

Policy

Title: **Customer Contacts Policy**

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This document relates to:

-  ✓ The Calico Group
-  ✓ Calico Homes
-  ✓ Calico Enterprise
-  ✓ SafeNet
-  ✓ Acorn Recovery Projects
-  ✓ Whitworth Care Trust
-  ✓ Ring Stones

providing
quality services that
make a difference
to people's lives

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1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This policy and the supporting Customer Contact Procedure have been developed to provide a framework of best practice for handling customer contacts, so we can deliver a consistent and quality customer experience across The Calico Group.

Customer contacts are defined as a question, information, feedback, dissatisfaction, a compliment or a complaint about the services provided across The Calico Group.

Customers can contact us in a variety of ways; face to face, on-line, over the telephone via social media or in written form – letters, leaflets and emails.

We believe that all customer contacts should be treated as gold and are an opportunity for us to learn. We actively encourage all customer feedback, positive or negative and we use this to help us make improvements to our service delivery. We also encourage staff to think creatively and use common sense when dealing with complaints so we can put it right at the first point of contact.

2. AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

The aims of this policy are: -

1. To explain how we deal with and resolve a range of customer contacts.
2. To ensure that the “Passionate About Customers – Be the best that you can be” principles are embedded in how we handle our contacts.
3. To provide a clear framework to enable a timely resolution of customer contacts and high levels of customer satisfaction.
4. To provide clarity on what we will do when service failures occur.
5. To listen and act upon what our customers are saying and how we use that insight to drive future service improvements.
6. To outline how we aim to resolve customer complaints

3. POLICY SCOPE

This policy applies to all customer contacts. We recognise that terminology differs across The Calico Group, but in terms of this policy the word ‘customer’ applies to all tenants, clients, service users, external partners, agencies, funders and commissioners, or anyone else who receives a service from a company within The Calico Group.

The policy excludes:

Complaints from customers about other customers. And any complaints relating to disrepair or the right to repair.

4. COMPLAINTS POLICY SCOPE

The aim of this table is to clarify what we consider to be a complaint and what we treat as dissatisfaction. If a customer does not agree with a policy decision then we would not treat this as a complaints, we would explain the reasons why we are unable to meet their requirement and provide some alternative solutions to help the customer.

Complaints – these examples will generally require a formal investigation:	These examples would not be investigated as a formal complaint and will be registered as customer dissatisfaction:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Failure of the company to provide services at the expected level 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Disagreement with policy decisions
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Unhelpful staff attitude 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Disagreement with regulatory decisions
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Delay or neglect to administrative or other processes 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Failure to follow the companies own policies, procedures or standards 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Failure to consider all relevant information before reaching a decision 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Failure to fulfill any contractual responsibilities 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Any examples of malice, bias, inequity or discrimination 	

5. CUSTOMER CONTACT TYPES

Customer contacts and the advice or action taken should be logged on the relevant systems available in each part of the group, so we can understand themes and analyse trends and identify solutions to improve the customer experience.

The timeframes according to each contact type are explained in the supporting Customer Contact Procedure document. Customer contacts can be broadly categorised as follows:

Contact type	Definition
Questions or Requests	On any of the products, services or support we provide.
Information	Provided by the customer, to help us serve the customer.
Feedback or Dissatisfaction	On the customers experience of our products, services or support.
Compliments	Praising the product, service or support received.
Complaint	When the customer is unhappy with the product, service or support received and it falls under the scope of requiring a formal investigation.

6. CUSTOMER CONTACTS POLICY DESCRIPTION

The following policy statements explain how we will deal with customer questions, customer information, requests for services, or feedback and any dissatisfaction on our services.

Customer Contacts Policy	
Accessibility	We provide a choice of accessible contact methods and publicise how customers can contact us by; telephone, in person, email, letter, via our website, social media, and through leaflets and customer satisfaction surveys.
	Contacts can be made in any language, as we provide translation and interpretation services.
Confidentiality	All customer information will be treated in the strictest of confidence in line with our Data Protection policy.
	Customers will be required to provide their verbal or written approval, before any of their personal information is passed onto anyone acting on their behalf, for example, a family member, friend or a local MP/Councillor.
Process	All staff and managers are committed to providing a common sense and customer focussed approach to handling customer contacts, as shared in the Passionate About Customers – Be The Best That You Can Be training.
	Customer contacts are recorded on the relevant systems in each part of the group. These currently range from paper or spread sheet based, to fully integrated Customer Relationship Management systems.
Resolution	There is a clear commitment from staff to resolve all customer enquiries at the first point of contact.
	If customer contacts are unable to be answered at the first point of contact, the name of the staff member who is dealing with the enquiry will be provided to the customer, along with the expected timescale for a full response.
	If a customer is reporting dissatisfaction with their experience, we will try to put it right as soon as we know about it. Customer dissatisfaction may relate to an action, a lack of action or about the quality of service received. Customer dissatisfaction is something that a customer wants to be recognised but not investigated. Dissatisfactions will be logged on the relevant system as appropriate to each part of the group and passed onto the service manager, to how staff deliver services or inform improvements to future services or policy.
	If after a customer expresses dissatisfaction, they still remain dissatisfied with our response, then they have the right to decide that the matter is treated and investigated as a formal complaint.
Learning	The learning from customer contacts will be reported on and shared to inform changes to services and policies.

