Customer Contact Procedure

This procedure has been developed to ensure Acorn Recovery Projects (Acorn) has a fair, transparent, formal system in place to deal with complaints, dissatisfaction and compliments. The procedure is a tool for use with the Calico Group Customer Contacts policy launched in September 2016.
The procedure is designed to assist staff and volunteers in determining the difference between compliments, dissatisfaction or a complaint and then the appropriate route to follow, dependent upon the nature of the contact.

1. Principles

- This procedure supports the Calico Group Company Values of;
    - *Going one step further with our customers*
    - *Improving and strengthening ourselves and our organisation*
    - *Our wellbeing as individuals and teams*

- Acorn acknowledges the rights of others, including clients, to challenge decisions made by the organisation, or the actions or behaviour of any staff member or volunteer.
- Acorn welcomes any complaint or feedback, with the aim of learning from them, thereby improving the services the organisation provides.
- Acorn encourages discussion and problem solving rather than a defensive response to complaints and concerns.
- Acorn will listen to and act on any complaint or feedback.
- Acorn will support clients or people acting on their behalf to make complaints or give feedback.
- Acorn encourages staff and volunteers to act as advocates for vulnerable clients or will support a client to access independent advocacy services.
- Acorn will fully consider and resolve, where possible, all complaints and concerns.
- Acorn will set time limits to emphasise the need for swift response to complaints and concerns.
- Acorn will keep a record of complaints and feedback made via the use of our in-house Shuttle software, enabling monitoring of the types of problems raised with the aim of preventing or minimising a reoccurrence.

2. Definitions

Customer: An individual who accesses a service within the business. This can include clients, commissioners, staff, volunteers, family members etc.
Contact: A form of communication. For the purpose of the procedure a contact can be explained as a question or request, feedback or dissatisfaction, compliment or complaint.
Dissatisfaction: Where there is a lack of satisfaction with a service, decision, rule etc. and is not recognised as a formal complaint.
Complaint: Where the service is received as unsatisfactory or unacceptable and warrants a formal investigation.

3. Scope

The procedure covers customer contact in the form of complaints, dissatisfaction, and compliments for the Acorn service across all its programmes and projects. This includes Tier 3 community projects; Tier 4 residential and rehabilitation projects, supported housing projects; volunteering service and central services (central services consist of finance, data and performance, vehicles, head office and reception).
The procedure does not cover disputes/contact between service users, services received from external agencies or staff disputes.

4. Discussing the customers issue at the first point of contact

We recognise that all feedback as gold and is an opportunity to put something right.
The aim is to always try and resolve the issue at the first point of contact. The first point of contact may be face to face, a phone call, an email, through a website form, on social media, or via a text or letter.

If the enquiry has been made by way of a letter, email, letter, social media etc. it's important to ring the customer to discuss the issue further so to help clarify the situation.

The Passionate About Customers methods below provide a structure to help staff handle dissatisfaction or complaints in a positive manner.

4.1 The Glad>Sure>Sorry method

This is the Positive 1st Response tool for handling dissatisfaction, a complaint or any other feedback. We use this method so staff can avoid giving a negative 1st response – for example, ''It's not my department'' or ''It's not my job or ''it's not for me to sort out'' or ''its company policy''.

The Positive 1st response is not the detailed investigation or actual resolution of the matter, (that comes later in the '10 Steps') this is the initial 1st response showing the customer that we; welcome their feedback; we have a 'can do' attitude; and are ready willing and able to help. You can use the Glad, Sure Sorry, stages in any order, as appropriate to the situation

'Glad'	**'Sure'**	**'Sorry'**
This expresses appreciation and welcomes the feedback.	This is the action part and gives assurance and expresses confidence that action will be taken and that you are taking ownership and responsibility	Apologise and empathise
Alternative words /phrases for 'Glad' I'm **glad** you've told us this **Thanks** for letting me know I **appreciate** you sharing this It's **good** that you've raised this I'm **grateful** for you telling me You've done the **right thing**	Alternative words /phrases for 'Sure' I'm **confident** we can sort this I **can** help you **I can** put you in touch with the right person to help you I'm **certain** we can fix this I'm **positive** this can be dealt with today I can **sort** this for you now	Alternative words /phrases for 'Sorry' I'm **sorry** this has happened I'm **sorry** we have let you down Empathy phrases: I **understand** your frustration I can see how **disappointed** you are I can see how this is **affecting you**

