

ACORN



BUSINESS FINANCE

COMPLAINTS POLICY AND PROCEDURES

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Acorn Business Finance

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Acorn Business Finance is the trading name of SJT Corporate Finance Limited, SJT Corporate Finance is registered in England and Wales, number 10919713. Registered office, Festival House, Jessop Avenue, Cheltenham, GL50 3SH. SJT Finance Limited is authorised and regulated by the Financial Conduct Authority, reference number 822913.

1. Purpose

This policy and procedures detail how SJT Corporate Finance Ltd t/a Acorn Business Finance (the Firm) will deal with complaints.

The Firm is authorised by the Financial Conduct Authority (FCA) and, as such, will act in accordance with the Complaints rules as defined in the FCA Handbook, which will take precedence over the requirements of this policy and procedures.

2. Review of Policy and Procedures

This policy and procedure will be reviewed regularly, at least once a year, and amended as considered necessary by the Firm's Management body in the event of changing circumstances or regulations.

3. Responsibilities

3.1 Management Body Responsibilities

The Management Body of the Firm are responsible for the implementation of the Complaints Policy and for monitoring compliance with it.

3.2 Compliance Responsibilities

The Compliance Function is responsible for analysing complaints and the complaints handling data to identify and address any risks or issues.

3.3 Employee Responsibilities

All employees are expected to refer any verbal or written complaints to the Complaints Manager at the earliest opportunity and to cooperate fully with the Complaints Manager in its investigations.

4. Definitions

4.1 Definition of a Complaint

The FCA defines a complaint as any oral or written expression of dissatisfaction from or on behalf of a client, whether **justified or not**, which includes an actual or potential financial loss, material distress or material inconvenience.

The Financial Conduct Authority complaints rules apply to complaints:

- Made by, or on behalf of an eligible complainant
- Relating to regulated activity
- Involving an allegation that the complainant has suffered, or may suffer, financial loss, material distress or material inconvenience

4.2 Definition of eligible complainant

An eligible complainant is a complainant that is:

- A consumer (a person acting outside their trade, business or profession)
- A micro enterprise
- A charity with an annual income of less than £1,000,000
- A trustee of a trust which has a net asset value of less than £1,000,000

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- A guarantor

Complainants that are professional clients or eligible counterparties that are acting outside of their trade or professions in relation to the activity to which the complaint relates are considered to be consumers and, as such, eligible complainants.

If in doubt whether a complainant is an eligible complainant or not, the Firm will treat them as an eligible complainant.

5. Policy

It is the Firm's policy to treat all complainants the same, however, eligible complainants are legally defined and have additional rights in law that the Firm must acknowledge and adhere to. The Firm has elected to treat all complaints in the same way for simplicity. Occasionally the Firm may not know if a complainant is 'eligible' in which case it will treat them as such and if it becomes necessary, the Financial Ombudsman Service will establish the status of the complainant, not the Firm.

Clients and potential clients are able to submit complaints free of charge.

Complaints will be handled promptly, effectively and in an independent manner, obtaining additional information as necessary.

The Firm will always communicate with clients and potential clients clearly in plain language that is easy to understand and will reply to the complaint without undue delay.

The Firm will assess fairly, consistently and promptly:

- The subject matter of the complaint
- Whether the complaint should be upheld
- What remedial action or redress may be appropriate
- Whether another party may be solely or jointly responsible for the matter alleged in the complaint

The Firm will promptly comply with any offer or remedial activity, or redress accepted by the complainant.

The Firm will consider a complaint closed when it has issued a final response.

The Firm will provide information about the Financial Ombudsman Service to eligible complainants in the general conditions of its contracts with eligible complainants in a clear, comprehensible, and easily accessible way.

5.1 Consumer Awareness

The Firm has published Complaints Procedures that include contact details of the Complaints Manager / Compliance Officer. The procedures are made available to clients and potential clients on request and when the Firm is acknowledging a complaint. The procedure contains information about the Financial Ombudsman Service.

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5.2 Timings

On receipt of a complaint the Firm will send the complainant a written acknowledgement within 5 working days providing confirmation that it has received the complaint and is dealing with it.

The Firm has a maximum of 8 weeks to issue a final response to the complainant, and it requires that this practice is followed (as a maximum timescales) for all complaints.

