

This Complaints Handling Procedure tells you how we will deal with your complaint and how long it is likely to take. It provides important information about what you can do if you are not happy with the way in which we are dealing with your complaint or about our final decision. Our Complaints Handling Procedure also contains information about what you can expect from us when you make a complaint. We will not charge you for handling your complaint.

How do I make a complaint?

If you have any concerns about our service, our work or our charges, you should discuss these in the first instance with the Legal Adviser who has day-to-day control of your matter. If your complaint is about our charges you have the right to apply for assessment of the bill under Part III of the Solicitors Act 1974.

If your Legal Adviser cannot satisfactorily address your concerns and you wish to make a complaint, please contact the appropriate Head of Department. Alternatively, if your complaint relates to the Head of Department, you should address your complaint to the Complaints Director.

To help us to understand your complaint, and in order that we do not miss anything, please tell us: your full name and contact details; what you think we have got wrong; how you would like your complaint resolved; and your matter reference number (if you have it).

Step One: Acknowledging your Complaint

Within 10 working days of receiving your complaint, we will send you a letter acknowledging your complaint and enclosing a copy of this procedure.

Step Two: Investigating your Complaint

Up to 10 working days from our sending of the acknowledgement letter, we will review your file(s) and any other relevant documentation and send you a detailed letter telling you how we propose to deal with your complaint. This will be dealt with on an individual, case by case basis but some examples of what we might say in this letter are listed below.

- If your complaint is straightforward we might make suggestions as to how we can put things right or we may offer you some form of redress.
- If your complaint is more complicated we might ask you to confirm, explain or clarify any issues and also advise you that our timescales may need to be altered in order to carry out the investigation diligently.
- We may ask to meet with you to discuss the issues face-to-face and if we do, we will try to arrange a meeting with you no longer than 10 working days after first receiving your complaint. If you would prefer not to meet, or if we cannot arrange this within an agreeable timescale, we will write to you fully setting out our views on the matter and making suggestions as to how we can put things right, or asking you to confirm, explain or clarify any issues.
- Within five working days of a meeting, we will write to you again to confirm the details of that meeting and any offer of redress that we have made.

Where the Head of Department has not been able to resolve your complaint it will then be directed to our Complaints Director. A new, independent review of the file will then be conducted and a final decision made.

Where the Complaints Director has reviewed your complaint in the first instance, your complaint will be directed to another senior member of our management team. A new, independent review of the file will then be conducted and a final decision made.

No matter how our investigation into your complaint progresses, we aim to give you our final decision within 8 weeks of receiving your initial complaint – and sooner if possible.

Step Three: Appealing against our Final Decision

If you are not satisfied with our final decision, please let us know and another senior member of our management team will independently review that final decision. We will let you know the result of any appeal within 5 working days of receiving your appeal.

What to do if we cannot resolve your complaint

We have eight weeks to consider your complaint. If we have not resolved it within this timescale to your satisfaction, you may be able to complain to the Legal Ombudsman. The Legal Ombudsman will look at your complaint independently and it will not affect how we handle your matter.

Normally, you will need to bring a complaint to the Legal Ombudsman within six months of receiving a final written response from us about your complaint and within six years of the act or omission about which you are complaining occurring (or if outside of this period, within three years of when you should reasonably have been aware of it). However, the Legal Ombudsman will not accept complaints where the act or dates of awareness were before 6 October 2010.

Ordinarily, you cannot lodge a complaint with the Legal Ombudsman until you have first attempted to resolve your complaint using our internal Complaints Handling Procedure but you will be able to contact the Legal Ombudsman if:

- The complaint has not been resolved to your satisfaction within eight weeks of first making the complaint to us; or
- The Legal Ombudsman decides that there are exceptional reasons why the Legal Ombudsman should consider your complaint sooner, or without you having to use our internal Complaints Handling Procedure first; or
- The Legal Ombudsman considers that your complaint cannot be resolved using our internal Complaints Handling Procedure because the relationship between you and us has broken down irretrievably.

If you wish to make a complaint to the Legal Ombudsman you must be one of the following:

- An individual;
- A business with fewer than 10 employees and turnover or assets not exceeding a certain threshold;
- A charity with an annual income less than £1 million;
- A club, association or society with an annual income less than £1 million;
- A trustee of a trust with a net asset value less than £1 million;
- or a personal representative or the residuary beneficiaries of an estate where a person with a complaint died before referring it to the Legal Ombudsman.

If you do not satisfy any of the above criteria you can only obtain redress by using our Complaints Handling Procedure or by mediation, arbitration, or by taking action through the Courts. Alternative dispute resolution bodies such as ProMediate (www.promediate.co.uk) exist which are competent to deal with complaints about legal services should both you and our firm wish to use such a scheme.

Legal Ombudsman Contact Details

Address: PO Box 6806, Wolverhampton, WV1 9WJ.

Telephone: 0300 555 0333

Email: enquiries@legalombudsman.org.uk

Website: www.legalombudsman.org.uk

What to do if you are unhappy with our behaviour

The Solicitors Regulation Authority can help if you are concerned about our behaviour. This could be for things like dishonesty, taking or losing your money or treating you unfairly because of your age, a disability or other characteristic. You can visit its website (www.sra.org.uk) to see how you can raise your concerns.

A large print version of this Complaints Handling Procedure is available on request.