

Introduction

We are sorry if you have to complain about our service. We are committed here to achieving principles of quality and also fairness. It is part and parcel of that that we acknowledge mistakes can be made and things can go wrong.

Accordingly, we will address your complaint with an open mind and if we think we should, we will apologise, see what we can do to put matters right and get back on course with the business in hand if that is still possible.

It is important that you know broadly what our procedure will be. The aim in this respect is to make things as simple and quick as possible, without neglecting to pay attention to detail where necessary.

Generally, therefore, we are looking to achieve progress in the investigation of your complaint within short periods of time, but allowances may need to be made where a lot of reading and consideration is required.

Stage 1

We will deal with your complaint in the first instance. We shall send you an initial letter acknowledging the complaint. We aim to do this within forty-eight business hours at most of receiving the formal complaint.

We will also tell you at this point, according to the information that we have to date, what we think might be the best way forward to resolve the complaint, subject to any different views that you may have.

We may also ask you for some further information, not to make life difficult and try to deflect you from any criticisms, but to help us understand the issues that need to be addressed.

Stage 2

This will be the initial investigation of your complaint. Hopefully we shall have been able to agree within Stage 1 how to proceed, and an approximate timescale.

We may have agreed to deal with it by written response, in a personal meeting or by telephone discussion – or by a combination of these.

Where we plan to meet or talk on the telephone, it may still be helpful if we produce an initial written response, if only as a suggested agenda for discussion and an indication of what we think are the issues, and whether or not we appear to understand them!

Whatever format we adopt, it may be that we need to spend some time reviewing your file and considering detail beforehand. At the outset of this stage of the procedure, we will tell you how long we think is needed before we write, telephone or meet with you.

Stage 3

We may by now have reached agreement, in outline at least, in which case we would expect to be writing to you to confirm our agreement or develop the detail.

Otherwise, we shall write to tell you where, if at all, we think we have found common ground and what we understand to be the continuing areas of dispute between us.

In either case, we aim to write within seven days of whatever conclusion has been reached within Stage 2 above.

We shall try at this point to agree, if nothing else, exactly what it is that we disagree about, before moving forward.

We may suggest that we invite the local Law Society or the Sole Practitioner's Group, who offer independent investigation and advice services, to look into the matter and give an opinion with the benefit of which we will review the progress and outcomes of the complaint to date.

We will find out and tell you if we can how long that further process is likely to take and then we will write to you with my decision following completion of the review.

Stage 4

If you are still not satisfied, and if there is no scope for further discussion between us (in principle there always *should* be) you can contact the Legal Ombudsman, an independent complaints body, established under the Legal Services Act 2007 who will investigate your complaint. Full details were provided to you under cover of the Client Guide (Terms and Conditions of Business) but please do not hesitate to ask and we will ensure you have all the necessary contact details.

There are other complaints bodies who are able to deal with complaints about legal services should you not wish to use the Legal Ombudsman and if we reach that point then we shall provide you with further information. If it is felt that there are issues of professional conduct then the complaints body will report to the Solicitor's Regulation Authority.

The complaints body prefers people who have complaints to try and resolve them with their solicitors in the first instance. When you contact them you will need to send copies of all relevant documents, including our complaints handling correspondence.

We hope that whatever unhappiness has arisen we can resolve it quickly so that we may move forward or, if we must, part on positive terms.