5.2.1 *Complaints resolved by the close of the third business day*

If the Firm satisfactorily resolves the complaint by close of business on the third business day following the receipt of the complaint then the Firm will issue a written “Summary Resolution Communication” to the complainant, advising that it considers the complaint as resolved and inform the complainant, for eligible complainants, about their options for referring the complaint back to the Firm or for onward referral to the Financial Ombudsman Service if they are dissatisfied.

In addition to sending a complainant a “Summary Resolution Communication”, the Firm may also use other methods to communicate the information where:

- It considers that doing so may better meet the complainant’s needs; or
- The complainant and the Firm have already been using another method to communicate about the complaint.

5.2.2 *Complaints not settled within 3 business days*

On receipt of a complaint the Firm will send the complainant a written acknowledgement within 5 working days providing confirmation that it has received the complaint and is dealing with it.

The Firm will ensure that the complainant is kept informed of the progress of the measures being taken for resolution of the complaint. The Firm will write to complainants after four weeks if it has not reached a decision.

The Firm will issue a final response to the complainant within 8 weeks and inform the complainant, for eligible complainants, about their options for onward referral to the Financial Ombudsman Service.

Letter	Timing
Initial response letter	Promptly: ideally by the next working day, but within 5 working days on receipt of the complaint.

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Holding letter	Optional until the 8 th week. When the investigation has not involved a continuous dialogue the complaints manager may issue a holding letter after 4 weeks if the complaint remains outstanding. <i>The holding letter can be issued more frequently if necessary or desirable.</i>
Final response	By the end of the 8 th week after the receipt of the complaint in all cases, but sooner whenever possible. If, exceptionally, a full response is not possible by this time the Firm must send out a holding letter explaining why it has not been able to issue a decision within the above time frame and when it expects to be able to provide a decision. It should, however, be noted that <i>it is a requirement that final responses are issued by the end of 8 weeks after receipt of complaints.</i>

The final response will clearly set out:

- Whether the Firm accepts or rejects the complaint
- The reasons for rejection, where applicable
- The intention to offer redress or remedial action, where applicable
- Details of the redress to be offered and any compensation offered with a clear method of calculation.

Additionally, where the client is an eligible complainant, the Firm will:

- Explain that where the complainant disagrees with the Firm's decision, they must refer the matter to the Financial Ombudsman Service within six months of the date of this letter or the right to use this service is lost, and
- Enclose a copy of the Financial Ombudsman Service's standard explanatory leaflet

The Firm will consider a complaint closed when it has issued its final response.

5.3 Complaints forwarding

The Firm may promptly forward the complaint in writing to another party if they have reasonable grounds to believe that the other party may be solely or jointly responsible for the matters alleged in the complaint. If a complaint is forwarded, the Firm will inform the complainant promptly in a final response of why the complaint has been forwarded to another party and provide the complainant with the other party's contact details.

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If the Firm receives a forwarded complaint, the complaint will be treated as if the Firm has received the complaint directly and at the same time limits will apply from the date on which the Firm has received the forwarded complaint.

5.4 Complaints time barring

If the Firm receives a complaint which is outside the time limits for referral to the Financial Ombudsman Service, it may reject the complaint without considering the merits but will explain this to the complainant in its final response.

Unless the Firm consents, the Financial Ombudsman Service will not consider a complaint if the complainant refers it to the Financial Ombudsman Service:

- More than six months after the respondent sent the complainant its final response
- More than six years after the event complained of
- More than three years from the date on which the complainant became aware that they had cause for complaint

5.5 Financial Ombudsman Service

The Firm will cooperate fully with the Financial Ombudsman Service in resolving any complaints made against it and agrees to be bound by any awards made by the Ombudsman. The Firm undertakes to pay promptly the fees levied by the Financial Ombudsman Service. We are committed to providing a high standard of service. If you are unhappy with any aspect of our service, you can make a complaint by contacting us using the details below. We will acknowledge your complaint promptly and aim to provide a final response within **8 weeks**.

If you are not satisfied with our response, or if you do not receive a final response within 8 weeks, you may be entitled to refer your complaint to the **Financial Ombudsman Service**, which is an independent body that resolves disputes between consumers and financial services firms.

