

Policy

Title: Customer Feedback Policy including Complaints Handling [OBJ]

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Approved by: Calico Homes Board

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This document relates to:



Policy

1. Introduction

- 1.1 This policy sets out our approach towards handling customer feedback, to ensure a consistent, high-quality, and person-centred complaint, compliment and concerns handling service is delivered by Calico Homes.
- 1.2 We actively encourage all customer feedback, positive or negative and we use this to drive improvements to our services. We expect Calico Homes employees to have a positive approach, take responsibility, show empathy, use common sense, and make good decisions when dealing with customer feedback.

2. Context

- 2.1 The Social Housing Regulation Act (2023) has set out a new working relationship between the Regulator of Social Housing (RSH) and the Housing Ombudsman. The new powers allow the Housing Ombudsman to intervene where complaints are not resolved in an adequate timeframe, and issue complaint handling failure orders.
- 2.2 The Housing Ombudsman can refer Registered Providers to the RSH when it finds evidence to suggest individual cases are indicative of wider failings. The RSH has introduced a new integrated regulatory approach, with proactive regulation of the consumer standards. The RSH can act where it deems registered providers (RPs) have not complied with the requirements of its Transparency, Influence and Accountability Standard.
- 2.3 This policy has been developed to ensure that Calico Homes is fully compliant with all relevant legislation and regulations including the Complaints Handling Code issued by the Housing Ombudsman in February 2024 and the Transparency, Influence and Accountability Standard which came into effect on the 1st April 2024.
- 2.4 The new Code introduces the following key areas:
 - Ensuring fairness in complaint handling with a resident-focused process.
 - Taking action to put things right and appropriate remedies.

- Creating a positive complaint handling culture through continuous learning and improvement.
- Demonstrating learning in annual reports.

3. Policy Aims and Objectives

The aims of the policy are:

1. To ensure a clear approach for the handling and resolution of complaints that require an investigation
2. To make it easy for customers to give us customer feedback which can be captured and used to inform service improvements
3. To learn effectively from all customer feedback and take appropriate action
4. To ensure regulatory and legislative compliance on complaint handling in line with the Housing Ombudsman Code of Practice and the RSH Consumer Standards.

The policy supports delivery of the Calico Homes vision and strategic objectives as set out below.

The Calico Homes Vision

“Going one step further with customers and local communities to provide affordable, safe and quality homes and personalised services; supporting customers to live their best lives in challenging times.”

The Calico Homes objectives:

- To provide safe and well-maintained homes through investment in existing and new properties.
- To support customers to sustain tenancies.
- To provide good quality and personalised repairs, customer and neighbourhood services.
- To develop trusting relationships and to empower customers and communities to take the lead on the things that matter most.
- To strengthen the business so it is strong, well-governed, environmentally friendly and provides value for money customers.
- To create a place where people want to work now and in the future.

4. Accessibility and Awareness

- 4.1 Residents can complain in person, in writing, by telephone, via their Calico Homes portal account, by email or via social media. More information can be found on our website <https://Calicohomes.org.uk/make-a-complaint>
- 4.2 Where complaints are received via social media, confidentiality and privacy will be maintained through private messaging initially. Once processed all

subsequent communication will be through formal written communication by letter or email.

- 4.3 You can raise a complaint with any Calico Homes employee. All employees will be aware of the complaints process and be able to pass on details of your complaint to the relevant person.
- 4.4 Support is available to any resident who may need assistance to complain. If you require assistance, you can: call us on 01282 686300; come in to reception; or email us on contact@calicohomes.org.uk. Customers have the opportunity to have a representative deal with their complaint on their behalf.
- 4.5 We encourage you to contact our Contact Centre if you believe that we can make reasonable adjustments to enable you to fully access our complaints service. We will seek to establish an agreement with you on what may be reasonable in the circumstances based on your individual need and requirements. Examples of reasonable adjustments we might make include providing a translator or information in a different format.
- 4.6 This Customer Feedback Policy and procedure is published on our website and available in other accessible formats on request. A copy of this Policy will be provided on request.
- 4.7 The Housing Ombudsman Service can be helpful to you in making a complaint. A link to their website is included here: www.housing-ombudsman.org.uk.
- 4.8 Housing Ombudsman Service contact details:
email: info@housing-ombudsman.org.uk
telephone: 0300 111 3000
postal address: Housing Ombudsman Service, PO Box, 152, Liverpool, L33 7WQ

