an escalation of enforcement action.

7.4 Fixed Penalty Notices

7.4.1 Certain offences may be dealt with by Fixed Penalty Notices (FPNs) where permitted in legislation. FPNs are recognised as a low-level enforcement tool and avoid a criminal record for the defendant. Where legislation permits an offence to be dealt with by way of a FPN, for example littering, dog fouling, or smoking in a smoke free place, we may choose to administer a FPN on a first occasion, without issuing a warning. Second and subsequent offences are unlikely to be dealt with by FPN and will normally result in prosecution.

7.5 Formal Notice

7.5.1 Certain legislation allows notices to be served requiring offenders to take specific actions or cease certain activities. Notices may require activities to cease immediately where the circumstances relating to food hygiene, health, safety, environmental damage or nuisance demand. In other circumstances, the time allowed will be reasonable, and take into account the seriousness of the contravention and the implications of the non-compliance.

7.5.2 In some cases, a charge will be made where a notice is served.

7.5.2 All notices issued will include details of any applicable *Appeals Procedures*.

7.5.3 Some notices allow works to be carried out in default. This means that if a notice is not complied with [a breach of the notice] the Council may carry out any necessary works. Where the law allows, we may then recover our costs from the person/business served with the notice, through the Courts if necessary.

7.6 Seizure

7.6.1 Some legislation enables authorised officers to seize goods, equipment or documents, for example unsafe food, sound equipment that is being used to cause a statutory noise nuisance, or any goods that may be required as evidence for possible future court proceedings. When goods are seized a receipt is given to the person from whom the goods are taken.

7.7 Injunctive Actions

7.7.1 In certain circumstances, for example, where offenders are repeatedly found guilty of similar offences, or where it is considered that injunctive action is the most appropriate course of enforcement, then injunctive actions through the Courts may be used to deal with repeat offenders or dangerous circumstances.

7.8 Refusal, Suspension and Revocation of Licences

7.8.1 Grounds for Refusal, Suspension or Revocation of Hackney Carriage or Private Hire Drivers' Licences

The grounds for refusing to renew a licence, or for suspending or revoking a licence, are based on whether the driver has:-

- (a) been convicted of an offence involving dishonesty, indecency or violence;
- (b) been convicted of an offence under the Local Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 1976;
- (c) failed to comply with a requirement of the Local Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 1976, or
- (d) any other reasonable cause.

Licences may be suspended or revoked with immediate effect if such a decision is deemed necessary in the interests of public safety.

Where a Licence is refused or revoked, the Council will lodge these details with the National Register of Refusals and Revocations, NR3.

7.8.2 Under the Licensing Act 2003, where a Review of a Premises Licence is sought, the options available to the Licensing Committee are:-

- To modify the conditions of Licence
- To exclude a Licensable activity from the scope of the Licence
- To remove the Designated Premises Supervisor
- Suspend the Licence for a period not exceeding three months
- Revoke the Licence
- Issue a warning letter
- No action

7.8.3 Under the Gambling Act 2005, where a Review of a Premises Licence is sought, the options available to the Committee are:-

- Revocation of the Licence
- Suspend the Licence for a specified period not exceeding three months;
- Exclude a condition attached to the Licence, or remove or amend an exclusion;
- Add, remove or amend a condition;
- Issue a warning letter
- No action

7.9 Simple Caution

7.9.1 A Simple Caution is a means by which the Council deals quickly and simply with less serious offences, both reducing burdens on the Court system and reducing the chance of repeat offences. A Simple Caution is an admission of guilt, but is not a form of sentence, nor is it a criminal conviction, though a record may be made of the Caution.

7.9.2 For a Simple Caution to be issued a number of criteria must be satisfied:

- Sufficient evidence must be available to prove the case;
- The offender must admit the offence;
- It must be in the public interest to use a Simple Caution;
- The offender must be 18 years or over

Ministry of Justice Guidance on simple cautions is accessible by visiting:

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/708595/cautions-guidance-2015.pdf

7.9.3 We will also take into account the following when making our decision:

- The offender should not have received a simple caution for a similar offence within the last 3 years.

7.9.4 The final decision on whether or not to issue a Simple Caution will be made by the Head of Environmental Health, or other suitably authorised officer, after receiving appropriate legal advice.

7.9.5 A record of the Caution will be kept on file for 3 years. If the offender commits a further offence, the Caution may influence a decision to take a prosecution. If during the time the Caution is in force the offender pleads guilty to, or is found guilty of, committing another offence anywhere in England and Wales, the Caution may be cited in court, and this may influence the severity of the sentence that the court imposes.

7.10 Prosecution

7.10.1 A prosecution will normally follow where the individual or organisation concerned has done one or more of the following:

- Deliberately, negligently or persistently breached legal obligations, which were likely to cause material loss or harm to others;

- Deliberately or persistently ignored written warnings or formal notices;
- Risked or endangered, to a serious degree, the health, safety or well being of people (or animals as the case may be) or the environment ;
- Assaulted or obstructed an Officer in the course of their duties.

7.11 Civil/Financial Penalty Notices

7.11.1 Certain Housing offences can be dealt with by issuing a Civil Penalty Notice for offences to owners and or agents of residential premises as an alternative to prosecution. The burden of proof needed to issue a civil penalty is the same as is necessary for a prosecution.