Financial Ombudsman Service

Website: www.financial-ombudsman.org.uk

Telephone: 0300 123 9 123

Address: Exchange Tower, London, E14 9SR

You must refer your complaint to the Financial Ombudsman Service within **6 months** of the date of our final response.

5.6 Analysis

The Firm will conduct root cause analysis of any complaint received and record any appropriate actions taken. Complaints will be analysed for any reoccurring patterns and all lessons learnt will be incorporated into future training and development. The causes of complaints will be recorded in the Management Information and will be used with the prioritisation of dealing with the root causes.

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6. The Procedure

Refer any complaint, verbal or written, to the Complaints Manager / Compliance Officer at the earliest opportunity.

The Complaints Manager / Compliance Officer will then:

- 1) Make an initial assessment of the complaint, contacting the complainant for further information if required. This can be done via telephone, email or any other appropriate means of communication.
- 2) If there is sufficient information and the complaint can be resolved within 3 business days, then proceed to step 9.
- 3) If the complaint cannot be resolved within 3 business days, send out an initial response letter to the complainant using the Initial Response Letter Template, adding the details known about the complaint by the next working day, stating that the complaint has been received and is being dealt with.
- 4) Investigate the complaint impartially obtaining additional information from the Firm and/or the complainant as necessary.
- 5) Enter the complaint onto the Complaints Log and create a Complaint Record.
- 6) Assess fairly, consistently, and promptly:
 - a. The subject matter of the complaint
 - b. Whether the complaint should be upheld
 - c. What remedial action or redress (or both) may be appropriate
 - d. If appropriate, whether it has reasonable grounds to be satisfied that another party/respondent may be solely or jointly responsible for the matter alleged in the complaint.
- 7) If appropriate, forward the complaint to the relevant party/respondent and advise the complainant in writing why the complaint has been forwarded to the other party and provide the other party's contact details.
- 8) If the complaint is unresolved after four weeks, send out a holding letter using the Holding letter template, advising an expected resolution date.
- 9) If the complaint is resolved, communicate the Firm's position on the complaint to the complainant and inform them about their options, including that they may be able to refer the complaint to an alternative dispute resolution entity (Financial Ombudsman Service for eligible complainants) or that the complainant may be able to take civil action, using the Final Response Letter template. If the complaint was resolved within 3 days, use the Summary Resolution Communication instead.
- 10) In the final response letter, clearly set out whether the Firm accepts or rejects the complaint, the reasons for rejecting any complaint or where the Firm accepts the complaint, and intends to offer redress or remedial action, details of the redress to be offered, any compensation offered and a clear method of calculation.
- 11) In the final response letter to eligible complainants, enclose a copy of the Financial Ombudsman Service's standard explanatory leaflet, provide the website address of the

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Financial Ombudsman Service and inform the complainant that if they are still dissatisfied with the Firm's response, the complaint may now be referred to the Financial Ombudsman Service.

- 12) Comply promptly with any offer of remedial action or redress accepted by the complainant.
- 13) Conduct a root cause analysis in the case of any complaint and record with the appropriate action having been taken. Record any actions within the individual complaint record.
- 14) Liaise with senior management if any changes need to be made to the Firm's procedures based on the analysis.
- 15) Update the Complaints Log and Complaints Record with the final decision including details of the amount of any redress offered.

7. Record keeping

The Firm will keep a record of each complaint received and the measures taken for its resolution, including any redress offered, and retain that record for three years from the date the complaint was received.

8. Complaints reporting

Twice a year, the Firm will provide the FCA with a complete report concerning complaints from eligible complainants. Complaints that have been forwarded in their entirety to another party will not be included in the report.

9. Breaches of the Complaints Policy and Procedure

Any breaches of the Complaints Policy and Procedure will be recorded on the Firm's breach log in conjunction with its Regulatory Breach Policy.

10. Annex

Financial Ombudsman Service

Address:

The Financial Ombudsman Service,
Exchange Tower,
London
E14 9SR

Tel: 0800 023 4567 (free for most people ringing from a fixed line) or
0300 123 9123 (cheaper for those calling using a mobile) or
44 20 7964 0500 (if calling from abroad)

Email: complaint.info@financial-ombudsman.org.uk

Website: www.financial-ombudsman.org.uk

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