7. CUSTOMER COMPLAINTS POLICY DESCRIPTION

The following additional policy statements explain how we will handle customer complaints. Over overriding aim is to encourage staff to think creatively and use common sense when dealing with complaints so we can put it right at the first point of contact. Further details for staff are outlined in the supporting Customer Contacts Procedure.

Customer Complaints Policy	
Making a Complaint	Support is available to help customers, or people representing customers, to make formal complaints. This can be in a number of ways face to face, on-line, over the telephone, via social media or in written form – letters, leaflets and emails.
	If a customer makes a complaint, it does not affect the customer's rights to use the services provided.
	Anonymous complaints are accepted by the care and support services within The Calico Group. We accept that we are unable to report the outcome of the investigation back to an anonymous complainant.
Investigation	The overall aim is to resolve a complaint at the first point of contact. But if this is not possible and an investigation is required, then there are several stages which are noted in the service standards for each part of the group.
	Staff will be trained to triage, investigate, respond and resolve complaints in an impartial manner. Management support is available to staff when dealing with customer complaints.
	All formal complaints will be logged on the relevant system as appropriate to each part of the group.
	In order to provide a fairer outcome for the customer, we may agree different response times so to allow adequate time to resolve more complex contacts.
	We will keep the customer informed during any complaints investigation and will confirm the outcome of our findings at the end of the investigation.
	If we feel that we have taken all reasonable measures to investigate and resolve the matters reported we may close down persistent, unjustified complaints or any that are pursued unreasonably.
Resolution	If there is an on-going dispute, in order to reach a positive outcome, we may suggest using mediation or other services.
	If a customer decides to seek legal advice in respect of a complaint, we will continue with the complaint through our normal procedures unless continuing would be prejudicial to any legal proceedings. This will be considered on a case by case basis by the Director of the service area.
	If we have failed to deliver a service which has had a detrimental impact on the customer, then we may offer an appropriate gesture of goodwill. This may be in the form of: an apology, a gift, a voucher or payment, or another form of compensation as agreed with the customer. The guidelines on compensation on service failures are outlined in the supporting Customer Contact Procedure.

	A complaint ends for the customer when they are back in the position that they would have been before the complaint occurred.
	A complaint ends for The Calico Group when the root cause of the complaint has been identified and the internal change has been delivered and the customer has been informed.
Performance and quality	We will quality check a proportion of closed complaints against the service standards outlined in this policy and the supporting Customer Contacts Procedure. Actions will be agreed to bring any that fall short, up to standard.
	We will have complaint handling targets in place to measure what matters most to the customer.
	We will publish data on the volume of complaints, the complaint reasons and the action taken to resolve matters for the customer.
Learning	We recognise that customer complaints are an opportunity to learn from what our customers are saying and they give us the chance to put something right for the customer.
	Learning from complaints influences staff training.
	We have systems in place to monitor and learn from customer contacts, to identify trends, the root causes of any service failures and the remedial action taken.
	The learning will be reported on and shared with staff, customers and Board Members, to inform changes to services and policies.

8. CUSTOMER CONTACTS SERVICE STANDARDS

The specific Service Standards are outlined in the group Customer Care policy and the standards cover what customers can expect when they ring us, write to us, contact us on social media, visit us, or when we visit them. Each company in The Calico Group works within their own service agreements and these outline how customers can contact us and how we will contact them, along with the response times.

9. COMPLAINT STAGES

Complaints should in the main should be dealt with and resolved at the first point of contact, or within customer led timeframes, but when that is not possible as a minimum the following stages should apply. If the complaint is complex and needs additional time to resolve, then those revised timescales should be agreed with the customer. Further details are outlined in the Customer Contacts procedure.

9.1 Assessment stage

This is the preliminary stage to assess whether a formal investigation is necessary.

Stage	What this involves:
Assessment / Resolution	<p>Triage/assess the customer's request:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can this be resolved at the first point of contact? – If yes record the action taken • Does it need to pass onto a more appropriate person to deal with operationally for resolution? If yes record it and pass it on, letting the customer know the name of the person who is dealing with it and the expected timescales for response • Is the complaint route the right process for the customer to gain resolution to this matter? If it is not the right route for the customer, then don't use it, as that may lead to further upset. Record the feedback as dissatisfaction as outlined in section 4 of this policy • If we are unable to provide what the customer wants as it falls outside of our policy or our service agreement with them, then we will explain why at this assessment stage, offer alternative solutions and record the matter as dissatisfaction • Or is this matter regarding dissatisfaction with a service which needs to be registered to inform future policy decisions?

