

<b>Name of procedure(s)</b>	Complaints Handling procedure
<b>Responsibility for policy</b>	Directors
<b>Date last reviewed</b>	September 2023
<b>Date of next review</b>	September 2024
<b>Associated policies and documents</b>	

## Complaints Handling procedure

### 1. Introduction

- 1.1 We are committed to providing a high-quality legal service to all our clients. When something goes wrong, we need clients to tell us about it. This will help us to improve our standards.
- 1.2 This procedure describes how we handle complaints we receive and ensure we comply with our regulatory obligations.
- 1.3 We will handle complaints promptly, fairly and free of charge.

### 2. Definition of what we regard as a complaint

A complaint can include any expression of dissatisfaction about the service a client has received from us.

### 3. Information to be provided to a client

All clients will be informed in writing in our client care letter and terms of business at the outset of the matter about:

- their right to complain about our services and our charges;
- how a complaint can be made and to whom; and
- any right they have to make a complaint to the Legal Ombudsman and when they can make any such complaint.

### 4. Responsibility for dealing with complaints

- 4.1 Graham Pearce is the client care director and is responsible for handling complaints and will receive and record internal notifications of complaints, decide what action should be taken and maintain a register of complaints. They will review this register on an annual basis to establish whether there are any patterns or trends, whether any staff training is required on any particular legal, procedural or administrative issues and whether we should take any other action to minimise the risk of a similar complaint arising in the future.

4.2 The client care director will:

- assess whether it is necessary to notify our professional indemnity insurers of the complaint and, if so, notify our insurers; and
- assess whether it is necessary to notify our Compliance Officer for Legal Practice (COLP) of the complaint if there is a potential breach of Solicitors Regulation Authority (SRA) requirements and, if so, notify our COLP.

4.3 If the client care director is involved in the matter to which the complaint relates, the COLP must nominate someone else in our firm to deal with that complaint.

## **5. How a complaint can be made**

5.1 A complaint may be made in writing by letter, fax or email, or verbally, in person or by telephone.

5.2 A client must be provided with a copy of our complaints procedure, if requested, and a copy of this procedure will also be available on our website.

5.3 A complaint may be made including by contacting the person dealing with the relevant matter to discuss concerns, contact the person responsible for the overall supervision of the matter or contacting the client care director.

5.4 If a client raises a concern or complaint with a member of staff, they must report it as soon as possible and without delay to the client care director. The following information should be provided:

- the date the complaint was received;
- the name of the member of staff who received the complaint;
- the name of the fee earner involved;
- the file reference;
- the name and address of the complainant;
- whether the complainant has any communication challenges or other vulnerabilities, e.g., hearing difficulties or language barriers;
- a brief summary of the complaint;
- whether the complainant has requested a specific remedy, and if so, what;
- whether the complainant has made any previous complaints, and if so, what those were.

5.5 Once the client care director has initially considered the complaint, they will advise whether the complaint can be dealt with informally by the member of staff and/or their superior, or whether they themselves will handle the complaint more formally.

## **6. Dealing with a complaint**

### *6.1 Recording complaints*

6.1.1 The client care director will record complaints as they are received, including the following information:

- contact details of the complainant;
- a summary of the complaint;
- specific issues complained about;
- any requested remedy;
- agreed date for a response;
- who has the responsibility for dealing with the complaint.

6.1.2 Throughout the process of dealing with the complaint, they will also record:

- any investigative steps taken;
- minutes of any meetings held internally and/or with the complainant;
- references to any documents relied on for resolving the complaint.

6.1.3 The client care director will maintain a central register of complaints. This will identify the cause of any problem of which the client has complained and will help us to identify any trends or training needs.

6.1.4 The client care director will consider whether a complaint involves matters that need to be notified externally, e.g., to the SRA or our professional indemnity insurers if the complaint involves negligence.

## *6.2 Acknowledging a complaint*

We will write to a complainant within two working days acknowledging the complaint. This letter will include:

- a statement that the complaint will be dealt with promptly, fairly and free of charge;
- our understanding of the complaint;
- if appropriate, a request for further information that we need in order to consider the complaint, and a timeframe for providing that information;
- how the complaint will be handled;
- the contact details of the person who is dealing with the complaint; and
- information on when we will next be in contact with the complainant with an initial and/or substantive response.

## *6.3 Dealing with a complaint*

6.3.1 Following the preliminary assessment by the client care director we will:

- investigate the complaint, which will involve reviewing the relevant file as a first step;
- obtain feedback from relevant people; and
- provide a response to the complainant.

6.3.2 Both the complainant and member of staff involved in the complaint will be given the opportunity to provide their account of the situation and respond to points raised.

#### *6.4 Responding following investigation*

6.4.1 We will write to the complainant at the end of our investigation to tell them what we have done and what we propose to do to resolve their complaint, This response will:

- re-state the details of the complaint;
- outline the investigations which we have carried out;
- set out our findings resulting from the investigations;
- offer a remedy or explain why we do not think it is appropriate to do so;
- explain how to accept the proposed remedy; and
- inform the complainant of their right to complain to the Legal Ombudsman and/or the SRA if they remain unsatisfied, the timeframe for doing so and full details of how to contact the Legal Ombudsman and/or the SRA.

6.4.2 Where possible we will aim to do this within 14 days of the date of our letter of acknowledgement of the complaint.

6.4.3 We have eight weeks to resolve a complaint, after which the complainant may refer their complaint to the Legal Ombudsman for resolution. This applies to individuals, businesses with fewer than 10 employees and turnover or assets not exceeding a certain threshold, charities or trusts with a net income of less than £1 million and certain other categories within which the client may fall.

6.4.4 If we cannot resolve a complaint and or complaints procedure has been exhausted, then we will write to the complainant and inform them:

- that we cannot settle the complaint;
- of the name and website address of an alternative dispute resolution (ADR) approved body which would be competent to deal with the complaint; and
- whether we agree to use the scheme operated by that body.

#### *6.5 Remedies*

In order to remedy a complaint, we may:

- resolve the specific problem;
- correct any unsatisfactory procedures;
- offer compensation for specific losses or general inconvenience;
- offer to reduce the bill; and/or
- offer an apology.

## **7. Reviewing this procedure**

We will review this policy regularly and will provide information and/or training on any changes we make.