Never use ~~Thanks for bringing this to my attention~~ As this does not sound genuine or personal ~~'Unfortunately,' or 'can't'~~ As they are negative words	Never use ~~Guarantee~~ ~~Promise~~ As this can raise false hope	Never use ~~I apologise for any inconvenience caused~~ As this does not sound genuine or personal ~~'Unfortunately,' or 'can't'~~ As they are negative words

The 10 Steps method- Is to help staff handle and clarify the cause of dissatisfaction, or what has led to the complaint.

The table below summarises each of the 10 Steps:

10 Steps	What you can do;
1. Listen	Listen actively, without interrupting
2. Don't get defensive	Keep yourself in the 'Black' (positive - can do mind-set)
3. Respond with a Positive 1st response	Use the **Glad>Sure>Sorry** template
4. Express empathy	Use the empathy phrases
5. Ask questions to understand the problem	Consider asking: How long has this been an issue? Have you been in touch with anyone else about this? What is the current situation? How is this affecting you – what impact is this having? How would you like us to rectify this?
6. Find out what the person wants	Explore the options and solution that they are seeking
7. Explain what you CAN DO	Use a positive 1st response Use **Template 1>2>3** (below) if we are unable to provide what the customer wants
8. Discuss alternatives and agree on next steps	This is part 3 of **Template 1>2>3** Explain timeframes using **'Time Speak'** **Keep the customer informed**
9. Take action	Resolve at first point of contact; or, Log as dissatisfaction; or, Log as a complaint. Updating the customer with the **Progress** reports
10. Follow up to ensure satisfaction	If a complaint – follow up by way of a quality check conversation or a complaints satisfaction survey

4.3 Template 1>2>3 method

This method is used when you have to say ‘No’ or have to give disappointing news in a positive 1st response way. This technique can help defuse difficult situations as it stays solution focussed.

1 – Explain what you CAN DO, give the best solutions, and focus on what is possible
2 – This is what you are unable to do, or where you have to give some disappointing or upsetting news
3 – This is where you need to provide additional solutions, options, or alternatives, so the customer can decide the next steps

It is a good idea to think ahead of the requests and questions we have to say no to, so the perfect Template 1>2>3 answer is prepared and shared in the relevant guidelines. If this is done at the first point of contact, this can often avoid it escalating into a complaint further down the line.

5. Initial contact summary

Once you have run through the above steps you are then in a position to truly understand if this issue;

- Can be resolved at the first point of contact by yourself or a colleague
- Is dissatisfaction
- Is a complaint – this is when the enquiry is not possible to be resolved at the first point of contact AND it needs a formal investigation.

5.1 Complaints versus dissatisfaction

This table clarifies what Acorn class as being a complaint or dissatisfaction. If a customer does not agree with a policy/budget decision, then we would not treat this as a complaint. We will not pass our customers through a complaints process if this will not resolve their issue. If we are unable to meet their requirements then we must explain this at the first point of contact and provide some alternative solutions to help the customer, using Template 1>2>3.

