



STEWART LAW

SOLICITORS

COMPLAINT HANDLING POLICY

A. Our complaint handling policy

We are committed to providing a high quality legal service to all our clients. When you think or feel that something may have gone wrong, or if you are unhappy with any aspect of our service, or an invoice that you have received, we need you to tell us about it. If you do so as soon as your concern arises, this will enable us to address your concern without delay and, where applicable, help us to improve our standards.

The firm's complaints handler is our Principal, Julie Stewart, who is responsible for this policy.

If you have a complaint, please contact us with the details. We have eight weeks to consider it, dealing with it promptly, fairly and free of charge, with respect to any time spent by any fee earner who assists with or contributes to the investigation of your complaint.

If we have not resolved your complaint within this eight week timeframe, or you are unhappy with the outcome, we will write to you confirming your right to complain to the Legal Ombudsman and providing you with the timeframe for you doing so and full details as to how to contact it.

This policy supplements the information in our client care letter and terms of business, as provided to you at the start of your matter.

B. Our internal complaint procedure

Stewart Law Solicitors will typically adopt the following informal and then, if necessary, formal approach when we receive a complaint from a current or former client.

Starting the procedure

If you have a complaint, the onus is on you to contact us with the details, either by telephone, letter and/or e-mail as soon as your complaint arises so that we may deal with it promptly and before recollections fade.

Informal stage

You should, in the first instance, aim to resolve your complaint informally through discussion with the individual who your complaint is with. If this does not achieve the desired result or it is reasonable to go straight to the formal stage of our procedure, you should, within seven calendar days following any informal discussions or the issue giving rise to the complaint, raise it formally using the procedure set out below. We will then satisfy ourselves (where applicable) that it is appropriate to deal with it under the formal stage of our complaint procedure instead of attempting to resolve it informally with you.

Formal stage

Please note that the timescales set out below may need to be modified in certain circumstances including, by way of example only, and without limitation, where:

- *the complaint is factually or legally complex; and/or*
- *the history to the complaint spans over a lengthy period of time; and/or*
- *you are unavailable due to sickness absence, annual leave, another form of leave or for some other reason; and/or*
- *the solicitor addressing the complaint is unavailable due to their sickness absence, annual leave, another form of leave or an urgent and/or heavy workload (whether unforeseen or not); and/or*
- *the complaint is about a solicitor who cannot respond to the complaint made due to their sickness absence, annual leave, another form of leave or an urgent and/or heavy workload (whether unforeseen or not).*

Where any of the above circumstances apply, revised timescales will typically need to be set. Where we identify this, we will notify you in writing, setting out the reasons why and the revised timescales that we hope to be able to work to with your assistance and co-operation throughout.

1. We will aim to send you an acknowledgement of receipt of your formal complaint within three working days of us receiving it, together with a copy of this procedure. We may well send this correspondence by e-mail to ensure speed of receipt.
2. We will then pass your complaint to, in no particular order, our Practice Manager or one of our solicitors for them to investigate it. As part of that investigation, we will, typically, invite you to a meeting to discuss and, hopefully, resolve your complaint. We will aim to do this within 14 calendar days of sending you the acknowledgement letter.
3. You should respond within seven calendar days of receipt of our invitation.
4. Any meeting should then take place within 10 working days of our receipt of your reply, at a mutually convenient time and, save in exceptional circumstances, at our office.
5. We will then further investigate your complaint, including by way of taking such steps as:
 - (a) considering fully everything that you have supplied;
 - (b) reviewing your matter file;
 - (c) providing details of your complaint and documentation to the member(s) of staff who your complaint concerns, and anyone else within and (subject to your express consent where necessary) outside the firm of relevance, and asking them to reply to/comment on it within a reasonable timeframe (which will vary depending upon the specifics of your complaint);
 - (d) speaking, where necessary, directly to the individual(s) in (b) above;
 - (e) considering the information and replies provided by the above;
 - (f) considering the information in your complaint file; and

- (g) where appropriate, having further discussions with you regarding your complaint and potential solutions.
6. Once we have completed our investigation, we will write to you to confirm the outcome and any solutions that have been agreed with you.
 7. If you do not want a meeting, or it is not possible or appropriate for us to meet within a reasonable timeframe or at all (for whatever reason), the individual investigating your complaint will send you a detailed written reply to your complaint, including their suggestions for resolving the matter, usually within 28 calendar days of us sending you the acknowledgement letter.
 8. At this stage, if you are still not satisfied, you should contact us again within seven calendar days of your receipt of the written outcome setting out fully your reasons why. We will arrange for an appropriate person to review your complaint. This review will consider whether or not your complaint has been dealt with properly and fairly to date and issue such findings, recommendations and outcomes as are appropriate.
 9. We will write to you within 14 days of receiving your request for a review, confirming our final position on your complaint and explaining our reasons.

C. Externalising an ongoing complaint

If you are still not satisfied, you can then contact the Legal Ombudsman, which is an independent body that handles complaints about legal services. Its contact details are as follows:

Legal Ombudsman
PO Box 6806
Wolverhampton
WV1 9WJ

Website: www.legalombudsman.org.uk
Tel: 0300 555 0333
E-mail: enquiries@legalombudsman.org.uk

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 this period, within three years of when you should reasonably have been aware of it). For further information, you should contact the Legal Ombudsman using the details listed above.

Alternative complaint bodies, such as Ombudsman Services, ProMediate and Small Claims Mediation, exist, which are competent to deal with complaints about legal services should both you and this firm wish to use such a scheme. For this firm's part, however, we do not agree to use such a scheme.

You may report a matter direct to the SRA at any time if you think a firm or anyone regulated by the SRA has breached an SRA Principle. Details of the SRA Principles can be found at <https://www.sra.org.uk/consumers/whowe-are/sra-regulate/#principles>.



The SRA can be contacted via their website: <http://www.sra.org.uk/contactus/>, telephone: 0370 606 2555 (or +44(0)121 329 6800 for international callers) or by post: Solicitors Regulation Authority, The Cube, 199 Wharf Street, Birmingham, B1 1RN.