7.11.2 The decision as to whether a prosecution is taken rather than issuing a Civil Penalty depends on factors such as the seriousness of the offence, historical offences, culpability, likelihood of continuing, repeated or escalating offences taking place, vulnerability of the tenant and the potential impact on the wider community.

Council officers will maintain their discretion, in conjunction with advice from the legal team on which option is pursued.

7.11.3 The maximum charge per offence is £30,000, but the level of charge in the Civil Penalty Notice will be determined by reference to the Council's adopted Civil Penalty Policy. Where a Financial Penalty is to be administered, the level will be determined in accordance with the Financial Penalty Policy.

7.11.4 A decision by the Service Manager in consultation with the Head of Service/Director, with the advice of Legal Services, is necessary to determine the most appropriate course of action. In making a decision, consideration will be given to relevant government guidance, this Policy and the Council's adopted Civil Penalty and Financial Penalty Policies.

7.12 Rent repayment orders, banning orders and rogue landlord database for Housing offences

7.12.1 The Local Authority may seek to make an application for a rent repayment order for a range of housing offences and will provide information to tenants where possible to allow them to make their own applications.

7.12.2 The Local Authority may seek banning orders where landlords or property agents have been convicted of a banning order offence. Where a breach of a Banning Order occurs the Council may seek to issue a Civil Penalty - the amount would be no less than £10,000 to reflect the seriousness of the offender having

received a Banning Order in the first place and be reserved for the worst offenders.

7.12.3 The Local Authority must make an entry on the national Rogue Landlord database where a banning order has been issued and must revoke any licence held by a person subject to such as order

8.0 Determining whether a Prosecution or Simple Caution is viable and appropriate

8.1 We apply the 'Full Code Test' to determine whether a Prosecution or Caution is viable and appropriate. This Test, described in the Code for Crown prosecutors (2018), consists of two stages:
(i) the evidential stage; followed by (ii) the public interest stage

For more information about the 'Code for Crown Prosecutors' visit:
[The Code for Crown Prosecutors | The Crown Prosecution Service](#)

8.2 A Caution or Prosecution proceedings will only be progressed when the case has passed both the evidential test and the public interest test.

8.3 Prosecutors must be satisfied that there is sufficient evidence to provide a realistic prospect of conviction against each suspect on each charge. They must consider what the defence case may be, and how it is likely to affect the prospects of conviction. A case which does not pass the evidential stage must not proceed, no matter how serious or sensitive it may be.

8.4 In every case where there is sufficient evidence to justify a prosecution, prosecutors must go on to consider whether a prosecution is required in the public interest. A prosecution will usually take place unless the prosecutor is satisfied that there are public interest factors tending against prosecution which outweigh those tending in favour. In some cases the prosecutor may be satisfied that the public interest can be properly served by offering the offender the opportunity to have the matter dealt with by an out-of-court disposal rather than bringing a prosecution.

9.0 Who decides what enforcement action is taken

9.1 Decisions about the most appropriate enforcement action to be taken are based upon professional judgment, legal guidelines, statutory codes of practice and priorities set by the Council and/or Central Government.

9.2 Where appropriate, decisions about enforcement will involve consultation between and / or approval from:

- Investigating Officer(s);
- Head of Service or Director / Service Manager;
- Council Solicitors;

9.3 The decision about enforcement will be documented and signed off by at least two officers.

9.4 Where enforcement decisions relate to licensing matters, these will be taken under delegated authority by Officers or by a Licensing Committee, as detailed in paragraphs 7.8.1 – 7.8.3 inclusive.

10.0 Liaison with other regulatory bodies and enforcement agencies

10.1 Where appropriate, enforcement activities within Environmental Health will be coordinated with those of other regulatory bodies and enforcement agencies to maximise the effectiveness of any enforcement.

10.2 Where an enforcement matter affects a wide geographical area beyond the Council's boundaries, or involves enforcement by one or more other local authorities or organisations all relevant parties will, where appropriate, be informed of the matter as soon as practicable and all enforcement activity coordinated with them.

10.3 The Environmental Health Service will share intelligence relating to wider regulatory matters with other regulatory bodies and enforcement agencies, including:

- Government Agencies (for example, HSE, Environment Agency, UKVI (former Border Agency), HMRC, Benefits Agency);
- Police Forces;
- Fire Authorities;
- Statutory undertakers;
- Other Local Authorities and Public Health Agencies;

11.0 Considering the views of those affected by offences

11.1 The Environmental Health Service undertakes enforcement on behalf of the public at large and not just in the interests of any particular individual or group. However, when considering the public interest test, the consequences for those affected by the offence, and any views expressed by those affected will, where appropriate, be taken into account when making an enforcement decision. .

12.0 Protection of Human Rights

12.1 This Policy and all associated enforcement decisions take account of the provisions of the Human Rights Act 1998. In particular, due regard is had to the following:

- Right to a fair trial;
- Right to respect for private and family life, home and correspondence;

13.0 Review of the Enforcement Policy

This Policy will be reviewed every 5 years or following significant changes to relevant legislation or Government guidance.

Signed

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Chief Executive