Some examples of customer dissatisfaction:
• Disagreement with policy decisions • Disagreement with regulatory decisions

Complaints – these examples may require a formal investigation:
• Failure of the company to provide services at the expected level • Unhelpful staff attitude • Delay or neglect to administrative or other processes • Failure to follow the company’s own policies, procedures, or standards • Failure to consider all relevant information before reaching a decision • Failure to fulfil any contractual responsibilities • Any examples of malice, bias, inequity, or discrimination

6. Logging dissatisfaction

- Complete the customer contact form either with or on behalf of the customer.
- Identify the service area it relates to (A list of service areas and their corresponding managers is available in appendix 1)
- If possible, apologise to the customer and inform them of who their feedback will be passed to.
- Inform them that the relevant manager or someone on their behalf will be in touch with 3 working days. (Table of deadlines available in appendix 2)
- If using the contact form, send the form to the relevant manager. If using email, mark the email as urgent. If an out of office is received on email, forward the email to the next manager up (see service area table – Appendix 1)

Managers Only

1. Upon receipt of a customer contact form…
2. Ensure the customer's feedback is acknowledged and ensure this is carried out **within the 3 working days** from the date the contact was made.
3. Update the case file saved on the Quality Assurance drive or inform the Data and Performance Co-Ordinator **within 10 working days** of the date the dissatisfaction was submitted.
4. Data and Performance Co-Ordinator will review the feedback and the associated actions and close the case.

1. Logging a Compliment

- Upon receipt of a compliment, such as a thank you card; letter; email or via a customer contacts form send the compliment to the reception staff distribution email and copy in the Data & Performance Co-Ordinator.
- Compliment details will then be logged on the compliments log on the Acorn shared drive.

2. Logging a Complaint

- Complete the customer contact form either with or on behalf of the customer.
- Identify the service area it relates to (A list of service areas and their corresponding managers is available in appendix 1)
- If possible, apologise to the customer and inform them of who their feedback will be passed to.
- Give the customer a copy of the Customer Contact Policy and Procedure.
- Inform the customer that the relevant manager or someone on their behalf will be in touch within 3 working days. (Table of deadlines available in appendix 2)
- If using the contact form, send the form to the relevant manager. If using email, mark the email as urgent. If an out of office is received on email, forward the email to the next manager up (see service area table – Appendix 1) (Copy the Data and Performance Co-Ordinator into any correspondence)
- Inform the Data and Performance Co-Ordinator how the Customer Contact Procedure and Complaints Policy were sent to the complainant if this was not via email.

Managers Only

1. Upon receipt of a customer contact form…

2. Ensure that the customer receives acknowledgement of their complaint **within 3 working days** from the date the contact was made.
3. Update the case file on the Quality Assurance drive with the corrective actions identified upon investigation of the complaint and inform the customer of the action resulting from their feedback **within 10 working days** of the date the complaint was made. Inform the customer of their right to appeal the outcome of their complaint. An appeal should be received **within 30 days** of the last contact with the customer.
4. If the customer is satisfied with the corrective actions, update the case file and inform the Data and Performance Co-Ordinator.
5. If customer is unsatisfied and wishes to appeal, inform the Data and Performance Co-Ordinator who will then escalate the complaint.
6. The manager handling the preventative actions/reflection should review the information and update the Data and Performance Co-Ordinator with the lessons learned/preventative actions within 20 days of the contact being logged. This should include the date that the lessons learned were shared with the relevant team
7. Close case file.

Appeal of complaint outcome

If a complainant is not satisfied by the outcome of the investigated complaint, follow the steps below.

- If the complainant is unsatisfied with the outcome and formally challenges the complaint investigation findings, inform the Data and Performance Co-Ordinator and the relevant senior manager (see appendix 1)
- Senior Manager to review the complaint investigation and its findings.
  The senior manager will:
  O uphold the complaint investigation and its findings, **or**
  O arrive at a different conclusion, **or**
  O requires further action/new investigation to address any shortcomings of the original complaint investigation.
- The senior manager to inform complainant of appeal outcome.

3. Investigating a Complaint

See appendix 3 for the Complaint Investigation Checklist. This can be used to assist in carrying out a through investigation.

- Inform the Data and Performance C-Ordinator that you are investigating the complaint and whether the investigation was completed within 10 working days (and if longer, whether the complainant has been updated).

4. Progress reports method

This method is used to ensure that we keep our customers informed on the progress of their enquiry. Using this technique can avoid customer frustration, chase ups and further dissatisfaction. We recognise that no news is bad news and lack of updates or information can send people into the ‘red’. Keeping people informed is particularly important when managing a complaint.

