

The Gatehouse Cooling Off Period Procedure

Purpose

This procedure outlines The Gatehouse approach to managing risk in a detailed, practical, trauma-informed and psychologically informed way. It replaces the previous banning process with a structured Cooling Off Period model, while recognising that in some circumstances a permanent exclusion may be necessary. The procedure is designed to support consistent, safe, and compassionate decision-making across all sessions.

Trauma-Informed and Safeguarding Approach

The Gatehouse recognises that Guests may behave or respond in ways shaped by trauma, stress, or unmet need. Staff and volunteers are expected to approach all situations with empathy, patience, and without judgement.

At the same time, The Gatehouse has a duty of care to all Guests, volunteers, and staff. Where required, decisions will be made within a safeguarding context to ensure safety and the effective running of the service.

While volunteer perspectives are valued, final responsibility for decisions rests with paid staff.

Psychologically Informed Environment (PIE)

The Gatehouse operates within a Psychologically Informed Environment framework. This means we actively consider relationships, environment, emotional wellbeing, reflection, learning, and staff support in how we respond to behaviour.

De-escalation and Early Intervention

Before applying a Cooling Off Period, staff should attempt to manage situations through de-escalation where possible. This may include calm communication, offering space, setting boundaries, and involving additional staff support.

A Cooling Off Period should only be used where these approaches are not sufficient to safely manage risk.

Cooling Off Period

A Cooling Off Period is a time-limited pause in accessing the building, used to reduce risk and support a safe return to the space. It is not a permanent exclusion and aims to maintain engagement wherever possible.

This approach is intended to reduce immediate risk while maintaining connection and supporting ongoing engagement with The Gatehouse.

When a Cooling Off Period May Be Applied

- Drug or alcohol use in the building
- Aggressive or threatening behaviour
- Behaviour posing risk to others
- Repeated boundary breaches

Types of Incidents and Initial Response

Guest to Guest Incidents:

Staff should prioritise immediate safety and de-escalation. Individuals may be separated and asked to leave the building if required. A Cooling Off Period may be considered for one or both individuals depending on behaviour, risk, and context rather than blame.

Guest to Staff or Volunteer Incidents:

The immediate priority is the safety and wellbeing of the staff member or volunteer. A Cooling Off Period will normally be considered where behaviour has caused distress, fear, or risk.

Staff and Volunteer Welfare

Following any incident involving a staff member or volunteer, the Community Centre Manager will carry out a follow-up at the next available opportunity.

This will include a welfare check, an opportunity to share their perspective, and communication of any proposed actions or Cooling Off Periods.

Timing of Decisions

A conversation should take place at the time of the incident to acknowledge what has happened and set immediate boundaries. However, final decisions should not normally be made in the moment.

Immediate actions may be taken to ensure safety, but formal decisions will follow the structured process. This allows time for reflection, input from appropriate staff, and consideration of proportionality.

Decision-Making and Escalation

Cooling Off Period decisions follow a tiered structure:

Level 1 – Community Centre Manager and Coordinator: First point of decision-making and review.

Level 2 – Services Manager: Supports complex or high-risk cases.

Level 3 – CEO: Involved in serious, unresolved, or high-risk cases, including bans and

complaints.

Volunteers and Coordinators may be consulted and their perspectives are valued, particularly where they have been involved in an incident.

Final decisions sit with designated staff and the co-ordinator in line with safeguarding responsibilities and organisational accountability.

Access During Cooling Off Period (Red Door)

Guests may access takeaway food and drink via the red doors on Woodstock Road.

For safety reasons, Guests are asked not to enter the building or garden area.

Expected behaviour includes respectful engagement and leaving promptly after being served.

If a Guest attempts to enter the building or garden, they will be asked to leave and will not be served that day.

If behaviour becomes difficult to manage, access may be withdrawn. If behaviour escalates, the Cooling Off Period may be extended or reset.

Duration

Cooling Off Periods are typically 3 days.

For more serious or repeated incidents, the duration will be determined by the staff team based on individual circumstances.

All durations should remain proportionate to the level of risk presented.

Communication and Issuing Letters

Cooling Off letters must be completed using the agreed template.

Letters should be issued at the next appropriate opportunity when the Guest attends.

Letters must be given in an envelope by two Project Workers.

A copy must be placed on the staff noticeboard.

A copy must be emailed to the Services Manager.

A record must be added to the Guest profile on Lamplight.

Confidentiality

All information relating to incidents and Cooling Off Periods must remain confidential.

This information should only be shared within The Gatehouse and through appropriate channels.

It must not be discussed in informal settings or via personal messaging platforms.

Complaints Process (Guests)

Complaints should be made to the Community Centre Manager first and then the Services Manager.

If unresolved, they may be escalated to the CEO.

If still unresolved, they may be referred to the Board of Trustees.

Volunteer Concerns

Volunteers may raise concerns with the Community Centre Manager first and then Services Manager.

If required, concerns may be escalated to the CEO.

Decisions made during a session must be followed at the time and reviewed afterwards.

Volunteers should not seek to challenge decisions during a session.

Permanent Exclusion (Ban)

A ban may be necessary where risk is severe, ongoing, or cannot be safely managed.

A ban removes access to all Gatehouse services, including takeaway provision.

Safeguarding Overrides

In some situations, safeguarding considerations or external advice may override this procedure.

Access to services may be restricted, adjusted, or withdrawn based on professional judgement and duty of care.

Re-engagement

Guests may be offered a re-engagement conversation following a Cooling Off Period.

These conversations should normally be led by the Community Centre Manager, with support from the Services Manager and CEO where required.

This provides an opportunity to reset expectations and support a safe return.

Reflection and Review

Staff teams may review incidents to reflect on practice, ensure consistency, and identify any bias.

This procedure will be reviewed periodically to ensure it remains effective and aligned with Gatehouse values.

Review Date: July 2027