4. Customer Scrutiny, Monitoring and surveillance

- 4.1 Calico Homes values transparency and accountability in our handling of customer feedback particularly how we handle complaints. We believe that our customers should be able to make complaints easily which we respond to within an established timeframe.
- 4.2 We have an established Complaints Scrutiny Group whose membership tenants of Calico Homes and the Member Responsible for Complaints from the Homes Board.
- 4.3 We commit to publishing information about our performance on a quarterly basis so that customers can see how we are performing, and what we are learning from customer feedback.

- 4.4 This policy has been developed to include feedback received from the Complaints Scrutiny Group.

5. Customer Feedback Policy Statement

- 5.1 Calico Homes seeks to resolve complaints as quickly as possible by being fair, putting things right and learning from outcomes.
- 5.2 The aim of this policy is to: recognise when things go wrong; put things right; ensure that customers are treated fairly in the complaints process; use feedback from customers to develop and improve our services; and ensure our buildings are safe. We recognise the importance of a positive complaints culture in achieving this aim.
- 5.3 Concerns about the safety of our buildings will be handled in line with this policy.
- 5.4 This policy refers collectively to people who may make a complaint as 'customers'. The terms 'you' and 'your' in this policy mean anyone who has made a complaint.

6. Customer Feedback definitions

- 6.1 A complaint is defined as: 'an expression of dissatisfaction, however made, about the standard of service, actions or lack of action by Calico Homes, its employees, or those acting on its behalf, affecting a customer or group of customers.'
- 6.2 You do not have to use the word 'complaint' for it to be treated as such. Whenever a customer expresses dissatisfaction, we will offer the choice to make a complaint. A complaint that is submitted via a third party or advocate will be handled in line with this policy.
- 6.3 When you express dissatisfaction, we will seek to distinguish between a complaint and a service request. A service request is 'a request from a customer to Calico Homes requiring action to be taken to put something right'. Service requests are not complaints, but are recorded, monitored and reviewed regularly.
- 6.4 We will raise a complaint when you express dissatisfaction with the response to your service request, even if the handling of the service request remains ongoing. We will not stop our efforts to address the service request if you complain.
- 6.5 An expression of dissatisfaction with services made through a survey is not defined as a complaint. Where we ask for feedback about our services, we will provide details of how you can make a complaint.

- 6.6 A concern is your way of reporting something which is a safety related - for example "The work on my property has been completed but the scaffolding has been left up, and I am worried someone will break in" or "I don't think the smoke alarms in my scheme are working". These will be logged as a concern and actioned immediately.
- 6.7 Compliments also contribute towards the continuous improvement of services. They provide positive feedback to employees and increase levels of morale and motivation. Compliments are recorded centrally, acknowledged and referred to the manager of the individual concerned.