9.2 Formal investigation stages

Stage	What this involves:
Stage 1 (Acknowledge)	<p>If all other options to resolve the matter at the first point of contact have been exhausted, then the contact is to be investigated as a formal complaint.</p> <p>Acknowledge this within 2 working days of receipt the complaint by way of an email, letter or phone call and provide the contact name and title of the manager who is dealing with this.</p>
Stage 2 (Investigate)	<p>Within 10 working days. This is the Complaint investigation period where the outcome is decided and any corrective and preventative actions agreed and implemented. If we are unable to provide all that the customer wanted, then we will explain why at this stage.</p>
Stage 3 (Appeal)	<p>Any Appeal has to be received from the customer within 10 working days of Stage 2. The Complaints Appeal Panel will be set up within 20 working days of receiving an appeal.</p>
Stage 4 (Ombudsman)	<p>If the customer is still unhappy they can appoint a designated person to act on their behalf, for example the relevant Ombudsman or other recognised body up to 8 weeks after Stage 3.</p>

The number of working days within which to expect a response excludes weekends or public holiday closure days.

10. RESPONSIBILITY

The Passionate About Customers Strategic Group is responsible for reviewing and monitoring the implementation of this group policy to ensure service standards are met.

Service Managers are responsible for the implementation of this policy.

11. REGULATORY AND LEGAL COMPLIANCE

This table shows the various regulatory bodies applicable to the relevant parts of the Calico Group.

Company	Service	Regulator(s) / Accreditor(s)
Calico Homes	Social and Affordable Homes to rent	Homes and Communities Agency (HCA) Housing Ombudsman Housemark
	Whitworth Care Trust	Care Quality Commission (CQC)
	Homes for sale	National House Building Council (NHBC)
Calico Enterprise	Floating Support	Quality Assessment Framework (QAF) LCC Supporting People
	Skills and Enterprise	Skills Funding Agency (SFA)
	Calico Assure	Telecare Services Association (TSA)
Acorn		Care Quality Commission (CQC)
SafeNet		Previously - Quality Assessment Framework (QAF)
Ring Stones		Royal Institute of Chartered Surveyors

12. MONITORING

Customer Contacts are monitored in several ways:

- Through the analysis of system generated spreadsheets and reports
- ICT systems (for example Shuttle) and reported against in respect of response timescales, themes and by service area. The information is reported in the weekly Performance Report
- Service Managers are responsible for ensuring that corrective and preventative actions are appropriate and communicated to both customers and staff, to ensure any necessary system or process changes are implemented

13. LEARNING

Customer Contacts provide us with a wealth of feedback about our service provision that can be used to help us continually improve our practices.

It is important that all staff are aware of the customer feedback and how it has been used to shape our service delivery. To ensure that this learning takes place we will use the following framework: -

- Customer dissatisfaction and avoidable contacts will be analysed and the root causes identified and resolved
- Learning will be gathered from complaints to prevent similar occurrences
- Learning will be used to identify the required changes to policy, procedure or systems to drive improvements to customer service
- We will inform customers of our learning in a 'You said' 'We did' style in customer newsletters, social media and the annual report
- Customer feedback will be 'themed' and reported to the relevant Board quarterly

14. PERFORMANCE MEASURES

Performance measures are monitored in the company performance report and reported to Board quarterly. The performance measures which monitor customer contacts vary by each part of the group, but as a minimum will include:

- % of contacts dealt with within the service standards
- % of customers satisfied with the way their complaint was handled
- % complainants very or fairly satisfied with the outcome of their complaint
- The number of complaints where goodwill or compensation payments were made and the cost
- The cost of service failures

15. CONSULTATION

Consultation was held with both staff and customers to inform the review of this policy. Continuous learning was identified through complaint management has also informed the review of this policy.

16. BENCHMARKING

We have bench marked against several organisations Customer Contacts/Complaints policies and best practice:

Connect Housing	Institute of Customer Service	PierHead housing
Community Gateway	Leeds and York Housing	Rochdale Boroughwide
Complaints Ombudsman	New Charter Housing	Stafford and Rural
Great Places Housing Group	Places for People	Together Housing

17. GROUP RELATED STRATEGIES, POLICIES AND PROCEDURES

- Customer Care Policy
- Customer Contacts Procedure
- Customer Strategy
- Equality Diversity and Inclusion Strategy
- Data Protection Policy
- Calico Homes Repairs Policy and procedure