

STEWARTS

COMPLAINTS HANDLING POLICY

Our complaints policy

We are committed to providing a high-quality legal service to all our clients. When something goes wrong, we need you to tell us about it. This will help us to improve our standards. If you have any problem with our service, the level of our fees, or with the way in which we have dealt with any matter, please in the first instance contact the lawyer dealing with the matter by telephone, e-mail or by post.

Timescales

All references to “days” in this policy mean working days, which are Monday to Friday excluding bank holidays and notified days of office closure.

What is the procedure?

- 1 We will send you a letter/email acknowledgement receipt of your complaint within 5 days of receiving it, enclosing a copy of this procedure.
- 2 We will then investigate your complaint. This will normally involve a review of your file by the supervising partner (identified in our engagement letter that will have been sent to you at the outset of this matter) in conjunction with the lawyer who acted for you. The head of the department will oversee this review and any proposed resolution. If your complaint is about the supervising partner on your matter then the head of department will normally lead the review.
- 3 You will usually then be invited to a meeting, to discuss and hopefully resolve your complaint. Wherever possible that meeting will take place within 15 days of sending you the acknowledgement letter. Occasionally it may not be possible or appropriate to offer a meeting, or you may decline the offer to meet.
- 4 Within 5 days of such a meeting, the supervising partner or head of department will write to you to confirm what took place and any resolutions agreed with you. Alternatively if a decision is made to not hold a meeting then they will send you a detailed written reply to your complaint, including his/her suggestions for resolving the matter, within a 5 day timescale.
- 5 At this stage, if you are still not satisfied, you should contact [Julian Chamberlayne](#), the Partner who is our Compliance Officer for Legal Practice, or [Funmilayo Kolaru](#), Leader of Compliance and Data Protection, and they will independently investigate the complaint and our response. They will revert to you in writing, reporting their findings within 15 days of receiving your notification that you are not satisfied with the initial response.
- 6 Our complaints procedure concludes at this stage. If we do not hear from you within 15 days of sending you our final response (or the period stated in our final response if different) we will consider your complaint closed. We will have no further obligation to review your complaint once we have concluded our internal process and closed your complaint.
- 7 If you have commenced preparatory steps or actually applied to the court for an assessment of our costs or commenced other proceedings relating to any aspect of your complaint, your complaint may be stayed pending the conclusion of those

proceedings. Any residual matters not settled as part of the proceedings will then be investigated in accordance with this procedure. If this applies to your complaint we will let you know as soon as possible.

- 8 If we have not responded to your complaint within the timescales stated, without explanation or you are not satisfied with the response, you can contact an alternative complaints body such as ProMediate – www.promediate.co.uk who are competent to deal with complaints about legal services should both you and our firm wish to use such a scheme.
- 9 In principle we agree to use ProMediate or another suitable Alternative Dispute Resolution provider to assist in resolving complaints.
- 10 If we are not able to resolve your complaint through our complaints process or through mediation you can contact the Legal Ombudsman by visiting www.legalombudsman.org.uk or on 0300 555 0333 or by email on enquiries@legalombudsman.org.uk.
- 11 A six month time limit, from the date of our final response, normally applies to complaints to the Legal Ombudsman. Further information can be found on its website at <http://www.legalombudsman.org.uk/>. The service provided by the Legal Ombudsman is only available to certain types of clients/organisations. Further details of those eligible for the service can be found on the Legal Ombudsman's website. Alternatively, you can contact the Ombudsman on the helpline number given above.
- 12 If your complaint relates to our charges and/or any of our bills, then subject to the terms of your engagement of us you may also have a right to object to the relevant bill by applying to the court for an Assessment of the bill under Part III of the Solicitors Act 1974.
- 13 Please note that if all or part of a bill remains unpaid, the firm may be entitled to charge interest and may exercise a lien over your papers, as explained in our Terms of Business.
- 14 If we have to change any of the timescales above, we will let you know and explain why.