7. Exclusions

- 7.1 We do not define the following as complaints:
- Complaints about services, persons or bodies over which we have no control.
 - Closed complaints you have raised previously and have already been considered under our complaints policy at both Stage 1 and Stage 2.
 - Complaints that have not been brought to our attention within 12 months of the incident occurring. Where there are good reasons to do so, residents can request that our Complaints Officer consider whether to apply discretion to accept complaints made outside of this time limit.
 - Matters which are, or have been, the subject of Court or Tribunal proceedings.
 - Complaints of neighbour nuisance or disputes between neighbours that are dealt with through our Community Safety Policy, unless these complaints relate to how we have dealt with the matter.
 - Where the Housing Ombudsman Service has already determined the outcome of an investigation.
- 7.2 Legal proceedings start when details of the claim, such as the Claim Form and Particulars of the Claim are filed in court. At this point, the complaint ceases to be part of our complaints process and will be dealt with by our legal representatives. Calico Homes endeavours to resolve complaints prior to legal proceedings, wherever possible.
- 7.3 If we decide not to accept your complaint, we will provide you with an explanation setting out the reasons why the matter is not suitable for the complaints process and your right to take that decision to the Housing Ombudsman.

8. The complaint handling process

- 8.1 There are up to two stages in our complaint handling process:
- Stage 1 – early resolution or investigation
 - Stage 2 – at customer request, a review of the stage 1 investigation

- 8.2 At each stage of the complaints process, our complaint handlers must:
- Deal with complaints on their merits, act independently, and have an open mind.
 - Give you a fair chance to set out your position.
 - Take measures to address actual or perceived conflict of interest; and
 - Consider all relevant information and evidence carefully.
- 8.3 Where relevant, a complaint may be handled by a third party (e.g. a contractor). When this is the case, the third party will act in accordance with this policy.
- 8.4 Complaint definition and acknowledgement - When a complaint is received, we will log it and set out our understanding of the complaint and the outcome you are seeking. If any aspect of the complaint is unclear, we will ask you for clarification.
- 8.5 When we accept a concern, we will categorise the level of risk involved and ensure we deal with these concerns in order of urgency.
- 8.6 We will assess whether the matter can be responded to as soon as possible or requires further investigation. Complaints will be logged, defined, and acknowledged within 5 working days of being received. At this point a date will be provided by which a full response in writing can be expected

9. Complaint stages: Stage 1

- 9.1 We aim to ensure that most complaints are resolved promptly, and an explanation, apology or resolution provided to the customer. We will contact you directly to understand what resolution you are seeking, put things right and provide a written response.
- 9.2 Investigation - When a complaint requires further investigation, we will ask an operational manager to investigate. The complaint acknowledgement to the customer will include an outline of the complaint to be investigated; required outcome, if identified, and the date a full response can be expected by.
- 9.3 We will issue a full written response to stage 1 complaints within 10 working days of the complaint being acknowledged. When this is not possible, a full written explanation or interim response as to why the timescale cannot be adhered to, together with a date of when a full response is anticipated will be issued by the investigating manager. Any extension must be no more than 10 working days without good reason, and the reason(s) will be clearly explained to you.
- 9.4 When we inform you about an extension to timescales, we will provide you with the contact details of the Ombudsman.

- 9.5 Where we are unable to provide a response within the timeframes set out above we will seek to agree with you suitable intervals for keeping you informed about progress with your complaint.
- 9.6 Investigating managers will try to make contact with you prior to issuing their response to ensure that they have fully investigated your complaint and where appropriate visit you and/or the property in order to resolve the complaint.
- 9.7 Where customers raise additional complaints during the investigation, these will be incorporated into the stage 1 response if they are related and the stage 1 response has not been issued. Where a response has been issued or it is not appropriate to incorporate within an existing complaint, this will be logged as a new complaint.
- 9.8 Investigating managers will address all points raised in the complaint definition and provide clear reasons for any decisions, referencing relevant policy, law and good practice where appropriate.
- 9.9 We will confirm the following in writing to you at the completion of stage 1 in clear, plain language including explanations of any technical language (where appropriate):
- The complaint stage.
 - What the complaint is about.
 - The outcome you are seeking.
 - The decision on the complaint.
 - The reasons for any decisions made.
 - The details of any remedy offered to put things right.
 - Details of how to escalate the matter to stage 2 if you are not satisfied with the response.

10. Complaint stages: Stage 2

- 10.1 If all or part of the complaint is not resolved to your satisfaction at stage 1, it will be progressed to stage 2 at your request. You have 30 working days to ask us to do this. The stage 2 response concludes and exhausts our complaints process.
- 10.2 Requests for stage 2 will be acknowledged, defined and logged at stage 2 of the complaints procedure within 5 working days of the escalation request being received.
- 10.3 The person considering your complaint at stage 2 will not be the same person who considered your complaint at stage 1.

- 10.4 The manager conducting the review will contact you directly to discuss your reason for remaining dissatisfied with our stage 1 response.
- 10.5 We will issue a final response to the stage 2 in writing within 20 working days of the complaint being acknowledged.
- 10.6 When considering the complexity of your complaint, the reviewing manager will decide whether an extension to this timescale is needed. You will be informed in writing of any extension required. Any extension will be no more than 20 working days without good reason, and the reason(s) must be clearly explained to you.
- 10.7 When we inform you about an extension to timescales, we will provide you with the contact details of the Ombudsman.
- 10.8 Where we are unable to provide a response within the timescales, we will seek to agree with you suitable intervals for keeping you informed about progress with your complaint.
- 10.9 Reviewing managers will address all points raised in the complaint definition and provide clear reasons for any decisions, referencing relevant policy, law and good practice where appropriate.
- 10.10 We will confirm the following in writing to you at the completion of stage 2 in clear, plain language, including explanations of any technical language (where appropriate):
- The complaint stage
 - What the complaint is
 - The outcome you are seeking
 - The decision on the complaint
 - The reasons for any decisions made
 - The details of any remedy offered to put things right
 - Details of how to escalate the matter to the Ombudsman Service
- 10.11 Stage 2 is the Group's final response and will involve all Calico Homes employees needed to issue such a response.

11. Equality, Diversity and Inclusion

- 11.1 Calico Homes recognises that customers of all races, ages, religions, gender, sexual orientation, literacy levels and disability should be treated equally and fairly. We will make every reasonable effort to ensure that no-one is discriminated against directly or indirectly on the basis of any protected characteristic as defined by the Equality Act 2010. We recognise that some protected groups may be disproportionately impacted and will take additional steps in the application of this policy and make reasonable adjustments to ensure compliance with the Act.

11.2 It is our policy to ensure that discretion is used in cases of identified vulnerabilities such as disability, frailty, domestic abuse, concern for welfare or any other identified need. Calico will use information provided by customers and held in our systems to assist in personalising our response appropriately to enable a quick and agreeable resolution for the customer.

12.0 Self-assessment, reporting and compliance

12.1 We will produce an annual complaints performance and service improvement report. This report, alongside our governing Board's response to it, will be published on the complaints section of our website.

12.2 The Housing Ombudsman requires that we self-assess against its Complaint Handling Code 'the Code' each year. We must also carry out a self-assessment following a significant restructure, merger and/or change in procedures. Our self-assessment against the code will be published on the complaints section of our website. We will review and update our self-assessment if requested to do so by the Housing Ombudsman following an investigation.

12.3 If we are unable to comply with the Code due to exceptional circumstances, such as a cyber incident, we will inform the Ombudsman, provide information to customers who may be affected and publish this on our website. We will include a timescale for returning to compliance with the Code.

13. Scrutiny and monitoring and supervision

13.1 We look beyond the circumstances of the individual complaint and consider whether service improvements can be made because of any learning from the complaint. We take customer complaints and service requests into account when reviewing the performance of our services.

13.2 The following people have lead responsibilities for complaints for Calico Homes:

- The Member Responsible for Complaints (the MRC) is a member of our governing body (Calico Homes Board) who is appointed to have lead responsibility for complaints to support a positive complaint handling culture. As at 1st April 2024 this is Claire Bradley, member of Calico Homes Board and the Complaints Scrutiny Group.
- The senior lead person is a senior manager who is accountable for complaint handling. This person must assess any themes or trends to identify potential systemic issues, serious risks, or policies and procedures that require revision. As at 1st April 2024, this is Vicki Webb, Managing Director of Calico Homes.

- Our Group Head of Assets and Development is responsible for ensuring any building concerns are dealt with appropriately. As at 1st April , this is Lisa Bell.
- The complaints officer is a manager who takes responsibility for overseeing complaint handling, including liaison with the Ombudsman and ensuring complaints are reported to Calico Homes Board. As at 1st April 2024, this is Danielle Edwards-Cooke Head of Customer Experience.

13.3 Our Complaints Scrutiny Group (CSG) regularly reviews complaints learnings, trends and performance, in addition to reviewing a sample of anonymised complaints to ensure compliance with this policy.

13.4 Monitoring of the delivery of this policy will include the production of daily, weekly and monthly reports to enable operational managers to effectively monitor the performance and progress of the service. This includes a weekly report of outstanding complaints and monthly service improvement reports to departments.

13.5 Board members are responsible for overseeing delivery of this policy. To do this they will receive regular updates about our performance including data relating to complaints, compliments, and concerns.

13.6 The complaints policy is continually monitored for adherence by the Complaints Officer. Quarterly complaints updates are provided to the Calico Homes Board

13.7 This policy is reviewed at least once every two years.

14. Regulatory and Legal Compliance

- Social Housing (Regulation) Act 2023
- Complaints Handling Code 2024
- Equality Act 2010

15. Links with other Calico Strategies, Policies and Procedures

- The Humanitarian Offer – Calico Group Customer Strategy
- Compensation Policy
- Reasonable Adjustments Policy
- EDI Strategy

Glossary of Terms

Customer Feedback: Opinions or comments from customers about our services, including complaints, compliments, and concerns.

Complaint: When a customer expresses dissatisfaction with the service, actions, or lack of action by Calico Homes, its employees, or those acting on its behalf. It can be made in various ways, such as in person, in writing, or by phone.

Service Request: A customer's request for action to be taken to correct something.

Concern: A report of something related to safety, such as issues with property maintenance or safety equipment.

Compliment: Positive feedback from customers about the service they received.

Stage 1 Complaint: The initial step in the complaint handling process, where efforts are made to resolve the complaint promptly and provide a response within a set timeframe.

Stage 2 Complaint: If the complaint is not resolved to the customer's satisfaction at Stage 1, it can be escalated to Stage 2 for further review by a senior manager and response.

Regulatory Compliance: Ensuring that Calico Homes follows all relevant laws and regulations related to complaint handling, including the Social Housing (Regulation) Act 2023 and the Complaints Handling Code 2024.

Accessibility: Ensuring that customers can easily make complaints through various channels, including in person, by phone, or online.

Transparency: Being open and honest about how complaints are handled, including publishing information about performance and outcomes.

Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI): Ensuring that all customers are treated fairly and without discrimination, regardless of their race, age, religion, gender, or other characteristics.

Housing Ombudsman: An independent organization that investigates complaints from customers if they are not satisfied with Calico Homes' response.

Complaint Handling Process: The steps taken by Calico Homes to address and resolve customer complaints, including investigation, response, and escalation if necessary.

Customer Scrutiny Group: A group made up of tenants and Calico Homes representative who support with reviewing our approach to complaints and provide us with a customer perspective.

Annual Complaints Performance Report: A report produced by Calico Homes that summarizes complaints received, actions taken, and areas for improvement.

Complaints Officer: A manager responsible for overseeing the complaint handling process, including liaising with the Ombudsman and reporting to the Calico Homes Board.

Legal Compliance: Ensuring that Calico Homes adheres to all relevant laws and regulations, including those related to complaints handling and discrimination.

Continuous Improvement: The ongoing process of making changes and enhancements to services based on customer feedback and learning from complaints.

Policy Review: Regular evaluation of the complaints policy to ensure it remains effective and up-to-date with current regulations and best practices.