Keeping people informed is:	Never use these words or phrases, as these create doubt and false hope for our customers:
• Updating and advising on what is happening, by when and by who • Agreeing dates and times for the next progress update • When circumstances change and deadlines are in jeopardy then you must still contact the customer and let them know what you can do and agree fresh timeframes	• I'll try and get back to you • I'll do my best • Probably be able to look at this • I think that should be ok • I don't see why not • Probably

5. Monitoring

All compliments, dissatisfaction and complaints will be monitored via the use of the secure Quality Assurance drive and Complaints Log.
The Quality Assurance Drive is only available to managers (those listed in Appendix 1) and receptionists at Head Office. All those accessing the Quality Assurance Drive will adhere to Acorn's confidentiality policy and the General Data Protection Regulations 2018 and Data Protection 2018.

The Data and Performance Co-Ordinator will be responsible for auditing the Quality Assurance drive on a regular basis to ensure it is being used effectively.

The Data and Performance Co-Ordinator will be responsible for reporting customer contact information to the board as requested and is necessary for good business practice and the reviewing of the customer contact procedure. The Data and Performance Co-Ordinator will run reports from the data saved on the Quality Assurance Drive and will anonymise its data at this point.

6. Follow up

Within 30 days of a complaint being closed on the Quality Assurance Drive, the Data and Performance Co-Ordinator will send the customer a complaint survey (see appendix 4). The complaint survey will be sent by email if an email address was given by the customer.

Once a returned survey is received, the results will be inputted into a Complaint Survey Database, located in Quality Assurance/Compliments & Complaints. The results will then be analysed and included in Quality Assurance reports which will go to Group Leadership Team and the board on a quarterly basis.

The board will then review the information and if necessary, report back any findings in relation to improvements or alterations to the procedure and handling of complaints to the Data and Performance Co-Ordinator and relevant managers.

Appendix 1

Service Areas and Managers

Service Area	Manager 1 *(corrective actions)*	Manager 2 *(Reflection and lessons learned, preventative actions)*	Manager 3 ***(for appeals only)***
Blackpool Community Projects	Gareth Bently		Sarah Tattersall
Manchester Community Projects and Supported Housing	Peter Taylor		Sarah Tattersall
Stockport Tier 3 Projects	Dianne Edwards		Sarah Tattersall
Lancaster supported housing	Darren Lang		Sarah Tattersall
Manchester Rehabilitation and Residential Projects	Darren Brooks	Kerrie Lang	Sarah Tattersall
Lancashire Rehabilitation and Residential Projects	Darren Brooks	Kerrie Lang	Sarah Tattersall
Central Service	Sarah Tattersall		Sarah Tattersall
Volunteering Service	Louise Whitworth	Kerrie Lang	Sarah Tattersall
LCFT	Dannielle Rose	Kerrie Lang	Sarah Tattersall

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Appendix 2 – Retention, Investigation Timescales and Follow Up information

Retention	Investigation timescales	Follow up
All paper-based correspondence will be scanned onto the Shuttle software.	Investigating manager to contact customer **within 3 working days** of contact being received by Acorn. (Complains and Dissatisfaction)	If customer has agreed to be contacted following a complaint…
Once scanned, all paper-based correspondence will be destroyed confidentially.	Investigation to be completed and findings/actions shared with customer **within 10 working days** of contacting customer in response to their contact. (Complaints Only)	Within 30 days, the Data and Performance Co-Ordinator will send a complaints survey to the customer by either post or email…
Electronic files will be retained for up to 5 years.	Appeal to be received **within 30 days** after completion of investigation. (Complaints Only)	Upon the return of the anonymous survey, the results will be inputted into a database.
Electronic files over 5 years old will be destroyed confidentially.	Appeals manager to contact the customer **within 5 working days** of appeal being received by Acorn. (Complaints Only)	The database will be stored in: *Quality Assurance/Compliments & Complaints*
	Further timescales to be agreed between manager and customer with an aim to complete appeal investigation and feedback findings to customer **within 30 days.** (Complaints Only)	The results will be analysed and fed into the quarterly board report where the board can discuss the findings and report back any issues, good work and alterations.

