Complaints handling

The complaints handling process is intended to resolve as many problems as possible within the firm so as to avoid complaints to the Legal Ombudsman and preserve the goodwill of the client, even if things have gone wrong. It is also intended, at worst, to minimise professional negligence claims against the firm. All personnel need to pick up on client dissatisfaction when it does arise and address it as best as they can.

The firm therefore operates a complaints handling process that seeks to ensure that it:

* Knows about client dissatisfaction if and when it does arise
* Take all reasonable steps to ensure that the dissatisfaction is addressed and resolved wherever possible
* Reassures all clients who do complain that the firm will address their concerns without delay and that it takes all complaints seriously.
* Learns from experience to lessen the risk of complaints in the future
* Complies with current SRA rules surrounding complaints handling procedures

Some complaints may be well founded. Everybody makes mistakes and we will expect honesty and realism from any member of staff when they have done so. The member of staff should in turn receive support from the firm. Complaints must be dealt with sympathetically and quickly. The firm’s reputation depends on this as part of our commitment to treat clients fairly and to provide excellent service levels.

The role of the Legal Ombudsman (LeO)

Our client complaints procedure is intended to deal with issues as quickly, objectively and sympathetically as possible. However if a client is not satisfied with the outcome of our complaints procedure they may then raise the issue with the Legal Ombudsman. Apart from professional pride and reputation, there are also purely practical and financial reasons why it is preferable that complaints do not escalate to involve the LeO. All staff should be aware that the LeO now charges £400 to handle any complaint whether or not the complaint is upheld. If upheld, the level of fines that can be imposed are high and even if the complaint is not upheld we can still be held guilty of not handling the complaint in an appropriate way and the LeO can refer a firm or staff to the SRA for further disciplinary action. For all these reasons it is preferable to prevent a client’s dissatisfaction escalating to a referral to the LeO if at all possible.

The Legal Ombudsman will accept complaints from individuals and small businesses, charities, clubs, societies, associations and trusts. It can also consider complaints from other individuals and bodies not officially a client of the firm.

Please note: the LeO on investigating a complaint may contact the named member of staff direct and without contacting the firm’s Complaints Manager (CM). If this should happen the CM should be informed immediately.