Appendix 3 – Complaint Investigation Checklist

Customer information:			
Name			
Address		**Email Address**	
Telephone number		**Date**	
Complaint summary	Enter the main issues and a summary of what the customer wants		
Investigation by:		**Department**	

Before you speak to the customer

1.		**Understand the customers' issues raised in the complaint:**
2.	☐	• How long this has been ongoing? • Who have they been dealing with? • What impact is this issue having on their life? • Any vulnerabilities? • What does the customer want? • How can we resolve this?
3.	☐	Liaise with the relevant staff, manager, cross team or contractor for background information.
4.	☐	Review all previous contacts on Active H, Shuttle, Case notes, etc.
5.	☐	Review any other systems history – Client databases, Assessments etc.
6.	☐	Identify any Media impact – inform the Calico Communications Team.
7.	☐	Check is any other customers or properties affected by this matter?
8.	☐	Does the experience meet service standards or current policy?
9.	☐	Prepare a list of questions to ask the customer, to check your understanding. Along with your proposed approach or action taken to resolve the matter
When you speak to the customer		
10.	☐	Use the Passionate About Customers Complaint handling tools (10 steps, Glad Sure Sorry, Positive 1st response, take responsibility, say what you can do, template 123 etc.)
11.	☐	Check if a visit required to the customers home, to understand the issue further?
12.	☐	Ask your questions and agree what you can do and the next steps for remedial action.
13.	☐	Keep the customer informed - agree the ongoing communication methods and frequency.
Closing the complaint		
14.	☐	Write to the customer with a full response confirming the actions taken to resolve the matter.
15.	☐	If the customer doesn't want a response in writing, then upload your notes on the discussion/ questions asked and the customers' response. Then this can be used to upload in Shuttle as evidence of the corrective action.
16.	☐	Ensure the Corrective and Preventative actions are completed, and Reflection occurs.
17.	☐	After the complaint is closed ask if the customer is happy with the outcome (quality survey)

Appendix 4 - Customer Contact Form

Customer Contact Form			
Type *(Please circle)*	Compliment / Dissatisfaction / Complaints		
First Name		Surname	
Current Address		Contact Number	
Email Address			
Case received via:		Case received from:	
Details of case	Use the following questions as guides: 1. Can you tell me briefly what has happened up to now? 2. What is your current situation? 3. What impact is this having on you? 4. What would you like us to do to resolve this?		

Customer is happy to be contacted in acknowledgement of the case: Yes ☐ No ☐

If yes, what is the best way to make contact with the customer?

Date completed		Completed by:	
Passed to…		Date passed on:	

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Appendix 5 – Customer Contact Survey

Sent via email

1. ***Did you feel that the staff member listened and dealt with your complaint in a positive manner?***
   Yes ☐ No ☐

2. ***How well were you kept informed about the progress of your complaint?***
   Very well ☐ Quite well ☐ Neither ☐ Not well ☐ Not at all well ☐

3. ***Overall, how satisfied or dissatisfied are you with the way your complaint was handled?***
   Very Satisfied ☐ Fairly Satisfied ☐ Neither ☐ Fairly dissatisfied ☐ Dissatisfied ☐

4. ***Overall, how satisfied or dissatisfied are you with the final outcome of your complaint?***
   Very Satisfied ☐ Fairly Satisfied ☐ Neither ☐ Fairly dissatisfied ☐ Dissatisfied ☐

5. ***Is there anything Acorn could improve on when handling complaints?***

6. ***To help improve our services, someone from Acorn may be in touch to discuss your feedback – are you happy to be contacted?***
   Yes ☐ No ☐

7. ***How would you like us to contact you?***
   Telephone ☐ Email ☐ Post ☐
   Please provide contact details: